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**COUNCIL SPEAKER CHRISTINE C. QUINN'S SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION ON SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

My name is Christine C. Quinn, and I would like to submit testimony to Chair Nolan and the members of the Education Committee expressing my strong support for the reauthorization of Mayoral Control of our City's schools.

Mayoral Control has brought about real accountability to our City schools, with a single elected official in charge of all 1500 plus schools. The old system was a broken mire of bureaucracy that was more concerned with serving itself than with serving New York City's school children. With no accountability, the problems within our school system reached crisis proportions. There is no question that a major factor in the recent success of our schools has been Mayoral Control. That success and accountability can only be strengthened moving forward with increased oversight on the City level from the City Council. The Council is uniquely positioned to act as the direct conduit between the Department of Education (DOE) and parents within the community.

In July of 2007, the New York City Council created an internal working group on Mayoral Control and School Governance, chaired by Council Members James Vacca,

David Yassky and Robert Jackson, that was tasked with developing recommendations on ways to improve Mayoral Control.

Over the past year and a half, the Working Group did extensive research on Mayoral Control here in New York City and in cities across the country, met with stakeholders and held an all-day public hearing in coordination with the Council's Education Committee in which they received testimony from parents, educators and advocates. I have received the Working Group's preliminary recommendations, as I know your committee has, and I am currently reviewing them. I am also looking forward to the release of the Working Group's full report in the next few weeks, which will also be forwarded to the Assembly and Senate Education Committees, Speaker Silver, Majority Leader Smith and the Governor. I respect the challenge the working group faced in reaching conclusions among a wide array of opinions, and I want to speak today about a few of the recommendations that will further strengthen Mayoral Control.

New York City public schools should run under a system of municipal control - with the DOE acting like any other city agency. The Council, rather than the State legislature, should have oversight and legislative authority over City schools. When Mayoral Control was initially enacted, the primary goal was to stop the pass-the-buck mentality of the previous Board of Education and create a system that provided clear structures of accountability. The current law has undoubtedly increased accountability for the Mayor and the Chancellor, but it does not clarify legislative and oversight authority. This lack

of clarity has led to confusion among parents, educators, advocates and even legislators themselves when they disagree with the Chancellor's decisions.

The New York City Council should be the body responsible and accountable for the oversight and legislation that concerns our City's schools. Constituents and parents regularly turn to their local elected officials when problems arise because we're the ones most deeply rooted in their communities. I would never look to weigh in on local education policies in Elmira County, and I don't think a State legislator from Elmira (no matter how qualified her or she may be) should or wants to be responsible for decisions made about New York City schools.

If New York City parents are upset about a decision made by an upstate legislator about their child's school, there is no way for them to hold the legislator accountable. New York City parents don't get to vote for State legislators from counties outside of the City, nor should they. But, as a result of the current system, we have a breakdown in accountability to the constituencies that must matter most – our parents and students. Parents in New York City can come to City Hall to testify at hearings, begin a dialogue with their locally elected officials and advocate directly on their children's behalf. But local officials must have the authority to legislate on their behalf. As the fight over cell phones reminded us, the City Council can currently only legislate up to the door of a school. Once inside, it becomes the domain of the State Legislature.

Now, I am not advocating that the City Council should have limitless authority over the DOE's operations. We're lawmakers, not education experts. But the Council should have oversight and legislative authority over the DOE just as we do with other agencies. In the DOE's case, this oversight would include, but not be limited to, transportation, procurement, school safety, capital planning and siting of schools.

Additionally, the legislation should be amended to clarify that all DOE contracts are subject to the City's contract law and Procurement Policy Board rules. The reauthorizing legislation should also be clear that DOE must bring its budgeting systems in alignment with the City's Financial Management System. Without these changes, the Council will continue to find it extremely difficult to follow how funding is being spent, which in turn raises concerns about our ability to identify inefficiencies and increase transparency. An example of this is last year, in early 2008, when the DOE reduced school budgets by \$100 million. The Council was unable to track and report the impact of this budget cut on school programs because the DOE has a different internal budgeting system. This was a problem not only experienced by the Council but also by the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, the Independent Budget Office and the City Comptroller's Office. It is critical that the DOE be held to the same standards as other City agencies when budgeting and administering contracts.

The City Council should be provided with information and raw data when requested to perform proper oversight of the DOE. The Independent Budget Office should also be expanded to take on the task of providing timely independent analysis of DOE data and should issue annual performance reports. Currently, anyone who wants to get information or data about the operation or performance of our City's schools has to go through the DOE. The lack of access and transparency of data has led to a criticism that the DOE is manipulating numbers to forward its agenda. Whether this is true or not, having an independent body do the data analysis would go a long way in providing greater transparency and trust in evaluation of the performance of our City's schools.

Lack of parental engagement is one of the biggest complaints we at the Council hear from parents. There needs to be greater meaningful parental involvement in the system, particularly at the school level. Parents must feel that they can have real input into the aspects of school that impact their children. One way to accomplish this is by making it clear to parents that they can – and should – turn to their locally elected Council Member when they have a problem.

Community superintendents must also be re-empowered and allowed to be the true educational leaders of the schools in their community district – supporting both the teachers and the parents. This role for superintendents is required by State law, but is not the current practice at the DOE. By establishing a clear grievance policy, the superintendent should serve as a point of contact for a parent if a problem cannot be

resolved at the school level. Parents shouldn't feel that they're helpless or that their complaints are being sent into a black hole, never to be answered.

Mayoral Control has given education responsibility to the Mayor, and by and large it has improved New York City's schools. We cannot go back to a system that lacked accountability. As the State reevaluates Mayoral Control, I strongly urge you to reauthorize it with changes that will bring even greater accountability and parental involvement. Creating a system of municipal control accomplishes this by providing clarity about who is responsible for legislation and oversight on DOE matters. It also sends a strong message to parents that the Council is the place to turn to with their concerns and questions. This will serve to both strengthen Mayoral Control and our City's schools for future generations.