

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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December 9, 2010

Start: 01:27pm

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HELD AT: Committee Room - 14th Floor
City Hall

B E F O R E:
ANNABEL PALMA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
Gale Brewer
Brad Lander
Stephen Levin
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
James G. Van Bramer
Rubin Wills

A P P E A R A N C E S

Seth Diamond
Commissioner
Department of Homeless Services

Scott Stringer
President
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Jane Bock
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Stephanie Gonzalez
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Laurel Eisner
Executive Director
Sanctuary for Families

Louise Feeley
Executive Director
Housing Court Answers

Meshawn Danes
Homeless Person

Levonne Johnson
Homeless Person

Natalie Johnson
Homeless Person
Daughter of Levonne Johnson

Linda Brilliant
New York City Resident

Aminia Nelson
New York City Resident

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Good afternoon, I'm Annabel Palma, Chair of the General Welfare Committee. I would like to welcome everyone to today's hearing, especially Commissioner Seth Diamond from the Department of Homeless Services, and Commissioner Robert Doar, who's going to join us shortly, from the Human Resources Administration. I'd like to thank Lisette Camilo, counsel for General Welfare Committee for preparing today's hearing. I also would like to acknowledge my colleagues in the City Council and who sit on this Committee, Council Member Stephen Levin from Brooklyn, Council Member Maria Del Carmen Arroyo from the Bronx, Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez, and I would like to warmly welcome the new ... our new addition to this Committee, Council Member Rubin Wills from Queens. Welcome to our Committee. Today we will examine three matters related to transparency and accountability at the Department of Homeless Services. First, we will discuss the controversial study of the agency's home lease program; second, we will review Intro 395, which will require both DHS and HRA to collect and

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2 report data on their advantage program, as well as
3 their other rent-subsidy programs; and finally we
4 will review Intro 444, which will require DHS to
5 include all categories of shelter beds in the
6 agency's regularly-published census account. In
7 recent Mayor's management reports, and in numerous
8 City Council hearings, DHS has claimed that over
9 90% of the HomeBase participants have avoided
10 entering the shelter system. It is undeniable
11 that the administration has praised the efficacy
12 of the HomeBase programs for years. Yet, despite
13 this unwavering support for the HomeBase program,
14 DHS chose to undertake a controversial and, many
15 would argue, unethical study to evaluate the
16 HomeBase program. The study randomly assigned 400
17 participants who sought homeless preventive
18 services from HomeBase into two groups. All of
19 these 400 New Yorkers, which encompasses
20 individuals and their families, were at risk of
21 losing their houses. The first group, or the
22 treatment group, received preventive services from
23 HomeBase. The other 200 participants, however,
24 will continue to receive no services for up to two
25 years. The goal of the study is to track all 400

1 participants and evaluate how they utilize city
2 services, such as shelter, public assistance or
3 foster care, in their time of great need. To be
4 clear, the Committee is of course supportive of
5 evaluating the effective of social service
6 programs that the city provides. However, we
7 seriously question the methodology chosen for this
8 particular study. This study raises profound and
9 serious ethical questions. The study deliberately
10 denying services to at-risk individuals who sought
11 out help because they were about to lose their
12 homes. This study as designed uses poor and
13 vulnerable families in strict scientific
14 experiments where more appropriate and more
15 ethical evaluation tools are easily available and
16 commonly used in evaluating social service
17 programs. As previously mentioned, it is
18 consistently cited that the HomeBase program has a
19 success rate of 90%. I ask, what data were these
20 statistics based on. The data has never been
21 shared with this Committee, DHS regularly collects
22 large amounts of data about people who access
23 their services. DHS regularly collects
24 information about the people that receive homeless
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2 preventive services, and those that do not. Why
3 has DHS not used that data that they already have,
4 to determine whether preventive services are
5 effective? Why is DHS denying service?

6 Additionally, DHS has publicly stated participants
7 were made aware that if they chose to partake in
8 the study there was a potential denial of services
9 and the participants were made aware that they
10 could be denied services. This flies in the face
11 of commonsense. People who are seeking HomeBase
12 services believe that they are at risk of losing
13 their homes already. Why would people at risk of
14 becoming homeless willingly and knowingly sign up
15 for a study that would deny them and keep them
16 from getting services? I cannot believe that
17 participants in the control group really
18 understood the consequences of participating in
19 this study. People under stress sign documents,
20 not fully understanding the consequences of their
21 signature, and in this case I don't believe these
22 signatures are evidence of full understanding of
23 what the program and the study called for. Today
24 we will also discuss Intro 395, which would
25 require DHS and HRA to collect and report data on

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2 the Advantage program and many other rental
3 subsidy programs. The data collected required in
4 the bill will help us better determine whether the
5 Advantage program and other rent subsidy programs
6 are successful in their efforts to keeping
7 families experiencing homelessness become more
8 self-sufficient and if these programs are really a
9 pass out of shelters and into more permanent
10 housing. Lastly, Intro 444 will require DHS to be
11 more inclusive in regard to the published
12 information on shelter usage. Currently the
13 agency's daily census figures do not include
14 people who spend the night in a number of
15 different types of shelter, including Safe Haven,
16 stabilization beds, HPD shelters, and faith-based
17 shelters. Not counting these people in the
18 overall census results is unacceptable to us, to
19 this Committee and I think to the city. Not
20 counting these people in any ... you know, in the
21 overall capacity of homelessness is to me
22 degrading, and every New Yorker counts.
23 Undercounting paints a misleading and inaccurate
24 picture of the homeless population in New York
25 City. Furthermore, DHS had a few years ago

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2 included many of these beds in their total census,
3 so we can't understand why they're not ... why they
4 are not continuing that practice and why it's not
5 being done. And this law will now require DHS to
6 always report a full accurate count of shelter bed
7 usage in New York City. HomeBase, Intro 395, and
8 Intro 444 all speak of the value of inclusive
9 information, transparency and accountability when
10 trying to determine inroads in the efforts to
11 address homelessness. I look forward to hearing
12 from the administration and the public on this
13 issue. Before I take the Commissioner's
14 testimony, I'd like to acknowledge that we have
15 been joined by Manhattan borough President Scott
16 Stringer, who has a statement he would like to
17 make, and I will allow him to make his statement.
18 And we've also been joined by Council Member Brad
19 Lander from Brooklyn. You can come.

20 MR. STRINGER: Wow, it's something
21 up here. Well, first I want to thank Council
22 Member Palma and members of the Committee for
23 hosting this important hearing on the Department
24 of Homeless Services' evaluation of its HomeBase
25 community prevention program. As you know, this

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2 concerns an ongoing DHS study which involved the
3 Department randomly selecting 400 families who
4 applied and qualified for emergency housing
5 subsidies through HomeBase, and then summarily
6 denying those services to half the population as
7 part of some misguided study. The stated intent
8 was to engage the effectiveness of HomeBase
9 services, which is a perfectly laudable goal. We
10 should always be looking for ways to measure the
11 effectiveness of the services we provide, and to
12 make improvements based on what we learned. But
13 the method DHS selected is both extreme and
14 unnecessary, and I really want to thank Council
15 Member Palma for holding this hearing to really
16 dig deeper on this issue. I believe they chose to
17 systematically deny critical housing benefits to
18 qualified families in crisis, just to see what
19 would happen. Would these families successfully
20 seek help otherwise? Would they stave off
21 eviction notices? Or would they end up on the
22 street, headed toward a city shelter? And let me
23 state as clearly as I can, I believe that the city
24 should not be making guinea pigs out of its most
25 vulnerable citizens, period. Denying emergency

1 housing benefits to families in crisis is not just
2 bad policy, it is ethically questionable and
3 totally unnecessary from a policy point of view.
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5 There are plenty of other ways to measure a
6 program's success, short of plunging families into
7 the unknown. The administration needs to end this
8 study now, and devote its resources to helping the
9 200 families that have already been thrown into
10 this dangerous control group. Since the existence
11 of this study was first revealed last October, I
12 had two meetings with senior administration
13 officials to express my concerns. While I thank
14 the administration for their response to those
15 concerns, the meeting really turned out to be
16 unsatisfactory. The administration argues that
17 their experiment is the same as evaluations often
18 conducted by the Federal government. However, as
19 of yet they have not been able to produce a single
20 study that involves suddenly denying core
21 emergency benefits to applicants who are homeless,
22 or on the brink of homelessness. I have grave
23 concerns, Council members, with the central
24 feature of this evaluation, that all 200 families
25 were denied benefits only after they gave their

1 informed consent to be enrolled in this study
2 group. I have reviewed these consent forms and
3 have copies here, if anyone would like to evaluate
4 what if anything is informed about them. This is
5 a consent form that would take a lawyer to
6 navigate. This is not a consent form that is
7 easily transparent, where people can understand
8 what they're going through in the middle of a
9 crisis. For this reason alone, this experiment
10 must be stopped. And finally, in summary, it's
11 time for Homeless Services to end this demeaning
12 study and turn its attention towards finding and
13 helping the 200 families they cast into the wind.
14 The Mayor's own management report actually talks a
15 lot about HomeBase and how successful it is. They
16 know this is a worthwhile program, they know it's
17 worth the money. The fact that the Department of
18 Homeless Services cannot figure out how to have a
19 conversation with Mark Page, that does not mean
20 you have to take it to the next level and get out
21 into the streets. So I want to just thank you so
22 much for doing this hearing, thank you for giving
23 me this opportunity to testify. I know you're
24 going to learn a lot, but I would like to leave
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2 this consent form for anybody who really
3 understands it, and we should go from there. So I
4 would like to submit this for your review, Council
5 Member, I know you have it. Thank you all very
6 much, thank you for giving me this courtesy.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you, Mr.
8 Borough President. Commissioner.

9 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Good
10 afternoon, I am Seth Diamond, the Commissioner of
11 the Department of Homeless Services.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Commissioner,
13 I'm sorry, I just want to make an announcement to
14 my colleagues.

15 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Since we're
17 going to be hearing on HomeBase and the other two
18 intros, 395 and 444, the Commissioner has three
19 actual testimonies, so we're going to hear the
20 HomeBase testimony, open it up for questions and
21 answers, correct, Lisette?

22 MS. CAMILO: Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And then hear
24 the other testimony.

25 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes, I have

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three separate prepared.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay. I wanted them to be sure.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Okay, as I started to say, I'm Seth Diamond, the Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services, and joining me on our panel today are representatives from two of the nation's leading research institutions, and accordingly our partners in evaluating the city's community-based prevention program. Seated with me is Dr. John Mollenkopf on my left, distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology and Director of the Center for Urban Research at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Gretchen Locke on my far right, the Senior Associate at Abt Associates, and Dr. Howard Rolston, sitting right next to me on my right, Principal Associate and Researcher in the Social and Economic Policy Division at Abt Associates. DHS has previously testified before the Council about the need to study prevention efforts and the importance of using proven

1 strategies to fight homelessness in New York City.
2 In fact, when the public advocate chaired the
3 Committee, then Councilman Bill de Blasio, he
4 discussed the need for funding prevention efforts
5 rather than subsidizing new shelters. The city's
6 independent budget office further presented this
7 Committee a report in 2008 which called on policy
8 makers at Homeless Services to regularly evaluate
9 the effectiveness of prevention programs
10 throughout the city. Additionally, following this
11 hearing I will submit testimony to the same
12 Committee regarding two pieces of legislation
13 which seek to reinforce data measurement and
14 evaluation as the centerpiece of both the
15 Bloomberg Administration and the New York City
16 Council. These bills and my presence here today
17 makes clear the correct intention of this body is
18 to use data to most effectively deliver services
19 and spend taxpayer dollars. I'm pleased that we
20 have these important values and goals in common.
21 I'm also pleased to report that our groundbreaking
22 study to evaluate the effects of community
23 prevention services on the shelter system is now
24 under way at the Department of Homeless Services.
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2 This study is proof of DHS's commitment to work
3 with the Council to find and fight the causes of
4 homelessness. It demonstrates in deed, rather
5 than words, our dedication to advancing our
6 mission to prevent homelessness wherever possible.
7 As explained to this Committee on several
8 occasions, the HomeBase service model began as a
9 pilot with six offices in 2004, to help families
10 and individuals overcome immediate housing issues
11 that could result in becoming homeless. After an
12 expansion of this prevention model, New Yorkers at
13 risk of homelessness now have thirteen storefront
14 locations in five boroughs to call on if they are
15 experiencing a housing crisis. These offices are
16 run by the most experienced and responsible
17 providers in our city. It's the Catholic
18 Charities of New York, Help USA, Palladia,
19 Partnership for the Homeless, Ridgewood, Bushwick
20 and Camba, who partner with the city to invest in
21 your communities and helping New Yorkers remain in
22 their homes. HomeBase represents a \$20 million
23 investment of taxpayer dollars that gives New
24 Yorkers at risk of homelessness a community-based
25 option to assist them in reaching self-

