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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

3

PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE COMMITTEE ON

4

TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC UTILITIES

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Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, April 20, 1999
10:45 a.m.

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RESOLUTION 990128 - Calling for the Committee on
Transportation and public utilities to conduct
hearings examining the high cost of purchasing
SEPTA tokens for Philadelphia's middle- and
high-school students to attend school, and to work
with the School District and SEPTA to develop
strategies to eliminate or reduce the cost to
Philadelphia families.

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PRESENT: COUNCILMAN FRANK DICICCO, Chair
COUNCIL PRESIDENT ANNA C. VERNA
COUNCILMAN DAVID COHEN
COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCIO
COUNCILMAN ANGEL ORTIZ

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2 P R O C E E D I N G S

3 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Good morning,
4 everyone. I apologize for the delay in the
5 starting of the hearing. We need four members of
6 City Council who are members of the Transportation
7 Committee to be here to establish a quorum. We
8 are trying to get three other members down here,
9 so I do appreciate your indulgence. I do hope in
10 a few minutes we will have the others so we can
11 get on with the hearings. Again, I apologize for
12 the delay.

13 Thank you.

14 - - -

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Good morning.
16 Good morning, everyone. And, again, thank you for
17 your patience.

18 My name is Frank DiCicco. I'm the
19 Chairperson of the Committee on Transportation and
20 Public Utilities. Council President Anna Verna,
21 who is not a member of the committee is here to
22 help us establish a quorum, and she has appointed
23 Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell to this committee
24 for the purpose of conducting the hearings. To my
25 extreme left is Councilman Ortiz. And we have a

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2 quorum so we're about to begin. Thank you. Thank
3 you Madam President, for coming.

4 Before we begin the hearing, I just
5 would like everyone to understand that for me, the
6 purpose of this hearing is to discuss issues
7 concerning the cost of tokens for school children
8 in the City of Philadelphia. For me, this is not
9 a finger-pointing exercise. I am not here to
10 criticize or complain to anyone. I just want this
11 to be a more informative hearing, to get to the
12 heart of what the problems are and to see if we
13 can cumulatively cooperatively come together to
14 find some solution -- SEPTA, the City of
15 Philadelphia, the School District, and the State
16 for that matter. And I hope that at the end of
17 these hearings, we will have some basis to make
18 some recommendations to the entities that I just
19 mention, and if there's any other outside
20 entities, to see what we can do about bringing the
21 cost of tokens down for the students of the School
22 District of Philadelphia.

23 So again, I don't want this to become a
24 hostile meeting. There's a price, there's a cost
25 involved, no matter how we decide is the best way

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2 to reduce those costs to the students, and we need
3 to find out what is the most economical and
4 efficient way to do that. And I hope that these
5 hearings will produce some of the answers to those
6 questions and problems that we have facing us
7 today.

8 The first witness is Denise Goren,
9 Deputy Mayor for Transportation.

10 (Denise Goren comes forward.)

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay. Deputy
12 Mayor Goren realizes that there are a number of
13 students and teachers here, and we all know how
14 you anxious you are to get back to school, so she
15 will yield to the students and to the teachers.
16 So we'll go in a reverse order, okay? Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Donna Faye,
19 English teacher at Dobbins Randolph Skills Center.

20 (Ms. Faye comes forward.)

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Please state your
22 name for the record and continue with your
23 testimony. Thank you.

24 MS. FAYE: My name is Donna Faye. I
25 teach English at Dobbins Randolph High School.

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2 It's a technical school.

3 I had two seniors last year who were in
4 similar situations, both fatherless, essentially
5 motherless because the mothers were on drugs.
6 One, Kareem, was the top electrical student in the
7 building. His mother put him out, and he lived
8 with one friend after another for limited periods
9 of time. He was working but he wasn't earning
10 enough to also allow him to pay \$9 week for
11 tokens. He stopped attending school until some of
12 the teachers caught up with him in the hallway,
13 found out what was going on, and I gave him the
14 money out of my pocket to attend school.

15 Marquetta was another senior I had last
16 year, a very difficult child in 10th grade. Her
17 mother put her in with her grandmother, who then
18 put her in a home. By senior year, she had
19 brought up her grades, she graduated 20th in the
20 class, but for about a month, it looked like she
21 wasn't even going to make it to school, wasn't
22 going to graduate. Again, we all paid for her
23 tokens.

24 Rebecca was a 9th-grader last year,
25 coming all the way from Kensington to North

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2 Philadelphia. She's in the health-related
3 technology program, pre-medicine. She became
4 pregnant, started missing school toward the end of
5 her program. Again, she had money problems, and
6 teachers at the school footed her SEPTA bill. The
7 baby is now ten months old, she's a straight-A
8 student, she's still in school, and she asked me
9 to read something for you because she was too shy
10 to come today.

11 "My name is Rebecca Berger. I'm 16
12 years old. I'm writing because I am very
13 concerned about free tokens. Last year, I started
14 attending this program, and everything started out
15 fine as far as buying tokens until I started
16 having financial problems at my home. My mom had
17 a health problem and she's a single parent. I was
18 too young to get a job so there wasn't any way I
19 could get to school. I made it often because my
20 little sister stayed home from school so I could
21 go, and she gave me her tokens. Then this year,
22 the same thing happened, but it's harder because
23 although I have a job, I don't make very much
24 money and I have to take care of my ten-month-old
25 son, so that's where my check goes."

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2 Renardo was a student in Washington,
3 D.C. Last year, his mother went off welfare. The
4 family, the five children, all moved in with the
5 grandmother in Baltimore. Then this year, at the
6 beginning of the school year, they moved in with
7 the aunt, which didn't work out. The family was
8 separated, the two older sisters went to live with
9 the grandmothers -- one in D.C. one in Baltimore.
10 And Renardo and his three younger brothers and the
11 mother all became homeless. They've been in three
12 different shelters, and Renardo's had a
13 tremendously difficult time scraping the money
14 together to get to school every day to pay for
15 SEPTA. He frequently misses school. This is a
16 child who was in advanced courses in Washington.
17 He was taking foreign languages, advanced math,
18 advanced English, and now he misses so much school
19 that he may not even graduate from 9th grade.

20 We do have a scholarship program. It's
21 called the White Davis Program, but you have to
22 have straight As or Bs to stay on it. There's
23 only 20 kids in our 600 kids who manage to get
24 tokens from the program because we're a trade
25 school, we're not an academic magnet, so most

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2 students don't have straight As and Bs.

3 I think it's very important for kids to
4 get to school.

5 This is Kenneth Howard, one of our
6 9th-graders.

7 MR. HOWARD: My name is Kenneth Howard
8 from Dobbins Randolph, and I'm here because. . .
9 students at high school need --

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Kenneth, do me a
11 favor. You have to tilt that microphone down a
12 little bit. You have to speak directly into it.
13 Thank you.

14 MR. HOWARD: I'm here because students
15 at my school need free tokens. Some of 'em can't
16 make it to school. Um. . . I need a free token
17 because I have a bad problem and I can't afford
18 tokens. Every week, it cost \$9. So every day, my
19 principal give me two tokens every day for me to
20 come so I can pass. But I was on my bike for a
21 month and that wasn't helping. So I had to stop,
22 and she started giving me two tokens every week.

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You say two tokens
24 every week?

25 MS. FAYE: A day.

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: A day, okay.

3 MS. FAYE: Once a day.

4 Okay. There's one more issue, and that
5 is the fact that if you're in a magnet school --
6 (Applause.)

7 MS. FAYE: If you're in a magnet school
8 and you come and you travel long distances -- some
9 of our kids travel for over an hour on SEPTA. We
10 lose many, many students from our magnet program
11 -- we're not an academic program, we're a trade
12 program -- because they can't afford SEPTA, and
13 they can walk to the neighborhood school. So that
14 means that the magnet programs aren't really open
15 to everybody; they're only open to those who have
16 no family problems, have no financial problems,
17 etc.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Any questions for
21 these witnesses from members of the committee?

22 (No questions.)

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

24 I just want to note for the record that
25 Councilwoman Tasco is now present.

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2 Youth United for Change. James Cheely,
3 Antoine Robinson, Rita Frazier, Bryan Gardenas,
4 Eric Braxton.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Eric is with the
7 Philadelphia Student Union.

8 (Above group of students come forward.)

9 MR. CHEELY: Hi. My name is James
10 Cheely, and I'm a student at Edison High School
11 and the leader of Youth United for Change.

12 Youth United for Change is an
13 organization of high-school students from
14 Kensington, Edison, and Olney actively involved in
15 improving our schools. We represent over 6,000
16 students. We are here today to support the
17 proposal to provide free transportation for
18 students to go to and get from school and to tell
19 you why this happens.

20 From my own personal experience, there
21 has been days when I come home late from
22 extracurricular activities, such as sports and
23 clubs, and I have to walk home at least two and a
24 half miles alone, in the dark. And there also
25 have been times when I couldn't get to school

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2 because of bad weather, such as rain or snow.

3 These are just two of the many reasons that I feel
4 free transportation is important.

5 Thank you.

6 MR. ROBINSON: Hello. My name is
7 Antoine Robinson. I'm a student leader at Edison
8 High School for Youth United for Change. I'm here
9 today and also some parents that's here to support
10 us.

11 Education is a right and not a
12 privilege, and getting to and from public schools
13 should not be a privilege either. But for many of
14 us who cannot forward to get there every day, it
15 can become expensive sometimes. We spend up to \$9
16 a week trying to get to and from school, while
17 students in New York and Boston spend nothing.
18 For many of us who do not have jobs and whose
19 parents cannot help us afford to pay for tokens,
20 getting to and from public school can become
21 rather expensive. We believe that free public
22 transportation would increase attendance and help
23 support Philadelphia's young people, especially as
24 more and more families are coming off of welfare.

25 My own personal experience is, I live

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2 about a mile and a half away from school. When it
3 rains and snows, sometimes we have terrible
4 winters, sometimes we have rain storms and all
5 that. I like to dress up nice and I hate getting
6 to school when I got mud stains all over my pants
7 and my sneakers because I had to walk in the rain
8 when there's a bus stop within a couple of from
9 steps from my house. I could catch the bus and
10 get there within ten minutes.

11 Basically, I play in a lot of sports
12 so I stay after school a lot, so that means I have
13 to walk home alone or with James and in the dark,
14 or I have to go my own separate way and that's not
15 good for me when I could just catch the bus at the
16 end of my corner to go get home from school. I
17 cannot afford tokens, you know, 'cause I be low
18 income so I cannot afford tokens every week.

19 In closing, I would like to leave you
20 all with a statement that I used a while back:
21 Why charge urban kids for what suburban kids get
22 for free.

23 Thanks.

24 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

25 (Applause.).

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2 MS. FRAZIER: Hello. My name is Rita
3 Frazier. I'm an 11thgrader at Kensington High
4 School. I am also a leader in Youth United for
5 Change.

6 On March 22nd, we presented a platform
7 of youth issues to the six mayoral candidates at
8 an Eastern Philadelphia organizing project,
9 Neighborhoods First Convention. One of our issues
10 we presented were free public transportation for
11 all school-aged youth during the weekdays. As
12 young people are entitled to free education, I
13 believe that we are also entitled to free
14 transportation to and from school. I am here
15 today because of that.

16 In my 9th and 10th-grade years, I had
17 to walk almost two miles to school. There are
18 shorter ways to get there where I will be less
19 than a mile, but they're not necessarily safer,
20 and I found that out during the end of my
21 10th-grade year. I met a friend at a bus stop so
22 that we could walk together because it was the
23 middle of January, and it's dark at 6 o'clock in
24 the morning. Halfway there, we got into some
25 trouble and we were basically being sexually

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2 harassed. And since that day, my friend got
3 transferred and I have been taking public
4 transportation, which is good for me but not for
5 my mother because my mother also has a younger
6 daughter. And my mother not only is in a business
7 school but holds a job, and we both take the bus,
8 so this is why I think this is very important to
9 me.

10 I'm not asking for -- for somebody to
11 hold my hand and walk me to school; I'm just
12 asking for somebody to get me to school.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: How far do you
15 live from school, Rita?

16 MS. FRAZIER: I live about two and a
17 half miles maybe.

18 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Two and a half
19 miles?

20 MS. FRAZIER: It's not -- it's like a
21 mile and a half like if you take short cuts but
22 the short cuts aren't safe so. . .

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: They're not safe,
24 all right. From your experience, do you know how
25 many students, fellow students, may not be able to

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2 get to school or don't go to school as a result of
3 not being able to afford tokens?

4 MS. FRAZIER: Yes.

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And I'm not saying
6 using that as an excuse. Legitimate reasons as to
7 distance, inclement weather, and safe streets.

8 MS. FRAZIER: Last year, I had a lot of
9 friends that lived further than I did, and it took
10 them forever to walk to school. And by the
11 beginning of this year, they all got transfers.

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: They were
13 transferred?

14 MS. FRAZIER: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: To other schools?

16 MS. FRAZIER: Closer to them.

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Closer to where
18 they live. Okay, thank you.

19 And that because of the token issue,
20 because they were -- their reasons for not going
21 to school was they couldn't afford the tokens so
22 then the School District, or whoever decided to
23 make it, they transferred them to a location
24 closer to where they live?

25 MR. ROBINSON: I'm around the area for

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2 Gratz, Gratz School, but I attend Edison so when I
3 told them -- I went to the counselor and I let
4 them know that I need to catch the bus; see, I
5 can't be walking every morning to school, you
6 know. She told me that I should transfer over to
7 Gratz. But, you know, I'm active in Edison. I
8 mean, I'm in a lot of programs, good grades. So I
9 don't think it was fair for her to tell me I need
10 to transfer to another school, where, you know,
11 people --

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You didn't want to
13 go to Gratz.

14 MR. ROBINSON: No.

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You wanted to stay
16 where you are.

17 MR. ROBINSON: No, I have nothing
18 against Gratz but, you know --

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: That's okay.

20 MR. ROBINSON: But I'm very active in
21 my school, so there's not -- so I fear -- I know a
22 bunch of people that had to face that, you know,
23 especially off the teams, you know, the sports
24 teams. Getting out at night is dangerous, it's
25 dangerous walking home at night when you could

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2 just catch the bus, you know.

3 So it is important that we come to some
4 kind of agreement about tokens, you know, in
5 public schools.

6 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And I think you
7 testified that you live about a mile and a half
8 from school?

9 MR. ROBINSON: Yeah, about a mile and a
10 half, yeah.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.
12 The young gentleman to your left,
13 Rita.

14 UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT: I don't really
15 have anything to say.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay, but you
17 agree with everything that's been said?

18 UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT: Yeah.

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay, thank you.
20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Eric Braxton, is
22 he here?

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Eric is not
24 here. We have some students from Gratz.

25 (Gratz students come forward.)

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Good morning.

3 Pull the microphone close to you and speak
4 directly into and state your name for the record.

5 MR. BLANCHE: My name is Kwan Blanche
6 (ph.), and I'm a student at Simon Gratz High
7 School. I am here to speak on behalf of Eric
8 Braxton.

9 MR. PENDERTON: My name is Calvin
10 Penderton. I'm at Simon Gratz High School.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You have to speak
12 a little bit louder and closer to the mike.

13 MR. PENDERTON: Oh, my name is Calvin
14 and Penderton and I go to Simon Gratz High School,
15 I'm on the board at the Philadelphia Student
16 Union.

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay, please
18 proceed with your testimony.

19 MR. BLANCHE: Okay. I just wanted to
20 talk a little bit about what the Student Union is.
21 The Student Union a student-run student-founded
22 organization that works towards students' rights
23 and giving students a say in what goes on inside
24 of their schools.

25 Now, Calvin is going to speak a little

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2 bit about the token issue.

3 MR. PENDERTON: My name is Calvin
4 Penderton, and I live about --

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Just pull the mike
6 closer.

7 If we can get you tokens, we're going
8 to try to see if we can get some money for a
9 better sound system in here.

10 MR. PENDERTON: Hello, City Council.
11 My name is Calvin Penderton. I live in the
12 Germantown area of Philadelphia.

13 I'm a student at Simon Gratz High
14 School. The distance from my school is about like
15 two miles. I used to live in the area of Simon
16 Gratz High School, but because of certain
17 situations, I had to move farther from the
18 school. So I don't really have a lot of money to
19 get tokens because of certain situations. Me and
20 my parents, we don't really be together like that
21 so it's kind of hard for me to get money to go to
22 school.

