



Testimony of

Ailin Chen
Senior Policy Associate
Education, Juvenile Justice and Youth Services
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc.

Before the
New York City Council
Transportation Committee

Regarding Metropolitan Transit Authority's Proposed Budget Cuts
To Student MetroCards

Thursday, February 24, 2010, 10am

My name is Ailin Chen and I am the Senior Policy Associate for Education, Juvenile Justice, and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 66-year old privately supported, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources nor do we provide direct service or represent a sector or workforce; rather for 66 years we have undertaken public policy research, community education and advocacy activities to draw attention to what is or is not for working for children in New York and to advance budget, legislative, and policy priorities—all with the goal of ensuring that children are healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chairman Vacca and the members of the Transportation Committee for holding this critical hearing and for the opportunity to testify on the MTA's proposal to eliminate free and reduced fare student MetroCards.

While CCC understands that the MTA is facing a deficit of nearly \$400 million in 2010, the MTA's budget must not be balanced at the expense of New York City school children who have few other options than to rely on the City's transit system.

Currently, students in grades 3 through 6 are eligible for free MetroCards if they reside one mile or more and half fare cards if they reside one mile or less from school. Eligibility requirements increase to 1 ½ miles for students in grades 7 through 12. More than half a million (550,000) New York City school students rely on reduced fare and free MetroCards to get to school, and participate in after-school and extra-curricular activities.

Without this critical student resource, students who receive free MetroCards would all receive half-fare cards beginning September 2010 and be responsible for paying the full fare in September 2011. This adds up to an additional expense of between \$343 to nearly \$890 per student in a school year depending on whether they currently receive half-fare or free student MetroCards. This cut would disproportionately impact low-income students and families as well as families with multiple school-age children who may already be struggling to meet the ever-increasing costs of living in New York City.

Most alarmingly, these cuts place students who are already at-risk for truancy and dropping out in greater jeopardy of being disconnected from the school system altogether, by taking away a basic resource that supports full attendance and positive school and community

engagement.

Eliminating reduced fare and free student MetroCards sends the wrong message to students and parents about the importance of school attendance and we urge the City Council to work with the MTA, Governor, State Legislature and Mayor to prioritize the restoration of these proposed cuts.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.