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2 sufficiency. HomeBase's comprehensive service
3 model has been recognized by Harvard, with the Ash
4 Center's Innovations in American Government award,
5 HUD and the American Planning Association's
6 Secretary Opportunity and Empowerment award, and
7 the National League of City's Municipal Excellence
8 award, for its innovative packaging of benefits
9 and services, so that households at risk of
10 becoming homeless can one-stop shop for services
11 to prevent homelessness. HomeBase case managers
12 have developed an expertise in the array of
13 benefits and services available throughout the
14 city, that can help families quickly resolve their
15 housing crisis. The HomeBase evaluation seeks to
16 answer three central research questions. 1. What
17 is the impact of HomeBase prevention services on
18 subsequent shelter utilization? 2. Is HomeBase
19 cost effective, compared to shelter costs? And 3.
20 Is HomeBase effective in linking clients to
21 mainstream programs? The agency worked with CUNY
22 Professor John Mollenkopf to plan this program
23 impact study. CUNY hired Abt Associates, one of
24 the leading research firms in the country, to help
25 us learn everything we can about what works at

1 HomeBase and how to maximize the program impact.
2 Abt Associates assigned Howard Rolston, PhD to the
3 project. Dr. Rolston is a highly-regarded social
4 researcher who changed the way Federal programs
5 for children and families are evaluated. In fact,
6 Dr. Rolston spearheaded the use of innovative
7 research techniques as a senior official at the
8 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for
9 over three decades. Dr. Rolston and his
10 colleagues at Abt Associates designed an
11 evaluation that uses a randomized process to study
12 HomeBase services. This study design has been
13 fully endorsed by leading researchers in the field
14 of homelessness from Columbia University, the
15 University of Pennsylvania, Vanderbilt University
16 and the Urban Institute. It has also been
17 endorsed by our community partners in this process
18 at HomeBase whom your offices regularly consult
19 with. I'm pleased to have their letters of
20 support and endorsement which I have appended at
21 the conclusion of my testimony. From June to
22 September of this year 400 households were
23 enrolled in two groups, 200 in the treatment
24 group, and 200 in the control group. Researchers

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2 will follow study participants for the next two
3 years to determine their patterns of shelter use,
4 employment status, and use of work supports. In
5 implementing this study, Abt Associates made sure
6 that the highest ethical and legal standards were
7 met. To start off, the study design was reviewed
8 and approved by the Abt Institutional Review
9 Board, a committee whose sole responsibility, as
10 established by Federal guidelines, is to ensure
11 that the welfare and rights of study participants
12 are fully protected. When it came time to
13 implement the random assignment process, Abt staff
14 conducted extensive training at our community-
15 based HomeBase offices, and provided technical
16 assistance to frontline staff. Staff received
17 training on the proper procedure for obtaining
18 informed consent from study participants, how to
19 make referrals, insuring confidentiality and how
20 to handle grievances. Consent forms were
21 available in three languages, English, Spanish and
22 Creole. HomeBase staff carefully explained the
23 study process to each applicant, emphasizing that
24 they did not have to participate in the study, but
25 could receive referrals to other community

1 resources located throughout the city that could
2 assist them in remaining stably housed. I want to
3 take a moment here to explain some details about
4 the evaluation. First, you should know that
5 HomeBase has limited funding and cannot fully
6 serve all of its current applicants. In fact,
7 over the course of a year approximately 1,500
8 applications cannot receive the full spectrum of
9 HomeBase services. These applicants do, however,
10 receive information and referrals to other well-
11 known community-based resources to assist them.
12 Let me be clear, we did not reduce the number of
13 people served for the sake of this study. Instead
14 of referring people to other citywide services
15 when HomeBase caseloads filled up, which as I just
16 explained they do throughout the year, this summer
17 we randomly determined those who will receive
18 HomeBase services. In September when the study
19 enrollment process was completed, we went back to
20 allocating resources the way we always do, by
21 giving overflow applicants information and
22 referral on where else they may obtain services
23 throughout the city. Similarly, the control group
24 received an extensive listing of citywide
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2 services, such as well-known community resources
3 like the Legal Aid Society, and the Human
4 Resources Administration, to obtain emergency
5 funds to prevent eviction, as well as assistance
6 from other not-for-profit organizations throughout
7 the city. Some have asked us why individuals who
8 did not consent to participate in the study did
9 not receive HomeBase services, but were instead
10 provided with a listing of services available in
11 the community. This methodology is routinely used
12 in other evaluations of social services. For
13 example, HUD and the city ... and the Centers for
14 Disease Control and Prevention jointly funded a
15 study to examine the impact of providing HOPWA,
16 which is the Housing Opportunities for Persons
17 with AIDS, rental assistance for homeless people
18 living with HIV. Those assigned to the treatment
19 group received immediate HOPWA housing assistance.
20 Both control group members and those refusing to
21 participate in the study did not receive HOPWA's
22 housing assistance, but did receive the usual
23 housing and case management services available to
24 them in the community. Data generated through
25 examination of intervention services like the

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2 study I just mentioned will undoubtedly improve
3 service delivery throughout this city and the
4 nation. For the past six years the department has
5 carefully monitored and publicly reported on
6 HomeBase's outcomes. Data is also always
7 available through the monthly reports incorporated
8 in the Mayor's management report, and the citywide
9 performance report. This data includes the
10 success rate of those who use HomeBase services
11 and avoid shelter. While these results are
12 impressive, our current data does not, however,
13 answer the critical question of whether or not we
14 are assisting the clients who would have entered
15 shelter if they had not received HomeBase
16 services. Let me just repeat that. That our
17 current data, however impressive the results are,
18 and they are, does not answer the most critical
19 question, which is whether people would have
20 accessed shelter but for the HomeBase services.
21 Homeless services in New York City have potential
22 ... have the potential for great transformation.
23 There is no question that we are on the correct
24 course to combat homelessness as we know it today.
25 However, moving forward requires partners with

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2 expertise to produce the most accurate evidence-
3 based data, as well as the courage and support
4 from the community to take the steps necessary to
5 identify strategies that will truly make a
6 difference in the lives of New Yorkers. We have
7 the opportunity to shift from a system of spending
8 billions of dollars to build and maintain shelters
9 in more and more communities throughout New York
10 City, to a system of solutions. I am counting on
11 your commitment to progress, which will lead to
12 support on this endeavor. And I'm ready to take
13 your questions. Oh, before we take your questions
14 actually, Dr. Rolston has a brief statement to
15 read about the study design.

16 DR. ROLSTON: Since I'm not
17 familiar with your procedures, we prepared- -

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
19 You can ... yeah, turn on the mic and announce
20 yourself for the record. Okay, and just speak
21 into the mic.

22 DR. ROLSTON: Now? Thank you. I'm
23 Howard Rolston, I'm a Principal Associate at Abt
24 Associates. Since I'm not ... we had expected to
25 submit a statement for the record. In order to do

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2 that, would you like me to read it in its
3 entirety, because it's probably not entirely
4 brief? Or I could read parts of it.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You ... if you're
6 going to submit it for the record, you don't need
7 to go through it point by point.

8 DR. ROLSTON: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You can just
10 summarize.

11 DR. ROLSTON: All right. Well, I
12 won't do that, But I'll read parts of it.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay.

14 DR. ROLSTON: Thank you. Abt
15 Associates, founded in 1965, is built on the
16 concept that sound information, empirical analysis
17 are the best foundations for effective decision
18 making. The company was ranked 19th among the top
19 U.S. research organizations as one of the top 25
20 global research firms in 2010. Abt Associates is
21 an employee-owned company with a worldwide staff
22 of 1,700, and has seven offices in the U.S. and
23 program offices in nearly 40 countries. Abt
24 Associates' work includes nationally-recognized
25 research evaluation and technical assistance to

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2 improve the effectiveness of government programs,
3 both domestic and international, in diverse
4 domains, including housing, community development,
5 education, workforce and developmental health.

6 Abt Associates has evaluated hundreds of social
7 programs over the past 45 years. Many studies
8 have used designs in which study subjects are
9 randomly assigned either to a treatment group that
10 receives an intervention or a control group that
11 does not receive it. Examples of our housing work
12 include multi-site random assignment studies for
13 the Department of Housing and Urban Development,
14 of the Moving to Opportunity program, and the
15 effects of housing choice vouchers on welfare
16 families. These rigorous studies have yielded
17 important data to guide policy by answering
18 critical questions about social programs. What
19 would happen in the absence of the intervention?
20 Is the intervention inappropriate use of scarce
21 public resources? The evaluation of New York
22 City's HomeBase community prevention program falls
23 into this category. Mary Beth Shinn of Vanderbilt
24 University, one of the leading researchers in the
25 area of homelessness prevention, has frequently

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2 critiqued prevention programs because she has
3 found it is difficult to identify those households
4 who would become homeless but for the services.
5 Shinn's research has indicated that it is
6 difficult to target resources and services to
7 those households who would have otherwise become
8 homeless, so prevention programs would expend
9 considerable resources on families who will remain
10 out of the shelter system anyway. In 1999 Shinn
11 and Jim Baumohl of Bryn Mawr College called for
12 rigorous evaluation to assess the effect of
13 prevention programs. They concluded: in 1990 the
14 General Accounting Office reviewed what was known
15 about indicated programs to prevent homelessness
16 and concluded that their effectiveness could not
17 be determined because too few collected the
18 necessary data. Now, nine years later, the same
19 conclusion holds. While a few programs may be
20 promising, none are even near proven. If
21 indicated strategies are to be pursued in the
22 future, we must have more rigorous evaluation
23 designs, including random assignment of treatment,
24 and more important, long-term follow-up on both
25 those in the treatment group and controls. When

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2 programs are unable to meet the demand for
3 services, we see no ethical obligation to
4 allocating services by lottery, among those
5 eligible. Since Shinn and Baumohl authored that
6 paper over a decade ago, we have not been able to
7 identify any really additional rigorous studies of
8 prevention that answer the question whether
9 prevention is a cost-effective service delivery
10 strategy. New York City is spending about \$20
11 million each year on HomeBase services. Insuring
12 that HomeBase is an effective and efficient use of
13 public resources is important, both for the
14 families that it serves and the taxpayers that
15 fund the services. Further, the current study of
16 HomeBase provides an important opportunity to
17 contribute to filling this gap in knowledge by
18 testing this community prevention intervention in
19 a rigorous way. Random assignment is frequently
20 described as the gold standard in program or
21 medical evaluation, because it provides a reliable
22 way of determining what would have happened to the
23 population served by a program in its absence.
24 Given a sufficiently large number of people
25 assigned randomly to a treatment group that the

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2 program will serve, or to a control group that can
3 access other services in the community, but not
4 the program itself, will provide strong evidence
5 for concluding whether or not the program works.
6 Prevention of a serious condition such as
7 homelessness is an important goal. Numerous
8 studies have shown that even well-designed
9 prevention programs such as HomeBase may not be
10 successful or efficient in preventing a condition
11 it is intended to positively affect. One reason
12 that this can occur is the difficulty of
13 targeting, that is identifying from what is often
14 a very large at-risk population the relatively few
15 who will actually experience the condition one is
16 trying to prevent. For example, two families
17 might look to the external observer to be in
18 identical circumstances. But one may have access
19 to help from a friend, or have a more patient
20 landlord that the other might lack. And one of
21 these differences might lead to one family
22 escaping homelessness and the other not. In the
23 case of HomeBase community prevention, random
24 assignment is the most accurate and credible way
25 to answer the question of whether the program

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2 reduces shelter entry among those who would
3 otherwise use shelters as an option. The fact
4 that there is a low rate of shelter entry by
5 individuals who accessed HomeBase community
6 prevention could mean that it reduces shelter use.
7 Or it could mean that most families who had
8 accessed its services would have avoided shelter
9 without it. Evaluation design developed for the
10 HomeBase evaluation called for an enrollment of
11 400 heads of households, 200 which would be
12 assigned to the treatment group, to receive
13 HomeBase services, and 200 would be assigned to a
14 control group. Abt Associates developed training
15 materials for both the HomeBase agency and the
16 frontline staff who were involved in study
17 recruitment and administering consent. A
18 conference call was held with agency directors in
19 February of 2010 to present the study design,
20 answer questions, and solicit feedback on the best
21 ways to integrate study procedures with customary
22 program operations. The study tools and
23 procedures were developed and refined in
24 consultation with DHS staff, and once final
25 consent materials were translated into Spanish and

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2 Haitian Creole, all the study tools and protocols
3 were reviewed and approved by Abt Associates'
4 institutional review board. In-person training
5 for providers' staff was provided at DHS
6 headquarters in May of 2010, with staff
7 representation from all providers. Three members
8 of the Abt staff project staff, the study
9 director, the task leader for study
10 implementation, and the study liaison, presented
11 the study design and procedures to be used for the
12 study. Abt staff provided a thorough explanation
13 in the consent process, including reviewing the
14 consent form in detail and providing suggestions
15 on how to answer questions about the study from
16 applicants. Training manuals covered the same
17 material were provided to staff working on the
18 study. Follow-up telephone training was held the
19 following week, for the small number of staff that
20 was unable to attend the in-person training.

