CITY OF NEW YORK

THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

January 26, 2023

Hon. David C. Banks Chancellor New York City Public Schools Department of Education 52 Chambers Street, Room 314 New York, NY 10007

Re: Linda Wilson

Shaquieta Boyd Joanne Castro Maria Sylvester Mishawn Jack Virgen Ramos

SCI Case #: 2019-1844

Dear Chancellor Banks:

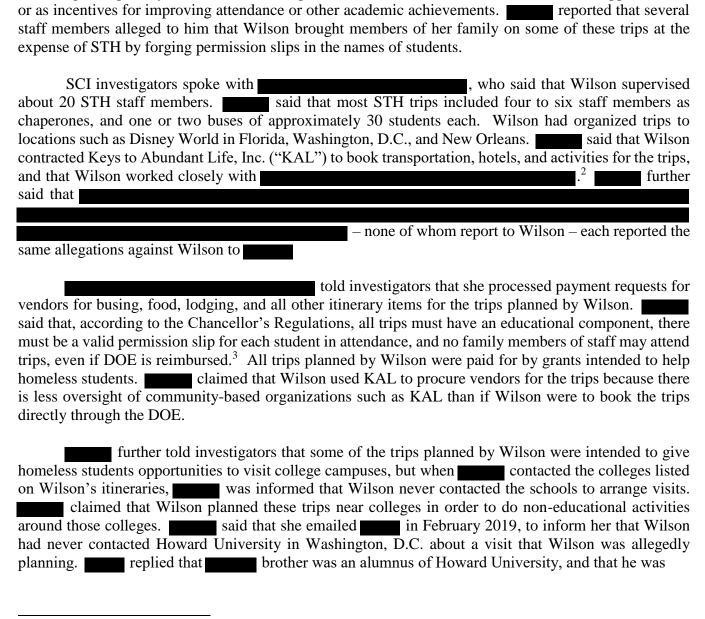
An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that New York City Department of Education ("DOE") Queens Students in Temporary Housing ("STH") Regional Manager Linda Wilson ("Wilson") brought family members on STH-sponsored trips, and also allowed other STH employees – Queens STH Program Manager Shaquieta Boyd ("Boyd"), Queens STH Family Assistant ("FA") Joanne Castro ("Castro"), Queens STH FA Mishawn Jack ("Jack"), Queens STH FA Virgen Ramos ("Ramos"), and Queens STH Community Coordinator Maria Sylvester ("Sylvester") – to bring their family members on STH-sponsored trips.¹

I. Investigation & Findings:

The investigation began in March 2019, when the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District ("SCI") received a complaint from who reported that one of Wilson's responsibilities was planning and

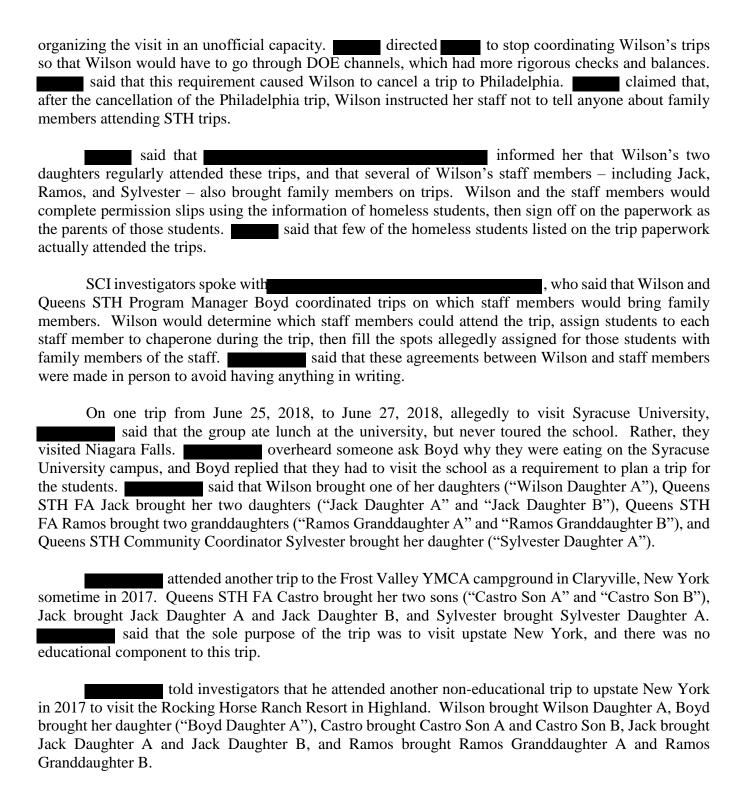
¹ No one was reassigned during this investigation, and there are no problem codes associated with anyone's personnel file. All of the subject's positions are as of the time of the incidents.

