



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

## Expanding the Free Student OMNY Program

SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL, MICAH LASHER, & COUNCIL MEMBER SHAUN ABREU September 9, 2024

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September 9, 2024

Dear Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks:

We thank you for the City's decision to provide many New York City students with OMNY Cards that give them free 24-hour access to NYC subways and buses up to four rides per day, 365 days per year. As you are well aware, under the previous system, students received MetroCards for use only on school days — less than half the year — and during school hours, for three rides per day.

By definition, this expansion of transit access for young people is not about their commutes to and from school — which were covered under the old system — but about making it easier and more affordable for them to get around the city.

As the Mayor recognized at the announcement of the new OMNY Cards, they “are a game-changer for families across New York City, particularly for working-class families that need just a little more help to afford our city — families where older siblings pick their younger brothers and sisters up from school or where kids have after-school and summer jobs to help make ends meet.” And as MTA Chair Janno Lieber noted at the announcement, “the student OMNY card program makes it even more convenient for kids to use the public transit

system, teaching them how indispensable it is to New York City.”

With these important goals at the heart of the program, it makes little sense to arbitrarily exclude parts of the student population from the benefits of the OMNY Card. And yet the program, as currently designed, does exactly that. Based on our understanding of the Department of Education’s eligibility criteria, students who live within 0.5 miles of their schools or who receive DOE busing services will not receive OMNY Cards. This includes many, if not most, public elementary school students who attend their zoned schools. These students have no less of a need to travel to after-school and weekend activities — and would benefit no less from year-round access to public transit — than the students who have been provided with OMNY Cards.

Therefore, we strongly urge you to eliminate the program’s arbitrary eligibility criteria and give every New York City student an OMNY Card, unlocking access to the transit system without regard to where a student lives or whether they take a yellow bus to school.

Given that the cost to the City of New York of the shift to the OMNY Card program is a modest \$5.5 million annually, we believe that providing all NYC students with OMNY Cards will not have a material fiscal impact. The benefits of doing so, however, are incalculable.

Thank you for the consideration of this request. We would be eager to discuss this issue with you further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

**Brad Hoylman-Sigal**

State Senator 47th District

**Shaun Abreu**

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