23 But because I used to live in the area,
24 I had a strong reputation with Simon Gratz. I'm
25 on the tennis team, the debate team, the art club,

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2 I'm in a lot of extracurricular activities and
3 stuff like that. So I keep -- when I moved from
4 the area from where I used to live at 'cause I
5 used to live directly right up the street from the
6 school, around like two blocks. When I moved, I
7 had to -- it was kind of hard 'cause I needed
8 tokens to get to school every day, and I missed a
9 lot of days from school when I didn't have
10 tokens. And it was kind of bad 'cause we was
11 having the SAT-9 tests and stuff like that.

12 So it's kind of hard for me to get to
13 school so I wish I could find a way possible
14 whereas I could get to school. I want to transfer
15 but it's kind of hard for me to transfer because
16 I've been in the school so long and I have a
17 strong reputation in the school and a lot of
18 people care about me in the school. So it's kind
19 of hard for me to transfer. And I have a lot of
20 things going on in that school, so I can't -- and
21 plus my mom, she doesn't really have the money
22 like that to go all the way up to Gratz and stuff
23 like that from where we're living at to get me
24 transferred to Germantown.

25 So it's kind of hard, and I wish I

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2 could find some way possible to supply people in
3 the Philadelphia that's in a similar situation I'm
4 in with tokens so they could get to school.
5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.
6 (Applause.)
7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Any questions from
8 the committee from these witnesses? No?
9 (No questions.)
10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you for your
11 testimony. Thank you for being here today.
12 MR. PENDERTON: Thank you, sir.
13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Are there any
14 other students who --
15 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Mr. Chairman?
16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes. Excuse me.
17 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: How much do you
18 spend a month on tokens?
19 MR. PENDERTON: A month, I estimate
20 it's around -- she gives me like two tokens every
21 day so I figure about --
22 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Who gives you two
23 tokens every day?
24 MR. PENDERTON: My mom. She gives me
25 two tokens every day to go to school and come

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2 back. So that would be like 2 tokens times 7, so
3 that would be about like 14 tokens per week.

4 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: You live in
5 Germantown?

6 MR. PENDERTON: Yes.

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Okay, very good.

8 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you. Thank
9 you for your testimony.

10 MR. PENDERTON: Thank you, sir.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Are there any
12 other students who wish to testify? Are there any
13 other students who wish to testify?

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Are all of you
16 going to be testifying?

17 MR. MACKIE: My name is William
18 Mackie. I'm the Executive Director of the
19 Citywide Improvement and Planning Agency. And
20 these four young people will be testifying on our
21 behalf. Thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

23 MR. MACKIE: You have any tokens?

24 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Uh, no.

25 (Laughter.)

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2 MR. MACKIE: Have a good lunch.

3 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

4 Okay, who's going to be the first to
5 testify? State your name for the record and speak
6 directly into the microphone.

7 MR. MOETTE: Hello. My name is Wayne
8 Moette (ph.). I attend Benjamin Franklin High
9 School. I am currently a participant of Citywide
10 Improvement Agency.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Excuse me, excuse
12 me, sir. Tilt that microphone down a little bit
13 and pull it very close, very close to you.

14 MR. MOETTE: I am currently a
15 participant of the Citywide Improvement and
16 Planning Agency. During my five years of
17 attending this program, I have made five
18 presentations before City Council.

19 I am now here to inform you on how
20 convenient the transfers are that Citywide
21 provides. Not only are they useful for getting to
22 school but to work and other important places as
23 well. We aren't just given these transpasses; we
24 earn them. And these transpasses are also
25 convenient for the summertime when we don't have

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2 school to get to work and other places as well.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

5 MS. DAY: LaShonda Day, and I live in
6 the Germantown area of Philadelphia, and I attend
7 William Penn High School, and I'm here to speak on
8 behalf of the tokens.

9 Before I was -- before I came into this
10 program, Citywide, I was getting tokens every
11 week. And I don't feel as though they need to --
12 in order to get tokens, you need a I.D. and you
13 need, you know, some identification 'cause they
14 only give tokens -- SEPTA stations only give
15 tokens to certain schools. And in order for you
16 to get tokens, you need your I.D. And I was one
17 of the people who usually didn't remember to bring
18 her I.D. to get tokens, and I usually missed
19 school because I didn't have any tokens.

20 This was before I was in this program.
21 But now that I'm in this program, they give us
22 transportation to and from school to get to
23 school. So I think I still be having that problem
24 with SEPTA, forgetting my I.D. and not getting
25 tokens if I wasn't in this program.

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2 Thank you.

3 MS. JONES: My name is Monique Jones.

4 I attend William Penn High School. And before I
5 entered the Citywide Program, it was hard for me
6 to get back and forth to school because, like they
7 said, it costs like weekly, it's a whole lot of
8 money for a transpass and stuff. And when I got
9 in Citywide, they provided transpasses for school
10 and back and forth to work and Freedom Theater.
11 And it's much easier now that I don't have to buy
12 tokens and everything.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I'm sorry. I
15 missed that last part. You said it's easier
16 because you --

17 MS. JONES: It's easier that I don't
18 have to buy tokens because it's like I was
19 spending too much on tokens. And now it's much
20 easier.

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: How much were you
22 spending on tokens?

23 MS. JONES: Like 9 -- it was like \$9 a
24 week on tokens.

25 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And now because of

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2 the program, you don't spend anything?

3 MS. JONES: They provide us
4 transpasses.

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

6 MS. JONES: We had to -- Citywide, they
7 like -- they like -- yeah, we do community service
8 on Saturdays. We do four hours of work training
9 on the weeks at Freedom Theater, we go to Freedom
10 Theater. They provide us transportation for
11 Freedom Theater and everything. And I work at the
12 Empowerment Zone.

13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay, thank you.

14 Yes ma'am?

15 MS. HARDY: Good morning. My name is
16 Sharlitta (ph.) Hardy, and I'm the Special Events
17 Coordinator of Citywide Improvement and Planning
18 Agency. And I guess I am speaking on behalf of
19 the youth of Citywide -- well, youth all over.

20 I used to be a health intern in the
21 program. And what the program basically does is,
22 it teaches youth, it empowers youth. And we
23 received monthly transpasses and tokens. And for
24 me, that was important also as well as receiving
25 the training and the community service because of

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2 the fact that tokens and transportation is
3 costly. And being involved in a program and
4 after-school activities, the program provided
5 transpasses and things of that nature, and that
6 helped our family out as far as budgetary means
7 because a lot of families today don't really have
8 the money consistently to provide tokens and
9 things of that nature for their children --
10 especially if they're active in the after-school
11 programs with the extracurricular activities and
12 the job training and things of that nature.

13 So I think that it is very important
14 for students to have free transportation to and
15 from school and especially with our school-based
16 program because those students are from the ages
17 of 8 through 13, and a lot of their parents and,
18 you know, their parental guidance, they don't have
19 the money for tokens and things of that nature.
20 So we provide that for them, and it's more
21 convenient for them to get -- it helps them out to
22 travel to and from school also.

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

24 Any questions for these witnesses by
25 members of the committee?

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2 (No questions.)

3 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, thank
5 you for being here.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Frances Jones from
8 SEPTA, I think you're next, and Denise Goren. Do
9 you want to come up together? Or whoever else is
10 with you, Frances and Denise, can also come up.

11 (Denise Goren and Frances Jones come
12 forward.)

13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You can work it
14 out amongst yourselves who wants to start off,
15 okay?

16 MS. GOREN: Good morning. Good
17 morning. I am Denise Goren, Deputy Mayor for
18 Transportation. And I would like to thank you for
19 the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of
20 the Administration about the funding of SEPTA
21 transportation for our school students of the
22 School District of Philadelphia.

23 For many years prior to 1984, the SEPTA
24 school fare was less than half the adult fair.
25 The net cost of selling school tokens at a

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2 discount was buried in SEPTA's operating budget.
3 Then the cost allocation formula was changed to
4 reduce the cost to SEPTA to zero. In fact, the
5 total cost of paying for transporting students is
6 now shouldered by the students, the School
7 District, and the State and City through
8 subsidies.

9 SEPTA now charges \$1.15 per token for
10 student transportation, 40 cents for a transfer.
11 And of this amount, the student pays out of pocket
12 90 cents, and the School District is responsible
13 for the additional 25 cents as well as the cost of
14 transfers.

15 According to the School District,
16 10,620 students out of all of the students using
17 public transportation ride free of charge, in
18 which case, the School District pays the full
19 fare. The total approximate cost for providing
20 student transportation is \$14.5 million a year.
21 Of this amount, 9 million is paid by the School
22 District from its \$1.3 billion budget, with
23 \$5.5 million paid by the students directly.

24 The City plays a key role in supporting
25 our schools and our transit system. As you know,

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2 each year, for the past four years, the City has
3 provided the School District \$15 million of
4 supplementary funds to help address the budgetary
5 difficulties facing the School District.

6 Additionally, the City gives SEPTA \$55 million a
7 year annually in operating subsidy.

8 In conclusion, I think it's important
9 to scrutinize the cost of SEPTA tokens for student
10 transportation. And to that extent, this hearing
11 today is an important facet of that examination.
12 Given the amount of funding already being
13 provided, however, to support the School District
14 and fiscal pressures on the City from other
15 quarters, such as welfare reform, shifting the
16 cost of school fare discounts to the City's
17 operating budget would not be a prudent solution.
18 Nonetheless, this hearing should be congratulated
19 in terms of its fact-finding mission and the
20 opportunity to hear from all of the voices you'll
21 here today.

22 Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

24 Any questions for Miss Goren?

25 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Yeah.

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Councilman Ortiz.

3 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: At one point, the
4 City did contribute to the public school
5 transportation, did it not?

6 MS. GOREN: At one point, there was a
7 one-time contribution, and that occurred in
8 coincidence with a fare increase. As you're
9 aware, SEPTA has not raised its fares in five
10 years. But, in fact, five years ago, when it
11 occurred, it did create a question as to how the
12 discount could be funded and the differential
13 could be matched during that interim year where
14 the fares were increased and how to soften the
15 impact on the students. So that was the one
16 instance.

17 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: We never had a role
18 in supplying a subsidy to students in terms of
19 tokens for SEPTA during the '80s?

20 MS. GOREN: Not to my recollection, and
21 my recollection is pretty long at this point.

22 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: What would be the
23 cost if the City decided to provide some
24 assistance to the students? What would be the
25 costs and the burden that we would have to assume

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2 in terms of the operating budget?

3 MS. GOREN: Councilman, that's a
4 difficult question to address. The best facts
5 that I can give you is what I set out in my
6 testimony -- what the current overall cost is to
7 the School District now, what the kids pay,
8 putting those numbers together.

9 So mathematically speaking, the annual
10 cost for providing student transportation is
11 \$14.5 million, and I would defer to the School
12 District transportation people to tell you exactly
13 how that's broken out. It's fairly complicated
14 because it has to do with distance and the age the
15 kids are and what grade and school they're in and
16 where they are and where they're going to.

17 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: How many students
18 are we talking about that now have to pay fares to
19 SEPTA?

20 MS. GOREN: It's rather a very small
21 percentage of the majority of our student
22 population. It's important to note that most kids
23 walk. So approximately, I believe, 25,000
24 students a year, about 25,000 students a year rely
25 on SEPTA.

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2 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Philadelphia

3 Children and Youth says that approximately 30,000
4 students are absent every day. Now, we cannot
5 ascertain if all of them are absent because of
6 transportation difficulties, but let's say that a
7 good amount of those are absent because of the
8 transportation difficulties. Don't you think it's
9 prudent for the City and the school system to be
10 able to get together and identify and look at how
11 transportation impacts on the absentee ratio and
12 what economic impact that absentee ratio has on
13 the overall cost to the City and to the school
14 system?

15 MS. GOREN: Right. You raise important
16 issues. One of the best ways to look at the
17 interrelationship between absenteeism and the
18 transportation issue is to look at what happened
19 during the (unintelligible) of the recent SEPTA
20 strike. In fact, kids found their way to school.
21 It's hard to figure out what the relationship is,
22 but I do agree that this an issue overall that
23 everyone should discuss. In terms of drawing
24 conclusions, I'm not in a position to do that.

25 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Why is it that our

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2 costs are three times higher than Boston?

3 Obviously, SEPTA is a very expensive system. But
4 in other cities, public policy has dictated that
5 assisting and attending school is a top priority.
6 And in New York and San Francisco and even Erie
7 and Pittsburgh, students don't carry the burden of
8 paying for transportation.

9 Could you explain to us the public
10 policy dynamics. And how do we see this in terms
11 of us as a city?

12 MS. GOREN: Okay. At a prior hearing,
13 at the subsidy hearing, I know SEPTA did do some
14 research that looked at some of the differences
15 among various jurisdictions where children use
16 public transit to attend school. I think it's
17 important to note that each of them have very,
18 very different fact patterns in terms of the
19 overall cost of that transit, the number of kids
20 being served.

21 And the mechanism of how that subsidy
22 is funded is very, very different -- just as the
23 mechanism of how mass transit is funded generally
24 is very, very different from jurisdiction to
25 jurisdiction. The situation differs with each

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2 locale. The cost, of course, differs as well.

3 The issues in New York or Boston or
4 Chicago or even Pittsburgh are different in terms
5 of the cost of what the students pay -- whether
6 it's a half fare or a special fare, there is
7 always a subsidy.

8 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Well, in New York,
9 they don't pay anything.

10 MS. GOREN: Actually, to ride the bus
11 in New York, the students pay 75 cents. And it's
12 based on distance as to whether or not they're
13 entitled to a metro card or not.

14 So again, it's a proportion of the
15 students who have free fares. Some pay 75 cents
16 for the bus, others pay not at all and they use a
17 metro card.

18 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: But there is a
19 problem. And, in fact, we have such a problem of
20 absenteeism and truancy in the City that through
21 hearings that we had here, we finally had to
22 establish truancy courts that go to Kensington and
23 so on.

24 And truancy and the overall aspect of
25 it carries an economic cost. Truancy has been --

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2 and given the testimony that we've heard from
3 family court judges and so on, truancy has been
4 attributed in many instances to the lack of
5 children having the fare to go to school. That
6 then translates into an economic cost for the City
7 and an economic loss for the school system.

8 And I think that instead of looking at
9 the way that tokens would be an expenditure, why
10 don't we look at it in a way that it would be a
11 saving in terms of the cost that it would accrue
12 to us because truancy would be less, we may have
13 to do other things that -- we may have to
14 eliminate other things that we now do because we
15 need to take care of these kids, 30,000 kids that
16 are absent daily.

17 And has the City ever looked at this?
18 I mean, we have a very deep problem in terms of
19 our educational system and our kids being able to
20 attain the educational level that they need.
21 Isn't it prudent for us to see that a small
22 contribution from the City might, in the long run,
23 be a very positive and cost-saving method, that we
24 might end up gaining some money?

25 MS. GOREN: I appreciate your

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2 sentiment. I think what would be most prudent at
3 this time is for us to hear from the mechanism of
4 everyone as to the responsibilities for the
5 overall impacts of the issue of the cost of
6 transportation and how that fits in with all of
7 the costs of education that are reimbursed from
8 the State in terms of its providing services for
9 our children -- transportation being a part of
10 that educational service.

11 Whether or not it's prudent for the
12 City at this time, I believe that a lot more facts
13 need to be put forth and a lot more discussion
14 needs to occur.

15 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I mean, I know that
16 by legislation, we're providing free
17 transportation to kids who attend private schools
18 while poor kids and kids who live in poverty and
19 cannot afford it are denied free transportation so
20 that they can attend public school. And that to
21 me is a contradiction, and I don't see why if we
22 pay for private-school kids whose parents
23 obviously probably can afford to pay for their
24 tokens, we have such a huge number of kids whose
25 families cannot afford it and they cannot get free

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2 transportation.

3 MS. GOREN: I think you raise an
4 important public policy question for the reason we
5 do that in terms of the legislative mandates that
6 the School District faces. That too should be
7 discussed in this context.