21 Study enrollment began on June 9th, 2010. Staff at
22 HomeBase-provider agencies provided information
23 about the study to heads of households who were
24 eligible for HomeBase. Abt project staff held
25 conference calls with the provider staff during

1 the enrollment phase. In addition to the calls,
2 an Abt liaison was also available to answer
3 questions from agency staff by telephone or email,
4 as they arose. And the Abt liaison visited
5 provider agencies in July, to meet with staff,
6 observe program services and answer questions.
7 The evaluation of HomeBase community prevention
8 meets the ethical standards for the conduct of the
9 social experiment. The program is not an
10 entitlement, and there are not sufficient
11 resources to serve all who are eligible to
12 participate. The number of clients served during
13 the enrollment period was not reduced as a result
14 of the evaluations. There is no reliable evidence
15 that the program achieves its purpose of reducing
16 shelter use. Individuals in the control group
17 were denied access only to the HomeBase program,
18 not to the other substantial services and
19 resources in the city that are designed to avoid
20 eviction and prevent homelessness. Finally,
21 individuals were informed of the study protocol in
22 accordance with Federal regulations and Abt's high
23 standards, and voluntarily considered to
24 participate in the study. New York City is to be
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1
2 applauded for undertaking this evaluation,
3 including its random assignment design. If the
4 program is not achieving its intended results, and
5 were to continue unchanged, the individuals who
6 would be most harmed by this waste would be the
7 very people it's intended to serve. On the other
8 hand, if the evaluation finds credible evidence
9 that the program is successful in reducing shelter
10 use, that credible evidence will provide a very
11 strong argument for bringing greater resources to
12 bear on behalf of more at-risk families, and
13 potentially serving more people than are now
14 allowed to be served, given their resources.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify with DHS
16 and the City University of New York on behalf of
17 this important study. This study has the
18 potential to provide critical empirical evidence
19 to improve targeting and service delivery for
20 people at risk to homelessness. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,
22 Doctor. Commissioner, as you can imagine, we have
23 probably even more questions now.

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Okay, well,
25 we're ready to answer them.

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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I want to begin
3 by ... I want to begin just by ... I want to ask, how
4 was HomeBase evaluated before? Can you take us
5 through the process of evaluation of HomeBase, or
6 was it ever evaluated from its inception until the
7 time that DHS decided to do a study?

8 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: HomeBase
9 initially started as a pilot in six community
10 districts, six community districts, and there was
11 an attempt to evaluate the shelter usage for
12 people in those community districts against other
13 ... in other six community districts elsewhere in
14 the city. That was an imperfect process at best,
15 for a variety of reasons, dealing with the
16 similarity of people in one community district
17 with another, and it produced some information,
18 but not anything that you could certainly base
19 full-scale evaluation of, or base a major funding
20 decision on. When the- -

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
22 I'm sorry, when you say, based on similarities,
23 can you give us an example? Like were some people
24 utilizing one HomeBase service because they had
25 rent arrears, versus others who were already

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evicted? What?

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It wasn't at that level of detail, which was one of the failings of the earlier effort to evaluate it. It was just looking at community districts to see the percentage and the number of people, I believe, that utilized the services. There was a decision made to expand HomeBase to a citywide when we ... some additional funding was made available, and at that point there was ... no comparison was even like that was possible, because you had a citywide coverage for the services. So you couldn't compare it to people in areas that were not covered with HomeBase, since the entire city was covered. The other indicator of effectiveness is one that all of us have mentioned, which is looking at how people who access HomeBase now, whether those people do come to shelters. That's a limited indicator in that it tells you of the people who come to HomeBase, do they come to shelter, but it doesn't answer the critical question, which is the question that everybody wants to know the answer to, and that leading researchers in both New York City and in

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2 Washington and across the country want to know,
3 which is, but for the HomeBase services, would
4 people have accessed shelter? If you do not
5 answer that question, you do not know whether the
6 prevention services are effective, and you can't
7 therefore make decisions based on that
8 information.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So then I ask
10 if, you know, taking us through the explanation on
11 why the evaluation wasn't a success, how was ... how
12 then was the city claiming a 90% success rate, if
13 you felt that you weren't getting the information
14 that you needed from the data that was being
15 collected, or that you couldn't use that data
16 because every neighborhood differed, or everybody
17 ... need is different from neighborhood to
18 neighborhood?

19 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Again, the
20 90% rate looks at the people who came to HomeBase
21 and whether those people accessed shelter
22 services. What it does not tell you, and cannot
23 tell you, is would they have accessed shelter
24 services but for HomeBase. That's the critical
25 question, and you don't know that without doing

1
2 the research. And that is why prevention
3 services, people who are interested in prevention
4 services across the country are interested. There
5 are strong arguments that people make that
6 prevention services spend too much money and reach
7 too many people without truly preventing ... without
8 ... they serve people who would not access the
9 ultimate service anyway. There are others who
10 claim that prevention services have a real role in
11 preventing people, for example, from coming to
12 shelter. We need to answer that question, because
13 we don't want to overspend, spend more money than
14 we need to. But if it does prevent homelessness,
15 it holds the promise of keeping people out of
16 shelter, and that's the real thing we will miss if
17 we do not pursue this study. We will miss an
18 opportunity to prevent people from accessing
19 shelter services, and that's the shame if we're
20 not able to pursue this program.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But wouldn't
22 the goal be to, like you stated, to prevent people
23 from entering the shelter? So if we have an
24 opportunity to keep a family at home in their
25 community, why would I want to find out if they

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2 would have ultimately have ended up in shelter? I
3 would rather not want them to even think having to
4 go to shelter, but to actually remain at home in
5 their community in permanent housing, and continue
6 to, you know, to get connected to resources within
7 their community that would never allow them to go
8 beyond, you know, that next step, which is
9 entering the shelter system.

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: You're
11 right, that's precisely the question we want to
12 answer, but we don't know who those families are
13 who would come to shelter but for the HomeBase
14 services. And that's what we're trying to
15 identify. We are trying to get at your question,
16 who are those families that, if we didn't provide
17 HomeBase services, would have come to shelter? We
18 don't know that now, we will not know that without
19 this study, and the shame of it is, a family like
20 the one you're talking about may not be able to
21 receive services if we aren't able to expand and
22 fund HomeBase properly, and we may not be able to
23 do that without this study.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Why wouldn't
25 they be able to, because they would ... just there

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2 wouldn't be enough money for HomeBase services, or
3 because they'll be denied services?

4 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: If we can
5 learn how to target HomeBase services properly and
6 invest in prevention, we might be able to expand
7 what we're doing now to reach more families who
8 are at risk of homelessness, prevent them from
9 coming into the shelter system, and keep them in
10 the community, which is a goal we share. We want
11 people in the community, we want to be able to
12 know how to target resources effectively to reach
13 them. We can't do that now, but the study is
14 about trying to help us be able to learn how to do
15 that.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And DHS
17 couldn't do that with the population that's
18 already in shelter, that already have reached that
19 ultimate goal of losing their apartment, out of,
20 you know, out of their community and in shelter?
21 We couldn't, DHS couldn't study those families,
22 those people in shelter already?

23 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: You have to
24 compare it to people who didn't access services,
25 to see if the people ... the shelter services.

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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But ... okay,
3 Commissioner, I'm sorry- -

4 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:
5 (Interposing) Let me just explain. If you ... you
6 need to understand, to get at your question, you
7 need to understand if the people who access
8 shelter services have some difference from the
9 ones who don't, and that's what the purpose of the
10 study is, to find out what in people's
11 demographics, their situation, their
12 circumstances, causes them to access shelter
13 services. If we know that, then we can target
14 prevention services specifically to that group.
15 If we don't, we are spreading the prevention
16 services far thinner than we can afford to do so,
17 than we'd like to do so, because we don't have the
18 money.

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Does DHS have
20 data now on the people, singles and families,
21 living in shelter who maybe have preventive
22 services but ended up in shelter anyway? Do we
23 know of any of those?

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: We would
25 know people who access preventive services who

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2 came into shelter, yes. But again, we can't
3 compare that to people ... we don't know what would
4 have happened but for the preventive services, and
5 this is a question that has ... is across the
6 country. Dr. Rolston talked about the General
7 Accounting Office in Washington having raised the
8 same question a decade ago, the IBO in New York
9 City raised the same issue. Others have called
10 for studying this very issue, because, precisely
11 because we don't know the answer to it.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Those folks
13 who, you know, you mentioned them, I mentioned it
14 in my opening statement and, you know, the concern
15 that I have, someone, you know, the 400
16 participants who were chosen to be in this group,
17 and were giving a waiver or consent to opt into
18 the program or out of the program. I mean, I
19 still have a hard time understanding why someone
20 going to a HomeBase office will actually sign off,
21 other than, you know, fearing either not getting
22 services or not fully understanding, you know,
23 what they were signing off on, you know, signing
24 something off saying, I'm denying HomeBase
25 services for two years, and then given a list of ...

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2 someone submitted to my office, I mean, the name
3 is blacked out, but someone filled out the
4 application, went, received the letter that they
5 didn't qualify for, or wasn't chosen for the
6 control group, therefore had to go seek services
7 on their own. And the only thing that was
8 attached was like maybe a page with 30 or 40 real
9 estate agencies. Not Kemba, not POTS, not the
10 providers that DHS has contracts with, to help
11 people stay in the community, but maybe 30 real
12 estate agencies, brokers, names and numbers of
13 brokers who are in the business of finding people
14 apartments for a fee. So I'd like, that to me,
15 you know, that to me is heartbreaking, because
16 someone seeking to stay in their apartment, the
17 last thing they need is to be given a page full of
18 real estate brokers who are going to do what? You
19 know, they're not going to help them.

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Let me
21 explain what happened. People who were not able
22 to access HomeBase services were given a list of
23 community resources, which is precisely the kind
24 of resources you identified, those community-based
25 organizations that have a long history in working

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2 to prevent homelessness. Some of them funded by
3 the Department of Homeless Services to provide
4 legal services, some of them other community-based
5 resources or other governmental resources, for
6 example, the job centers were on the list. Those
7 were agencies that provide far greater financial
8 resources to prevent homelessness than even
9 HomeBase does. And people did access those
10 services, they were able to go to other resources
11 to prevent homelessness, and many people did,
12 including the one person who was profiled in the
13 newspaper today who had accessed those services
14 when she couldn't access HomeBase services. So
15 people were able to go to other resources, they
16 did, they were provided that information on a
17 community-based level, and we can give you the
18 listing that people had, if you didn't get that.

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Was the listing
20 for every HomeBase office the same, or the
21 instructions the same? Were they to give each, to
22 each of the 200 participants that got the letter
23 saying you were ... you know, this is a lottery, it
24 was done in the fairest way, you were denied to be
25 part of the control group, therefore you can

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2 access ... you cannot access HomeBase for two years,
3 but, you know, attached you will see a list. Was
4 that list consistent throughout all the 16 offices
5 of HomeBase?

6 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It was ...
7 there are 13 offices. It was a tailored list for
8 each community, so that the people who were
9 accessing services in the Bronx got a somewhat
10 different list than the ones in Brooklyn, based on
11 what services are available in their community.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I still have a
13 lot more questions, but I'm going to let my
14 colleagues ask some of their questions. Council
15 Member Arroyo, followed by Council Member Lander,
16 Rodriguez, Levin, Brewer and Wills.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you,
18 Madam Chair. Commissioner, thank you for your
19 testimony. How much is DHS paying for this study?

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's
21 altogether about \$570,000.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. Now
23 and why 400? What's so magical about 400?

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Dr. Rolston
25 could talk to the study.

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2 DR. ROLSTON: Before you undertake
3 a study like this, you want to make sure that the
4 sample sizes are large enough that you can, if
5 there are actually differences between, you know,
6 receiving the services or receiving the other
7 services that are available in the community, that
8 we'll be able to have a very good chance of
9 finding that. Because if the program is working,
10 so that people are doing better in the treatment
11 group, we want to have a very low chance of
12 missing that. And we conducted an analysis
13 beforehand with the data that we had, and which
14 suggested that 400 was a conservative way to
15 conduct this study. If we had had too few people,
16 then one could imagine, if you had two people, you
17 really wouldn't know what resulted.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I'm not
19 suggesting that 400 is a low number, by the way.

20 DR. ROLSTON: Well, as a researcher
21 we always prefer larger numbers, with 400 we
22 thought it was a conservative estimate of what
23 would be required in order to do this.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
25 Commissioner, from inception, HomeBase is a pilot

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not available in every community.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: That's initially true. In 2007, I believe it was expanded to citywide. So there was a period, you're right, when it had limited availability. But when it went citywide, we couldn't compare it to anything else, which was one of the reasons we needed the study to determine its effectiveness.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So from your testimony on page three, interpreting what you're saying in that it doesn't matter how many come seeking this service, you wouldn't be able to provide it to everyone that presents.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: We currently don't have the funding to serve everyone who presents, that's right, there are about- -

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
(Interposing) What's the capacity? What's the number of individuals that can be served? The doctor mentioned \$20 million is spent on HomeBase. What's the capacity for that amount of money?

