**REPORT & ADVISORY BOARD REVIEW COMMISSION**

# Comments received between May 4th and 5pm on May 10th, 2012

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Dear Commission Members,

I write to express my strong support for the retention of the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report ("PMMR").

As Chair of the City Council's Finance Committee, I am especially attuned to the City's fiscal challenges and the difficult choices and trade-offs that must be made during the budgetary process. Given these challenges, it is critical that we have the right tools and information in order to make well-informed and fiscally responsible decisions. The PMMR is an important tool for making these very difficult choices. The PMMR assists the Council in evaluating the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, allocating resources, and establishing priorities – all of which ultimately inform decisions that are made in the Executive Budget. Rather than eliminate the PMMR, I urge this Commission to consider and recommend ways that the PMMR could be made stronger, namely by linking performance measures with the budget.

Together with the Mayor's Management Report ("MMR"), the PMMR was created in direct response to the City's fiscal crisis of the early 1970s.[1] While both reports play an important role in the Council's oversight of the performance of City agencies, it is the PMMR that was intended to be used in the preparation of the Executive Budget.[2] It is for this reason that the release of the Mayor's Preliminary Budget and the PMMR are timed together. Importantly, the PMMR is required to contain:

- Actual agency performance for the first four months of a fiscal year relative to established performance goals and measures;
- Proposed performance goals and measures for the next fiscal year based upon appropriations proposed in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget;
- An appendix linking these proposed program performance goals and measures to appropriations made in the Preliminary Budget; and
- An explanation of significant changes to program performance goals and measures as a result of budgetary modifications.[3]

This information – which is not contained in other budgetary documents – enables the Council to examine during the budget process whether agency funds are being used efficiently and allocated properly.

Admittedly, the PMMR has never fully realized its intended purpose as a budgetary tool, in large part because of the poor alignment between budgetary units of appropriation and actual agency programs. Moreover, in recent years the PMMR has become less useful, as the Bloomberg administration has reduced much of the content it is required to provide regarding the linkage of performance goals and budget appropriations. But these are reasons to focus on improving the PMMR, not eliminating it.

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[1] State Charter Revision Commission for New York City, "Preliminary Recommendations of the State Charter Revision Commission for New York City," June 1975.
[2] *Id.* at 11.
[3] N.Y.C. Charter § 12(b).

In addition to its review of the continued usefulness of reports, this Commission is also empowered to issue recommendations to the Mayor and Council on how to make certain reports more effective and useful.[4] Notably, the Mayor's Office of Operations recently convened a "roundtable" of experts tasked with offering recommendations for improving the MMR. One of the key areas the Roundtable is tackling is creating stronger links to the budget. The types of improvements being considered by the Roundtable would greatly improve the PMMR, making it the highly useful budgetary tool that it was originally meant to be. I urge the Commission to consider the work of the Roundtable in its deliberations, and, in addition to affirming the continued usefulness of the PMMR, issue recommendations for making the PMMR more effective.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this important matter. I am confident that in the end you will agree that the retention of the PMMR is in the City's best interest.

Respectfully,
Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.
Councilmember, 47th District
Chair, Committee on Finance

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Dear Report and Advisory Board Review Commission,

My children attend Manhattan's PS 87 & MS 54, and I think it is extremely important that class-size and overcrowding date be publicly shared with parents, politicians, and other community members.

The Mayor talks repeatedly about the parents' right to know, and yet on issues that parents care deeply about, class size and overcrowding, the DOE is proposing to eliminate that right.

The November class size report is critical for several reasons. Contrary to the claims of DOE, it is more accurate than the February report, particularly in high school, as the latter reports class sizes after thousands of students have dropped out or been discharged from their schools. It is also far more u seful for parents to find out class sizes in their children's school as early in the year as possible.

The trailer or TCU report is critical because nowhere else is there any data on how many how many actual TCU classrooms there are, or the current use of any of these rooms. Sadly, according to the latest data, there were 600 TCU classrooms in 2010-11.

I urge you to reject DOE's proposals to eliminate these reports. Instead, they should be significantly enhanced and improved, to provide parents and other members of the public a mor e reliable and complete picture of the sorry and substandard conditions under which thousands of New York City schoolchildren are subjected to every day.

Yours,

Cynthia Wachtell
Director of the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program &
Research Associate Professor of American Studies
Stern College
Yeshiva University

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[4] N.Y.C. Charter § 1113(f).

Dear Report and Advisory Board Review Commission

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We urge you to reject DOE's proposals to eliminate these reports. Instead, they should be significantly enhanced and improved, to provide parents and other members of the public a more reliable and complete picture of the sorry and substandard conditions under which thousands of New York City schoolchildren are subjected to every day.