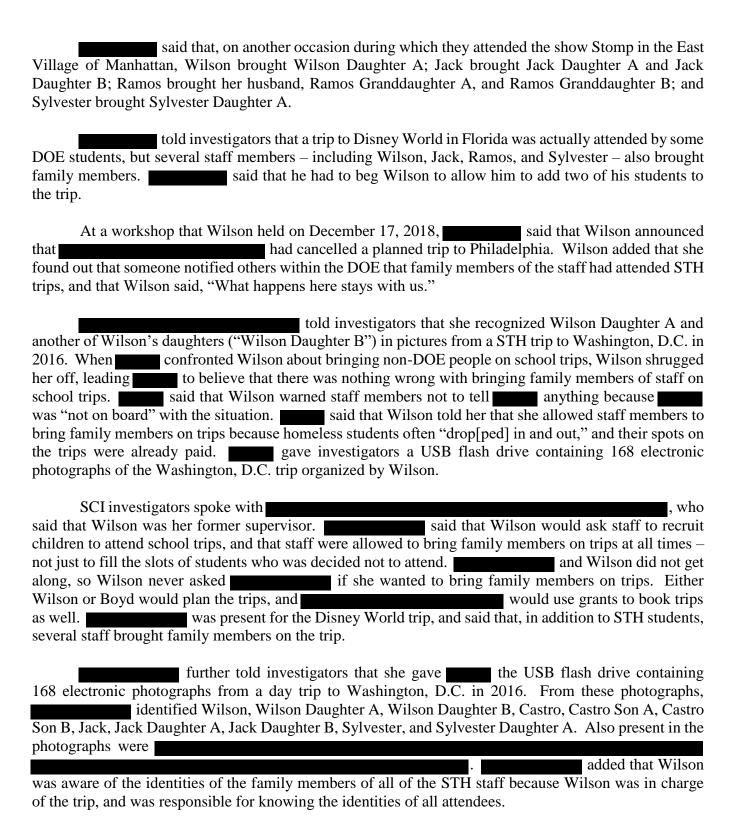
executing multiple-day, out-of-town field trips for homeless students to serve as enrichment opportunities,

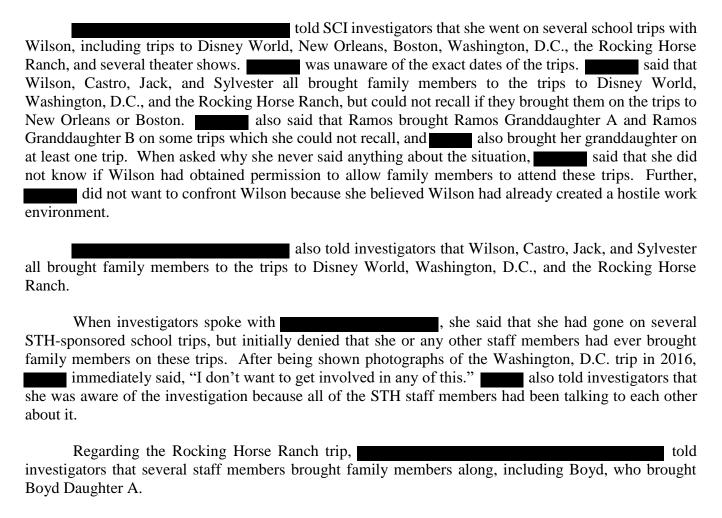


² The stated mission of community-based organization KAL is "[t]o empower individuals to live healthier and happier lives by teaching healthy culinary classes and practical lifestyle skills." Accessed from https://keystoabundantlife.com/about/ on January 24, 2023. There is no mention on KAL's website that KAL provides travel services of any kind – to students or anyone else. The only reference to any service on the KAL website that could even be considered to apply to students is this vague description of "Academic Support" on the "Activities" page of the website: "Academic support are [sic] programs and strategies that are used by schools to increase the academic achievement of students, particularly for students who may be at risk of diminished academic achievement. A wide variety of strategies have been developed to provide extra support to students. These strategies can be applied at all grade levels. Effective tutoring programs provide motivation, personal individual attention, direct instruction, and error correction to increase students' academic skills." Accessed from https://keystoabundantlife.com/classes-2/ on January 24, 2023.

³ See Chancellor's Regulation A-670.







SCI investigators spoke with Queens STH FA Ramos, who said that she went on the Disney World and Rocking Horse Ranch trips, as well as the Stomp show, but denied bringing her granddaughters or her husband to any of these events.