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: About 8,000 people a year, 7,000 people a year are served currently, but again, there are about 1,500 people

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2 who are not able to be served in the program, and
3 the promise of the study, that we might lose if we
4 don't pursue it, is to be able to serve not just
5 those 1,500, but others who might need the service
6 throughout the city that we don't have sufficient
7 resources to do now.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay, so
9 assuming that we pursue this study that troubles
10 so many of us in so many ways, you would need how
11 much more money to provide services to the
12 additional 1,500 or so families that would be
13 presenting for the service?

14 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, those
15 are the things that we would get at when we see
16 the analysis. That would give us a better way to
17 target the resources, to be able to determine
18 what, how best to structure the program. That's
19 one of the things we don't know now.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. I'm
21 ... I did really poorly in math, so if you're
22 serving 8,000?

23 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: 7,000.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: 7,000 with
25 \$2 million.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: \$20 million.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: \$20

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million, what are we spending on a family in

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HomeBase?

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's about

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\$3,000 a family, but again, it's not ... the actual

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financial resources that are available to families

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is not ... it's not the full \$20 million, some

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people get financial assistance, some people get

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counseling, some people get employment assistance.

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It's a range of services.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And not

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everyone gets the same services.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Absolutely,

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it's a customized package.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I'm going

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to go back to some ... to follow up on Council

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Member, on our Chair's ... we have copies of some of

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the letters that the providers were sending to the

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families that were not selected, or eliminated

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from participating in HomeBase services. And it

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seems almost conflicting in terms of the

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information that's provided. As part of the

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study, you were not ... you were assigned to a group

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2 that will not be servicing ... be receiving HomeBase
3 services. This selection ... and it goes on, this
4 selection will not affect your eligibility for
5 other services offered by DHS or other agencies.
6 That, that is such a confusing message.

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I don't ...
8 because the letter goes on to outline the services
9 that are available, so I- -

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
11 (Interposing) But it doesn't. this is what the
12 letter looks like.

13 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: No, I have a
14 copy of the letters that were sent on the various
15 letterheads, Catholic Charities and Bronx Works,
16 I'm not sure what this actually is- -

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
18 (Interposing) This is Palladia's letter, and the
19 person, the recipient's name is blacked out for, I
20 guess, confidentiality purposes. It's a one-
21 paragraph letter, and it has, as Council Member
22 Palma suggested, a list of real estate agents, as
23 the list of services that they would be entitled
24 to, and/or room finders specializing in room
25 rentals, and other information about single-parent

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2 women and families with children under 21, and
3 then another series. It's just- -

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
5 I'm sorry. And in no way, shape or form is this
6 an attack on Palladia. I'm pretty sure ... I know
7 that they're a good provider, they're doing the
8 best that they can. We're trying to understand
9 how, you know, what information was given to the
10 providers for something like this to get out to
11 one of these participants. And what constraints
12 did the providers feel.

13 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Okay.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: That and I,
15 you know, I have a contract with DHS to provide
16 these services, I'm going to be hard-pressed not
17 to give you a letter of support. You know, I ... so
18 attaching letters of support from the providers on
19 this study, for me is not worth the paper it's
20 written on. If I have a quarter of a million, a
21 half a million dollar contract with your agency to
22 provide services to communities across the city,
23 I'm going to be challenged not to give you a
24 letter of support. And I don't want you to answer
25 that, I'm just giving you my opinion about what I

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2 think these letters are worth, and I'm not going
3 to pursue it.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, let me
5 just say first, I have a lot more faith in the
6 integrity of those organizations than you
7 apparently do. I've worked with many of them for
8 fifteen and sixteen years, they're run by people
9 who have the highest ethical standards, who are
10 only interested in serving the people in their
11 communities, and to demean their integrity like
12 that is a I think frankly- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

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(Interposing) No, you're making it mean that.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: No.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Don't do

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that.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: You said

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that.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Don't do

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that.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I think

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that's insulting to the organizations.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: You, you

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are not in my office when I meet with providers,

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2 and hear them express the challenges that they
3 confront in continuing to do the work that they
4 do, given what is demanded of them and the
5 agencies. And this is not just DHS, across the
6 board. So don't put words in my mouth- -

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

8 (Interposing) And don't put words in- -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

10 (Interposing) ... about what I ... no, no, what I, and
11 the respect that I have for the agencies that are
12 providing services in the community, don't do
13 that.

14 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, we
15 have sat here this morning very quietly and been
16 accused by this afternoon ... accused of a lot of
17 things which I have not answered, and I think it's
18 insulting for you to demean the organizations that
19 we work with. That's ... but in terms of Palladia,
20 they may have attached real estate brokers, but
21 there was other community-based organizations that
22 were attached to the letters, other organizations,
23 put the community organizations right in the same
24 letter, and we can show you from Bronx Works, from
25 Catholic Charities, and from Kemba, how they did

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2 that. But everyone was designed to receive a
3 wealth of community resources, people accessed
4 those resources, they are available, they are
5 well-known in the community. The budget for some
6 of those resources far exceeds the HomeBase
7 budget, so they have ample funding to provide
8 people who need them and that was the design of
9 the study, and we think it was effective.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you,
11 Madam Chair. Thanks to the panel for being here.
12 Let's ... I'm going to grant for a minute that it's
13 important to evaluate this program and try to get
14 at the questions that we're discussing. It seems
15 to me that core question is to try to weigh two
16 things: on the one hand, you know, we believe that
17 random assignment is a better way of
18 understanding, you know, what's really going on,
19 and that there be some loss in quality of data if
20 instead we used other ways of trying to figure out
21 how to do that comparison and have the control
22 group. On the other hand, it seems to me that
23 there is an ethical issue, and that there's a
24 difference between doing random assignment where
25 you extend a new benefit to some people that they

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2 would not have been eligible before, and
3 withdrawing a benefit that they likely would have
4 received otherwise. So first, I think that the
5 studies that I'm familiar with, I mean, that you
6 mentioned MTO, Moving to Opportunity, and some of
7 the housing choice voucher studies, section 8
8 studies, Jobs Plus is another like this, where
9 essentially you piloted something where you did
10 random assignments, but what you did was offer a
11 new benefit, so that you weren't withdrawing from
12 someone something that they were eligible for
13 previously. So I guess my first question is just,
14 do you agree that there is an ethical distinction
15 there? There's still the question of how to weigh
16 the ethical distinction against the loss of data
17 quality. But do you agree that there's an ethical
18 distinction in random assignment studies, between
19 where you're extending a new benefits, and where
20 you're withdrawing something someone likely would
21 have received?

22 DR. ROLSTON: I think it's an
23 important consideration to take into account
24 whether something is a new or an existing program.
25 But I don't think it's sort of the defining bright

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2 line at all. I think that the defining bright
3 line is around programs which are either
4 entitlement programs, which everybody by statute
5 or regulation who applies gets, and programs which
6 are not entitlements and in which there is not
7 sufficient resources to serve everybody.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But don't ...
9 I mean, well ... if there is in place a logic of
10 assignment of service already, and the study
11 changes the logic of assignment, I mean, that's an
12 ethical act, right? Someone who likely, I mean,
13 in this study, even though not everyone would have
14 gotten it before, a set of people who very likely
15 would have gotten it, but for the study, were now
16 had that withdrawn from them. We can agree on
17 that, can't we?

18 DR. ROLSTON: I don't know what the
19 likelihood was for any particular individual- -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
21 (Interposing) They were in the office asking for
22 HomeBase services.

23 DR. ROLSTON: Correct.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And you
25 know they were eligible, else they wouldn't have

1
2 been part of the study group. So they clearly
3 were likely, it is likely they would have received
4 HomeBase services.

5 DR. ROLSTON: I think it depends on
6 the proportion which get ... my understanding is
7 that there are individuals who are not served, who
8 do show up- -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

10 (Interposing) I was going to ask about that.

11 DR. ROLSTON: ... at the office and-

12 -

13 DR. MOLLENKOPF: (Interposing)

14 Could I add a comment? It's just a pure accident
15 of timing that somebody didn't get services
16 because they were part of the comparison group, or
17 came in at the end of the year, after, you know,
18 the money basically ran out and the service ran
19 out- -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

21 (Interposing) But so why not, this is a really- -

22 DR. MOLLENKOPF: (Interposing)

23 That's purely, there's no ethical issue there at
24 all, Brad.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Well, I

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2 don't know, wait a minute, so this ... I guess my
3 question is, for those who didn't get it, leaving
4 the study aside, in previous years, those who
5 didn't get it because there was a lack of funding,
6 I assume it was essentially on a first-come,
7 first-served basis, that the money ran out and
8 that when you came and showed up, if the money was
9 gone, you weren't able to get those services. You
10 could call that an accident of time. Let me just
11 sure I have that right, it wasn't random before or
12 like a lottery number came up, the money ran out
13 and then if you came after the money ran out, you
14 couldn't get services.

15 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Right, you
16 were referred to other resources, but you couldn't
17 get HomeBase services, correct.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And
19 whatever, that's unfortunate.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I'm sorry,
21 Council Member, I'm ... but I think what you're
22 trying to get at, the control group, whether
23 HomeBase still had money or not, the 200 that
24 didn't make it to be part of the control group,
25 were denied services. Were denied services to

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2 HomeBase for two years.

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DR. ROLSTON: It was likely a different 200 people than might have done it under another selection process.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So my first question here is, why not just use the people that wouldn't have gotten it ... I mean, I guess I do believe there's an ethical distinction between the distributive allocation principle of first-come, first-served, which has a lot of problems, it's not perfect, it's not how I would like to do distributive justice. I prefer to have the resources in this case for everyone we did. If we didn't, we could talk about different principles for how to allocate, but I do think first-come, first-served has a certain level of fairness to it, and it's what had been used here. So I guess my first question is, why not just use that? Like why not have sort of stuck with first-come, first-served, and when you ran out of money, then have assigned people to the control group who you didn't have money to serve, it would still be unfortunate, but you wouldn't have withdrawn from them something they likely would have gotten

1
2 otherwise? Wouldn't they have been just as good a
3 control group, without this ethical issue?

4 DR. ROLSTON: I don't think they
5 would be just as good a control group, because we
6 would not know that they were equivalent to the
7 people who were served. Using random assignment
8 for the same reason we do medical work is because
9 we want to insure that if the groups are large
10 enough, that they will be equivalent. Because we
11 don't want to draw the wrong policy conclusion
12 from a study, we don't either want to say that a
13 program is effective when it's ineffective or the
14 other.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: You think
16 there was reason to believe that the people that
17 came in later in the calendar year, or the fiscal
18 year, would have been statistically different from
19 those who came in earlier in the calendar year or
20 the fiscal year, such that it would have disturbed
21 your study?

22 DR. ROLSTON: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Really?

24 DR. ROLSTON: Yes.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Based on

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what? Tell me what's the ... I- -

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DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing) There's

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... I think there's a lot of indication and lots of

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programs that seasonality applies, and that there

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are other considerations, and they may not have

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been distributed in the same way.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Did you

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consider this? Did you consider it?

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DR. ROLSTON: I never considered

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it.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Did you

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consider any other ways of ... because of

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identifying a control group that would have helped

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you reach a good level of data quality without the

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ethical complication of the withdrawal of service

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from someone who would likely have gotten that

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otherwise?

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DR. ROLSTON: I think in a case

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like is, there is no other feasible design. It's

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not a question of the level of data quality.

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We're not talking about data quality, because the

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information we have on the groups is the same,

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it's about the outcome, it's whether people enter

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shelter or not. The question is, can we be

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2 confident that the groups that we compare to each
3 other are in statistician's terms equivalent, that
4 they're not biased in one direction or another.

5 And that we can't assure without random
6 assignment. That's why we don't give drugs to
7 people without testing in this manner, that's why-

8 -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

10 (Interposing) Well, shouldn't that ... that's not
11 fair. (crosstalk) I granted at the beginning that
12 random assignment is a valuable way of doing it,
13 and I guess I think that there's a question to
14 weigh against some level of data quality against
15 some level of ethical issue. And it seems to me
16 here that you guys decided that, you know, the
17 data quality of random assignment was worth the
18 ethical complication of denying some people a
19 benefit they likely otherwise would have gotten,
20 when I think, for example, just letting those
21 folks who be the control group, who in every other
22 way you could have done a whole bunch of check
23 research to make sure those 1,500 people were
24 comparable to the others, you would have had
25 something that might have been very slightly less,

1
2 you know, you have your margin of error is bigger,
3 but your ethical issue is much smaller, and that
4 seems to me that would have been a better way to
5 go or we wouldn't be here today yelling and
6 screaming about it.