8 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman.

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: The State
11 contribution, the subsidies that the State puts
12 in, is there any difference between what the value
13 of the State contribution to the Philadelphia
14 School District is as opposed to Merion or any of
15 the other counties that you know of? Is it equal
16 across the board, or does --

17 MS. GOREN: I would defer to the School
18 District to answer that.

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay.

20 MS. GOREN: It's rather complex.

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I know. Several
22 of these things probably would be --

23 MS. GOREN: Yeah.

24 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: -- more
25 appropriate with them, but thank you.

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2 Miss Jones.

3 MS. JONES: Good morning, Councilman
4 DiCicco and members of the Transportation and
5 Public Utilities Committee. I am Frances Jones,
6 Assistant General Manager at SEPTA.

7 With me this morning is Dick Voith, the
8 City Representative to SEPTA's Board; and Ken
9 Heimley (ph.) from our Strategic Planning and
10 Operations Department. I think I have that right,
11 Ken?

12 Thank you for the opportunity this
13 morning to address SEPTA's role in providing
14 transportation for Philadelphia school children.
15 We are strongly committed to improving the
16 economic and social well-being of the region.
17 Education is one of the vital building blocks
18 necessary to ensure the continued vitality and
19 viability of our region, and we are proud of the
20 service that we provide to school children from
21 neighborhoods across the City as they travel to
22 and from school.

23 On a daily basis, the City's children
24 take 100,000 trips to centers of learning, using
25 SEPTA's regular bus, light rail, and subway

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2 elevated route service. In addition, the
3 Authority operates bus service with morning and
4 afternoon route scheduling and service compatible
5 with the School District's hours of operation for
6 schools along these routes for which we receive no
7 special subsidy. This service encompasses
8 approximately 56 routes and carries in excess of
9 25,000 children.

10 Working in partnership with the School
11 District of Philadelphia, SEPTA established a
12 program for sale and distribution of tokens.
13 These specially designated school tokens are
14 intended for use by students traveling to and from
15 school, during hours prescribed by the School
16 District.

17 The Authority circulates and sells the
18 tokens to the School District at the standard
19 discounted fare of \$1.15 per token and 40 cents
20 for transfers. This figure represents about a
21 28 percent discount off the regular base fare of
22 \$1.60. In turn, the School District sells the
23 tokens to the students for 90 cents per token.
24 Transfers are free. As determined by the School
25 District, one-third of their students are eligible

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2 for and receive free tokens through their
3 distribution and sales program.

4 The School District's transportation
5 budget for '98-'99 includes the 17.3 million trips
6 SEPTA provides to school children on an annual
7 basis. As an instrumentality of the State, the
8 Authority's rates and regulations governing fares
9 and fare instruments are established by tariff,
10 issued and amended by the Authority. The tariffs
11 are published by the general manager after public
12 hearings and describe the allowable fares for
13 passenger transport on SEPTA in Philadelphia and
14 our other four counties.

15 SEPTA's pricing of school tokens is
16 governed by Tariff No. 1, Supplement No. 29
17 effective January 22, 1995. This tariff was
18 adopted by SEPTA's board of director on January
19 13th of the same year after a series of public
20 hearings in each of the five counties that
21 constitute SEPTA's operating region.

22 The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
23 reimburses school districts for transportation
24 costs for both public and non-public school
25 students. As determined by the State, however,

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2 only public transportation fares qualify as
3 100 percent allowable expenses.

4 The School District of Philadelphia's
5 overall reimbursement rate of 65 percent, or
6 \$38 million, is based on a formula derived from
7 allowable expenses and District needs ratio based
8 on family income. However, the State does not
9 impose a funding cap for reimbursement of
10 transportation costs.

11 As I am certain most of you are aware.
12 Based on our operating budget testimony, we are in
13 the midst of a fare policy study. This analysis
14 is designed to evaluate our different pricing
15 strategies with the objective to increase
16 ridership and revenue.

17 Concurrently, we have undertaken a
18 study of our fare collection processes also. This
19 includes our various types of fares, such as
20 tokens and passes, as well as applications of new
21 technology, such as a smart card. For those you
22 who are not familiar, a smart card is a stored
23 value card which offers greater flexibility than
24 our existing tokens and passes.

25 The results of both studies should

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2 allow us the opportunity to offer creative and
3 innovative solutions for the challenges faced by
4 our daily riders -- and to a large degree, of
5 course, our Philadelphia school children. We
6 would be more than one happy to share the results
7 of both studies upon completion.

8 Today, my testimony and my presence
9 underscores our commitment to work with the School
10 District, the City of Philadelphia, and all other
11 entities to pursue additional funding sources to
12 underwrite the token program.

13 Again, thanks, Councilman DiCicco for
14 your indulgence. And at this point, I will try to
15 answer any questions that you might have.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, Miss
17 Jones.

18 Your statement about the Authority
19 circulating the school tokens to the School
20 District at a discounted rate. Could you walk me
21 through that process. How do you circulate them?
22 I mean, does the School District put an order in
23 for X-amount of tokens? What happens at that
24 point? Who administers the tokens going to the
25 District?

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2 MS. JONES: The tokens are bought in
3 bulk from the School District. We deliver them to
4 the School District, and then they are responsible
5 for the sale and descriptions.

6 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And then you're
7 out of it, right?

8 MS. JONES: We're out of it.

9 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I believe -- was
10 there a time when SEPTA sold the tokens to the
11 students if I'm not mistaken directly? Or
12 students could purchase the tokens at --

13 MS. GOREN: Prior to 1984, I believe
14 there was some mechanism to do that in terms of
15 the half-priced tokens.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: It was that long
17 ago?

18 MS. GOREN: But someone older than I
19 might have to answer that.

20 MS. JONES: Yeah, but since 1995,
21 that's been a mechanism that's been implemented
22 for the sale and distribution of tokens.

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: All right, I guess
24 I'll save some of my questions for the School
25 District.

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2 Councilwoman Tasco.

3 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Thank you. Good
4 morning.

5 MS. JONES: Good morning.

6 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Is there any
7 possibility that you could provide this
8 transportation free? What does it cost if you
9 provide this transportation for free?

10 MS. JONES: Right now, I don't have an
11 exact number of what it would cost, but I will
12 defer to Dick Voith, our board member.

13 MR. VOITH: Thank you, Frances.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: State your name
15 for the record.

16 MR. VOITH: I am -- thank you for the
17 opportunity to be here and to talk with Council.

18 There are two issues here -- three
19 issues, I guess, is more appropriate. First, I
20 think that we at SEPTA are very sensitive to the
21 issue of student fares, and I think that we stand
22 at this position sort of ready to try to see
23 whether there are more innovative ways to address
24 the issue.

25 The second point is that, I guess, from

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2 the numbers that I know, and I'm not sure if
3 they're actually right, we're talking about
4 \$15 million that we spend on transportation for
5 students, which is a large chunk of money in
6 anyone's budget. If we did not recoup that sum of
7 money, then we'd have to make it up somewhere
8 else. We have not had a change in our operating
9 budget in three years -- the same level every year
10 for the past three years.

11 So if there's reduced revenue, then,
12 you know, the only things you do are change
13 service or become more efficient, which we're
14 trying to do; or you increase fares, which we
15 don't plan to do.

16 The third thing from my point of view
17 that I find continually frustrating and have to
18 keep in mind is that I am a City representative on
19 the board, and I am very sensitive to these
20 issues, but I am 2 of 15 members of the SEPTA
21 Board. Any fare changes, and especially something
22 of the magnitude of sort of free tokens would
23 imply for students, would have to go through the
24 entire board, and I think that that would be a
25 very difficult prospect, to say the least.

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2 Having said that, I think that we as an
3 authority, we stand -- you know, we must be ready
4 to try to figure out better ways to deal with the
5 issue that we're facing now.

6 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Could someone --
7 you add more buses, provide more service when
8 school is in session between September and June.
9 Do you cut the service in the summer?

10 MS. JONES: Yes.

11 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Okay. I think
12 those are the only two questions I have. Thank
13 you.

14 MS. JONES: Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Councilman Ortiz.

16 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Again, going back to
17 public policy, it is in our city's interest to be
18 able to make sure that as many of our kids attend
19 school and graduate as possible. And I'm
20 interested in how SEPTA has one of the highest --
21 even with the subsidy, even with the subsidy, it
22 still has one of the highest fares in the country.

23 We have an interest in the school
24 system, okay, and SEPTA, and we subsidize SEPTA
25 and the public school system and the City come

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2 together in which we can set a rate that is lower
3 than what it is right now because of the interest
4 that we have as a city as an economic development
5 tool as a city that wants to the next level to
6 make sure that all of our kids can attend school.
7 And I would be interested in seeing how we can
8 facilitate a process in which the City, SEPTA, and
9 the school system can get together and come
10 together.

11 And really, I think, the Philadelphia
12 Citizens for Children and Youth's recommendations
13 are the things that we should be aiming for. And
14 I would like to see us get to the point of each
15 child that needs a token should be able to get a
16 token -- and especially in our city where the
17 levels of poverty are so high.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I mean, 30,000 kids
20 being absent every day is unacceptable, and I
21 think behooves us to be able to come to a system
22 in which public transportation -- as one of the
23 students said, public transportation to school is
24 a right and not a privilege. And I think they
25 should be afforded that, and I think we have to

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2 come to that conclusion. We cannot afford to do
3 anything less.

4 You know, everything else is (Spanish
5 phrase). You know what I'm saying? It's just
6 smoke going up in the air and disappearing. We
7 have to get to the reality that we need to get our
8 kids to school.

9 We have the public education system
10 come before us, the board, the superintendent, and
11 one of the key issues is attendance. And I think
12 we have to be able -- it's a fixable thing, it's a
13 fixable thing because all it needs is a little bit
14 of money. This is not about systems or books or
15 teaching ability or something else; this is a
16 fixable thing.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: This City should not
19 do anything else but that.

20 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes, Councilwoman
22 Tasco?

23 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: I'm looking at the
24 report given to us by the Philadelphia Citizens
25 for Children and Youth. And they outline the

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2 cities and Philadelphia where transportation is
3 provided for free, or they provide yellow-bus
4 services. And then in all the other cities like
5 Detroit and New York and St. Louis and Milwaukee,
6 San Francisco, Boston, the cost is so much lower
7 than Philadelphia; and in some instances, it's
8 free.

9 Has there been any effort to review how
10 these cities are able to provide the service at a
11 low cost that's provided and/or for free?

12 MS. JONES: As Miss Goren stated, it
13 was a part of her testimony, it varies from
14 authority or property to property, depending upon
15 what that local government has set up as a
16 formula.

17 For us, it's always an issue -- or in
18 those instances, some of them have a subsidy, some
19 of those authorities or properties receive a
20 direct subsidy which enables them to have a fare
21 at a cost -- a youth fare that is across-the-board
22 for youth at a lower cost. For us as well it is a
23 matter of a direct subsidy, which we don't
24 receive.

25 So the cost of the standard discounted

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2 fare, which is \$1.15, that we charge the School
3 District.

4 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: In New York, for
5 instance, do you know where the subsidy comes
6 from? Is it from the state or is it from the
7 city?

8 MS. JONES: It varies.

9 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: It varies. So
10 you're saying that in each of these cities, there
11 is a subsidy so that they're allowed to provide
12 this service?

13 MS. JONES: Not in each one. As I
14 said, it varies from property to property. We did
15 an analysis and looked at some of the larger
16 cities. In Pittsburgh, which is here in
17 Pennsylvania, the process that they have in place
18 is the same as it is here in Philadelphia. They
19 don't receive a direct subsidy and they charge --
20 they do charge a reduced fare, but they don't
21 receive a subsidy. Other places, like I think it
22 is Washington, D.C., gets a subsidy, the authority
23 gets a direct subsidy, so they are able to reduce
24 the fare.

25 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Thank you.

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Miss Jones, the
3 smart card, do we anticipate any savings as a
4 result -- if that was implemented to the
5 District? Would SEPTA have a savings and would
6 that savings be able to be transferred over to the
7 District? And does anyone have an answer for that
8 yet?

9 MS. JONES: That's -- we'll know that
10 as -- that's part of what we expect to glean from
11 the study that's in place now.

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I guess my other
13 question -- I know I have to hold some of them off
14 till the School District people come here, but in
15 someone's testimony, administrative costs of
16 selling tokens to the District is about
17 \$1.5 million a year. I guess so the question
18 would be both to the School District and to
19 SEPTA.

20 Is there any way that you think that we
21 can reduce that cost? Has anyone looked into
22 reducing that cost? And would it be more cost-
23 effective if SEPTA were selling the tokens
24 directly to the students as opposed to sending
25 them over to the School District and letting them

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2 administer?

3 MS. JONES: It would probably be more
4 costly to SEPTA. I can't speak on behalf of the
5 School District, but I would assume that they have
6 a mechanism in place where there's a central
7 location and then they distribute through their
8 mechanism within the school.

9 If we did the sale and distribution, we
10 would have to put people in place to do that, to
11 take care of that sale and distribution, so that
12 means that SEPTA forces would have to do it and
13 would have to put together a structure, a program,
14 and implement it. So I think that it would cost
15 additionally to SEPTA.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes, Mr. Heimley.

17 MR. HEIMLEY: Kim Heimley, Office of
18 Business Development.

19 One of the thing that our studies are
20 looking at are --

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Microphone closer,
22 please.

23 MR. HEIMLEY: -- the costs inherent
24 with the different types of fare instruments.
25 Tokens, their distribution and administration, are

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2 fairly expensive when compared to some
3 technologies that may be available. For example,
4 smart card, that has a stored value in it, only
5 has to be distributed possibly once a week or once
6 a month and may be much cheaper to administer.
7 There could conceivably be control issues about
8 how the District would then make sure it was only
9 used to go to and from school.

10 But the costs of tokens per se is
11 something that we're looking at. It's an old
12 technology, it's been around for a long, long
13 time, and we're trying to figure out whether
14 there's other alternatives that would help
15 mitigate not only the expenses for this program
16 but throughout SEPTA.

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Miss Goren.

18 MS. GOREN: I would say that New York
19 is moving to a smart card-type technology right
20 now with its metro card. And what they're doing
21 right now, which is basically a stored-value card
22 on it, is that even for the kids, if the kids
23 aren't paying anything or paying something, they
24 still slide their card through. That way the
25 charging that this is a kid and the coding of it

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2 through the machines and equipment goes back to
3 the schools so they know what the trip is. So
4 that the intelligence on the card really helps you
5 collect a lot of the data that now we all do by
6 basically hand.

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I just have a
8 concern when I hear \$1.5 million for
9 administrative costs. Do you want to respond to
10 that? You were about to respond or no?

11 MR. HEIMLEY: (No response.)

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: If you don't want
13 to respond, that's fine. I was just --

14 MR. HEIMLEY: No, I was just curious
15 where that came from. Was that from SEPTA?

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: No, that's from
17 Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth. And
18 I see Miss Yanoff ready to jump up.

19 MS. YANOFF: It's the School District's
20 costs.

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: So, again, some of
22 these questions will go to the School District and
23 I'm just curious about it.

24 And when you speak about how SEPTA
25 would have to absorb the cost of distribution if

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2 they took the responsibility for administering it,
3 is that because you would -- I assume you're
4 saying there would be designated areas and you
5 would have to hire personnel? Or could not the
6 tokens be sold the same way others tokens are sold
7 at the subway stations or wherever people purchase
8 tokens in general?

9 MS. JONES: We're talking additional
10 personnel to sell them.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I have a little
12 problem with that one, but we'll talk about that.

13 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: They would need
14 additional personnel?

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: No, to sell the
16 tokens.

17 You have a place where tokens are
18 sold. Down here on the concourse is an example;
19 people are there selling tokens on daily basis.

20 MS. JONES: The school token is
21 distinct and different from regular tokens. And I
22 mean, if you had them sold, there would be no way
23 you could distinguish a sale of a regular token
24 from a school token if it were in a machine.

25 If you're talking about selling tokens

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2 like at our regular outlets, that absolutely would
3 -- we would incur additional costs because we
4 would have to have people sell the tokens to the
5 school children and be able to handle that volume
6 of sale.

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay.