Yours,

Brooke Parker
District 14 public school parent

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Dear Commission Members:

I write to express my strong support for the retention of the Outreach Programs Report and the Permanent Housing Needs Report. These reports, put out by the Department of Homeless Services ("DHS"), help ensure that the needs of one of the City‟s most vulnerable populations are being met. Especially in these tough economic times, during which there has been a troubling spike in homelessness, these reports continue to be highly relevant and useful.

As Chair of the City Council‟s Committee on General Welfare, I know all too well the difficult challenges the City faces in serving our homeless population. In recent years, budget cuts have led to a reduction in services and resources for those city residents who have fallen upon hard times and find themselves in need of housing assistance. At the same time, the City‟s homeless population has been increasing. As of May 4, 2012, there were 41,132 homeless individuals relying on DHS for shelter, including 8,715 homeless families and 16,884 homeless children.1 DHS‟ own annual survey revealed a 23 percent increase in the number of homeless persons living on the streets from 2011 to 2012.2 By some estimates, homelessness in New York City is at its highest level since the Great Depression.3

The DHS reports being considered for "waiver" provide an important source of information for ensuring that in this difficult environment the City is still meeting the needs of the homeless. One of DHS‟ core functions is to develop and operate outreach programs to identify and assist homeless families and individuals who are living in public spaces.4 The "Outreach Programs Report" requires DHS to report information that indicates how effectively DHS is serving this function. Specifically, in the Outreach Programs Report, DHS is required to report – on a quarterly basis – the following information:

- The number of contacts with homeless families and individuals;
- The number of placements in transitional housing resulting from such contacts; and
- The number of referrals of persons so contacted to programs or services.5

In recent years, the bulk of the City‟s outreach efforts have been performed by organizations through contracts with DHS. Thus, the information required to be contained in the Outreach Programs Report is especially useful, as it enables City officials to evaluate the sufficiency of these contractors‟ efforts and performance.

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Unfortunately, in recent years, DHS has failed to provide much of the information it is required to report under the law. Notably, in 2007, DHS ceased reporting on the number of referrals of homeless persons contacted by outreach programs; in 2009, DHS stopped reporting on the number of placements in transitional housing resulting from contacts.6 DHS claims that the information in the Outreach Programs Report is redundant to the outreach and placement indicators in the MMR.7 But this is only because DHS has neglected to provide the appropriate information in the Outreach Programs Report. Instead of eliminating this important report all together, this Commission should call on DHS to fulfill its reporting obligations.

Similarly, the Permanent Housing Needs Report provides information to the Council that is highly useful for evaluating the adequacy of the City‟s current housing capacity for homeless families and individuals, for determining future needs, and for making long-term policy decisions. In this report, DHS must provide projections regarding the permanent housing and the transitional housing and services needed to house homeless families and individuals expected to be housed, including housing provided by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA").8

This information is not redundant to information in the Average Daily Overnight Census ("ADOC"), as has been suggested by DHS.9 The ADOC is an important report that details the number of families with children, adult families, and single adults that stay overnight in homeless shelters. The ADOC, however, does not indicate how much overall need DHS projects in the short- and long-term, and does not distinguish need by type of housing (e.g. permanent supportive housing vs. federally subsidized private housing). Moreover, the ADOC does not provide information regarding housing provided by NYCHA. Clearly, there is important information contained in the Permanent Housing Needs Report that is not contained in the ADOC.

Finally, the information contained in the Permanent Housing Needs Report is information that DHS must necessarily compile in order to make short- and long-term budgetary and operational decisions. Thus, the minimal resources that DHS devotes to compiling this report – two staff members, fifteen hours per year -- represents resources that DHS expends irrespective of this reporting requirement.

The Commission is tasked with the worthy objective of identifying and eliminating reporting requirements that are "outdated, redundant, or use valuable resources for little public benefit."10 I respectfully submit that these two reports do not fit the bill for any of these criteria. Given the current state of affairs outlined above, transparency and accountability regarding DHS‟ efforts to address homelessness is needed now more than ever. And as discussed above, both reports contain information that is not reported in other places. Finally, these reports do not require significant resources to compile, and it hardly needs stating that there is significant public benefit to ensuring that adequate efforts and resources are being made to provide for the City‟s homeless population.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this important matter. I am confident that in the end you will agree that the retention of these reports in the City‟s best interest.