7 DR. ROLSTON: I can only tell you
8 based on my experience, that would not have been a
9 reliable design, and it's not because ... we could
10 do the checks that you say on observable
11 characteristics, but we can't do them on
12 unobservable characteristics, and we can't do them
13 on external circumstances.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I don't
15 doubt you can draw a data distinction, I think
16 you're not really ... I mean, look, from my point of
17 view I sort of said, there is a data distinction,
18 and there is an ethical distinction. You can sit
19 there and say, we don't see an ethical
20 distinction. We disagree with you, I think you're
21 wrong that there's not an ethical distinction
22 between the logic of first-come, first-served the
23 way we used to do it before, and the logic of
24 withdrawal of service as a result of a random
25 assignment in a study. Those are ethically

1
2 distinct, and if you can't see it, and weigh it
3 against the data question, I'm sorry, but that's
4 what we're in the business of trying to do.

5 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But there's
6 no service distinction between what you're
7 suggesting and what we're doing. There were 1,500
8 people who were denied services, there are 1,500
9 people- -

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

11 (Interposing) Absolutely.

12 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: ... under your
13 system who would be denied service.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But they're
15 real individuals- -

16 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

17 (Interposing) ... because- -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

19 (Interposing) Yeah, it's not a question ... yes, I
20 wish we had more money to provide more services,
21 but we don't.

22 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And that's
23 what this is about.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: We allocate
25 ... no, it's not what this is about.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes it is.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: We allocate service based ... we allocate service all the time based on complex decisions we have to make. And when you choose or we choose to allocate those resources differently, and deny one person those services and give them to another, especially where one person is likely to have been the one to receive them, based on being first in line, that has an ethical implication to the individuals that are addressed here. It's not just the total of 1,500, we agree 1,500 people wouldn't have been served. But you chose 200 of them who likely otherwise would have received services, to withdraw it, and give it to 200 other people. That's an ethically complex thing to decide, and I think that, you know, we use first in line on all kinds of things. We use it to assign our section 8 vouchers, we use it to assign a whole set of things that we only have a scarce amount of. And moving from being on the list first to, for the purposes of a study, has implications for real families. And I would take, hoping that those 1,500 people, you know, whatever, I'm not going to

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say it again.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But the- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

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(Interposing) I feel like we are giving ... I feel

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like I'm giving more credence to the data

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questions here than I hear you giving to the

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ethical ones.

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DR. ROLSTON: I would acknowledge

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that it is a, you know, that one could argue for

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the ethics related to first-come, first-served, or

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random assignment. I think both are ethical to

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do.

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DR. MOLLENKOPF: And could I point

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out, in the new housing being created along the

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waterfront in north Brooklyn, in Williamsburg-

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Green Point, there's very heavy demand for the

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low- and moderate-income housing that is being

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developed in conjunction with that, and in part

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because of efforts that you have made. And that,

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the assignment to those units is not made first-

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come, first-served, it's made randomly because

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that's a much fairer way than just serving those

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people who maybe have inside knowledge or

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whatever, and get to the front of the line.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And I
3 agree, you know, that a lottery is a good
4 distributive principle where you have a scarce
5 resource, maybe there'd be some argument for using
6 other ways of distributing the scarce section 8
7 vouchers we have, but in this case, you already
8 had a principle in place, that folks got it when
9 they came in the door. And as a result of that, a
10 set of folks who did come in the door, we're not
11 talking hypothetically, who came ... you changed who
12 wouldn't have received services. You took a set
13 of people that would otherwise likely have gotten
14 them and withdrew it, and I don't ... anyway, you
15 know, had it been up front, like what we do every
16 year is let a whole bunch of people over a course
17 of a quarter or a six-month period apply for
18 HomeBase services, and then at the end of that we
19 take the ... we do a lottery and we decide who gets
20 them, I agree, it wouldn't have changed anything
21 here, and there wouldn't be this ethical issue
22 raised. But that wasn't the way it was done
23 before, and there is this ethical issue raised.
24 It doesn't feel to me like it was given quite
25 enough thought, and the implications of the

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2 ethical decision weighed against the data, it
3 doesn't feel to me like enough consideration was
4 given to that, I think we might have made a
5 slightly ... I would have made a slightly different
6 choice. So anyway, let me, I want to give my
7 colleagues- -

8 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

9 (Interposing) And I disagree that the ethical
10 issues weren't weighed. The institutional review
11 board at Abt seriously considered and rigorously
12 reviewed all the ethical issues involved, and they
13 approved the study because they found it ethical.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I asked you
15 ... I asked about one other potential way of
16 studying the thing, and it had not been
17 considered. I could ask about others, my sense ...
18 it's different to say "We decided we were
19 comfortable from this", to say, "We weighed the
20 ethical issues here against other approaches that
21 might have been ethically more sound, but might
22 have somewhat compromised the data in some ways".
23 It doesn't sound like that was done.

24 DR. ROLSTON: I think that we also
25 had a history and information from other studies

1
2 and from this area, and there's the quote from
3 Marybeth Shinn, for example. A lot of people have
4 thought for quite a while about how to design
5 reliable ways to study homeless prevention
6 programs. And I think that that's certainly part
7 of the context, it's not as if nobody had ever
8 thought of this before, and we were faced with a
9 brand new problem. This is a ... the difficulty of
10 forming an equivalent group in the case of a
11 population which is at risk but not at all known
12 that it's at all at high likelihood of entering
13 the situation we're trying to prevent, it's not as
14 if we're sort of thinking about that from scratch.
15 So I don't think we sort of ignored the ethics of
16 it, and I don't think we just sort of passed over
17 other solutions readily.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I had a
19 whole line of questioning about how you could have
20 looked more broadly at people at risk of
21 homelessness, but in the interest of time I'll let
22 this part rest here. I guess my last question is
23 just around sort of the timing of the study, and
24 the timing of the resources to HomeBase. What's
25 the level of city and state tax levy dollars to

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HomeBase, versus stimulus dollars to HomeBase?

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's about 80% stimulus dollars.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So, didn't you make the decision to ramp up this program in a major way without an evaluation, and now you're doing the evaluation, saying it's because we want to expand these services, but we're not going to be able to expand these services, we're going to have to cut them significantly, regardless of how good it is?

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, but that's precisely the point, is we don't want to cut the services if we can prove that they are effective to preventing homelessness, which is far more expensive to keep people in shelter than it is to do the prevention services. You're right, we are at a critical point for evaluating whether to invest additional money. The stimulus money will be running out, the city has tremendous budget difficulties which you will be weighing, and we'll all be weighing, within the coming years. But if we can find a better and more cost effective way to serve families, why wouldn't we

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2 want to invest in those services than- -

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

4 (Interposing) Better and more cost effective than
5 what?

6 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Than
7 shelter.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So you're
9 saying that you're going to cut the shelter budget
10 and reposition it to HomeBase if this study comes
11 up positive?

12 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: If we can
13 find a way to target the resources so that we are
14 preventing people from coming into the shelter
15 system, it would be a far more effective way.
16 Right now it costs to provide an average HomeBase
17 family- -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

19 (Interposing) Sure.

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The average
21 grant to a HomeBase family is what it costs for a
22 single month to keep a family in shelter. So if
23 we can target the resources effectively, we can be
24 far more cost efficient and serve more families.
25 But we can't do that if we don't have good data to

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go on.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: OMB is going to advance you new money to replace the stimulus dollars on the belief that if this study comes up positive that you're going to reduce shelter stays and therefore be able to save money over the longer run?

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, your skepticism is precisely why we need the most rigorous approach, to make sure that the data- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
(Interposing) And I've taken much better propositions to OMB in the past, and I've rarely gotten a yes from them.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well maybe they weren't backed by rigorous studies like this one was.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Well, a lot of rigorous studies, a lot of rigorous studies.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And so- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
(Interposing) I have a few more questions, but I'll wait for a second round and yield to my colleagues.

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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,
3 Council Member Lander. I want to acknowledge that
4 we've been joined by Council Member Jimmy Van
5 Bramer. Council Member Rodriguez?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank
7 you, Commissioner. I think that everyone agrees
8 that we don't have all the money that is needed to
9 support all families that go for that type of
10 support. I have a question that is more ethical
11 from my part. And my first question is, is this
12 research using any Federal money?

13 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: No, the
14 research is entirely funded with city tax levy
15 dollars.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Does
17 this research have to follow any Federal standards
18 when it comes to research?

19 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, Abt
20 certainly, and Dr. Rolston can speak to that, is
21 subject to a number of Federal regulations in this
22 area.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: What are
24 those regulations?

25 DR. ROLSTON: It's what's commonly

1
2 known as the common rule, which has been adopted
3 by many Federal agencies, and is the initial human
4 subjects protection regulations.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Let me
6 read to you what the Federal standards are on
7 this. It says, "Most of the research establishes
8 specific items for disclosure intended to assure
9 the subjects are given sufficient information.
10 This items generally include the research
11 procedure, their purpose, risk, anticipated
12 benefit and a statement offering the subject the
13 opportunity to ask questions and to withdraw at
14 any time from research."

15 DR. ROLSTON: Uh huh. The- -

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ:
17 (Interposing) Have you followed that with them?

18 DR. ROLSTON: Our ... this project,
19 along with all of our projects, is reviewed by an
20 independent institutional review board of the sort
21 that is described in those regulations.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Have you
23 followed those regulations?

24 DR. ROLSTON: Yes. Incidentally,
25 I'm just- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ:

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(Interposing) Have those 200 individuals being offered the opportunity to withdraw and have they received any written information?

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DR. ROLSTON: They received written information about what their status was- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ:

(Interposing) Were they asked if they wanted to participate?

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DR. ROLSTON: Yes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: That's not ... you said yes?

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DR. ROLSTON: They were given an informed consent, whether or not they wanted to participate.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Did you offer them information that they had the right to withdraw?

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DR. ROLSTON: Yes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Did you offer them information about the benefits that they will get?

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DR. ROLSTON: Yes.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Maybe we

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should describe the enrollment process.

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DR. ROLSTON: Yeah.

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MS. LOCKE: So the way the

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enrollment process worked, if someone was found

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eligible for HomeBase, the study was explained to

7

them- -

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

9

Can you just reintroduce yourself?

10

MS. LOCKE: Yes, certainly. Sorry,

11

I'm Gretchen Locke, I'm from Abt Associates, and

12

I'm the project director for the HomeBase study.

13

So the enrollment process worked as follows. An

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applicant would come in to HomeBase, they had to

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go through a screening process and be found

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eligible for HomeBase services. And those who

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were found eligible for HomeBase services were

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told about this study. It was explained that

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there was a research study going on right now,

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that the way we are allocating services to people

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... I mean, I'm going to have to sort of paraphrase

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here, but that we're doing this randomly, that you

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have an opportunity to participate in the study,

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and if you choose to participate in the study, you

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may be selected to receive HomeBase services, or

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2 you may be assigned to a group that does not
3 receive HomeBase services. It was also explained
4 that the study was voluntary, that you can choose
5 to participate or not, and that you may choose to
6 withdraw at any time. And if, you know, the
7 consent form was reviewed with the applicant, both
8 the actual language, we also, as we did the
9 training with the HomeBase staff, to train them on
10 the enrollment procedures, provided them with
11 information on, you know, frequently asked
12 questions, how to answer questions from applicants
13 about the study, and so forth. And then they were
14 asked if they would like to participate in the
15 study and complete the consent form.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Well,
17 I'm surprised, this is the first time that I hear
18 that they were offering all this information
19 before being selected to participate in this
20 study. And from the CUNY perspective, did you get
21 CUNY approval on this?

22 DR. MOLLENKOPF: The CUNY IRB
23 reviewed both the overall project and ... I mean,
24 they were informed about the overall project, and
25 they reviewed the specific part that we will be

1
2 carrying out, which has to do with census data and
3 other kinds of data on changes in housing costs
4 and prices in New York City. Since our part of
5 the study does not deal with any individually-
6 identified data, it was considered exempt, and the
7 part that deals with the human subjects'
8 information is what was carried ... is being carried
9 out by Abt, and in multi-party research efforts of
10 this sort, each unit is required to carry out the
11 institutional review of that portion of the
12 research that they're doing at their institution.
13 So CUNY required that the Abt portion be reviewed
14 by the Abt IRB and that we be informed that they
15 Abt IRB had approved that portion of the study.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: So the
17 institutional review board approved it?

18 DR. MOLLENKOPF: Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay.
20 So what are the benefits that you also shared with
21 those 200 families that they will get by
22 participating in this research?

