



**March 3, 2022**

**Mayoral Control Strips Parents and Communities  
of Their Dignity, Humanity and Self-Reliance!**

Dear Senator Liu and Colleagues,

It pains us that Mayoral Control is still a reality when it is so destructive to the human spirit, to individuals, to families and to communities. As students of history and admirers of American Literature, Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay entitled, "Self-Reliance" embodies for us the spirit of our democracy in which the individual's pursuit of his or her own well-being and happiness is the most fundamental pillar. It is bizarre and unconscionable to us that a country founded on principles like self-determination and self-reliance would have in its bosom a state that would institutionalize Mayoral Control in education in one of its cities, a city in which the majority of public school students are non-white and overwhelmingly economically disadvantaged. Without a doubt, Mayoral Control contributes to the status quo and robs poor families and poor BIPOC families of the opportunity to be masters of their own fates and captains of their souls, as the poet William Ernest Henley puts it and our Chancellor likes to repeat. Please, bear with us as we reflect on the historical damage inflicted by Mayoral control from its inception.

Under Mayor Bloomberg, Mayoral control robbed poor families and poor BIPOC communities of the opportunity to participate in the reconstruction of their schools and their communities by punishing systematically and callously poor schools and poor communities through school closures, displacing both students and staff. It continued to punish poor schools through the creation of a series of smaller schools and co-locations that solved neither the problem of low performance nor the problem of overcrowding. One can argue that it in fact exacerbated those problems.

It further punished educators by scapegoating them and rendering them responsible for the socio-economic issues that weigh so heavily on education. These were and remain problems that educators are not responsible for, cannot solve, and that are the direct results of a dereliction of duty by government. Yet, Mayor Bloomberg continued his assault on educators through ineffective ratings, continued demoralization of a workforce, already depleted of any type of professional well-being stemming from the systemic and traditional lack of support.

In truth, those schools and communities needed real investments and time to undo the damages incurred over decades and decades. Mayor Bloomberg continued to add insult to injury by championing the cause of charter schools and helping to brand them as supposed saviors to education in poor communities. Educators, students, parents, families and communities watched in horror as these developments occurred, unable to correct the course of this inevitable collision on the path to destroy and privatize public education – something that would have been detrimental to the upward mobility of the poor and the working poor.

Yet, in spite of these horrible sins committed by Mayor Bloomberg under Mayoral Control, none compared to the atrocities caused by the de Blasio Administration in the middle of a world pandemic. For the first time ever, New Yorkers in the public school system, in September 2021 felt the cruelty of what it is to live under a dictatorship and an autocratic government that did not care for the pain and the anguish of screaming parents and helpless children. During the pandemic, the dignity and the humanity of poor New Yorkers and Poor BIPOC New Yorkers were repeatedly stolen in broad daylight as the disparities in health, wealth, housing, employment, nutrition, safety, and political power became so terrifyingly stark.

As essential workers and people with multiple comorbidities who live in multiple generational homes, they and their families succumbed to the Coronavirus like flies. As food insecurity became pervasive, they risked their lives and stood in long lines to receive morsels to survive. While their richer counterparts packed their bags for the Hamptons, Europe and other cities and towns to find refuge in clean air, spacious living spaces, and remote work or no work at all as they could afford to live on their savings and trusts – poor New Yorkers continued their daily routines and lived in constant fear of the virus.

Yet, this reality did not spur our society to rethink our social contract and to rethink how to ameliorate the lives of the poor through socio-economic supports, compassion, fairness, justice, dignity, self-determination and self-reliance in a pandemic that stole so much from marginalized communities. Instead, it called for a swift return to normalcy – forgetting or not caring that a return to normalcy for poor, underserved, marginalized communities would mean what it always meant: inequity, a violation of basic human rights and a denial of basic human needs at the most elemental levels of human survival.

While their richer counter parts could continue to work from home and occasionally stop by the office, the demand for poorer parents to return to work in-person and for public schools to reopen was in full swing. The false justifications that were fed to the media and our society were nauseating, as they demonized, denigrated poor parents, and perpetuated negative stereotypes about poor BIPOC parents. Suddenly, the schools were the magic bullet solution to all the ills in our society. Children could **ONLY** learn in-person in a school building. Children could **ONLY** be socialized in-person in a school building. Folks could **ONLY** attend to the mental health of children in-person in a school building. Poor children **ONLY** could have nutritious meals in-person in a school building. Poor children **ONLY** could be safe in-person in a school building. Children **ONLY** could be saved from a life of crime in person in a school building.

Meanwhile, we know none of this is/was ever true. By the DOE's own admission, poor kids and poor kids of color have been falling behind the eight ball in education for decades. We know that children can socialize with other family members, friends, neighbors in homes, churches and in other community spaces. Educators are not mental health experts and the DOE has never adequately attended to the emotional well-being of our children. The nutritional values of school lunches were always questionable. Bullying and violence in schools were always an issue, and the matter of the school-to-prison pipeline was always a point of contention.