Respectfully,

Annabel Palma
Chair, Committee on General Welfare
NYC Council Member, 18th District

Endnotes:

1 NYC Department of Homeless Services, *available at* www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/home/home.shtml (last visited May. 7, 2012).
2 "Survey finds 23% more homeless in NYC," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 27, 2012.
3 *See* Coalition for the Homeless, "State of the Homeless 2011: „One in Three‟: A Plan to Reduce Record New York City Homelessness and Reverse the Failed Policies of the Bloomberg Administration," April 11, 2011.
4 N.Y.C. Charter § 612(a)(7).
5 Id.
6 *See* DHS, Outreach Programs Report, FY‟ 12 Q1, at n.1 & 2.
7 *See* Presentation, Report and Advisory Board Review Commission, February 28, 2012, at 3.
8 N.Y.C. Charter § 614.
9 *See* Presentation, Report and Advisory Board Review Commission, February 28, 2012, at 4.
10 *See* N.Y.C. Charter § 1113(e)(1).

I plan on attending the Reports and Advisory Board Review Commission hearing this Friday, May 11th to offer testimony on behalf of Common Cause/NY

Brian Paul
Research & Policy Coordinator
Common Cause/NY

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Dear members of the Commission on Reports:

As a parent, I urge you not to allow the DOE to eliminate any of its mandated reporting on class size or trailers. This is information that is critical for parents to know.

The November class size report contains class size data based on the Oct. 31 audited register. Not only is the February report too late in the year to help parents and advocates concerned about this issue, but it is far less accurate, as it gives the size of class sizes at the end of January, after thousands of NYC high school students have already dropped out or been discharged from their schools.

The TCU report is also necessary, as there is no data anywhere else, including in the DOE document called the "Blue Book,' on how many high school trailers remain (at least 73, in the TCU report); no data on how many actual TCU classrooms there are (at least 600, according to the TCU report) and no data on the current use of any of these classrooms (whether for general education core subjects, special education students, or art, science or drama rooms). Only the TCU report has information on these matters.

Sadly, the city has utterly failed to make significant progress in either of these areas in the last decade. Indeed, our schools have about the same number of TCUs as in 2006,the earliest year for which we have data, and this year, ou r students are suffering from largest class sizes in the early grades than in any year since 1998, despite repeated promises that both the numbers of trailers and the size of classes would be considerably reduced.

While the DOE may want to suppress information from parents on these two critical problems, allowing them to do so would do a grave disservice to our children, and to the transparency and accountability that New Yorkers have a right to expect from their government.

Yours sincerely,

Jennice Saiyad,
Parent of pubblic middle school student

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To Whom It May Concern:

I will be testifying on behalf of Citizens Union at the May 11th hearing of the Reports & Advisory Board Review Commission.

Please let me know if you require further information. I would appreciate confirmation of my email.

Thank you,
Rachael Fauss

Policy and Research Manager

Citizens Union/Citizens Union Foundation

## Comments received between April 20th and May 3rd, 2012

As a public school parent, I respectfully request that you maintain the transparency to which the NYC DoE so proudly aspires. Class size is one of the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school. It tells us more about the state of our schools than almost every other factor, including student test scores, and it ensures the quality of teaching our children receive. Additionally, that reporting is mandated by law. Since there are no parents on the commission, please know that we parents are indeed the stake-holders, and we care deeply about overcrowding in our schools. The quality of New York City public education matters more to me and my future than anyone else because my children sit in those classrooms every day, work hard to concentrate with crowds of distractions, and trust the adults in power to make honorable decisions. Honor the law. Please.

Kari Steeves

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Dear members of the Commission on Reports:

As a parent and teacher, I urge you not to allow the DOE to eliminate any of its mandated reporting on class size or trailers. This is information that is critical for parents to know.

The November class size report contains class size data based on the Oct. 31 audited register. Not only is the February report too late in the year to help parents and advocates concerned about this issue, but it is also far less accurate. It gives the size of class sizes at the end of January, after thousands of NYC high school students have already dropped out, been discharged from their schools. In addition, students who have suffered from over-crowded classes have endured months of gross educational neglect and invisibility. My daughter's over-crowded high school held classes in the hallway, which made hearing and discussion extremely difficult.

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While the DOE may want to suppress information from parents on these two critical problems, allowing them to do so would do a grave disservice to our children, and to the transparency and accountability that New Yorkers have a right to expect from their government.

Yours sincerely,

David Dobosz
Coalition for Public Education and
Grassroots Education Movement

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Yours sincerely,

Karen Sprowal
SLT/PTA member of P.S.75/ Emily Dickinson School

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Yours sincerely,
Antiqua Lewis