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REVIEW COMMISSION

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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DEVELOPMENT AND
SMALL BUSINESS
DOMESTIC ANIMAL WELFARE
SOCIAL SERVICES

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



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Senator, 17th District

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May 5, 2021

NYC Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Carranza:

The impairments of severe or multiple disabilities make online/remote learning nearly impossible. We are writing to urge the Department of Education in coordination with the Department of Health and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to issue a plan for safely operating viable programs to serve NYC's severely disabled students.

It seems that there was never a clear plan in place for tens of thousands of students for whom intellectual and emotional deficits make this crisis even harder to understand and tolerate than it is for other students. Their parents received little instruction and even less assistance. They have now been languishing for seven long weeks waiting for integral resources and related updated guidance. As discussions for reopening are now underway, these programs must be a priority.

Educators and parents agree that these children are particularly vulnerable. Every day without a consistent, reliable schedule, and every week without vital resources, they regress—and hard won skills are lost. Heartbreaking reports from parents include children with autism whose verbal skills or toileting skills are disappearing, and children whose frustration increasingly leads to behavioral issues expressed by hours of wailing or destructive behavior.

DOE District 75 schools serve approximately 25,000 severely disabled children, and thousands more are served by private or community programs. Over a typical school week in specialized educational programs, these students interact one on one or in small groups with a team comprised of special education teachers, instructional aides and various therapists. Many educators stand ready to help, but their hands are tied.

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Large-scale closures pose an unprecedented challenge to everyone, but for children with severe disabilities and their families, the mounting challenges are compounded. In hindsight, it seems clear that these essential services should not have been subject to a shutdown of this magnitude and we must begin to address the issue immediately.

We are available to discuss this critical matter by phone. Please contact us via Senator Felder's office at 718-253-2015. We look forward to your imminent response.

Sincerely,

Simcha Felder
NYS Senator, 17th S.D.

Brian A. Benjamin
NYS Senator, 30th S.D.

Andrew Gounardes
NYS Senator, 22nd S.D.

Brian P. Kavanagh
NYS Senator, 26th S.D.

Roxanne J. Persaud
NYS Senator, 19th S.D.