

Boston City Council Hears Complaints on BPS Bus System

By: Katrina Scalise

Nov. 17, 2022

Boston parents complained to school officials in a heated public hearing Thursday that a lack of bus monitors needed to accompany disabled students, and chronic late buses are disrupting family schedules.

The city council subcommittee hearing, which included parents, employees, advocacy nonprofits, and BPS administration officials, aimed to address rising BPS transportation expenditures, bus delays up to an hour-plus and resulting learning loss for special education students in particular, although no votes took place.

The Committee on Government Accountability, Transparency, and Accessibility hosted the hearing after filing an initial docket in June, and scheduled the meeting following a claim made against The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education by the Greater Boston Legal Services and Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC), that the rights of disabled BPS students are being violated by the system's "disarray."

"The BPS concerns are not new, [transportation] has not been equitable, reliable, and they have a consistent history of struggling to address disability needs," said Jakira Rogers, the program lead for MAC's racial justice and equity program. "We must do better for vulnerable learners, including Black and Latinx students with disabilities, who are disproportionately harmed."

Shamia Wall, a Dorchester mother of a young autistic BPS student, said severely late buses and a lack of bus monitors, forced her to drive her daughter to school.

"BPS was putting me in a position where I would have to choose whether to go to work and be late, or ensure my child could attend school," Wall said. "Why does my child have to feel left behind?"

The pause in Orange Line services during September and continued shortage of bus drivers impacted BPS transportation, leading to a consolidation of bus routes and recruitment of additional drivers, according to the BPS website.

Director of transportation for BPS Delavern Stanislaus said the department's priority is improving specialized transportation services for special education students, but that lengthy bus monitor hiring and busing contract bid processes have been barriers.

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However, current bus monitors feel disrespected by administration, leading to monitor shortages, “The bus monitors are not respected, we’re treated like kids and the pay is horrible,” said Sadie Jasmine, a BPS employee for 23 years.

“I used to love to come to work everyday, it was a joy,” she said. “Now, I barely want to get out of bed because of management ... You're going to tell me you can't pay me for extra [bus] runs yet you can get a raise when I'm doing the work? It's not fair to me.”

Community members also criticized BPS transportation for not providing quick compensatory services to parents that pay out-of-pocket costs to transport their children to school after late buses. The Office of Special Education is updating its reimbursement procedures, said Lauren Vivianti, the interim assistant superintendent of special education.

City Councilor Erin J. Murphy concluded the hearing by calling for BPS hone its efforts on remedying bus delays and to consider their long-term consequences, “We’re talking about thousands of students every day being left at bus stops, missed, not picked up, [having] disrupted education in a system that is already not delivering a consistent education,” she said. “We have to see real action.”