8 MS. JONES: Whereas now, it occurs in
9 the schools.

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay. Somebody's
11 paying. I mean, obviously, if it's not SEPTA,
12 it's the School District. And I mean, we're just
13 trying to see if we can cut some of the costs. I
14 don't know how much we can do that, how much costs
15 we could save, but I have to assume there's a
16 better way -- a less expensive way, I should say,
17 all right?

18 MS. JONES: Sure.

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: A less expensive
20 way. And maybe through these hearings, we could
21 come up with some solution. I mean, you go down
22 into the concourse and you purchase a five-pack of
23 tokens or a ten-pack of tokens. I mean, you
24 distinguish it because one package says "five" and
25 the other says "ten."

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2 Now, it may not be as simple as that to
3 say, Well, these are student tokens. There may be
4 a system that you have to have to have in place to
5 identify the person purchasing the tokens as the
6 student.

7 MS. JONES: Mm-hmm.

8 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: But I don't think
9 it should be all that difficult, and I think that
10 we may come up with a significant savings. And if
11 can, that savings hopefully can be passed on to
12 help reduce the cost of tokens.

13 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: We used to have a
14 machine that says "student tokens"; and the other
15 one, "regular tokens."

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Well, Councilwoman
17 Tasco said that maybe you could have it in one
18 machine. But the cost of the machine and
19 maintaining it, obviously, there's always a cost.
20 I just don't know what -- if there would be a
21 savings and how much that would be.

22 MR. VOITH: Councilman DiCicco, at
23 minimum, I think that we should be looking at all
24 of your suggestions about how we can make this
25 thing more efficient, streamlined, and generate

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2 savings.

3 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: See, I have a
4 problem with the School District, the cost of
5 doing business with the School District. And I
6 don't know if that's just a fact. I mean, if it
7 is, we'll find out, but 1.5 million seems to be an
8 exorbitant amount of money to distribute tokens.

9 MR. VOITH: Councilman, I don't know
10 whether it is or isn't, but it's certainly
11 something we should be looking at.

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: It just seems to
13 me like another layer of bureaucracy and
14 administration that probably we can do away with
15 and pass that savings on to the students and their
16 families.

17 Just for the record, in attendance now
18 is Councilman Cohen who, I believe, has a
19 question.

20 COUNCILMAN COHEN: It's more of a
21 comment than a question.

22 I think it's very ironic that we're
23 talking about how you make a constitutional right
24 effective. The constitution of the Commonwealth
25 of Pennsylvania says that the State has the

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2 constitutional responsibility to provide an
3 education, public education for everybody.

4 And I think one of the reasons people
5 are kind of fed up with government is, we have the
6 City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of
7 Pennsylvania, the School District, and SEPTA
8 spending all of this time and just wasting time
9 instead of getting in a closed room and coming up
10 with something --

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILMAN COHEN: -- that does --
13 coming up with something that does what the
14 statement of the Philadelphia Citizens for
15 Children and Youth states. And it's so simple.

16 The statement says, "Because
17 Philadelphia recognizes the importance of school
18 attendance" -- and I would say "and the
19 constitutional obligation of the government to
20 provide free public schooling for all people" to
21 its future viability and those of its youth, all
22 students should ride to and from school at no cost
23 to the student or family."

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I can't think of

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2 anything more succinct, more simple than that
3 statement. And for government agencies to be
4 fending and worrying about the costs of token and
5 having to explain that a school token is different
6 from another one, wondering about the
7 technological advances, every student -- there
8 ought to be some very simple system like a smart
9 card or what they do at various affairs, a stamp
10 on the wrist that entitles kids to get to school
11 and get educated.

12 And I just wish, Mr. Chairman, that we
13 could compel the mayor and all of these agencies
14 to go in a closed room and lock the doors until
15 they come out with a proposal that announces that
16 tomorrow, kids ride free to school.

17 (Applause.).

18 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

19 Any other questions for these
20 witnesses?

21 (No further questions at this time.)

22 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you all for
23 coming today. I appreciate your testimony.

24 MS. GOREN: Thank you.

25 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: We're going to go

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2 a little bit out of order again. I think there
3 are a number of parents who are here today who I
4 know need to either get back to work or at home.
5 So we're going to ask the parents to come up
6 first.

7 (Joanne Rodriguez, Mirreya Sales,
8 Caroline Hopkins, and Sue Osthoff.

9 (Above group of parents come forward.)

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Good morning
11 ladies. And you decide the order in which you
12 want to speak. Just speak directly into the
13 microphone and state your name for the record.

14 MS. HOPKINS: Good morning. Thank you
15 for giving us this opportunity to speak. My name
16 is Carolyn Hopkins, I'm Interim President of
17 Edison High School, and I'm here to talk about the
18 free tokens or low-cost tokens.

19 I am -- as a parent, my son rides SEPTA
20 and he gets free tokens because he was off, he
21 came off of the yellow school bus, he's a
22 special-needs individual. But there are other
23 students in our schools who I know walk to school,
24 and they're tired, their feet are hurting, okay?

25 Our students and our parents -- it

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2 costs too much money. You know, we are struggling
3 to get our parents to come to school and to
4 support our students, and it's difficult for them
5 to also pay for their tokens for them to come to
6 school.

7 We've heard about truancy. We parents
8 went to truancy court. A lot of our students are
9 not in truancy because of badness or they just
10 don't want to go to school; they can't afford to
11 come to school. And giving them free tokens, I
12 think, would better them, you know.

13 And listening to our Youth United for
14 Change, being transferred to a school just because
15 of tokens, just because they can walk to school, I
16 think that's unfair. Our students go to school
17 because their schools offer them something that
18 they want in particular other than maybe their
19 neighborhood school.

20 My son does not go to a neighborhood
21 school. We live in the William Penn cluster. My
22 son goes to Edison because we chose to go to
23 Edison but we still should be able to go to school
24 free or at low cost.

25 That's what I have to say.

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2 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I agree with you on
3 that.

4 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you. Anyone
5 else to testify?

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. SALES: My name's Mirreya Sales,
8 I'm a parent aide in high school, and I got two
9 kids that I raise them. I live one mile and a
10 half from the school. And my kids sometimes, if
11 the weather permits, they could walk. But in
12 winter, when it is so cold, they sometimes don't
13 to go out. They say, I don't want to walk to the
14 school. Because I got a bus stop in front of the
15 house, but they got to have free tokens and could
16 just take the bus and live one block from the
17 school.

18 You know, that's what I'm concerned
19 about, is free tokens for the parents. And there
20 are other parents in here that have three kids,
21 three or four kids in the same school, and that
22 they have to spend a lot of money to buy tokens
23 for them.

24 That's what I have to say.

25 (Applause.)

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2 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Good evening, panel.

3 My name is Joan Rodriguez. And I am from Edison
4 High School, and I'm with the Home and School and
5 AOP.

6 The reason I want to speak to the group
7 today is, more or less, I met a lady in the
8 audience here that has eight children, eight. She
9 is sitting right behind me. Do you know what that
10 would cost for eight student to have tokens? Some
11 of us here -- I have one, they have three and
12 four. You know, it adds up.

13 And I have seen kids being brought in
14 by the police. Why aren't you in school? I
15 didn't have money to get here, so I walk the
16 streets until the police officers pick me up to
17 broken me in. I don't think it's right.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 MS. OSTHOFF: Good morning. My name is
21 Sue Osthoff, and I want to thank this group for
22 letting me join them because I have to get back to
23 my office.

24 I am here today as a founding member
25 and the treasurer of KAVAD, which is Kids Against

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2 Violence and Drugs, which is an all-volunteer
3 group in West Philadelphia. If we truly care
4 about low-income children in Philadelphia and
5 believe that getting them to school is of utmost
6 importance, then we must provide our children with
7 free transportation.

8 As I said, I am speaking to you today
9 as founding member and the treasurer of group
10 called KAVAD. KAVAD was founded in 1988. It
11 began because a number of kids from my
12 neighborhood asked me and other adults from our
13 neighborhood to help them with school. Many of
14 them at that time in elementary and junior high
15 school were already having great difficulty with
16 school. And it didn't take us adults long to
17 figure out that a big part of the reason that so
18 many of the kids were having such a hard time was
19 because the kids faced so many nearly
20 insurmountable hurdles that made just getting to
21 school almost impossible.

22 And, obviously, one of the major
23 hurdles that kids faced was the price of tokens.
24 They simply did not have the money to get to
25 school. Of course, there were other hurdles, many

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2 of which involved money, or mostly the lack
3 thereof. The fact that the kids needed food,
4 clothing, and other basic necessities always
5 competed with their need to buy tokens to get to
6 school.

7 One of things I keep hearing about in
8 this token issue is, But it's only \$1.80 per day.
9 That's not really that much money. I mean,
10 really, can't their parents or their parent come
11 up with this money? The answer is absolutely no.
12 I think this fact is one of the most difficult
13 things for people of privilege, even just a little
14 bit of privilege, to understand.

15 All the kids in KAVAD had parents who
16 did the best they could and continue to do the
17 best they can. But it didn't mean, and it still
18 doesn't mean, that the kids have enough
19 resources. They still don't have enough
20 resources. Their parents simply did not, and
21 still do not, have enough money. These are
22 parents who are struggling to take care of the
23 kids. Most were not on drugs, most were not
24 drinkers, and all truly cared for their children.
25 They simply did not have enough money.

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2 Now if you had \$1.80 and hadn't eaten
3 for 24 hours, what would you do with that money?
4 \$1.80 can buy 2 packs of Oodles of Noodles, a bag
5 of chips, and a can of soda. For the kids I knew,
6 that was often dinner. For the kids I knew, until
7 KAVAD came along, it was often the only food they
8 had all day.

9 Initially, many of the adults involved
10 with KAVAD as tutors for the kids paid for the
11 kids' tokens out of their own pockets, but as time
12 went on, the tutors could no longer afford to keep
13 paying for the kids' tokens and all the other
14 things the children needed to attend school.
15 KAVAD began raising funds to try to defray some of
16 the expenses that the tutors were incurring
17 themselves.

18 In 1995 KAVAD spent \$1,199.75 for
19 tokens. This amount was almost 20 percent of our
20 total budget. Of this amount, almost \$1200 was
21 spent primarily in helping two students get to
22 school. By that time, most of the others were
23 working, and those who were working and attending
24 school were buying their own tokens.

25 The two other major categories on which

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2 we spent money that year were food and clothing --
3 two things that are also desperately needed by
4 kids who are trying to get to school. From 1996
5 to '98, we spent about \$900 per year on tokens,
6 most of which went to make sure that the youngest
7 of the group was able to complete high school
8 because she was the only one not working at that
9 time. That's \$900 per year for one child's
10 tokens.

11 Even to those of us who live
12 comfortably, \$900 is a lot of money. And imagine
13 what that is to a family whose monthly income is
14 less than \$500. Having to spend money on tokens
15 competes with spending money on other items, like
16 food and clothing that are also essential for
17 children to have so they can attend school.

18 It's simply not fair that low-income
19 families have to make these impossible choices.
20 And as you know, many of Philadelphia's children
21 go to school far distances from where they live,
22 as many of the students were talking about today.
23 It's not as if they could just walk even if they
24 wanted to.

25 I spoke with some of the kids from

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2 KAVAD about these Council hearings. I'm proud to
3 report Kenya, the baby of the group, is now
4 finishing her up second semester at LaSalle
5 University. She would have been here to testify
6 today but she had a class that conflicted with
7 these hearings.

8 Kenya asked me to tell you that she
9 knows that she would not have graduated from high
10 school, let alone be finishing her first year of
11 college, if KAVAD had not paid for her tokens.
12 Her sister Chanel (ph.), now a part-time student
13 at Community College, agreed. Chanel said she
14 would never have gone to school if KAVAD hadn't
15 paid for her tokens. She would just simply not
16 have had a way to get there.

17 How many of our children are missing
18 opportunities to do as well as these kids have
19 done simply because they don't have tokens to make
20 it possible for them to attend school?

21 The vast majority of our city's
22 low-income children do not have a community of
23 people who are willing or are able to provide the
24 level of support that KAVAD has provided to the
25 kids from our own neighborhood. As far as I know,

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2 KAVAD is a rather unique organization. All of the
3 adults in KAVAD have given very generously of
4 their time and their own money to help kids get to
5 school and secure employment opportunities. But
6 it is now time for the City to make sure that all
7 low-income children have free transportation to
8 school.

9 I also speak to you today as the
10 Director of the National Clearinghouse for the
11 Defense of Battered Women, which is an
12 organization based here in Philadelphia. We
13 assist battered women charged with crimes, mostly
14 battered women who are forced to defend themselves
15 against their abusive partners.

16 Every day at my job, I see the tragic
17 results of what happens when people have few
18 options. While having a high school diploma
19 certainly does not guarantee that one will not be
20 battered or not be a batterer, there is no
21 question that having more access to more resources
22 can be a great help in living a life that is free
23 from violence. And getting a good education
24 certainly gives one more access to resources and
25 helps to increase options. All of the children of

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2 Philadelphia, including low-income children,
3 deserve this chance.

4 KAVAD was founded to try to help the
5 kids in our neighborhood have more options. Over
6 the years, KAVAD has spent literally thousands of
7 dollars trying to make it possible for kids to get
8 to school. Many of our funds are spent on
9 tokens. It is time we take down one of the major
10 hurdles that impedes low-income Philadelphians
11 from attending school. They already face more
12 than enough barriers. Low-income students need to
13 have free transportation to school. It is time
14 for the City to make this possible.

15 Thank you very much.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Mr. Chairman?

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Councilman Ortiz.

20 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: You know, it boggles
21 the mind that we're in 1999, and I grew up in New
22 York City and I remember when I was in high
23 school, and you had a G-0 card, right? And you
24 would show your G-0 card as you got into any
25 subway or bus and you got in, right?

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2 And at that time, it seemed that we
3 placed a value on kids getting to school. New
4 York obviously still does it because kids in New
5 York don't pay any transportation to get to
6 school. And I think that was happening here at
7 one time.

8 And that a family has to choose between
9 food and transportation, they should never be put
10 into that situation by the school system, by the
11 City, or by SEPTA. They should never be put in
12 that situation.

13 We need to be able -- David Cohen said,
14 Put them all in a room. It's simple. Public
15 policy says we need our kids in school.

16 Olney High School has 3,000 kids, and
17 1500 of them are absent every day. That should
18 not happen. It isn't just because of schooling or
19 teachers; it's because many of them can't get to
20 school. When you have 1500 kids absent in a high
21 school, you got to look at the reasons why. And
22 if one of them is fixable by just providing
23 transportation, that should be done. And I think
24 we need been to be able to do that.

25 Choice and parents and families, they

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2 should not have to choose between a new pair of
3 shoes or food or whatever and transportation.
4 They -- school should be a priority, and our kids
5 should be our priority for making them attend.

6 I can't -- it boggles the mind that we
7 have come, and instead of going forward, we're
8 going backwards. Instead of providing easier
9 access to education, we're putting barriers to
10 education -- as if our kids didn't have enough
11 problems in itself. It just boggles the mind that
12 we were much further ahead in the 1960s than we
13 are in 1999 in being able to provide a free and
14 open public education to our kids. It's just very
15 disturbing.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I have a question
17 for the ladies up there. Are any of your children
18 who -- are they all just using tokens or are they
19 also using tokens and transfers?

20 MS. HOPKINS: Well, in the first two
21 weeks when the school year begins, I buy my sone a
22 weekly transpass, which, you know, I have to take
23 it from a bill, you know, so he can get to school,
24 okay? That's how my son gets to school for the
25 first two weeks because, you know, of, I guess,

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2 paperwork and stuff like that.

3 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Well, what is the
4 cost of that?

5 MS. HOPKINS: Our weekly transpass is
6 \$17.50, I believe, yeah.

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: 17.50? All right.
8 Any other questions?

9 Yes, ma'am. Speak into the microphone,
10 please.

11 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Oh, did you ask me a
12 question?

13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: It was just a
14 general question if any of your children are using
15 transfers or --.

16 MS. RODRIGUEZ: We use 'em both ways.
17 You know, it depends on how far we're going.

18 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay, thank you.

19 Any other questions for these witnesses
20 from the committee?

21 MS. HOPKINS: May I make one more
22 comment, please?

23 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes, sure.

