

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

80 MAIDEN LANE, 20TH FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10038

ANASTASIA COLEMAN  
SPECIAL COMMISSIONER

Telephone: (212) 510-1400  
Fax: (212) 510-1550  
[WWW.NYCSCI.ORG](http://WWW.NYCSCI.ORG)

**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.<sup>1</sup>

**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 [REDACTED], who reported that one of Wilson’s responsibilities was planning and

---

<sup>1</sup> 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, or as incentives for improving attendance or other academic achievements. ██████ reported that several staff members alleged to him that Wilson brought members of her family on some of these trips at the expense of STH by forging permission slips in the names of students.

SCI investigators spoke with ██████, who said that Wilson supervised about 20 STH staff members. ██████ said that most STH trips included four to six staff members as chaperones, and one or two buses of approximately 30 students each. Wilson had organized trips to locations such as Disney World in Florida, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans. ██████ said that Wilson contracted Keys to Abundant Life, Inc. (“KAL”) to book transportation, hotels, and activities for the trips, and that Wilson worked closely with ██████.<sup>2</sup> ██████ further said that ██████

██████████ – none of whom report to Wilson – each reported the same allegations against Wilson to ██████

██████████ told investigators that she processed payment requests for vendors for busing, food, lodging, and all other itinerary items for the trips planned by Wilson. ██████ said that, according to the Chancellor’s Regulations, all trips must have an educational component, there must be a valid permission slip for each student in attendance, and no family members of staff may attend trips, even if DOE is reimbursed.<sup>3</sup> All trips planned by Wilson were paid for by grants intended to help homeless students. ██████ claimed that Wilson used KAL to procure vendors for the trips because there is less oversight of community-based organizations such as KAL than if Wilson were to book the trips directly through the DOE.

██████████ further told investigators that some of the trips planned by Wilson were intended to give homeless students opportunities to visit college campuses, but when ██████ contacted the colleges listed on Wilson’s itineraries, ██████ was informed that Wilson never contacted the schools to arrange visits. ██████ claimed that Wilson planned these trips near colleges in order to do non-educational activities around those colleges. ██████ said that she emailed ██████ in February 2019, to inform her that Wilson had never contacted Howard University in Washington, D.C. about a visit that Wilson was allegedly planning. ██████ replied that ██████ brother was an alumnus of Howard University, and that he was

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> See Chancellor’s Regulation A-670.

organizing the visit in an unofficial capacity. ██████ directed ██████ to stop coordinating Wilson's trips so that Wilson would have to go through DOE channels, which had more rigorous checks and balances. ██████ said that this requirement caused Wilson to cancel a trip to Philadelphia. ██████ claimed that, after the cancellation of the Philadelphia trip, Wilson instructed her staff not to tell anyone about family members attending STH trips.

██████ said that ██████ informed her that Wilson's two daughters regularly attended these trips, and that several of Wilson's staff members – including Jack, Ramos, and Sylvester – also brought family members on trips. Wilson and the staff members would complete permission slips using the information of homeless students, then sign off on the paperwork as the parents of those students. ██████ said that few of the homeless students listed on the trip paperwork actually attended the trips.

SCI investigators spoke with ██████, who said that Wilson and Queens STH Program Manager Boyd coordinated trips on which staff members would bring family members. Wilson would determine which staff members could attend the trip, assign students to each staff member to chaperone during the trip, then fill the spots allegedly assigned for those students with family members of the staff. ██████ said that these agreements between Wilson and staff members were made in person to avoid having anything in writing.

On one trip from June 25, 2018, to June 27, 2018, allegedly to visit Syracuse University, ██████ said that the group ate lunch at the university, but never toured the school. Rather, they visited Niagara Falls. ██████ overheard someone ask Boyd why they were eating on the Syracuse University campus, and Boyd replied that they had to visit the school as a requirement to plan a trip for the students. ██████ said that Wilson brought one of her daughters ("Wilson Daughter A"), Queens STH FA Jack brought her two daughters ("Jack Daughter A" and "Jack Daughter B"), Queens STH FA Ramos brought two granddaughters ("Ramos Granddaughter A" and "Ramos Granddaughter B"), and Queens STH Community Coordinator Sylvester brought her daughter ("Sylvester Daughter A").

██████ attended another trip to the Frost Valley YMCA campground in Claryville, New York sometime in 2017. Queens STH FA Castro brought her two sons ("Castro Son A" and "Castro Son B"), Jack brought Jack Daughter A and Jack Daughter B, and Sylvester brought Sylvester Daughter A. ██████ said that the sole purpose of the trip was to visit upstate New York, and there was no educational component to this trip.

