



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

# Jumaane D. Williams

---

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON NEW YORK CITY EDUCATION  
MARCH 4, 2022**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Senator Liu, Senator Mayer, and Assembly Member Benedetto for holding this hearing. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. As someone whose entire educational background occurred within the New York City public school system, this is a very important and personal issue to me.

In 2019, I provided testimony to the State Senate regarding the renewal of mayoral control. Of course, as you all know mayoral control was extended until June of this year. This time around, we have a renewed opportunity when it comes to mayoral control. I remain unwavering in my belief that New York City and local government should have jurisdiction over New York City schools through municipal control. Circumstances have drastically changed since 2019; we have since encountered various challenges within the New York City education system due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there are new considerations that need to be assessed.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many educators, parents, and students experienced uncertainty due to the lack of coordination and organization from the previous administration. As a result, students' academic success and performance rate plummeted. I am aware that the administration had the best intentions and did the best they could based on these circumstances. However, our children's education should not be dependent on one person—the Mayor—especially during a time where we need heightened collaboration. It does not make sense to have one singular person at the helm of such an extensive education system when we can have a larger body share these responsibilities.

I would like to highlight that previous mayors, including our current mayor, are already familiar with working collaboratively in the education space. Mayor-elects establish a transition team for their administration which include education experts, elected officials, and government appointees. Why can't this collaborative effort extend into the decisions made throughout their term and include other governmental bodies in the process? The Mayor of New York City is currently not held accountable for any of the decisions they make for the education system, and they should not remain unchecked.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

# Jumaane D. Williams

---

We need to implement a system of checks and balances where the mayor and coordinating bodies are all held accountable via municipal control. With municipal control, governmental bodies including the City Council would take on a greater role and work in tandem with the Mayor in assessing the needs and constraints of the New York City education system. This role must include consent of the City Council for the hiring of a DOE Chancellor. Various advocacy groups and organizations already look to the City Council to create change but as the law stands, there are limitations to the say these bodies have in the education system. We must make room for other voices to weigh in on education issues. The City Council provides checks on other city agencies, yet they cannot do the same for the DOE. We have a chance to change this and provide a level of consistency across the board when it comes to agency accountability.

All students deserve to have a reliable and consistent education system that puts them first. The way this will be possible is by expanding the level of responsibility-sharing among multiple bodies including the City Council, not just the Mayor. We need to set an example for our students and show them that collaboration is how work gets done successfully, and this can be done through municipal control. At the end of the day, this decision impacts our students the most and I am hopeful there will be significant changes at the state and city level regarding this issue. I also look forward to working together to ensure that every student is able to have a fair chance to succeed in the system and that decisions moving forward involve a collective effort.

Thank you.