24 MS. HOPKINS: To piggyback a little on
25 Mr. Ortiz's comment, I was wondering and I was

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2 thinking when the children -- when the students
3 were talking, we tell our young people to be young
4 people, enjoy life, be young folks. We are asking
5 them to grow up fast by having them worry about
6 money problems and money problems involving
7 tokens, how they get to school. And that's a lot
8 what's on most of our young people's mind, how
9 much a burden it is on our parents, you know, them
10 going out and getting a job.

11 That's asking them to grow up really,
12 really fast, and I think it's a shame. It's
13 disturbing.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I think we all
15 agree with Councilman Ortiz's comments.

16 We have to look at the cumulative costs
17 to society for educating our children. I mean, we
18 read in the newspaper daily or weekly that we have
19 a limited workforce in Philadelphia, that
20 companies have a hard time recruiting new
21 personnel because of the educational standards or
22 whatever, that the people that we're graduating
23 from high schools just can't do that. And so in
24 addition to the issues relating to crime and the
25 cost on society and the citizens of Philadelphia,

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2 what it costs us the long term, so I think we
3 really need to really put the emphasis on this.
4 That's the purpose of this hearing, is to see what
5 we can do to about -- I use the words "reducing
6 the cost"; I would certainly like to say to
7 eliminate the costs completely.

8 But there is a cost, as I said in my
9 initial opening statement, involving -- somebody
10 would have to pay, pick up the tab for the \$5.5
11 million that the students are now paying
12 cumulatively. And we're going to look at doing
13 that. And as Councilman Cohen suggested, and I
14 already talked to my chief of staff, and we will
15 convene a meeting with the various people who may
16 be able to make a difference in this. We won't
17 lock them in a room but we'll have a closed-door
18 meeting and talk about some of the possibilities
19 and to see if we could find some portion of that
20 \$5.5 million by various cost-cutting measures or
21 what have you.

22 We will continue to work at this over
23 the next several months and hopefully come back
24 with something much more reasonable than we have
25 today.

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2 Councilman Cohen.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Is somebody still
4 here from SEPTA that was discussing technological
5 advances and tokens?

6 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes.

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I would just like
8 to ask, for senior citizens, the State provides
9 free riding during the non-rush hours, and all
10 that's needed is to show your Social Security
11 number. There's no red tape, there's no
12 administrative costs. Why couldn't we have just a
13 car that said "student" and just show it as you go
14 in. You eliminate entirely all the administrative
15 costs.

16 It seems to me it's such a simple way.
17 Yet, for some reason, government finds a way to
18 make the simplest problem enormously difficult.
19 And to be so wasteful of the money. The kids and
20 the parent can't afford it, shouldn't have to pay.

21 And my personal opinion is -- and there
22 are the lawyers here who may have their opinions.
23 But I think it's unconstitutional to require a
24 student to have to pay a fare in order to get a
25 public education. I don't think there can be such

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2 a constitutional requirement that somebody has to
3 pay to get a free public-school education.
4 But in any event, it's a small matter.
5 I applaud what the Chairman is saying about
6 bringing everybody in together, you know, the
7 different agencies, and compelling them to come to
8 an easy solution.
9 We don't even have proof, Mr. Chairman,
10 that it costs any money for the students. You
11 know, I don't know that SEPTA's actually put
12 through extra expense. And if they want to make a
13 case for extra expense, I think they have a pretty
14 hard burden to show that it's going to cost them
15 anything. But if it does, the government's got to
16 find a way to get together and revolve that
17 question right away. And there ought to be no
18 administrative costs associated in any with any
19 solution.
20 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And I also think
21 at the meeting that I would urge someone from the
22 business community, maybe the Chamber, to attend
23 the meeting.
24 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Fine.
25 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And be part of a

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2 task force, a working task force with SEPTA, the
3 School District, the City, the transportation.

4 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Right, and
5 Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth. And
6 did you say the State?

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Obviously, the
8 State, there's no question about it; the State
9 will be a part of that task force. And I will
10 convene that task force at, hopefully, in the
11 not-too-distant future.

12 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Very good.

13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And we'll begin to
14 have some real discussion on the issue.

15 And I thank you for all your testimony
16 today; it's been very helpful.

17 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Excuse me. I can't see
18 why they just can't show their student I D.

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Ma'am, we will
20 look into that stuff. Those are the things we
21 will look at -- a picture I.D., what have you. We
22 will look into that.

23 Thank you.

24 MS. RODRIGUEZ: All right, thank you.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: The School
3 District: Mr. Lombardi and Mr. Hazan, are they
4 still here?

5 (School District panel members come
6 forward.)

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Good morning.

8 MR. STEIN: Good morning.

9 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Please identify
10 yourself for the record.

11 MR. STEIN: I'm Jonathan M. Stein. I'm
12 with the Office of Government Relations for the
13 School District. I wanted to thank you for the
14 leadership that you and your colleagues have shown
15 in bringing this issue to the forefront.

16 With me is John Lombardi, who is
17 Director of Transportation Services for the School
18 District. And Herb Hazan -- and for the
19 stenographer, that's H-A-Z-A-N -- who plays a key
20 role in our attendance operation and is also a
21 coordinator for Court Services, you know, our
22 Family Resource Network. And I'll ask John to
23 begin. He has some numbers which we are
24 distributing to you and your colleagues on our
25 token situation.

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2 MR. LOMBARDI: Good morning,
3 Councilman. I also want to thank you for your
4 interest in this important matter.

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Speak a little bit
6 louder into the mike and state your name for the
7 record. Thank you.

8 MR. LOMBARDI: My name is John
9 Lombardi. I'm Director of Transportation for the
10 School District of Philadelphia.

11 In the handout that was just provided,
12 I wanted to provide some information about the
13 number of students receiving free tokens. The
14 number of public school students receiving free
15 tokens is 10,620, approximately, for the current
16 year; and the number of non-public students that
17 are receiving free tokens is approximately 830
18 students. They receive tokens in conjunction with
19 the current Board of Education policy.

20 The students who are not eligible based
21 on the Board's policy to receive free tokens have
22 the ability to buy the tokens from the schools
23 which they attend, and there are 13,853 public
24 school students who buy tokens to get to and from
25 school, and there's approximately 5700 non-public

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2 school students also buying tokens at their
3 respective schools.

4 The cost of the program to the
5 District, including transfers for free subsidized
6 tokens and transfers, is \$8,764,000 for the
7 current year -- that's what is budgeted. The
8 students are spending approximately \$6 million a
9 year to buy the tokens, the 90-cent piece of their
10 cost. The District subsidized the tokens for a
11 quarter, but they pay SEPTA approximately
12 \$6 million for the purchase of tokens.

13 The bottom line revenue for SEPTA is
14 approximately \$15 million per year. The estimate
15 of costs to the District for the sale and
16 distribution of tokens -- and these costs are
17 primarily at the school level -- is about a
18 million and a half dollars a year. That's for
19 people who receive the tokens from our delivery
20 trucks, they have to secure them in a place in the
21 school, they have to sell them to the students,
22 collect money for the sale of them, reconcile the
23 account, make a bank deposit and so on. It's a
24 big burden on the School District. And the
25 estimated cost for that is about \$1.5 million for

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2 the School District to do that.

3 We believe there's some correlation
4 between the price of the tokens and the attendance
5 ratings for the students, and Mr. Hazan will
6 provide that information and will answer any
7 questions that he can.

8 MR. HAZAN: Good morning. My name is
9 Herb Hazan. And I'm advisor for attendance issues
10 for the School District of Philadelphia. And in
11 that capacity over the last year or so, I have
12 spent a lot of time in some of our truancy courts,
13 which I've had a role in setting up.

14 And let me say at the outset that one
15 of the missions of the truancy courts is -- at
16 least initially -- not to be punitive but to try
17 and discover what the issues are that are
18 preventing a lot of these kids from attending
19 school on a regular basis. And over and over
20 again, I've heard parents and students refer to
21 the cost of transportation.

22 That's anecdotal evidence. And
23 fortunately -- or unfortunately -- though, we do
24 have some data that tells us what the impact of
25 not having transportation is on students

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2 attendance, and that comes about as a result of
3 the transit strike that the City went through last
4 June, June of 1998. I've given you some
5 information which you could refer to showing the
6 average daily student attendance rates for the
7 months of May and June for both the '97-'98 school
8 year and the '96-'97 school year, just aggregated
9 by school level -- high school, middle school, and
10 elementary school.

11 And what you can see from that is at
12 the high school level, attendance fell from May to
13 June 1998 by 20.77 percent. That is, the average
14 daily attendance in the month of May was 20.77
15 percent higher than in the month of June, 1998.
16 And while it's true that we do have a falling-off
17 of student attendance, which is an issue that we
18 are working on among other attendance issues,
19 traditionally from the month of May to the month
20 of June, in the previous school year, the
21 attendance fell off from May to June by less than
22 half the amount that it did in 1998.

23 That pattern is repeated for the middle
24 schools, and in the middle schools, the attendance
25 level fell by 10.12 percent, or about half the

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2 amount that it fell in the senior high schools.
3 And that could be due to the fact that many of our
4 middle schools are grades 5, 6, 7 and 8, and as
5 you've heard, we do provide school bus
6 transportation for the 5th- and 6th-graders. For
7 the elementary-school students, most of whom, if
8 they need transportation to and from school, the
9 District is already providing it. The drop in
10 attendance from one month to the next was not as
11 pronounced, although it was there.

12 As you can see, the School District's
13 policy on attendance, as you've heard -- on
14 busing, rather, is that we provide the
15 transportation of kids who live over 1.5 miles
16 from school for grades 1 through 6.

17 So clearly, the unavailability of SEPTA
18 transportation last June had a devastating impact
19 on student attendance. And the more dependent the
20 student was on SEPTA transportation, which is
21 generally the older students in higher grades, and
22 that is the student who is more at risk of
23 dropping out to get -- the more dependent those
24 students were on transportation to get to and from
25 school, the greater was the impact of the strike

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2 situation.

3 And we already know from our
4 examination of attendance patterns in the School
5 District that it is in the middle schools that
6 attendance begins to decline, and you could see
7 some of that on the first sheet just by looking at
8 the month of May for the attendance in middle
9 schools as opposed to elementary schools. And we
10 have more data that supports that.

11 And what we're saying is, it's possible
12 that the unavailability of transportation for 7th-
13 and 8th-grade students contributes to this
14 decline.

15 Again, as Mr. Lombardi said, we'll be
16 happy to answer any questions.

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

18 Mr. Lombardi, could you tell me the
19 number of personnel that are involved in the sale,
20 the distribution, receiving -- all the
21 transactions that take place with the tokens.

22 MR. LOMBARDI: Probably over 100 at the
23 school level, Councilman. And within the
24 Transportation Division, we have one office person
25 who reconciles all the collections of tokens from

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2 SEPTA and the distributions to the schools. And
3 two drivers make distribution to all the schools,
4 both public and private.
5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Two drivers are
6 School District employees?
7 MR. LOMBARDI: Two drivers are School
8 District employees who do the entire city and all
9 the non-public schools as well.
10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: So SEPTA delivers
11 all the tokens to one location?
12 MR. LOMBARDI: We pick them up.
13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You pick them up.
14 MR. LOMBARDI: We pick them up from
15 them and we deliver them to all the schools, all
16 the public and non-public schools.
17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay. And one
18 person reconciles the account.
19 MR. LOMBARDI: At our office, we keep
20 track of what we receive and what we distribute to
21 the schools. Then you have the reconciliation
22 process at the school level where if we deliver
23 10,000 tokens to a school, they have to account
24 for all those tokens, be it cash or free.
25 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Every school gets

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2 a --

3 MR. LOMBARDI: Well, every school --

4 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Well, every school
5 that --

6 MR. LOMBARDI: Every school that has
7 eligible students for free tokens, of course, gets
8 them. And there are schools who request to sell
9 tokens; we also deliver them to them.

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And there's
11 someone at each of those schools --

12 MR. LOMBARDI: Yeah, sure.

13 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: -- that monitors
14 the day-to-day daily sale of the tokens and --

15 MR. LOMBARDI: Correct.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: -- the collecting
17 of monies, what have you.

18 MR. LOMBARDI: Correct.

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And is that their
20 full-time job?

21 MR. LOMBARDI: I don't believe it is,
22 no. It is a portion of their day that's devoted
23 to this. Now, in some schools where you have
24 hundreds of high-school students, it could be a
25 significant part of their job.

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: But I'm just
3 curious; I'm not criticizing anything.

4 MR. LOMBARDI: There's probably over a
5 hundred in the public schools, a hundred employees
6 who are involved in this process.

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: In the --

8 MR. LOMBARDI: Public school system.

9 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: -- the process of
10 tokens, whether sales, deliveries, everything, a
11 hundred.

12 MR. LOMBARDI: Yes. Probably over a
13 hundred.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay. And tokens
15 are sold on a daily basis or is there a time
16 period in which students have to purchase tokens?

17 MR. LOMBARDI: Well, it varies. Some
18 schools sell them daily, some sell them weekly.
19 Some schools give them out daily because they
20 can't afford to give the tokens out each day to
21 the -- on a weekly basis because they may be
22 stolen. Some principals give a token out -- two
23 tokens out every day: one to get home and one to
24 get back. If they gave out ten tokens, they could
25 be stolen and the kids won't have any tokens to

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2 get back and forth to school.

3 So it varies by principal based on the
4 needs of his kids. So it could be a daily
5 occurrence, it could be a weekly occurrence. The
6 sale is usually two to three days a week in
7 schools.

8 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay. Councilman
9 Cohen.

10 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Would I be right or
11 wrong based on your figure, the total actual cost
12 to the School District, not counting that million
13 and a half.

14 MR. LOMBARDI: Right.

15 COUNCILMAN COHEN: But if we could set
16 up a system like the senior citizen Medicare
17 Social Security card, the total cost that the
18 School District pays for actual tokens is less
19 than \$9 million; it's about \$8.5 million,
20 according to your statement.

21 MR. LOMBARDI: That's correct.

22 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I would like to
23 figure out -- maybe somebody could -- the
24 percentage of a City General Fund budget of
25 \$2.5 billion, what 8.5 million would mean. You

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2 know, it's such a tiny percentage of 1 percent,
3 maybe a thousandth of 1 percent or a hundredth of
4 1 percent of the school budget.

5 It just seems tragic to have every
6 mayoral candidate talking about the first priority
7 of my rein as mayor of the City is going to be to
8 deal with the public school situation. Every
9 candidate for Council-at-Large is saying the same
10 thing, and there are 30 of them. And the various
11 district Councilmembers all say it because
12 Philadelphians know that the public schools are a
13 problem. To have a small sum like \$8.5 million
14 create such problem and keep kids in such large
15 numbers from attending schools is unthinkable.

16 Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to say that
17 I think in addition to convening the parties, this
18 committee should make a recommendation of City
19 Council that beginning with a certain date, like
20 May 1st, that a system has to be devised to permit
21 free transportation of all children; and if the
22 government agencies involved have not worked out
23 there technique, it will be their responsibility
24 to work it out as quickly as possible.

25 Because that's the total cost, right?

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2 If we had some other system that didn't require
3 administration, we're talking about \$8.5 million
4 to make it possible for every kid in Philadelphia
5 to attend public school. It just seems horrendous
6 that this problem has not been involved
7 previously.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

10 I just think what maybe what we need to
11 also look at, Councilman Cohen, is, you know, the
12 \$15 million that we subsidize every year to the
13 School District.

14 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Maybe a portion of
16 that should be dedicated. I know Councilman
17 Kenney has talked about dedicating some of that
18 money for other purposes, but I think that we do
19 have a pool of at least \$15 million. We don't
20 know if any of it goes towards the subsidizing of
21 the tokens. And maybe a portion, if not all of
22 it, could be used --

23 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Or maybe the City
24 could put in 3 million and the State could put in
25 3 million and SEPTA could put in 3 million, and

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2 you could solve the whole problem.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILMAN COHEN: An almost
5 infinitesimal cost to each of those bodies.

6 I like the Chairman's proposal too, but
7 it just seems to me that we ought not to haggle
8 very long. We ought to act and get a quick result
9 that enables kids not to have an excuse for not
10 going to school and to enable their families to
11 send every kid to school.

