Good afternoon. My name is Julie Marlette and I am the Director of Governmental Relations for the New York State School Boards Association. I want to start by thanking Chairperson Liu for bringing us together today for this important conversation affecting the education of over one million of New York State’s students.

The governance structure of a school district is an important factor in the academic success of their students. While the elected school board structure is the desired local governance structure in most cases, the NYC school district is not the same as any other district in the state.

New York City is different than any other city in the state. New York City’s population is greater than the population of 39 states. New York City’s population makes up more than 40% of New York State’s total population. New York City’s budget is greater than that of all but five states.

Some of the wealthiest and poorest households in the state reside within a few miles of each other. The city school district has the most students per square mile and is one of the largest districts as measured by square miles. The state has long recognized the different and unique needs and circumstances of New York City, not just for the school district, but for the city as a whole.

The state has passed specific laws relating to New York City’s speed limits and speed cameras, some of which we are talking about right now. New York has a different sales tax rate than the rest of the state; a unique income tax structure; an accelerated minimum wage increase implementation schedule; and a higher dollar threshold for Wicks law exemption. The New York City school district has a school construction authority which is completely exempt from Wicks law, and there are numerous different provisions of law dealing with the operation of charter schools.

The uniqueness of New York City and its school district requires careful consideration of its governance structure. NYSSBA’s members believe that maintaining mayoral control in New York
City is the right way to address those differences and needs, ensure accountability and reduce educational inequities.

In 2002, mayoral control was approved by the legislature. New York City mayoral control was reauthorized for the first time in 2009. The legislature drew careful lessons from the first seven years of the system, and incorporated changes to improve public participation and parental involvement with the panel for educational policy (PEP) and supervisory employment decisions for schools; established conflict of interest provisions relating to service on different city boards; established a comprehensive procedure for changes in school utilization including for co-location determinations; and made reforms to school district contracting procedures. Under the current administration, there have been 2 one-year extensions and a two-year extension, set to expire in June of 2019.

Over nearly 18 years, this model has worked for this district. Evidence can be found by looking at the dramatic increase in graduation rate. The class of 2005 had a four-year graduation rate below 50%; the graduation rate has now increased to over 74%. Further evidence can be found by looking at other performance indicators. Since 2016, performance on statewide ELA and math assessments for grades three through eight has increased by 5 and 10.6 percentage points respectively.

Students in the district have increased access to no cost SATs and advanced placement classes. 78% of all students are taking the SAT and 59% of students are enrolling in college. Successes are not just found in the higher grades. Nearly 70,000 students now have access to prekindergarten seats, approximately three times the number of seats that were available before the Mayor committed to this expansion.

The continued progress of the district does not mean that there is not more to do, and we have consistently heard from the current administration that the Mayor is committed to doing more. In my own work in Albany, each year I see the Mayor and his team making a concentrated effort to secure the resources and authority needed to grow successful programs like prekindergarten and 3-K, while also exploring new ideas to help students succeed and increase equity.

An ongoing level of uncertainty about the future of the governance model creates a level of instability that can disrupt educational programming, decisions and community relations.

Given the size and the profound diversity of New York City, centralized authority with a citywide elected official is the most appropriate way to ensure that the interests of all students are represented. We have heard from the Mayor that he welcomes that accountability, and further welcomes feedback on the implementation of programs.
The New York City school district has made tremendous progress under mayoral control and under the leadership of Mayor DeBlasio. I urge you to support the continued commitment to accountability, creativity and results by providing a three-year extension to mayoral control so the district maintains certainty of leadership and accountability for continued progress.