

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

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**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

December 28, 2023

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

Re: Jose Garcia  
Kariseli Quinones Morel  
SCI Case #: 2022-3431

Dear Chancellor Banks:

An investigation conducted by the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) has substantiated that Bus Attendant Jose Garcia (“Garcia”), an employee of First Steps Trans., Inc. (“First Steps”), made inappropriate comments to a then 19-year-old autistic female student (“Student A”), and engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior over live video with that student. SCI has also concluded that First Steps Bus Driver Kariseli Quinones Morel (“Morel”) failed to cooperate with SCI in this investigation.<sup>1</sup>

**I. Investigation & Findings:**

The investigation began in April 2022, when SCI received a complaint from [REDACTED] who reported that the aunt of Student A (“Aunt A”) informed [REDACTED] that Aunt A overheard a FaceTime conversation between Garcia and Student A on April 25, 2022, during which Garcia said, “Go into the bathroom and show me

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia is listed as “active,” but “ineligible,” in the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) Personnel Eligibility Tracking System (“PETS”). Morel is listed as “inactive,” but “eligible,” in PETS. There are problem codes associated with both of their personnel files.

your vagina.”<sup>2,3</sup> Aunt A also told [REDACTED] that Student A had at times waited for the school bus in Garcia’s personal vehicle.

SCI investigators spoke with the father of Student A (“Father A”), who said that Student A is autistic, and graduated from high school in spring 2022. Father A said that he allowed Garcia to purchase donuts for Student A in the past, and that Garcia once bought a chain for Student A. Father A told investigators that, in retrospect, Garcia may have been “grooming” Student A. Father A said he confronted Garcia about his relationship with Student A over the phone, and Garcia apologized and conceded that he “knew it was wrong.”

Aunt A told investigators that Student A and Garcia, with the permission of Father A, often spoke on the phone or over FaceTime. On April 25, 2022, Aunt A overheard Student A and Garcia discussing TikTok videos on FaceTime. Aunt A then heard Garcia say to Student A, “Go into the bathroom and show me your vagina.” Aunt A immediately told Student A to end the FaceTime call. Student A admitted to Aunt A that Garcia asked her to show him her “private area.” Aunt A provided investigators with screenshots of text messages sent between Garcia and Student A.

Investigators spoke with Student A in the presence of her father. Student A said that Garcia was the bus attendant on her bus route for the last school year, and that she communicated with Garcia through text messages, TikTok, and FaceTime. Father A was aware of this communication but did not know the subjects that were discussed. Student A said that Garcia had shown Student A his penis over FaceTime on multiple occasions while he was “using the toilet.” Student A said that she put her phone down while this happened to give Garcia “privacy.” Garcia asked Student A to show him her vagina several times, and Student A complied on one occasion. Student A also told investigators that she was alone with Garcia in his personal vehicle on more than one occasion, but there was never any physical contact between Garcia and her. Garcia also bought food for Student A on more than one occasion. Garcia told Student A to keep their relationship secret because Garcia was married. Student A also told investigators that she and Garcia said “I love you” to each other at times.

SCI investigators attempted to contact Garcia through a personal visit to his home, and via phone, email, and certified mail, but were unsuccessful.

[REDACTED] told investigators that the bus driver on Student A’s route on which Garcia was the bus attendant was Morel. Investigators attempted to speak with Morel about possible interactions between Garcia and Student A on her bus. Investigators scheduled an interview with Morel to discuss the matter, but Morel did not appear. After that, investigators made numerous home

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<sup>2</sup> MOTC is a District 75 School that provides highly specialized instructional support for students with significant learning disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Due to a fire at Student A and Father A’s New York City residence, they were temporarily residing with Aunt A in Bergen County, New Jersey, when the incidents alleged in the complaint took place. The allegations were initially referred to the New York City Police Department (“NYPD”) for criminal prosecution, but the NYPD ultimately determined that they did not have jurisdiction over the matter. The Kings County District Attorney’s Office made the same determination.

visits to Morel, made several phone calls to her, sent several emails to her, and sent a letter to her via certified mail. Morel did not respond to any further attempts by investigators to speak with her.

## **II. Conclusion and Recommendation:**

Upon review of the above facts, SCI substantiated that First Steps Trans., Inc. Bus Attendant Jose Garcia, a non-DOE employee, made inappropriate comments to a then 19-year-old autistic female student, and engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior over live video with that student. SCI has also concluded that Driver Kari Quinones Morel, also a non-DOE employee of First Steps Trans., Inc., failed to cooperate with SCI in this investigation. It is the recommendation of this office that Garcia remain permanently ineligible in PETS, and that the problem code currently attached to his personnel file remain in place to serve as a reminder should Garcia seek future employment with the DOE or any of its vendors. It is also the recommendation of this office that Morel face whatever disciplinary action is deemed appropriate.

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to any action taken regarding Garcia and Morel or the recommendations made herein. 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 Bergen County, New Jersey, Prosecutor Mark Musella for whatever action he deems appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>4</sup> See Footnote 3, *supra*.