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And I think as a
13 result of the information that we gather here
14 today --

15 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Yes, it's very
16 helpful.

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: When we do convene
18 that task force, those are some of the issues that
19 we can talk to.

20 Again, 9 million -- Councilman Cohen
21 and I always have a difference of opinion on these
22 issues sometimes, but 9 million is insignificant
23 compared to 2.5, but it's still 9 million, and
24 we've got to figure out where that's going to come
25 from.

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2 Again, I always have a problem, and
3 Councilman Kenney raised this issue with me a few
4 weeks ago: the 15 million goes into the School
5 District budget every year, and where it goes what
6 it's being spent for, I don't know.

7 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Mr. Chairman.

8 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: And maybe we need
9 to see if we can identify that as some sort of a
10 line item. You know, you get the 15 million, but
11 a portion of it has to go to pay down the cost of
12 tokens, or something like that.

13 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I'd like to find out
14 how many corporations we have given a TIF to in
15 the last two or three years. The money that those
16 corporations are not paying in lieu of taxes to
17 the City and so on is money that usually goes to
18 the school system. And maybe, maybe we could ask
19 all of those corporations to contribute a small
20 amount, a small amount yearly in lieu of the taxes
21 that they are going to be not paying -- a small
22 amount to the school system that would go towards
23 public transportation.

24 That is money that usually would go to
25 the school system. It is not going to the school

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2 system right now. It is money that is going to
3 developers, and they will make very huge profits
4 and they will make a lot of money. Maybe some of
5 -- a slight amount, not a lot, but a slight
6 amount, maybe we should look into that also.

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Well, again, I
8 think when we convene the task force, we'll have
9 the Chamber come in, and we can make some of those
10 recommendations to the Chamber and talk to the
11 people in the corporate and business community.
12 Because, as I've said earlier, they do have a
13 vested interest in what goes on, and I don't have
14 a problem with the fact that they will make
15 millions as a result of the TIFs because it does
16 create jobs for Philadelphians.

17 COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: That's very good,
18 but --

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Maybe we can find
20 a way in which we can free up some additional
21 money without putting the burden all on the City's
22 General Fund but spreading the costs among the
23 various agencies -- the City, the State, the
24 District.

25 I mean, the District maybe has to look

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2 in that process. The one thing I would point out
3 in terms of the administrative cost that we've
4 identified, that is more than 100 locations. And
5 as Mr. Lombardi has pointed out, its a very
6 labor-intensive process. And the balance that you
7 have to draw there is that if you don't have the
8 appropriate amount of people involved in the
9 process -- it's a cash business, and you know what
10 kind of problems a cash business brings with it.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I understand that,
12 but --

13 MR. STEIN: The other side of the coin
14 here is that we are accused of being careless in
15 the way we administer the program. So it's a very
16 fine balance that we have to --

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: But the trouble
18 with --

19 MR. STEIN: And I know you weren't
20 being critical.

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: At the onset of
22 the meeting, I said this was not to be a hostile
23 meeting, that we're not here to criticize and
24 point figures.

25 MR. STEIN: Sure.

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: But maybe we have
3 to look at a way to make it more cost-effective.

4 MR. STEIN: Absolutely.

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: All right, and
6 it's not a question to say, Well, you're not doing
7 the job properly and there aren't the right
8 controls in there.

9 MR. STEIN: Sure. No, I --

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: But could we
11 reduce the costs of managing that program.

12 MR. STEIN: Sure, right. I understand
13 what you're saying. I think we'd be the first
14 ones to say we'd like to get out of the business
15 of selling tokens.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Mr. Chairman.

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You know, my
18 instincts say that maybe you should be out of the
19 business, and I don't want to shift the burden to
20 SEPTA, but if there's a way we can do it to find
21 that balance. . .

22 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I think the way we
23 do it is to find a way to eliminate any
24 administrative cost to any of the agencies. When
25 you have such a simple thing as just having a pass

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2 that you show somebody, nobody has to sell
3 anything, nobody has to do anything.

4 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: You'll never
5 eliminate all of the administrative costs but,
6 again, bringing those costs down significantly so
7 that whatever the savings are, it gets passed on
8 to the student and it's less money that the State,
9 the City and whoever else has to come up with.

10 Because, again, as I said -- and I
11 don't want to be redundant -- somebody will have
12 to pay. And if we can reduce the cost by
13 1.5 million or whatever it is -- 2.3 million with
14 the transfers, as Miss Yanoff has pointed out to
15 me -- that's a significant savings, and I think
16 it's a start. And I'm hoping today that it is the
17 beginning of a dialogue that we can have with all
18 the entities to begin to look at this more
19 seriously.

20 Any other questions for these
21 witnesses?

22 (No further questions for these
23 witnesses.)

24 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you,
25 gentlemen, thank you for being here.

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2 MR. STEIN: Thank you.

3 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: The next witnesses
4 are Joy Butts, Carolyn Friedman, Tom Butler, and
5 Debra Kahn.

6 (Next panel of witnesses come forward.)

7 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you. And
8 you can decide amongst yourselves who will be the
9 first to speak. Speak directly into the
10 microphone and state your name for the record.

11 MS. BUTTS: Good afternoon. My name is
12 Joy Butts. I am a member of the Kensington
13 Welfare Rights Union and the Director of the
14 Economic Human Rights Documentation Committee. I
15 am also a welfare recipient and a mother of three
16 teenagers, ages 19, 16, and 14.

17 As director of the Economic Human
18 Rights Documentation Committee, it is my
19 responsibility to document economic human rights
20 violations which are occurring in this country
21 because of welfare reform and the TANF bill.

22 The Kensington Welfare Rights Union is
23 an organization of the poor and homeless people,
24 welfare recipients, and unemployed and
25 underemployed people. These are people who are

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2 excluded from debates such as welfare reform
3 debates which have huge impact on us and on our
4 families. We believe that we have a right to
5 thrive -- not just barely survive.

6 We are dedicated to organizing the
7 homeless, the working poor, and all concerned
8 people in this country to see that all people have
9 the basic necessities of life -- food, clothing,
10 utilities, medical care, housing, and education.
11 We speak to issues which directly affect our
12 lives. That is why I'm here to talk to you today.

13 There is an overwhelming need for free
14 school tokens for the heads of households on
15 welfare with children. I am required to buy
16 tokens for two of my children to attend school, a
17 total of \$74 a month. After paying rent and
18 utilities and tokens, there is nothing left of my
19 cash assistance. After buying tokens, many of us
20 have to choose between food or paying the gas,
21 electric, or telephone bill. Some of the bills go
22 unpaid. Furthermore, if we do not pay for these
23 things, we are in danger of losing our children
24 for not providing the daily necessities according
25 to DHS.

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2 In order for me to comply with all the
3 requirements of TANF bill, I need free school
4 tokens. The new TANF bill requires that all
5 school-aged children attend school every day. And
6 if they don't, their mothers are sanctioned. In
7 fact, the whole family is sanctioned, which means
8 no cash, no food stamps, and no medical for that
9 particular month. Mothers are often left without
10 any food.

11 There are days when only one of my
12 children can go to school because I don't have
13 money for to tokens for both of them. There are
14 some large families where it's impossible for all
15 the children to attend on a daily basis.
16 Therefore, there are many children who are missing
17 important work on a daily basis as well as testing
18 because of a lack of tokens. There are also
19 occasions when children lose their tokens and they
20 have to be replaced. Mothers have to come up with
21 the extra money somehow.

22 There are thousands of welfare
23 recipients in Philadelphia whose stories mirror
24 mine or are even worse. We are asking that the
25 City Council see to it that our children have free

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2 tokens so that they can go to school. Without
3 this basic action on your part, many families will
4 be sanctioned and many children in this city will
5 not receive the education they deserve, and are in
6 danger of being removed from their families. It
7 is imperative that matter be addressed
8 immediately. We're talking about the basic
9 survival of families.

10 At one point, my daughter received
11 occasional rides home from the cousin of a
12 friend. This was very helpful because it saved
13 our family money on tokens, and we were able to
14 spend the money on other daily necessity. However
15 on more than one occasion, this cousin failed to
16 pick up the girls as promised, and my daughter,
17 without a token or change for a phone call, was
18 forced to walk the hundred blocks between William
19 Penn High School in North Philadelphia to our home
20 in West Philadelphia. And someone questioned
21 that. It actually happened, my daughter will
22 verify it.

23 My daughter has been forced to miss
24 field trips as well as play and a visit to
25 Franklin Institute because our family could not

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2 provide the money for the fees because we had to
3 buy a month's worth of bus tokens. Plus to even
4 get her to the events in the first place, we would
5 have had to buy even more tokens, which we could
6 not afford.

7 Children of poor families are missing
8 an excessive number of days due to lack of
9 tokens. Their education is suffering. Many are
10 even forced to repeat entire years of school
11 because of the number of days that they miss.
12 Many dropped out, so demoralized that they drop
13 out of society altogether.

14 And I'd like to make a comment on
15 that. My daughter is in danger of failing this
16 year. There is another member of our group whose
17 daughter is an honors students who's in danger of
18 failing this year. There are a number of children
19 who are going to fail. There's a question of them
20 being late for school and being penalized around
21 this token issue.

22 And I would appreciate that if
23 anything's going to be done that it be done by May
24 because, as I said before, there are a number of
25 children who are going to be repeating and who are

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2 not going to repeat; they are going to drop out of
3 school.

4 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, ma'am.

5 MS. BUTTS: Thank you.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. FRIEDMAN: Good afternoon. My name
8 is Carolyn Friedman. I'm the Executive Director
9 of White Williams Scholars in Philadelphia, and I
10 want to tell you how much I appreciate this
11 opportunity. After 16 years of working with
12 Philadelphia public high-school students, this is
13 a really important issue to me.

14 White Williams runs two programs that
15 together serve a total of 2000 low-income
16 Philadelphia public high-school students. All
17 these families are struggling to pay the rent and
18 to buy food. And \$9 a week, \$360 a year for
19 transportation to school is a tremendous amount
20 and means considerable further sacrifice for these
21 families. And for families with multiple
22 children, hardship is obviously even greater.

23 It takes not just a financial toll.
24 These students are putting -- as someone said
25 earlier, these students are putting a lot of time

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2 and energy into getting jobs -- often multiple
3 jobs -- and worrying about how to get to school.
4 These are energies and resources they should and
5 could be focussing on their school work.

6 One of the programs that we run is
7 called the White Williams Scholars Program, which
8 serves A and B students eligible for federal free
9 lunch. Eligibility for that program means that
10 you have, for example, for a family of 3, a
11 maximum income of \$17,700.

12 We know firsthand how desperate these
13 students are for help paying for tokens to get to
14 school. I can't tell you how many calls we get
15 saying, Are you the token people?

16 These students receive a monthly
17 stipend from us. The largest portion of those
18 funds goes to tokens for them and often for their
19 siblings. There are many other expenses to public
20 high school, and these students can't afford to
21 have so much of that money taken up by tokens.

22 We know that many Philadelphia public
23 high-school students recognize education as their
24 ticket out of poverty. They want to go to school,
25 they want to achieve and go on to further

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2 education. They can't do this if they can't get
3 to school. The inability to get to school could
4 change their whole lives. It can mean lowered
5 attendance that, Joy was just saying, results in
6 lowered grades, which in turn jeopardizes what we
7 all want for them -- which is access to
8 opportunity.

9 The other program we run is the Charles
10 Ellis Trust Program. Students for that have to
11 have reduced lunch, which, for a family of three,
12 is an income of \$25,000. We serve over 600
13 students in that program. It's supposed to be for
14 enrichment. We have to cap our tokens at 12 weeks
15 because, otherwise, all those funds would be used
16 by tokens. And then when the 12 weeks are over,
17 we are deluged with phone calls of Where am I
18 supposed to go now, how am I supposed to get my
19 children to school?

20 Many of our students have chosen to
21 attend a school other than their neighborhood
22 school because it offers them an educational
23 opportunity that fits an interest not available in
24 their neighborhoods. Educational choice for
25 family is a key component of a great deal of what

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2 we talk about in education today. The School
3 District offers many choices for families, but the
4 choice isn't worth anything if the students can't
5 get to the program of their choice.

6 Many of our families tell us that if
7 they can't get help, they will not be able to send
8 their children to these programs, and many of
9 these children who are in these programs will drop
10 out without help.

11 From our experience, and you've heard
12 these stories before today, we know families who
13 keep their children at home because of the cost of
14 transportation. Families who send children to
15 school every other day. Students who alternate
16 going to school with a sibling -- today I go,
17 tomorrow you go. A student from William Penn, who
18 walked to school every day from West Philadelphia
19 until she found us to help her. And families that
20 are making choices on a daily basis between riding
21 to school and eating lunch, between riding to
22 school and paying rent.

23 As Councilman Cohen said earlier, it is
24 our responsibility as a community to provide basic
25 access to education for all of our children, and

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2 the ability to get to school constitutes basic
3 access to education. In a School District where
4 80 percent of our students come from families in
5 poverty and as many as half of our high-school
6 students are dropping out, continuing to make
7 transportation an obstacle to student attendance
8 is folly.

9 Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. BUTLER: My name is Tom Butler, and
13 I'm the Director of the College Access Program,
14 and I feel it an honor to be in front of Council
15 today and be able to speak on behalf and support
16 of -- all Philadelphia school students should be
17 able to go to and from school at no cost to the
18 student and their families.

19 The College Access Program, to give you
20 a brief description, is a program that services
21 ten high schools and nine middle schools in the
22 Philadelphia School District system. These
23 schools are comprehensive and the middle schools
24 we service are feeder pattern schools that feeds
25 into those high schools. We service in our three

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2 College Access centers over 10,000 individually
3 and approximately 30,000 just with a head count.
4 So those are a lot of repeat folks who are coming
5 in. But those are in our three locations: one at
6 4601 Market Street; the other at Second and
7 Lehigh, the Lighthouse Community Center; and our
8 largest center, which is located in the Gallery
9 Mall.

10 We've also serviced individually and
11 directly 2300 students from across grades 6
12 through 12 in the middle schools and the
13 comprehensive high schools. We provide them
14 information on college-going, college readiness,
15 and provide them daily -- or at least biweekly --
16 information and personal contact around the
17 college-going process.

18 We also have an additional 250 students
19 who are in our Last Dollar Scholarship Program who
20 have graduated from our schools and now are being
21 supported by Last Dollar monies to attend
22 college. Many of those dollars go toward
23 transportation and book costs.

24 More than two-thirds of the 2300
25 students that we are servicing are low-income

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2 according to federal government guidelines. These
3 guidelines are enforced by the Federal Trio
4 Programs, such as Upward Bound and things of that
5 nature. We receive talent search dollars.

6 An example of some absenteeism issues
7 for a College Access Program student is that we
8 may be running workshops or college information
9 sessions on a certain day of the week, and they're
10 at the school. If the students do not have tokens
11 to get to school, they obviously miss this
12 information. Many of the students have to make,
13 as you've heard earlier, decisions on whether or
14 not they can in fact attend one of our six
15 eight-week Saturday SAT prep courses because
16 they'll need their money to try just to get to
17 school; more or less talking about these
18 after-school or out-of-school hours to attend
19 programs.

20 The SAT prep actually costs each
21 student who comes to our Saturday program \$4 a
22 Saturday, meaning that it takes them a regular
23 token and use their pass to get to those site
24 locations. If you put that over eight weeks, they
25 are paying out \$32 over and above the \$9 that they

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2 have to pay for tokens to get to these enrichment
3 programs.

4 We feel it's very important that if
5 we're going to encourage students to be productive
6 citizens and if students are going to go on and be
7 a success in this society, they will to have all
8 of the availability and access needed to aspire.
9 We have to cut costs as much as we possibly can to
10 allow these students to have these experiences;
11 otherwise, it will continue to go on to the more
12 affluent, and those who are poor will not receive
13 that information. Thank.

14 You.

15 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

16 (Applause.)

17 MS. WEINER: Good afternoon. My name
18 is Debra Weiner (ph.), and I'm substituting for
19 Debra Kahn, the Executive Director of Philadelphia
20 Futures, who is also a former member of the Board
21 of Education.