██████ told investigators that he attended another non-educational trip to upstate New York in 2017 to visit the Rocking Horse Ranch Resort in Highland. Wilson brought Wilson Daughter A, Boyd brought her daughter ("Boyd Daughter A"), Castro brought Castro Son A and Castro Son B, Jack brought Jack Daughter A and Jack Daughter B, and Ramos brought Ramos Granddaughter A and Ramos Granddaughter B.

██████████ said that, on another occasion during which they attended the show Stomp in the East Village of Manhattan, Wilson brought Wilson Daughter A; Jack brought Jack Daughter A and Jack Daughter B; Ramos brought her husband, Ramos Granddaughter A, and Ramos Granddaughter B; and Sylvester brought Sylvester Daughter A.

██████████ told investigators that a trip to Disney World in Florida was actually attended by some DOE students, but several staff members – including Wilson, Jack, Ramos, and Sylvester – also brought family members. ██████████ said that he had to beg Wilson to allow him to add two of his students to the trip.

At a workshop that Wilson held on December 17, 2018, ██████████ said that Wilson announced that ██████████ had cancelled a planned trip to Philadelphia. Wilson added that she found out that someone notified others within the DOE that family members of the staff had attended STH trips, and that Wilson said, “What happens here stays with us.”

██████████ told investigators that she recognized Wilson Daughter A and another of Wilson’s daughters (“Wilson Daughter B”) in pictures from a STH trip to Washington, D.C. in 2016. When ██████████ confronted Wilson about bringing non-DOE people on school trips, Wilson shrugged her off, leading ██████████ to believe that there was nothing wrong with bringing family members of staff on school trips. ██████████ said that Wilson warned staff members not to tell ██████████ anything because ██████████ was “not on board” with the situation. ██████████ said that Wilson told her that she allowed staff members to bring family members on trips because homeless students often “drop[ped] in and out,” and their spots on the trips were already paid. ██████████ gave investigators a USB flash drive containing 168 electronic photographs of the Washington, D.C. trip organized by Wilson.

SCI investigators spoke with ██████████, who said that Wilson was her former supervisor. ██████████ said that Wilson would ask staff to recruit children to attend school trips, and that staff were allowed to bring family members on trips at all times – not just to fill the slots of students who was decided not to attend. ██████████ and Wilson did not get along, so Wilson never asked ██████████ if she wanted to bring family members on trips. Either Wilson or Boyd would plan the trips, and ██████████ would use grants to book trips as well. ██████████ was present for the Disney World trip, and said that, in addition to STH students, several staff brought family members on the trip.

██████████ further told investigators that she gave ██████████ the USB flash drive containing 168 electronic photographs from a day trip to Washington, D.C. in 2016. From these photographs, ██████████ identified Wilson, Wilson Daughter A, Wilson Daughter B, Castro, Castro Son A, Castro Son B, Jack, Jack Daughter A, Jack Daughter B, Sylvester, and Sylvester Daughter A. Also present in the photographs were ██████████. ██████████ added that Wilson was aware of the identities of the family members of all of the STH staff because Wilson was in charge of the trip, and was responsible for knowing the identities of all attendees.

██████████ told SCI investigators that she went on several school trips with Wilson, including trips to Disney World, New Orleans, Boston, Washington, D.C., the Rocking Horse Ranch, and several theater shows. ██████████ was unaware of the exact dates of the trips. ██████████ said that Wilson, Castro, Jack, and Sylvester all brought family members to the trips to Disney World, Washington, D.C., and the Rocking Horse Ranch, but could not recall if they brought them on the trips to New Orleans or Boston. ██████████ also said that Ramos brought Ramos Granddaughter A and Ramos Granddaughter B on some trips which she could not recall, and ██████████ also brought her granddaughter on at least one trip. When asked why she never said anything about the situation, ██████████ said that she did not know if Wilson had obtained permission to allow family members to attend these trips. Further, ██████████ did not want to confront Wilson because she believed Wilson had already created a hostile work environment.

██████████ also told investigators that Wilson, Castro, Jack, and Sylvester all brought family members to the trips to Disney World, Washington, D.C., and the Rocking Horse Ranch.

When investigators spoke with ██████████, she said that she had gone on several STH-sponsored school trips, but initially denied that she or any other staff members had ever brought family members on these trips. After being shown photographs of the Washington, D.C. trip in 2016, ██████████ immediately said, "I don't want to get involved in any of this." ██████████ also told investigators that she was aware of the investigation because all of the STH staff members had been talking to each other about it.

Regarding the Rocking Horse Ranch trip, ██████████ told investigators that several staff members brought family members along, including Boyd, who brought Boyd Daughter A.

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 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 [REDACTED] to come up with trip ideas. [REDACTED] would then execute the planning of these trips. Wilson said that Queens 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. Conclusion and Recommendation:**

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](mailto:dcasanova@nycsci.org).

Sincerely,

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

By: */s/ Daniel I. Schlachet*  
Daniel I. Schlachet  
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:DC:lr

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