For us in poor underserved communities, listening to the false narrative that pervaded the airwaves felt like living in an alternate reality in a dysfunctional marriage with a full-blown narcissistic spouse. The gas lighting, the bread crumbing, the ghosting and the future faking made our heads spin. The dismissal of our realities and sentiments hurt to the core, as we simply felt invisible and non-existent. It is so painful for marginalized communities to realize how little we matter, how little we are considered, how little our lives mean to a society to which we give so much. We were grateful and felt tremendous respect for the politicians, government officials and policy makers who were willing to tell the truth: schools need to be fully reopen because parents need to work and kids need to be somewhere safe while their parents work. However, at what cost? At the cost of our lives? At the cost of our children's lives? At the cost of our emotional well-being? At the cost of our children's emotional well-being?

Poor Parents and students spoke, pleaded, marched, argued and illustrated the need for a remote option – all to no avail. No one heard our cries from the abyss. Community and Citywide Education Councils, Presidents' Councils, School Leadership Teams, District Leadership Teams, Parent Associations, Parent-Teacher Associations, the Panel for Education Policy, the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council, parent advocacy groups all over the City organized, petitioned, wrote. Yet, nothing. Their children would go back to school and there was nothing a parent could do.

Can you imagine that moment of complete powerlessness, that moment of complete helplessness when you realized as a parent that your solemn and sacred right and duty to protect your children were snatched from your fingers? Can you imagine that moment of utter defeat and utter failure, when a parent gave it up to God, to chance, to fate, to the universe? Can you imagine that moment of arrant resignation when a parent is reduced to nothingness in front of his/her children because that parent can't guarantee them a basic human right – that of health, that of safety, that of protection, that solace? Can you imagine that moment of pure anguish for a parent, especially for a mother who carried that child and who was given the venerated obligation, the portentous job of protecting that life from the very moment of conception? Can you imagine how it tears a parent and breaks a parent in million pieces to have a mayor who does not know your child tell you and the world that his school system can protect your child better than you can?

To make matters worse, imagine the range of emotions a parent goes through having sent that child into a burning building, riddled with bullying and violence, unrespected COVID mitigation measures, a shortage of qualified staff due to resignations, illness, and exhaustion, and an increase in unqualified personnel, not to mention the deluge of social emotional maladjustment issues. Then imagine the harassment and the legal threats by school officials and ACS caseworkers, demanding that you send your

children into what you know is a dangerous situation, if you had the courage to keep your children home. Imagine the unresponsiveness of school staff who are overwhelmed, doing the best they can, but who do not know what else to do.

Imagine your child being denied home instruction because the DOE does not accept your child's medical situation as a valid enough reason for you not to want to take the risk as a parent. Imagine being denied homeschooling or the homeschooling department being unresponsive to your application. And then imagine having ACS conduct an investigation for educational neglect, when in fact, it is the DOE that is neglecting both the basic needs and the educational needs of your child by denying you a remote option, asynchronous learning through Google Classroom, and denying or stalling the requests for homeschooling and/or home instruction. Moreover, they did all of that to bully parents into submission and surrendering their natural rights to make decisions for their children.

Parents and education stakeholders have been reflecting on this pandemic and parents are infuriated. They are angry because Mayoral Control made them feel small and made them feel extremely small in front of their children. Parents feel disillusioned. Mayoral Control made them feel inadequate and inept. Their resulted powerlessness made them question their humanity, the meaning and the value of their lives and their contribution to society.

We invite you to feel the humiliation of parents at the hands of a mayor with absolute power. It is a cliché, but it is absolutely true that “absolute power corrupts absolutely.” However, it does more than that. Absolute power renders leaders cruel, disdainful and contemptuous of the “lesser than.” It cultivates a culture conducive to unspeakable abuses of power. It also contributes to political apathy and the desensitization of whole populations.

We have no doubt in our minds that Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks are fine, empathetic individuals – and might very well be good stewards of Mayoral Control. Many of us thought that about Mayor de Blasio and the story did not turn out so well. Life and politics have a way of changing our realities – and our fates cannot be left to the whims of politics. Nor can our fates depend on the caprices of big business and large corporations. And nor can our fates depend on the pressures of a government that doesn't always take the time to consider the plights of individuals, of the poor, of historically marginalized communities and BIPOC communities who are still not nearly adequately represented in the halls of government, of wealth and of power.

For those of us who are not wealthy, and who are not powerful, our only avenue to truly matter is in the decisions we make for our families, to the extent that we can make them. Our poverty and our status as overwhelmingly non-white already decide where we can live and how we can live. Our zip codes already decide where we can be educated, and how we can be educated. They also decide what we eat and how we eat. They moreover decide how healthy and safe we are. Mayoral control should not be another layer added to the means by which we are excluded, isolated and our children denied a future. For a country that was founded on the principles of equality, freedom, self-determination, self-reliance, and dignity,

government and Mayoral Control should not be the very entities that take those things away, as government's role is to preserve these things for all of us. Therefore, Mayoral Control must not and cannot be renewed.

On behalf of the District 8 Community Education Council and the New York City Coalition for Educating Families Together,

Warmest regards,  
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