SCI investigators spoke with Queens STH Community Coordinator Sylvester in the presence of her attorney and union representative. When asked about the Washington, D.C. trip in 2016, Sylvester initially said that she did not bring Sylvester Daughter A on the trip. Sylvester identified herself in one of the photographs from the trip, but claimed that the she did not see her daughter – who had been identified in the photograph by other individuals – in that photograph. After speaking with her union representative, Sylvester still claimed that she did not see her daughter in the photograph, but added that another one of her daughters drove Sylvester Daughter A to Washington, D.C. independently from the STH-sponsored trip, and that Sylvester and Sylvester Daughter A met there. After initially denying taking Sylvester Daughter A on the Disney World trip, Sylvester conferred with her union representative and admitted that she did take her daughter on the trip, but that she, not STH, paid for Sylvester Daughter A. Sylvester claimed that no one authorized her to bring Sylvester Daughter A, but that she hoped that one of the STH

students would not attend, which would create an open spot for her daughter. Sylvester could provide no documentation that she paid for Sylvester Daughter A to attend the trip. After conferring with her attorney, Sylvester told investigators that Wilson authorized her to bring Sylvester Daughter A on the trip, but insisted that she paid for Sylvester Daughter A.

Queens STH Regional Manager Wilson spoke with investigators in the presence of her attorney. Wilson said she was responsible for STH student trips. She worked with would then execute the planning of these trips. Wilson said that Queens to come up with trip ideas. STH Program Manager Boyd was responsible for creating and collecting permission slips, and for sending documentation to their supervisors at DOE. Students who had good attendance and who had attended the STH Saturday program were given priority. Wilson said that she attended many of the trips. Wilson denied ever having brought any of her daughters on any school trips, and said she was unaware if any other staff members had done so because, she claimed, she did not know any of their children. Wilson said that her staff members are "staff, not friends." When shown photographs of the Washington, D.C. trip in 2016, Wilson identified herself, Wilson Daughter A, and Wilson Daughter B, but claimed that her daughters did not go to Washington, D.C. on the STH bus. Wilson said that her daughters had something unrelated to do in nearby Maryland that day, and met the STH group in Washington, D.C. later. Wilson denied that she held a meeting on December 17, 2018, in which she informed staff of the cancellation of a scheduled trip to Philadelphia after Wilson learned that individuals at the DOE had been informed that STH staff were taking family members on school trips. Wilson also denied saying at that meeting, "What happens here, stays here."

Through their attorneys, Boyd and Jack refused to speak with SCI investigators, citing their right against self-incrimination under the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution. Castro initially told investigators that she would not speak with them without union representation, then resigned from the DOE.

II. <u>Conclusion and Recommendation:</u>

Upon review of the above facts, SCI substantiated that DOE Queens Students in Temporary Housing Regional Manager Linda Wilson brought family members on Students in Temporary Housing-sponsored trips, and also allowed other Students in Temporary Housing employees – Program Manager Shaquieta Boyd, Family Assistant Joanne Castro, Family Assistant Mishawn Jack, Family Assistant Virgen Ramos, and Community Coordinator Maria Sylvester – to bring their family members on Students in Temporary Housing-sponsored trips. It is the recommendation of this office that the employment of Linda Wilson, Shaquieta Boyd, Mishawn Jack, Virgen Ramos, and Maria Sylvester be terminated, and that problem codes be attached to each of their personnel files to serve as permanent bars to future employment with the DOE, within any of its facilities, or with any of its vendors. Although Joanne Castro has retired from the DOE, it is the recommendation of this office that a problem code be attached to her personnel file to serve as a permanent bar to future employment with the DOE, within any of its facilities, or with any of its vendors. Further, the DOE should seek reimbursement for all expenses incurred by the DOE on the part of those who wrongly benefitted from these actions.

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to any action taken regarding Linda Wilson, Shaquieta Boyd, Joanne Castro, Mishawn Jack, Virgen Ramos, and Maria Sylvester. We are sending a copy of this letter to the DOE Office of Legal Services. In addition, we are sending a copy of this letter to the New York State Education Department for whatever action they deem appropriate.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact David Casanova, the assigned attorney for this matter, at (212) 510-1419 or dcasanova@nycsci.org.

Sincerely,

ANASTASIA COLEMAN Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District

By: <u>/s/ Daniel I. Schlachet</u>
Daniel I. Schlachet
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:DC:lr

cc: Elizabeth Vladeck, Esq.
Karen Antoine, Esq.
Katherine Rodi, Esq.
Monica Davis-Thorne - Director