23 MS. LOCKE: In this particular
24 study the benefits are that we're going to learn
25 more about prevention services, that there aren't

1
2 enough services to go around, that we're for this
3 period of time allocating this limited resource
4 randomly, that there will be, you know, limited
5 risk to them and limited burden. In some studies
6 if you agree to be in a study you might need to
7 complete a survey later, or you might have some
8 other kind of requirements of participation in a
9 study. That was not the case in this study, we
10 weren't asking anything else of them. We were
11 asking for their permission to access
12 administrative data about them, but not placing
13 any other burden on them.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And when
15 the 200 who got enrolled into this study got the
16 letter saying that you've been denied, now you're
17 part of this study, then do you provide those 200
18 extra information?

19 MS. LOCKE: So that's what we were
20 discussing earlier. They did receive a letter
21 saying that they had been assigned to the control
22 group, and that they would not be receiving ... they
23 wouldn't be eligible to receive HomeBase services
24 for two years, and alternative referrals were
25 provided to them, citywide services that are

1
2 available to anyone who is at risk of
3 homelessness, as well as each individual provider
4 had sort of community-specific information that
5 they provided to the control group members on
6 services that they could access in their
7 community.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And in
9 that letter, did you let them know that they do
10 have the right to withdraw from participating?

11 MS. LOCKE: I don't know if that's
12 in the letter.

13 DR. ROLSTON: The consent form says
14 so.

15 MS. LOCKE: It's in the consent
16 form.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: In that
18 letter, the letter that they received.

19 DR. ROLSTON: The consent form- -

20 MS. LOCKE: (Interposing) The
21 consent form.

22 DR. ROLSTON: ... makes it clear that
23 it's voluntary.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Do we
25 have a copy of that letter?

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DR. ROLSTON: Yes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ:

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Chairman, do we have a copy of that letter?

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I don't- -

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

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(Interposing) If you don't, we can show you something.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I have copies,

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we have copies that we received from participants who sent it in to our office.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank

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you.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We had

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different letters sent.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: We can get

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you copies of that.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I will request

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from the Commissioner and he just agreed that he will send us some of the letters.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And for

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the record, what you're saying is that when they got the letter saying that they were denied, that from now on they would be enrolled in that study, in that letter there also explained that they had

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the right to withdraw if they want to?

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: That, the withdrawal part was gone over at the enrollment phase. It was fully explained that that was voluntary, that people did not have to participate.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Which is for me it's not fair because at the moment when the ... when for the first time when someone goes to apply, and they are told, you have the possibility of being approved or not, is different from the point, the moment, when they got the letter saying, you've been denied. And now because you've been denied, you will be enrolled in this study, that's the moment when those 200 families, they should have been told that they had the right to withdraw from participating in this study, and that's for me what it is to follow the Federal standards.

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DR. ROLSTON: All these things were reviewed by our institutional review board against that Federal standard.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Sir, in this city we have a long history in the whole

1
2 world of so many studies being done without people
3 knowing that they've been enrolled in the study.

4 DR. ROLSTON: Not in this case.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you
6 Council Member. Commissioner, before I go to
7 Council Member Levin, do we know if any of the 200
8 who were denied access to HomeBase because their
9 name came out from the lottery, that they couldn't
10 ... they weren't going to receive services, then
11 went back and said, I don't want to participate in
12 this, I want to withdraw my, you know, I want to
13 opt out, and then were given services?

14 DR. ROLSTON: Opting out, you can
15 opt out of the research, but you can't then opt
16 into the services.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So- -

18 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing)
19 Otherwise it would- -

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
21 So then- -

22 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing)
23 Otherwise there wouldn't be an experiment.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So I was
25 understanding that at any point any participant

1
2 could opt out, whether you were in the control
3 group receiving HomeBase services, or in the
4 control group who were denied services, you had
5 the opportunity to opt out without any
6 repercussions.

7 DR. ROLSTON: There are- -

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

9 So your actions- -

10 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing) ... no
11 repercussions from opting out.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But you are,
13 but there are- -

14 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing) But
15 they do not, you do not- -

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
17 But that's the rules.

18 DR. ROLSTON: ... and get the
19 treatment.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But, so then,
21 you know what, you're being penalized, because if
22 you're going, if you're going to seek services,
23 and then you're being told that's the control
24 group and, you know, I'm scared to death I'm going
25 to be left in the streets, I'm going to

1
2 participate in this control group, not fully
3 understanding what's going to happen, but I'm
4 hearing I can opt out, and then I opt out and I go
5 to an intake ... a DHS intake center and then I'm
6 going to be, you know, turned away, I'm going to
7 be turned away from HomeBase, I'm going to be
8 turned away from seeking services, so that's
9 penalizing someone.

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But there
11 are other community-based resources available, and
12 the promise of this study is that there will not
13 be people like that in the future, that we will be
14 able to invest in HomeBase services at a
15 sufficient level that we can prevent people from
16 coming into shelter. If we can't provide and go
17 forward with this study, we will not know how to
18 target the resources, and the tragedy of that is
19 that we'll leave families with no other choice but
20 to come to shelter.

21 DR. MOLLENKOPF: Could I comment?
22 Councilwoman Palma, some people think HomeBase has
23 no effect, that it doesn't work.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You know what,
25 Dr. Mollenkopf, I will have to agree with you,

1
2 because if I don't call Lisa Black, I won't get
3 help from HomeBase, so I agree.

4 DR. MOLLENKOPF: So the whole point
5 of this study is to understand whether getting
6 HomeBase services or going without HomeBase
7 services creates a statistically demonstrable
8 difference in the likelihood of entering shelter.
9 Some people ... we hope it does. We very, very
10 sincerely hope that it does, because that will
11 give us a good basis for further funding for the
12 program, and doing more targeted, more effective
13 prevention, with more families at risk in the
14 city. But if we find out that the program makes
15 no difference whatsoever, which is what
16 Councilwoman Brewer evidently thinks, then why
17 should we ... we should take the money that we're
18 wasting on doing something that doesn't work and
19 put it somewhere else. And it's only this kind of
20 study that's really going to tell us which way to
21 go.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you,
23 Madam Chair. I have a couple of questions. First
24 I would like to speak, Dr. Rolston mentioned
25 credible evidence numerous times, that the purpose

1
2 of this is to establish credible evidence. From
3 DHS's statement on performance record, and I'm
4 going to quote, on preventing homelessness. "DHS
5 continues to help more than 90% clients in all
6 populations receiving prevention services, to stay
7 in their communities and avoid shelter entry.
8 This can be attributed to the highly successful
9 model employed by DHS's community-based homeless
10 prevention program, HomeBase." Does this
11 statement rely on credible evidence, or is that ...
12 it's unqualified there, it doesn't mention whether
13 that's based on any evidence whatsoever, but is it
14 based on, in your opinion, Commissioner, credible
15 evidence?

16 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's based
17 on looking at who accessed HomeBase services, and
18 who came into the shelter. But you don't know,
19 the question that the study is getting at, which
20 is would they have accessed shelter anyway.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Right, no,
22 that leads me to my follow-up question here, which
23 is the Dennis Culhane, who wrote a letter of
24 support, there's a quote in today's Times from him
25 that says, "There's no doubt you can find poor

1
2 people in need, but there's no evidence that
3 people who get this program's help would end up
4 homeless without it." He's saying that there is
5 no evidence, right? Is that, do you agree with
6 that statement? That's a fairly broad blanket
7 statement, "There is no evidence that this program
8 ... that people would end up homeless without this
9 program", that's what he's saying.

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: He's getting
11 at that but-for question, what he's saying in that
12 statement, and if you read the full quotation in
13 the newspaper in his letter is that there are many
14 people in New York City that are at risk of
15 homelessness, but we can't effectively target
16 resources to know which ones would have come into
17 the shelter system. And that's the point of the
18 research.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: But his
20 quote here says there's no evidence that HomeBase
21 will get people to avoid being homeless. That's
22 what he said, there's no evidence that people who
23 get this program's help would end up being
24 homeless without it.

25 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: That's ... but

1
2 again, he's getting at this critical issue, which
3 is if HomeBase went away, would those people have
4 come into the shelter system. Yes, HomeBase was
5 effective, but it then said it allowed people- -

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

7 (Interposing) Commissioner, I'm sorry to
8 interrupt, go ahead. It says from DHS's
9 statement, this can be attributed to ... it says,
10 I'm quoting, "Receiving, for instance, to stay in
11 their community and avoid shelter entry. This can
12 be attributed to HomeBase." That's what your
13 statement is, sir.

14 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Right, we
15 know that people who come into the HomeBase
16 services, we can tell if they access shelter
17 services. And we know we've been very successful.
18 But it may be that some of the people who came
19 into HomeBase would not have come into the shelter
20 system anyway. We can't tell which people to
21 target the resources if we want to better ... fully
22 expand prevention services, we can only do that if
23 we can more effectively target to those people who
24 would not ... would have not have come into the
25 shelter system ... would have come into the shelter

1
2 system but for the application of the prevention
3 services.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And- -

5 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

6 (Interposing) You can't do that unless we know the
7 data behind that, to be able to target the- -

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

9 (Interposing) I understand that's the purpose of
10 the study ostensibly. But what I'm just trying to
11 say is that, you understand that there's
12 conflicting ... these are conflicting statements.

13 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I don't

14 think they're- -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

16 (Interposing) All over the place, three
17 conflicting statements.

18 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: ... they're

19 complementary.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: No they're

21 not.

22 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: They're

23 complementary. One is saying that if you provide
24 prevention services, that you can help people stay
25 out of the shelter system, but you may be over-

1
2 applying the services, you may be giving services
3 to people who don't need them to prevent ... for the
4 specific purposes of preventing shelter. Yes,
5 they may be at risk, and they can benefit from the
6 services. But if you're looking at whether the
7 intervention gets to coming into shelter, it may
8 be unnecessary. And when you're talking about
9 providing on a broader citywide level, you need to
10 make sure you're targeting the services in the
11 most effective, cost-efficient way, otherwise you
12 won't be able to provide them throughout the city,
13 and that's what this is getting at.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay, I have
15 two more questions. Dr. Rolston, during ... we're
16 having this hearing today based on ... this hearing
17 was called based on these ethical questions.
18 That's and our concerns over these ethical
19 questions. Did you consider, when constructing
20 this program, did you consider the ethical
21 questions? Did it cross your mind, did it cross
22 your desk? Did you write about it? Did you put
23 anything in writing? Was there a discussion, any
24 minutes of any discussion? Was this discussed,
25 was it thought about? Was there any

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2 consideration?

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DR. ROLSTON: In the design we certainly, I know I thought about ethical questions, and I can't remember to what extent they were explicit, but in an evaluation like this, we always take into account ethical questions, and yeah, I did think about it.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And that's the very point of the Abt IRB review, it's not to consider any other issue except the ethical issues, and Abt's IRB fully approved the study, and has done approval for similar studies, including one done by the Obama administration for homelessness ... not prevention as much, but for homelessness services, rental supplement services.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I have just one more question.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But the Obama ... the difference in the Obama administration is that those folks in that control group are all in the shelter system, and are still ... still can access services within the system, if they opt out of the- -

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

1
2 (Interposing) It's the same, they can access other
3 community-based services.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But they- -

5 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

6 (Interposing) In the same way that people who were
7 denied access- -

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

9 But they're in shelter.

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Right, in

11 some ways- -

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

13 Not- -

14 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

15 (Interposing) ... we want to even prevent that, so
16 this is even more important than the Obama- -

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

18 Right, but they're not denied services, they still
19 have access to them.

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Sure they

21 were ... the control group in the Obama

22 administration study is denied certain types of

23 rental supplement services. They can only access

24 other community-based services. It is virtually

25 identical in design to the study that we are doing

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here.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And I just have one last question, and it arose out of the description that Ms. Locke just gave on the participant agreement consent form. And I found something kind of disturbing about your testimony just now. You mentioned that participants, or that potential participants have the opportunity to opt out, okay, and that they don't have to use ... they don't have to opt into this program. But written in this document is "If you choose ...", well, I'll go back. "There will be about 400 people in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may or may not be randomly selected to receive HomeBase services, but", this is the part that you left out, "if you choose not to participate, you will not be eligible to be selected for HomeBase services." So participants were told that if they opted not to participate in this survey, in this study, then they would not be eligible for HomeBase services. That was something that you actually left out before. Can you ... is ... I don't think that that's quite been addressed yet. Do

1
2 you understand that if I were going in and if I
3 was going in to receive HomeBase services, and I
4 was at risk of homelessness, and I was told, do
5 you want to participate in this study, here is the
6 participant agreement consent form, and it says
7 that if you don't participate, you will not
8 receive HomeBase services. Then wouldn't you feel
9 compelled ... would I not feel compelled to enter
10 into the study? If I don't enter the study, I'm
11 not receiving the services. It's a force ... you
12 said that you were allowed to opt out, but you opt
13 out and you can't, you're not, you don't have
14 access to the services.

15 MS. LOCKE: In consenting you're
16 consenting to more than that, you're consenting to
17 be in the research, and the research involves
18 other things also. But you're correct- -

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:
20 (Interposing) That's not an acceptable response.

21 MS. LOCKE: You can't ... you- -

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:
23 (Interposing) That's not an acceptable response.

