



**Testimony from Smitha Varghese, NYC Campaign Coordinator at the
Alliance for Quality Education
to the New York State Legislature on Mayoral Control
March 4th 2022**

The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) supports a clear and planned phase-out of Mayoral Control. Since mayoral control has been enacted in New York City, every Mayor's leadership style has continuously shut out the voices of parents, students, teachers and taxpayers. The change of school governance in 2002 forced community school district boards to be replaced by Community Education Councils (CECs), whose members are currently elected to serve as the voices of parents. However, many parent leaders within CECs have expressed the parent council's inability to make any meaningful impact on the system due to lack of legal authority in developing, approving or rejecting policies, with the exception of school zoning. PEP members are able to vote on policy but every mayor has removed members of the PEP in order to manipulate the outcome of an upcoming vote. The theory that only one voice should dictate education policy is not only undemocratic, but inherently contrary to meaningful parental involvement and community support.

Furthermore, we reject the notion that the issue of mayoral control should be negotiated within the state budget. There is no rationale behind this timeline, other than allowing the Governor to use fiscal issues plaguing the city as leverage when deciding on whether or not to extend mayoral control. A clear example would be the fiscal burden and ballooning costs of charter schools¹ that New York City must pay for. For context, when then Mayor Bill De Blasio went to Albany for permission to extend mayoral control, then Governor Cuomo, as part of budget negotiations, wrote into the state budget policies that put NYC on the hook for charter school costs. A specific

¹ AQE: A majority of NYC's school aid increase goes to charter schools. How? See: <https://www.aqeny.org/2022/01/24/2489/>

example of this is rent: NYC is currently the only school district in the United States who is obligated to cover the costs of charter school rent. This is unique to NYC, and only happened because the former Governor used this as a bargaining tool during the state budget in exchange for extending Mayoral Control for deBlasio. Whether you are for or against mayoral control - we firmly believe that the process of determining the extension should not be negotiated and coupled with the state budget. **We ask that the Legislature take Mayoral control out of the budget and allow for a separate process to amend the Education Law.**

Lastly, we urge you to reject Governor Hochul's proposal to extend mayoral control for 4 years, which is needlessly excessive. AQE supports the Education Council Consortium's (ECC) recommendation for the state to fund and establish a task force for an inclusive, participatory process that involves parents, educators, students and experts to develop an alternative, democratic school governance system. In order to successfully transition back to local school governance, this task force would be tasked with ensuring parents, particularly parents of color, whose children make up the majority in NYC public schools, are educated and informed about how to run for local positions and receive training in how to manage school operations.