

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**  
**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**on**  
**Agency Performance Oversight:**  
**OSSE DOT**  
**on**  
**Tuesday, October 28 2025 at 11:00 a.m.**

Hello Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Robert Henderson. I am here in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

I am thankful that the Committee of the Whole has convened this oversight hearing, and I appreciate the solutions-oriented approach of inviting practitioners from other jurisdictions for insight. All anyone involved in student transportation in DC wants is for the system to better serve the students and families that rely on it to get to the schools that best suit their educational needs. I will note that Beth Daggett, a Ward 5 parent who is testifying today, has repeatedly offered concrete recommendations for improving services with little follow-through from OSSE. And while my testimony is critical, I offer it to underscore the need and urgency for improvement as it is not just OSSE's obligation to these students but is ours as a city.

**Improving Student Transportation Remains an Urgent Issue**

In my term as a member of the State Board of Education beginning in January 2023, the frequency of communications that I have received from families experiencing difficulties with OSSE transportation has fluctuated, but I have learned not to take the reduction or absence of communication to me to mean that all is well. For example, I had attempted to help a Ward 5 family with transportation issues last fall and again in the spring, with little success. I had not heard from them about transportation issues during this school year, so I checked in with them, hoping that no news indicated an improvement. Instead, I found that their struggles have persisted, in fact they have logged in their own records a dozen issues since the school year began including multiple no-show pickups, late pickups, extremely late drop-offs and long ride-times, as long as 2 and 3 hours after school ended, inconsistent communication, and no response to any complaints filed this year. I bring this up because I don't want the council to think that a reduction in complaints to your offices necessarily means that the issue has become less urgent. Families like the one I referenced have just learned to have low expectations that anything will change.

## **DC's Governance Structure Lacks Adequate Accountability and Oversight**

Direct provision of student transportation services is an unusual function for a state education agency. In other jurisdictions throughout the nation, local school districts provide student transportation and state education agencies set policies and provide oversight. I understand that in a state with 67 local education agencies, some of which are very small and only one of which provides by-right access, that it makes sense to consolidate this function across LEAs. And while I do not think that transferring the function to a local, rather than state agency would be a panacea, resting the responsibility of student transportation in the hands of our state education agency removes a layer of oversight and accountability that other jurisdictions have. The abdication of civil rights and special education oversight and enforcement at the federal level only heightens the longstanding need for DC to have an independent state education agency to monitor and enforce the proper provision of student services; OSSE cannot perform this function when OSSE provides the services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

Robert Henderson

Ward 5 Member, State Board of Education