24 MS. LOCKE: The question is- -

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

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2 (Interposing) You guys actually left out the fact-

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-

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MS. LOCKE: (Interposing) No.

5

DR. ROLSTON: We didn't leave that

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out.

7

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Just now you

8

left out the fact that in your description.

9

(crosstalk)

10

MS. LOCKE: It's an obvious fact,

11

and- -

12

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

13

(Interposing) If you don't opt in, then you're not

14

going to participate in HomeBase, period.

15

MS. LOCKE: That's correct.

16

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And I went

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over that in the testimony, so it's unfair to say

18

that it was left out.

19

MS. LOCKE: Right.

20

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It was

21

addressed right up front before, maybe you weren't

22

here then, but it was addressed- -

23

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

24

(Interposing) I was, I was.

25

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It was a

1
2 part of the testimony, precisely because we knew
3 that that was a concern. So I think it's unfair-

4 -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

6 (Interposing) If you don't opt into this, if you
7 do not ... so how could if you- -

8 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing) That's-

9 -

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

11 (Interposing) ... if it was voluntary ... yeah, but
12 you wouldn't receive HomeBase services if you
13 didn't sign it, so of course you're going to sign
14 it.

15 DR. ROLSTON: Well, you may or may
16 not choose to sign it, you may choose to get
17 services elsewhere. And in addition, there's a- -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

19 (Interposing) It was ... it would preclude you from
20 getting services at HomeBase, if you don't- -

21 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing) That's

22 correct.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: ... enter into
24 the program.

25 DR. ROLSTON: That's correct,

1
2 that's an obvious conclusion. We wouldn't be in
3 this room here having this discussion if that
4 weren't the case, and we wouldn't have the
5 research.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Well, when
7 Ms. Locke just gave testimony about this form,
8 about this consent form, she neglected to mention
9 that, so.

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But that was
11 addressed from the beginning, we were upfront
12 about stating that part of the enrollment process.
13 I specifically addressed it in my testimony. I
14 think it's unfair to intimate that we were not.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay, well,
16 I just want to make it clear for the public record
17 that if you did not opt into this program, then
18 you couldn't receive HomeBase.

19 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: That was- -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

21 (Interposing) If you didn't opt into being part of
22 the study, you couldn't receive HomeBase services,
23 quote.

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And I want
25 to make clear for the record the sentences I read

1
2 before, "Some have asked why individuals who did
3 not consent to participate in this study did not
4 receive HomeBase services, but were instead
5 provided with a listing of services available in
6 the community. The methodology is routinely used
7 in other evaluations of social services", and I
8 went on to explain that. So we did- -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

10 (Interposing) Yeah, yeah, but- -

11 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

12 (Interposing) So we did address it, and you may
13 have missed it- -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

15 (Interposing) Commissioner, I'm reading it right
16 now, and that does not address this, it's not the
17 same thing. Do not say that's the ... those are
18 totally different things. To say that some of the
19 individuals who did not consent did not receive
20 HomeBase services, you're saying that in this
21 consent form it says that you're not even allowed
22 to receive HomeBase services if you don't
23 participate. That's what it says here. "You will
24 not receive HomeBase services if you don't
25 participate in this program".

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's the

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same thing.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: It's not the

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same thing.

6

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's part of

7

the study design, and we- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

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(Interposing) It's not the same thing. For the

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record, we disagree on that. Thank you, Madam

11

Chair. Thank you, Commissioner.

12

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member

13

Brewer.

14

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They don't

15

like your study, Seth. I'm just letting you know.

16

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I got that

17

sense, yes. I actually knew that before I came

18

in.

19

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh good.

20

As Louise Seeley (phonetic) knows, we don't let

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anybody get evicted. And my question is, you

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know, how do you, what ... if the outcome is, and I,

23

and it's not that I don't, I didn't know what

24

HomeBase was, I must admit, a year ago, Annabel

25

Palma did. So I went to visit with Jane Velez,

1
2 and it was okay, but let me tell you the problem
3 with HomeBase, you don't have third parties. In
4 other words, in my neighborhood, you are about to
5 get evicted, we work 24/7. So we call the judge
6 at home, we will call the judge in her chamber, we
7 will find you third party, we will get the church
8 or synagogue to give you the money. That's how
9 you keep people in their homes. Now, that's
10 retail, it's not wholesale. That's the only way,
11 I could cut, I don't mean to be obnoxious, your
12 homeless population in half, if I was able to do
13 that kind of work, to call Fr. Gordon, he has the
14 Family Foundation, he comes into the office with a
15 check, we write it to the landlord, the person
16 stays. And that's how we keep people in their
17 homes, M-O-N-E-Y. HomeBase, the problem is, and
18 you know more about it than I do, but if you ain't
19 working and you don't have Gale Brewer to say, I'm
20 going to write you the check for the next six
21 months to the judge for your rent as a third
22 party, which is what I do - somebody else could do
23 it too - then they're not going to stay in their
24 apartment. That's the only way to do it. So my
25 question is, how many people who are getting

1
2 HomeBase services in the last however much long ...
3 however long this study has been going on, have
4 been ... stayed in their apartment, and how many in
5 the control group have been forced to access
6 shelter system, or do you have those data yet?

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, let me
8 just say, I think the point you were making
9 upfront is precisely the point that we've made in
10 terms of the people enrolled in the study.
11 HomeBase is one of a number of community
12 resources. We agree with that. It cannot prevent
13 homelessness on its own. We need the- -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
15 (Interposing) I can.

16 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: You can,
17 okay, so we should- -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
19 (Interposing) I would be glad to, Seth, you know I
20 would.

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: We'll give
22 you \$20 million and see what you can do with it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And I will
24 solve the homeless problem. I promise you.

25 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But it's ...

1
2 one of the great strengths of New York City is
3 that there are so many organizations and people
4 like you and your colleagues and others that are
5 dedicated to fighting homelessness. We agree,
6 it's a tremendous wealth of resources for people.
7 We're evaluating HomeBase, but there are other
8 services that are available, there's a whole
9 pastiche of services available in New York City
10 for people, to see if they can prevent
11 homelessness. And people know about those
12 services, you listed off the top of your head
13 several. There are people in organizations
14 throughout the city that know others, and that's
15 the point, that people don't have to access only
16 HomeBase services, they can go to other services
17 if they can't.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, I
19 mean- -

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:
21 (Interposing) We need HomeBase, we think it's
22 important, but it's not ... it can't do the job
23 alone.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What are
25 the hours of all the HomeBase programs?

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2 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: They all
3 have evening hours, in addition to being open
4 during business- -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
6 (Interposing) And on weekends?

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It varies on
8 the community and the need.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm just
10 saying, you'd be open weekends, if you open in the
11 evenings, if somebody's on the other end of the
12 phone.

13 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes, I mean,
14 the organization- -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
16 (Interposing) That's how you do it.

17 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Right. And
18 the organizations, as you know, that are involved
19 in these, are organizations that have people
20 dedicated their lives to preventing homelessness.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, but
22 they're not the 24/7, which is how you keep people
23 out of shelter.

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I understand
25 that.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But they're set up in a way, and they know their communities best, and they're set up in a way to make sure that they're providing services to the people who live there.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

Leave that as it may. Do we have an answer to how many in the control group or in the HomeBase have already been forced to access shelter system, in either group?

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's- -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

(Interposing) I'm not sure that either group is better than the other. Forget the challenges of the morality, but I'm not sure that either HomeBase or a group that's not HomeBase is better than the other, so I would like to know whether either group has ended up in shelter.

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's, the enrollment process has only been recently completed, it's too early to have any information on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So how many

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2 ... what's your group so far, numberwise? In terms
3 of numbers of people who have been going through
4 each process?

5 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, we
6 fully enrolled the 400 families, 200 in the
7 control group, 200 in the other group, and we're
8 going forward with the- -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
10 (Interposing) So so far nobody has ended up in the
11 shelter system?

12 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's not ... I
13 think it's just we haven't been evaluating that
14 information. We don't do it, we don't check every
15 day, it's part of a process, we want to check
16 after a certain point- -

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
18 (Interposing) Because I usually talk to like 300
19 people a day, so I could certainly call them and
20 find out.

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: That's not
22 how the ... I mean, you want to start a little- -

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
24 (Interposing) They all have texts, 100% of those
25 people have texts. Can you answer that? How many

1

2 people have ended up in the shelter ... in either
3 side?

4

5 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, let's
6 talk about how the research is designed to work in
7 terms of- -

8

9 DR. ROLSTON: (Interposing) Well,
10 basically the research has the two groups. It
11 will be matched against the New York City records
12 for, you know, related to shelter and other use of
13 other programs, such as food stamps.

14

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you
16 match it against the one shots that we love at
17 HRA?

18

19 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes, that
20 will be part of it, yes.

21

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And do you
23 match it against the issue of who does or doesn't
24 have a third party, and who ...

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I don't know
what- -

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27 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
28 (Interposing) Third party is a way you keep people
29 ... you know what a third party is?

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes I do,

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2 but I don't know how ... there's no database- -

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

4 (Interposing) Third party is the only way you keep
5 people out of shelter. You get the one shot, and
6 then you get somebody to pay the ongoing rent, and
7 then the judge, no matter who he or she is, says
8 they stay in their apartment. It's so simple.

9 DR. ROLSTON: The major- -

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

11 (Interposing) Except for NYCHA, that's another
12 problem.

13 DR. ROLSTON: The major ... the major
14 outcome that we are looking at is use of shelter,
15 days of shelter use for the two groups, and if one
16 is lower than the other.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So you're
18 not looking how to keep them out, you're looking
19 at who goes in.

20 DR. ROLSTON: Well, we assume that
21 if they measure shelter use for both groups, and
22 it declines for the group that was in HomeBase,
23 then we can measure- -

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

25 (Interposing) But you don't know why they would be

1
2 staying ... are you looking at why they would stay
3 out, or are you looking at who goes in?

4 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: No, that's
5 precisely the question, they're going to compare
6 the groups to see if there are differences.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And has the
8 Committee seen the list of questions that are part
9 of the study? Maybe you have.

10 DR. ROLSTON: Yes, I think so.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They have?

12 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yeah, I
13 believe ...

14 DR. ROLSTON: I assume you ...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Have you
16 seen the list of questions that are part of the
17 study?

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: No, we have
19 not.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well, can
21 we get those? I'm interested in this third party
22 issue. I know that's the key to solving the
23 problem of keeping people out of ... generally.

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The MOU that
25 outlines the study design has been submitted.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: So we did
send that in.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I'm
not going to go on, time is of the essence. I
will say that I understand why you're doing it, I
think it's very controversial, lots of morality
issues. I guess I have a much more simplistic ...
it costs money, it costs third party, and it costs
the ability for people to get jobs, which is
challenging, but not impossible. HomeBase is
good, they're not 24/7, they don't have that
necessarily I would disagree as good as the jobs,
as the groups are. They don't have that absolute
push that you need at the last moment to keep
people in their homes. I do it every day, and so
I understand it. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member
Wills.

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COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Thank you,
Chairwoman. The questions I had have been asked
and answered, so I'm okay.

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25

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, thank
you. Commissioner, I know that I'm going to ... in

1
2 the interests of time, I'm going to submit a lot
3 more questions to your department for further
4 answers, and I know that we will continue to have
5 ongoing discussions on this issue, since this
6 study just has begun and it, I believe it's going
7 to take two years to conclude.

8 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Two years,
9 the study period is two years, it will take some
10 period after that to gather the information, but
11 yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So we'll, you
13 know, be out of office by ... but I know that we'll
14 have ongoing discussions. So if you want to go
15 into your statement, opening statement on Intro- -

16 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:
17 (Interposing) Yeah, if we could just have a minute
18 for our- -

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
20 444.

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yeah, for
22 people ... thank you very much. Okay, are we ready?
23 Okay. Yes? Okay. All right, good afternoon. As
24 probably is clear, I'm Seth Diamond, the
25 Commissioner of the Department of Homeless

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2 Services, and despite the last interchange, I do
3 appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today
4 about the various populations DHS serves in our
5 public reporting process. Increasing transparency
6 in making data available to a broad audience is a
7 trademark of the Bloomberg administration. Since
8 2002, city agencies have made a marked improvement
9 in making information about city services widely
10 available. DHS is among the most transparent of
11 all city agencies, as demonstrated by the more
12 than 300 datapoints, reported both on our website
13 and on newyorkcity.gov. Moreover, DHS provides a
14 daily report detailing the DHS shelter census and
15 clients engaged in other DHS services. We refer
16 to it as the daily report, because we update it
17 each business day, to provide the most timely
18 information available. The report can easily be
19 accessed through two different access points on
20 the DHS website, including the home page.