22 The importance of regular school
23 attendance is widely agreed on by every segment of
24 the community. The correlation between attendance
25 an academic performance is so strong that veteran

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2 educators will tell you, Show me a kid's
3 attendance and I'll tell you his grades. And they
4 are probably right, at least 80 percent of the
5 time. It is no wonder, then, that both staff and
6 student attendance are taken into account in
7 determining a school's success in meeting its
8 performance goals.

9 But for an issue in which there is
10 almost uniform agreement, how we make sure kids
11 get to school regularly remains a dilemma. Every
12 day scores of poor kids, the very kids for whom
13 regular attendance is most important because of
14 all the other barriers to academic success they
15 face, do not make it to school because they are
16 poor.

17 Here's how the arithmetic of the
18 current system adds up: 80 percent of the 213,000
19 students in our public schools come from families
20 with low income, which is defined by the federal
21 government as under \$13,000 a year for a parent
22 and two children. That is a total of 170,000 poor
23 kids, more than the entire enrollment of 24
24 average-size school districts in Pennsylvania.

25 The parent of 2 children who works

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2 full-time at the minimum wage has a gross income
3 of only \$10,036 a year, considerably lower than
4 the federal poverty level.

5 If a family's 2 children need tokens
6 for school, they must pay \$18 per week, or \$648 a
7 year, 5.4 percent of their entire annual family
8 income of \$12,000 just to get to school.

9 Compare the \$324 yearly tab for every
10 poor kid in Philadelphia to get to school to the
11 free ride available to the student whose family
12 income may be \$500,000 a year. You can only
13 conclude the situation is not only grossly unfair,
14 but downright perverse.

15 Children in every suburban small town
16 and rural School District in Philadelphia ride to
17 school for free. Even public-school students in
18 big cities like New York ride for free, while
19 Philadelphia kids get to pay \$325 a year for the
20 privilege.

21 Clearly this inequity is one of the
22 many that results from a state constitution that
23 gives the Commonwealth the responsibility of
24 providing for public schools and then leaves much
25 of the financial burden to local school

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2 districts.

3 We do not blame the City, the School
4 District or SEPTA for the fact that low-income
5 Philadelphia students have to pay to get to school
6 while affluent suburban counterparts ride for
7 free. It is time for these three parties to craft
8 a solution which enables the District to lower the
9 cost of transportation to students and their
10 families by recovering more of the costs through
11 reimbursement from the Departments of Education
12 and Public Welfare.

13 Philadelphia Futures runs a
14 nationally-recognized and award-winning college
15 prep called Sponsor a Scholar, or SAS. All our
16 students come from low-income families and attend
17 neighborhood high schools. Most need to ride
18 SEPTA to get to school, even if they attend a high
19 school in their neighborhood because of distance.
20 Many others need to ride SEPTA because they want
21 to attend a high school outside of their
22 neighborhood that has a program in the area of
23 their interest, such as math, science, law, or
24 journalism. At a time when we are encouraging
25 students to choose the high school that best meets

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2 their academic interests and career goals, we
3 especially need to be sure that the cost of
4 transportation is not a barrier.

5 All of our students need to ride SEPTA
6 to attend our after-school activities such as
7 Homework Club, tutoring, SAT prep, and workshops
8 on college selection, college admission, and
9 financial aid. To do our job of preparing
10 students to be successful in college, we know we
11 must systematically remove as many obstacles as
12 possible.

13 Since the high cost of transportation
14 is one of those obstacles, we provide tokens for
15 our students for all our after-school and weekends
16 programs we sponsor. On an emergency basis, we
17 also help students obtain tokens for daily
18 transportation to school when their families
19 cannot afford them. Last year, we spent \$9,000 on
20 tokens. If we had not, many of our students would
21 have been unable to take advantage of the
22 high-quality college-prep activities we offer.

23 But the problem is that the
24 overwhelming majority of low-income in the public
25 schools do not have access to support programs

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2 like Sponsor a Scholar. And even if they could
3 find enrichment activities somewhere -- in a
4 library or a community center or a church -- they
5 probably could not afford the cost of getting
6 there. So we cannot rely on private philanthropy
7 to solve the student transportation problem. It
8 has to be a public investment.

9 We commend Councilmembers Verna,
10 Kenney, and DiCicco for the initiative they have
11 taken by conducting this hearing. And we commend
12 Councilmembers Ortiz, Cohen, and Tasco for having
13 attended. We hope the result of these
14 deliberations will be the crafting of a policy for
15 free school transportation for every low-income
16 child, or at least a significant reduction in the
17 cost to students. That investment will be repaid
18 many times over in creating a next generation of
19 students who are more likely to stay in school and
20 graduate with the full range of skills they need
21 for higher education, employment, and civic
22 leadership.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Any questions for
3 this witness from members of the committee?

4 (No questions.)

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, thank
6 you for your testimony.

7 Shelly Yanoff.

8 (Shelly Yanoff comes forward.)

9 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: With all due
10 respect to the remaining witnesses, we understand
11 that you're here today and you have put a lot of
12 time in and that you do want to get your comments
13 on the record. But if it's possible to summarize
14 some of your statements in the interest of time,
15 we would appreciate that.

16 I think we got the message. And as I
17 said earlier, we will convene a task force to
18 address this problem. Thank you.

19 Good afternoon, Miss Yanoff.

20 MS. YANOFF: Good afternoon. I'm
21 Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director of Philadelphia
22 Citizens for Children and Youth, the region's
23 child advocacy organization. I want to thank you
24 very much for the resolution and for holding the
25 hearings.

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2 As you know, we've studied this issue
3 at PCCY for quite a while. I want to skip over my
4 testimony because I think you have heard it. I'd
5 like to go to the proposal.

6 But before I do, I want to just make
7 two comments, and that is that there are no
8 villains here; there are only victims, and we're
9 all victims when we don't let our kids, when we
10 don't help our kids get to school.

11 We do not want to place the School
12 District or the kids who go there into other
13 choices. We don't want to take money for books --
14 something I know that's important to you -- and
15 money that is already being used to help educate
16 kids and take from that to deal with this problem.

17 (Applause.)

18 MS. YANOFF: That will not help us. We
19 need more dollars.

20 Now, together, the School District and
21 the children of Philadelphia provide \$15 million,
22 \$15 million in funds to SEPTA. That doesn't count
23 the funding that you provide SEPTA. I'm just
24 saying for this, for tokens.

25 So it seems to me what we need to do is

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2 to say, SEPTA, you have a role to play here;
3 State, you have a role to play here; City, you
4 have a role to play here. And together, we become
5 a city that really means it when we say we want
6 our kids to have an education, we want them to get
7 to school, and we're willing to take steps to do
8 it.

9 The proposal is reasonably simple. The
10 School District continues to pay SEPTA the full
11 cost of tokens, \$1.15. It, however, stops paying
12 for the transfers; and thus, saves 40 cents for
13 about half of the kids who need transfers to go to
14 school, okay? So the SEPTA continues to receive a
15 reimbursement, \$1.15, the full cost of the token
16 for the kids to get to school. It just doesn't
17 get the transfer cost.

18 Then the State receives from the School
19 District the list of kids whose families are on
20 welfare or who have just gone off of welfare, and
21 the State provides the transportation dollars for
22 them. 'Cause, as the woman said earlier, there
23 are three issues around that: one, the State is
24 supposed to provide transportation to families
25 that are coming off welfare; and two, those

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2 families are in danger from losing any of their
3 grants if their kids don't get to school. So it
4 makes sense for the State. And the State has an
5 enormous TANF surplus dollars, so it seems a very
6 appropriate use of that.

7 For the remaining amount, the City
8 picks up the cost that is remaining. That is only
9 about \$2.5 million, most of which, 62 percent of
10 which, can be reimbursed the following year by the
11 State through the Department of Education, through
12 their transportation reimbursement.

13 So each party in this provides a little
14 bit more, and all of our kids get to school. We
15 should do it, we should do it tomorrow.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

18 Miss Yanoff, at the end of your
19 testimony on the proposal sheet, you say the
20 School District would report to Council the impact
21 of these new policies concerning student
22 attendance and school performance.

23 MS. YANOFF: Absolutely, yeah.

24 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: I think I
25 understand that you're saying there. He would you

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2 recommend that we do that? I mean, do you have
3 any suggestions?

4 MS. YANOFF: I think that this is a
5 separate fund that you would be providing. You
6 would hold hearings and ask people to come, and
7 the same because you want accountability for this.

8 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Absolutely.

9 MS. YANOFF: And you want to know if,
10 in fact, we've improved attendance in part by
11 doing that.

12 So I think that we strongly would
13 support Council staying on this issue, Council
14 developing -- this is our proposal. We think it's
15 not hard on anybody, and it moves everything
16 closer to where we need to be.

17 But we -- the other part of it, I do
18 want to say that if we could use the smart card or
19 whatever, don't let the technical problems stop
20 that. I believe very strongly that if this city
21 said, If we only had the funding to install, to
22 use smart cards, we would take care of the rest.
23 I strongly believe that the philanthropic
24 community would respond, and I would be more than
25 willing to lead that charge.

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2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

4 Any questions for Miss Yanoff?

5 (No questions.)

6 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, thank
7 you for your testimony.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Thank you for
10 bringing the solution -- a solution.

11 MS. YANOFF: "The," I like "the"
12 better.

13 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: "The" solution.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Rabbi Zerbarini,
15 la hire Chung, Raisa Williams.

16 (Above individuals come forward.)

17 MS. CHEUNG: Hi. My name is Lai Har
18 Cheung, and I'm from an organization called Asian
19 Americans United. But I'm also here wearing
20 several hats because I'm the oldest in a family of
21 five children, and I am also a former graduate of
22 the Philadelphia public high school.

23 And I'm here today to maybe -- I am
24 sure -- I mean, I'm so glad you guys are doing
25 this because it really shows your support for this

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2 thing. I basically have, I think, new things to
3 say in terms of how the impact of it is in the
4 Asian community. I think the Asian community is a
5 community that is often looked over because we're
6 the high achievers, we do well in school, and so
7 don't worry about them, they'll be okay.

8 And what I am here to say is that no,
9 it is not true, that a lot of Asian families are
10 struggling. They're being exploited because they
11 do not speak English. They're living in very
12 low-income areas, suffering from all of the
13 different impacts of poverty around the City. And
14 maybe even more because of the racial hostility
15 again them. And this makes it a very, very
16 critical issue for Asian youth because of what
17 they've experienced going to school and in the
18 schools regarding the curriculum.

19 Something else I definitely want to say
20 is, back in 1985 when SEPTA wanted to raise the
21 fare, we led a student protest to prevent the fare
22 increase from happening. When we did that in
23 1985, I stood and spoke in front of the SEPTA
24 Board and was basically told to go back to school
25 and learn about civics and budgets. And like

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2 basically they told me, there was no free lunches
3 in this world.

4 Well, I am here to say that I, as a
5 student at that point, expected the adults to be
6 the leaders, okay? I expected the older people to
7 realize what the issue was and to do something
8 about it. And here, I was -- they passed the buck
9 to me, like a high school student that just
10 graduated, and then I was like this is so
11 ludicrous. I was so upset.

12 We won the issue. The SEPTA tokens
13 weren't increased to \$11, but I felt like there
14 was just so much hostility against young people
15 taking charge. And we're encouraged to become
16 citizens and be a part of this process called
17 democracy. Yet, there was so much hostility
18 saying something as simple as "don't increase our
19 fares" because of all these things you've heard
20 this morning, okay? And I'm so glad that City
21 Council has taken up this issue and is like being
22 leaders in this fight.

23 One thing I definitely want to say is
24 when I was going to school, my father spent
25 \$50-some a month so that I could get a monthly

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2 transpass so that I could go after school and
3 participate in extracurricular activities so that
4 I don't need to work the type of work that he
5 needed to work.

6 Basically, he said that education is a
7 priority. And then he made an issue so that no
8 matter how much it cost and how much of a burden
9 it was to my family, he spent over \$1400 so that
10 me and my sister can go after school and go to
11 activities, and weekends, do activities after
12 school, do whatever we needed to do to get the
13 best education we could. And I didn't realize how
14 much of a cost it was to him until now.

15 And the frustrating thing about just
16 being in the Asian community, where people look
17 down on you, they make fun of you. And then on
18 top of that, they say that your issues and your
19 things don't matter.

20 He made education a priority. And
21 because of that, I graduated from one of the
22 finest liberal arts institutions in this country.
23 And if the City puts a priority on education just
24 the same way the young people will see that this
25 city gives something to its young people, and

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2 they'll respond likewise.

3 I know my father sacrificed a lot so
4 that I could get a better life and I think it's a
5 multilayered issue, and everyone involved needs to
6 do the same thing and give young people the hope
7 and the inspiration to keep on working hard just
8 by whatever conditions they live in in this city.

9 That's all. Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, thank
11 you for your testimony.

12 (Applause.)

13 RABBI ZERBARINI: I'm Rabbi Lina
14 Zerbarini from the Jewish Council Relations
15 Council. And I have my testimony and that of
16 Reverend Ed Geiger, from the Metropolitan
17 Christian Council. And in the interest of time,
18 I'd be happy to submit most of those in writing.
19 Would that be useful?

20 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: That would be very
21 helpful. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank
22 you.

23 MS. WILLIAMS: Hi, my name is Raisa
24 Williams.

25 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Miss Williams,

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2 pull the microphone a little bit closer to you.

3 Thank you.

4 MS. WILLIAMS: I work with 10th-grade
5 students and their families at William Penn High
6 School, at Broad and Master Streets. And by the
7 way, at William Penn, they don't sell tokens in
8 the school. Students are given a list of places
9 where they can pick up the tokens.

10 The experience with a lot of students
11 -- and they are local places, supposedly.

12 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: When say "local,"
13 are they at schools or are they private?

14 MS. WILLIAMS: No. They're like at
15 Rite Aid, and there's a check-cashing place. It
16 doesn't always work, and sometimes students have
17 to come down to the 15th Street Suburban Station
18 concourse and pick them up, which is an additional
19 token to get to. So it's not a very good system,
20 but that's the way that the school dealt with the
21 expense and aggravation and the security and the
22 personnel issues. So not only the schools are
23 doing the same thing.

24 Although I am a member of the
25 Philadelphia Futures the staff, I have an office

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2 at William Penn and work closely with the Dr.
3 William Lotz (ph.), the lead guidance counselor at
4 the school. And today I'm testifying on behalf of
5 a group of 10th-grade parents who have expressed
6 their frustration with economic strain of sending
7 their children to public school in Philadelphia.

8 According to Dr. Lotz, about 300 of the
9 1200 students in the freshman class come from the
10 feeder school at William Penn. William Penn
11 personnel, the small learning community
12 coordinators go out and recruit students from all
13 over the City to come to their special programs.
14 William Penn is a Title I school, and 90 percent
15 of the students are low-income. They get a free
16 breakfast and free lunch, if they have the money
17 to get to school.

18 Students from all over the City attend
19 William Penn for a variety of reasons. They have
20 a good reputation, they're a -- small learning
21 communities have a reputation for exceptional
22 teachers and success in preparing students for
23 college and the world of work. The school employs
24 a part-time college counselor to ensure that
25 seniors who want to go to college can get there.

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2 There's a reputable girls track coach and a
3 swimming program. One small learning community
4 has an Afrocentric curriculum that attracts
5 students and community members to the school for a
6 variety of public programs.

7 At a time when parents want to be able
8 to choose school they feel is best for their
9 children, William Penn seems to offer a viable
10 alternative -- if they can afford the
11 transportation.

12 I wanted you to meet some of the
13 students I work with and some of the families who
14 actually wrote notes to me to tell me -- to
15 encourage me to come and speak on their behalf.

16 Margot is a 10th-grade student whose
17 mother is unable to work due to a disability. She
18 travels from West Philadelphia to participate in
19 the Health Academy Program. She wants to be a
20 nurse.

21 Tina is one of eight children at home.
22 Three of them travel to high school each day at a
23 cost of \$108 month. Two of them attend William
24 Penn. Tina's mom is a single parent who recently
25 joined the training and employment program as part

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2 of the welfare reform. I know for a fact that
3 last year, Tina would have to rush home from
4 school to give the transpass back to her mother so
5 she could go to her training program.

6 Carrie lives in East Mt. Airy with her
7 grandparents, who are raising three grandchildren
8 on the grandfather's salary and sending two of
9 them to high school.

10 Roberto is the son of a laid-off
11 mother. In September, she'll have two children in
12 high school.

13 And Raheem, an honor student, depends
14 on the White Williams Scholarship Grant of \$14 per
15 week to buy tokens to attend school. Raheem lost
16 his grant at the beginning of this year, after the
17 first marking period, because he had two Cs. His
18 classmates and friends spent a lot of time getting
19 adults to give them tokens for various and sundry
20 reasons until, finally, I pulled them and said,
21 What's going on? And they said some kids have to
22 get to school. And I finally found out that it
23 was his problem, and it was their attempt to solve
24 it.

25 His brother is also a high-school

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2 student who went to William Penn this year and was
3 transferred because of disciplinary reasons. And
4 with that transfer came free tokens to get to
5 school. So go figure.

6 These stories are not unique. Dr. Lotz
7 could spend a week relating many instances of
8 students who have to leave early to get their
9 transpass home so other family members can go to
10 work. I talked with her at length before I came
11 today.

12 Students who have not been able to
13 attend school the last week of every month, as
14 parents run out of cash. Students who come daily
15 to ask for tokens to get home. It's difficult to
16 concentrate on the school work and do your best
17 when you don't know how you're going to get home
18 and if you're going to come back the next day.

19 Dr. Lotz also worries about the new
20 graduation requirement of 23.5 credits for
21 graduation. There is no margin for error. Any
22 failed course will require night school attendance
23 at an additional cost in transportation. If the
24 students; families cannot afford the cost of
25 making up the failed course, we may be looking at

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2 lower graduation rates in years to come and less
3 opportunities for a large group of students.

4 The parents of the students I mentioned
5 in this statement urged me to speak on their
6 behalf. Some wrote notes so I could for them. I
7 understand their reluctance to acknowledge in
8 public that they find it difficult to provide
9 transportation for their children to attend the
10 public school of their choice. For these parents
11 and students, public education is not always
12 affordable, and it's definitely not free.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

15 (Applause.)

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, thank
17 you for your testimony.

18 Pat McNamara, Jon Stein, and Earnest
19 Peacock, I believe, are the last three.

20 (Above individuals come forward:)

21 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you for your
22 patience.

23 Yes ma'am.

24 MS. MCNAMARA: My name is Patricia
25 McNamara. I am CEPA, the Consumers Education and

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2 Protective Association's Executive Director.

3 I'm here today to support the call for
4 making transportation to and from school free for
5 all Philadelphia school students. When I think
6 about what each school dropout costs society, I
7 cannot help but wonder why there is anyone who is
8 opposed to finding \$1.5 million to make sure that
9 every student can afford to go to school.

10 There is no denying the facts. Some
11 students do not go to school because their parents
12 cannot afford to buy tokens. What happens to
13 these students? Does anyone believe that without
14 a proper education, these young people will reach
15 entire their full potential? Isn't it a sad fact
16 that many young people who drop out of school
17 struggle with low-paying jobs while others turn to
18 crime? In the long run, don't we as a society pay
19 for the problems that are associated with dropping
20 out of school? Why is it that we always find the
21 money to deal with the problems after they happen,
22 but we can never find the money needed to prevent
23 the problems?

24 No one hesitates to spend money on
25 police or jails. If you just heed the simple

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2 words "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of
3 cure," you will find the money to make school
4 accessible for all Philadelphia students.

5 Please do not insult our intelligence
6 and tell us you don't have the money. We know
7 that when you want to, you can find it. You found
8 millions of dollars to give Kvaerner, Disney, and
9 other multi-billion-dollar corporations. Every
10 year, you find \$30 million for the Convention
11 Center to make sure tourists can get to their
12 hotels. We know you can find \$1.5 million to make
13 sure our students get to school.

14 The question is, Will you? What are
15 your priorities? Are multinational corporations
16 more important than school children? Are tourists
17 more important than the families who live in the
18 City?

19 We will know your answers not by what
20 you say, but by what you do and how you vote.

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes. Thank you, .

23 MR. WEISHAAPT: Good afternoon. And I
24 promise to be brief.

25 My name is Richard Weishaupt, and I'm

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2 an attorney at Community Legal Services. And I'm
3 also the father of two children who go to the
4 Philadelphia public school system.

5 There are 501 school districts in
6 Pennsylvania. Seven do not provide free
7 transportation for every student and
8 Philadelphia's one of those.

9 We as a state -- and I recognize this
10 is not this Council's purview -- have decided that
11 it is more important to pay transportation to get
12 kids to private schools than it is to transport
13 the kids that go to our public schools. And it
14 seems grossly inequitable that children whose
15 families can't afford transportation are getting
16 free transportation through grades 1 through 6
17 while we've got high-school students and
18 middle-school students who cannot afford to go to
19 school.

20 There's something wrong with a set of
21 priorities that cannot address that particular
22 problem. I'm not saying that the best way to do
23 this would be to take transportation away from
24 some children; I think that the appropriate answer
25 is, as Pat says, it's a matter of priorities.

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2 Every child in Philadelphia should be
3 able to get to school and should not be charged
4 for transportation, just like they're not charged
5 for the chairs that they sit in the chalkboards
6 that they look at, and the books that they read.

7 (Applause.)

8 MR. WEISHAUP: And if we pay for the
9 transportation, we will see attendance go up, we
10 will see improvement in school work, and the books
11 that we care so much about will actually be read
12 because, I know from my own kids' experience, that
13 they're carrying like 20 pounds of books around
14 with them. And I can guarantee you that if you've
15 got 'em walking a mile each way, you're not
16 carrying those books back and forth. So if we
17 want them to read them, we have to put them on the
18 bus so that they can get them to and from school.

19 There are a lot of pockets to look to.
20 There's SEPTA, there's the City, there's the
21 School District, and there's the State Department
22 of Welfare. I've been working on this issue for
23 ten years, and everybody has always said, Somebody
24 else should go first and then we'll pick up. And
25 I think Councilman Cohen is right. We just need

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2 to get everybody in the room together and say,
3 Okay, step up to the bar, how much are you willing
4 to put in, and how far can we get?

5 And if we could get everybody to step
6 up to the bar, we could also realize appreciable
7 savings because, as you point out, if we have a
8 system that didn't rely on selling tokens, we
9 wouldn't have to pay all those people for security
10 and for counting the tokens and all that. We
11 could just give each kid a card saying that they
12 were a Philadelphia public school student, and
13 then they could just get on the train or bus it's
14 as simple as that.

15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 MR. STEIN: I will be briefer than my
19 colleague. I'm Jonathan Stein, General Counsel at
20 Community Legal Services.

21 One, we support Miss Yanoff's proposal.
22 I think it's really a fair one and it really meets
23 the need to have everyone pay their fair share.

24 And, Councilman DiCicco, your idea of a
25 task force, I think, is an excellent idea. I

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2 think we do need to get the relevant parties
3 together because they don't really talk together
4 about this, they've never seen the need to say,
5 you know, we can do this together as a combined
6 group of government -- including the State,
7 because one of the sources of State money that
8 PCCY has identified with our help is the TANF
9 money, the welfare money that is out there, and
10 there's a \$200 to \$300 million surplus of just
11 this category of federal welfare monies that the
12 State is not spending. It's available to spend on
13 the needs of welfare children in Philadelphia, to
14 pay their transportation needs, and that is an
15 identifiable source of money that could add to the
16 solution of this problem.

17 The plight of welfare families is just
18 extraordinary. I mean, it's not often known, you
19 know, how much is in a grant for three people -- a
20 mom, a single mom, and two children. Those three
21 individuals have to survive on a grand total of
22 \$403 a month, 4-0-3, and if those two kids going
23 to school have to pay tokens, as they do in these
24 grades above grade 6, that mother has to find \$72
25 or 15 percent of a pittance welfare grant of 4-0-3

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2 a month, \$76 out of 4-0-3 a month before she then
3 can pay her rent, utilities, food, and clothing, I
4 mean, it's an outrageous expense. If that woman
5 were in one of these welfare-to-work programs at a
6 minimum wage at 20 hours a week, you know, her
7 income bloom up from 403 to 442 a month. And
8 again, 442 is not a lot of money to take \$76 for
9 two kids' school tokens.

10 So without belaboring that point, I
11 think there's an extraordinary need here. There's
12 a great issue of fairness, of access to education
13 which we all believe, and we really welcome
14 Councilman DiCicco. Your initiative, I think, is
15 an extraordinary initiative you're taking because
16 I think this has not been done in City Council
17 before, and I really hope we can join with you in
18 keeping this momentum going.

19 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: We're committed to
20 keeping this going. And you've pointed out and
21 I've known this for the last three years, actually
22 longer than that, that I've been involved in local
23 politics. Generally what happens is, everyone has
24 idea, everyone has suggestion, but they just don't
25 come together. And putting people in the same

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2 room sometimes, you do get some interesting
3 results from it.

4 We're going to try and see if we can
5 put the parties together in the next two weeks,
6 three weeks, at the max. You know, there is an
7 election a couple of weeks away, so it may be
8 little difficult to get all of the Council
9 Committee members on the same day, but we will do
10 our best to do that and to get all the other
11 entities that we mentioned in a room and begin the
12 process.

13 One of the people who testified said
14 something about May. While I think they were
15 looking for the solution by May 1st, in all
16 honesty, that will never happen. It's an
17 impossibility. So I don't want anyone to leave
18 this chambers thinking that this is all going to
19 happen by May 1st. I don't even know what the
20 results will be, no less to be able to give you a
21 time definite on that. I'm not one to make you
22 feel good walking out of here and then do
23 something different.

24 The straight talk is we will convene a
25 task force, we will continue to hammer away at

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2 this thing. And hopefully, hopefully, sometime
3 between now and the next school year, we can have
4 some resolution to the problem.

5 MS. MCNAMARA: Can PCCY be included with
6 that task force? Because usually what happens is,
7 you put a bunch of people together in a room that
8 can figure out all the reasons why you can't do
9 it. PCCY, it's obvious that they have figured out
10 it can be done.

11 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Miss Yanoff will
12 be a part of that. And we're not going to have
13 people in the room that are going to figure out
14 why they can't do it; we're going to have people
15 in the room to figure out how we can get this
16 done.

17 MS. MCNAMARA: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: In some way I,
19 shape, or form. Again, I don't know what the end
20 result will be, but I do believe that we will be
21 in better shape than we are today. And at least
22 it's a first step, it's been a long time coming,
23 so we have to start someplace.

24 MS. MCNAMARA: Thank you.

25 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you.

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2 Is there anyone else here who wishes to
3 testify who is not on the list of the witnesses?

4 (Three women come forward.)

5 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Yes, ma'am.

6 Please state your name for the record and pull the
7 microphone closer to you or you can get closer to
8 the mike whatever.

9 MS. MORRISON: Good afternoon. My name
10 is Debra Morrison. I thank you for the
11 opportunity to be here.

12 We are employees at Parents Union. But
13 in addition to that, we are also the parents of
14 children in the Philadelphia public school system.

15 Some of the issues that was talked
16 about was global; they were more than what's
17 affecting just us. They are issues that, out of
18 the 215,000 children that's in the Philadelphia
19 public schools, I'm sure that the parents, if they
20 were able, would have packed this room here
21 because it affects us deeply.

22 But one of the questions we did have,
23 you answered it a few seconds ago. We wanted a
24 time line because we get phone calls weekly from
25 parents pertaining to the token issue. Because

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2 there is a need for reduced or free tokens. And
3 the question that was asked, What would it cost
4 for them to provide that? is an important
5 question. But a more important question is, What
6 it would cost for that service not to be
7 provided? Because attendance is an issue, and it
8 has to be addressed. And it only can be addressed
9 with us working together.

10 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Okay. I mean,
11 your answer to the folks who call you is -- this
12 is not an exercise in public relations today so
13 that Councilpeople could be heard and seen and not
14 do anything. This is really an exercise to begin
15 the process.

16 And again, I do not want to mislead you
17 into thinking that it will happen in the next two
18 weeks, six weeks. I don't know. It may take six
19 months. I just don't have an answer. And
20 Shelly's saying, No, I would like for it not to
21 take that long.

22 But it is a process, today is the
23 beginning. We will continue to work at this for
24 however long it takes to come to some resolution.
25 And, again, I don't know if it is a partial

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2 payment in addition to what's being paid or a full
3 free token. I don't have the answer. I'd love
4 for it to be free but I'm not going to let you
5 walk out of here, as I said earlier, feeling good
6 all, Oh, it's all going to be free, and then come
7 back with something different.

8 I'm not the only person that will be
9 involved in the process. There are a number of
10 people who are involved in it. There's 8 to
11 \$9 million that we're speaking of. It's
12 insignificant when you look at the big budget, but
13 it is significant nonetheless, and we to have
14 figure out a way how to close that gap. And
15 that's what this process will be about.

16 But the pledge, the promise that I can
17 make today is we will continue to discuss this
18 with the task force.

19 Yes, ma'am.

20 MS. BURTON: My name is Eudora (ph.)
21 Burton. And I also am an employee at Parents
22 Union for Public Schools and a parent trainer.
23 But first of all, I am a parent.

24 And I was wondering, when you do come
25 together with this task force, and I'd like -- at

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2 least you gave a time line of possibly two weeks
3 that you can organize and meet with this task
4 force. But when you come together, I hope that
5 you will consider getting statistics from the
6 police department of how many students did they
7 pick up for truancy. And talk to judges in
8 reference to truancy court.

9 Because every time you have a hearing
10 or something of that sort, that's costing
11 taxpayers more and more dollars. Every time a
12 child is hurt in the streets for safety reasons
13 coming back and forth to school because they don't
14 have tokens to catch a bus, hearing about these
15 children traveling from West Philadelphia to North
16 Philadelphia and other transportations, whenever a
17 child goes out of his community, he is then a
18 stranger -- unprotected and alone. And the cost
19 -- I'm sure if we could get statistics from the
20 hospitals of these emergency-room costs of
21 children who get hurt or children that are
22 loitering around in the streets because they don't
23 have transportation because their parents have to
24 choose whether they're going to eat or whether
25 they're going to pay their rent so that they have

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2 somewhere to live, or whether that child goes to
3 school, I'm sure that's enormous costs.

4 And I also want to make a point that
5 not every child that needs these tokens are on
6 public assistance or getting off of public
7 assistance. An even people that are on public
8 assistance have a time line. And eventually, it's
9 going to be a revolving door, we're going to be
10 back at this point for underemployed people.

11 This is a critical issue. I do agree
12 that right now that is another vehicle for it,
13 through TANF monies. But I want in that whole
14 process that all people be considered. Like the
15 young lady was speaking, some people need public
16 assistance but they have a lot of pride, and I can
17 understand that. And they make a lot of
18 sacrifices, but the need is still real, and the
19 need is still there.

20 And there are even people like me who
21 are not on public assistance but have a job which
22 is a J-O-B, "Just Over-Broke." And my children, I
23 have eight children. Four, I'm fortune, that have
24 graduated from school already. But like others
25 have said, they couldn't participate in

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2 extracurriculum programs that would allow them to
3 go on to college or allow them to do even better
4 in school than they would have because I can
5 afford the transportation involved for them to
6 attend those programs. Although I'm very proud of
7 them, and some did go to college.

8 But it's a realistic problem here, and
9 I do thank you for attempting to give parents a
10 time line, and I will be glad to tell them that at
11 least City Council cares about its children, and
12 something will happen.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you, thank
15 you ma'am.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Any other
18 witnesses?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILMAN DICICCO: Thank you for
21 coming here. I thank all of you for your patience
22 and indulgence and your interest.

23 This concludes the hearing of the
24 Committee on Public Transportation and Public
25 Utilities.

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2 Thank you.

3 (Adjourned at 1:25 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing
proceedings of the Council of the City of
Philadelphia of Tuesday, April 20 1999 were
reported fully and accurately by me, and that this
is a correct transcript of same.

RE: COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
PUBLIC UTILITIES

BILL NO. 990128

_____,
JOSEPHINE CARDILLO,
Registered Professional Reporter