21 Additionally, the Department of Homeless Services
22 regularly reports a great deal of supplementary
23 information to the Council. On a monthly basis
24 DHS provides the Council with the Homeless
25 Management Emergency System, better known as the

1
2 HOMES report, outlining the homeless family census
3 and length of stays, as well as the flex fund
4 update, which describes the financial assistance
5 provided by HomeBase through the use of the DHS-
6 created fund to assist those who are affected by
7 the section 8 shortfall. As you know, the
8 agency's Critical Activity Report or CAR, is also
9 updated publicly on our own website, and reflects
10 a vast number of indicators, including population,
11 length of stay, housing placements, facility
12 operation, safety and cleanliness, among others.
13 Quarterly, as required by section 21-311, DHS
14 reports on our hotline statistics, as well as
15 housing placements and length of stay,
16 disaggregated by population. also quarterly, as
17 required by section 612, DHS reports to Council
18 the agency and ... the outreach and non-shelter
19 population housing placements. Annually, as
20 required by section 19-613, the agency reports all
21 transitional housing, including the name and
22 borough of shelters, capacity, and the operator
23 status, also disaggregated by population. Thank
24 you for the opportunity to allow me to discuss
25 this process with you. While I do not believe

1
2 that legislation is necessary in this instance,
3 DHS will continue to be transparent and responsive
4 to this Committee's requests.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Commissioner,
6 the reason I decided to put this legislation
7 forward was because DHS prior to 2008 used to
8 report ... used to report, to count the homeless
9 single adults in shelters that access our shelters
10 like shelters for veterans and all the other ones
11 that were highlighted in my opening testimony, and
12 you're not ... and DHS is not doing it. And we've
13 asked why, but haven't been able to get a clear
14 answer. So, you know, we want to understand why
15 isn't that ... why was it that DHS decided to stop
16 counting certain shelter beds in their overall
17 census.

18 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: You know, I
19 don't think that's entirely fair. All the
20 information that you're talking about, including
21 the veterans, the safe haven, the outreach
22 placements, the faith-based, are reported every
23 day, it's updated every day, we're one of the few
24 city agencies that updates data every day for the
25 prior day, so I think we take great effort to be

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2 transparent and open, make sure all the
3 information is available and updated at a far
4 faster pace than probably any agency in the city.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But they're not
6 included in your overall count, so we argued that
7 there's a disparity in numbers, the numbers don't
8 add up. You have an overall DHS count, and then,
9 you know, you're stating that you're reporting
10 numbers ... you know, the veterans, the shelters,
11 the stabilization beds, but they're not included
12 in your overall count. Why? Why, what's the
13 rationale for that?

14 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, there
15 are different populations, and we're being held
16 accountable for how we handle different
17 populations. So we don't think it would be
18 effective to lump everyone together, because you
19 would lose the clarity that's provided in having
20 different programs evaluated separately. So you
21 can see easily how many veterans are placed, how
22 many safe haven beds we were using the night
23 before, and you can see how many people come
24 through the main shelter entry points that DHS
25 has. But the important thing is that we're not

1
2 hiding anything. The information is all
3 available, you can add it up, you can slice it
4 different ways. Some people may believe that
5 different populations should be included in
6 different ways. Whatever conclusions you want to
7 draw, the information is available. The reason
8 we're having this discussion is precisely because
9 we have so much information available on our
10 website that people can take and make the
11 conclusions that they want. But we make it fully
12 available, we update it constantly, that is far
13 more information, over 300 datapoints, than I
14 would gather almost any other city agency.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But then you
16 say all the information is there, and the reasons
17 you're giving me for keeping them separate is
18 because we're dealing with different populations,
19 and a veteran will be different than a single
20 adult who's probably recovering from alcohol or
21 drugs, a person who is in an HPD shelter, but at
22 the end of the day, all these people are homeless.
23 So the population that, you know, we want an
24 overall number of the people who are homeless,
25 regardless of whether they're considered a single

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2 adult, a female adult, a family, a veteran,
3 they're in an HPD shelter, or stabilization bed
4 like we ... that's what we want to know the exact
5 amount of people who are homeless, regardless of
6 what population that we categorize them in.

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But I don't
8 think that you would get a fair view of the
9 shelter population if we did it the way you're
10 suggesting. For example, people in the HPD system
11 are there because generally they've had some fire
12 or other kind of problem in their home that has
13 caused them to have to leave. They are not the
14 kind of, in the kind of situation that I think
15 most people would consider people to be homeless,
16 or people who had to leave their home because they
17 couldn't afford it or because they've had domestic
18 violence or other kinds of issues. So we keep the
19 numbers separate precisely so you can see, because
20 not ... all the populations are not the same. I
21 think it's important to be able to see the
22 different components of the overall system. The
23 shelter census is people who come in, that what
24 most New Yorkers think of people who are homeless,
25 people who come in through the main intake process

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2 that we offer. Again, all the numbers are
3 available. If people want to draw different
4 conclusions, they can. We fully try and update
5 the system, we do it as frequently as we can,
6 which is every day. And so the numbers are
7 available for people to see, and they can hold us
8 accountable for the results.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I think, you
10 know, we can go around and around with it. I
11 still think we'll end up disagreeing on, you know,
12 whether the way it's reported, whether you put
13 them in the overall homeless population, I mean,
14 it's there already, it's just a matter of counting
15 them in as the general homeless ... part as, you
16 know, the general count with, again ... and you do
17 it already with the explanation of whether they're
18 safe haven, stabilization beds, veterans, we will
19 know that by going into the website, but, you
20 know, not to add them to the general count just
21 seems it skews the numbers. It seems that we have
22 less homeless families in our city than we
23 actually do have, you know, in our shelters around
24 the city.

25 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: All the

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2 numbers are available, they're in different
3 programs. We don't think that it would be a good
4 way to hold us accountable and to be able to
5 evaluate fully the value of our services to lump
6 them all together. We think by having them
7 separate, you can understand what's going on in
8 the system, how many people are coming in through
9 the main shelter entry points that we have, how
10 many are accessing some of the more specialized
11 programs. But all the information is fully
12 available, people can read it and draw their own
13 conclusions, and again hold us accountable
14 ultimately for the results and how we're doing.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And then just
16 my last question on this, because again we're just
17 going to go, continue to go around. Why was the
18 reason for the change of policy, if I may, from
19 doing, from reporting it one way to now keeping
20 the numbers separate?

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The only
22 change that I'm aware of is with the veterans.
23 And again, they access shelter services through a
24 different entry point, there's a joint VA- and
25 DHS-operated entry point for most veterans, and I

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2 think most people would be interested in knowing
3 how we're providing service to veterans. So we
4 broke those out so you could easily see that. But
5 again, the number is fully available, I can tell
6 you, on the most recent report it's 409, so the
7 number is there, New Yorkers can see it, and they
8 can understand the components of the system.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member
10 Arroyo.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: You
12 reference several reports that the department
13 makes available, this is daily, monthly,
14 quarterly? They're not clearly stated.

15 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well,
16 different reports have different frequencies. We
17 have a daily report, which outlines the number of
18 people in shelter and in various other categories,
19 including the veterans and the safe havens. On
20 our website we have a monthly report which has a
21 number of indicators, over 300 indicators,
22 including the demographics of who's seeking
23 shelter, the placement, how long people have been
24 in shelter, the condition of the shelters. And
25 then we have certain reports that we provide to

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2 the City Council, some on a monthly basis and some
3 on a quarterly basis.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And the ...
5 what do I experience, or would I experience, as an
6 individual who's trying to aggregate this data and
7 draw a conclusion? Is it a database that's easily
8 accessible, user friendly? And how many screens
9 or links do I have to go through to pull all of it
10 together?

11 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The daily
12 report, which is I think most of the focus, is all
13 on one page, it's easily accessible from two
14 different points on the website. It does not- -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
16 (Interposing) Do you have an example of what it
17 looks like?

18 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Do you have
20 copies of that?

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: But it's all
22 there, all the numbers are laid out, they're ... you
23 do not have to scroll through, I agree with you,
24 if you had to scroll through seven pages to get to
25 and add it up, it would be a problem. But it's

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2 all clearly laid out, you click on one link and
3 it's right there, all in front of you. And I
4 think, again, it reflects the openness and the
5 commitment to making the numbers clear that we
6 have available.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

8 Without the benefit of looking at it, I- -

9 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

10 (Interposing) We're going to give it to you right
11 now.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: It doesn't
13 look like it's lot of work to add a couple of
14 totals to that data.

15 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And again,
16 people can draw their own conclusions, but the
17 point is that all the information is there and
18 available. We are fully disclosing the number of
19 people in different categories. We think it's
20 helpfully laid out, in that it's clear, it's one
21 page, it's not a crowded page.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I agree.

23 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Easy access,
24 and you can make conclusions about how we're doing
25 on outreach, or how we're doing in serving people

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2 through faith-based, or you can look at the larger
3 numbers of people who are served through our main
4 intake. But all the categories are not
5 equivalent, so we don't want to lump them
6 together, so we have them laid out in I think a
7 clear and easy-to-read way, and New Yorkers can
8 draw their own conclusions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I ... well,
10 the number of people that are homeless are
11 homeless regardless of the category. You break
12 out families and single adults, explain to me the
13 reason for ... and the family intake only reports
14 like a unit of people, not the number of people in
15 the family. So if I'm reading this correctly, for
16 the December 8th report, the number of families
17 requesting housing at PATH is 180 families, how
18 many people are involved?

19 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Okay, just
20 on the daily report we do break out both the
21 number of households, so if you look at the
22 December 8th report, the number of households is
23 8,200 ... 8,207, and then we tell, we list
24 specifically how many adults and how many children
25 make up those 8,200 families. So we do break that

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2 out. It becomes difficult when you're doing it
3 for every datapoint, to break out how many people
4 specifically, but I think we have an average
5 family size, about three, so it would roughly
6 translate, if you multiply it by three.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So
8 aggregating the numbers is just something that the
9 department feels is unnecessary, or just refuses
10 to do?

11 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Again, I
12 think it's more ... we give that information on the
13 daily report, we have the totals. It gets to be
14 just, I think, cumbersome to list it multiple
15 different ways, we're not ... we don't think we're
16 hiding anything. We have an average family size,
17 we can tell you, if you multiply it by three, what
18 it comes out to. We tell you how many applicants
19 there are, and the relevant statistic is how many
20 households are applying. How many people is in
21 some sense less relevant. You want to know, if we
22 gave how many people and we didn't tie it to
23 households, you wouldn't have a true sense of how
24 many families are coming to the system, because
25 the impact would be different.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So ... and
3 the question was, do you think it's unnecessary or
4 just refuse to do it. That's my question.

5 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's ... we'd
6 have to go look at it, to see if it ... how it fits
7 with the report. We want to make sure that the
8 report is ... provides good information in a clean
9 and consistent way. Again, we think we give the
10 breakout in other places, so we don't know that
11 it's necessary at every specific point.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you,
13 Madam Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Commissioner,
15 in the report that you shared, and I have it as
16 well, stabilization beds are not listed here.
17 Where do they fall on that?

18 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It's in the
19 CAR, we have the stabilization beds. The monthly
20 report, the Critical Activities Report.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: That's where
22 you report them?

23 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, thank
25 you. Again, you know, I ... as I said before, I

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2 think we'll continue to agree to disagree on
3 whether, you know, the numbers are easily
4 accessed. I believe that, you know, whether it's
5 a stabilization bed, an HPD bed or a faith-based
6 shelter, all the homeless population in general
7 needs to be counted under one umbrella, on the,
8 you know, we need to report one number so we get a
9 clear sense of how many people in the city we have
10 on a nightly, you know, on a daily basis accessing
11 shelter or sleeping in a shelter bed, is the
12 reason why I felt that we needed to put this
13 legislation forward. Again, in not understanding
14 if DHS was doing it before, why they would just
15 stop doing it that way, so- -

16 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

17 (Interposing) Again, all the information is
18 available. People ... we ... it's easily available,
19 it's all in one place. People can look at it, and
20 draw their conclusions and hold us accountable for
21 the results, and we think that's the appropriate
22 way to lay it out.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And the next
24 bill we want to hear on is Intro 395, and
25 Commissioner Doar has just entered the room, so we

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2 will not take a short break unless you really want
3 to.

4 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Okay, the
5 third time may be the charm, we'll try this again.
6 Thank you, members of the General Welfare
7 Committee for the opportunity to testify before
8 you this afternoon regarding the Rental Assistance
9 Tracking and Reporting legislation introduced by
10 Chair Palma and Public Advocate de Blasio. I
11 think you know by now that I'm Seth Diamond,
12 Commissioner of the Department of Homeless
13 Services, and I'm pleased, although maybe a little
14 less pleased than I was three hours ago, to be
15 joined by my colleague and DHS's partner in
16 serving clients in the city shelter system, Robert
17 Doar, who I'm sure you know is the Commissioner of
18 the Human Resources Administration, and also Mark
19 Glickson, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for
20 Housing and Homeless Services within the Family
21 Independence Administration at HRA.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We love
23 him.

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: We love him,
25 we all love Mark, yes. There you go. Employment

1
2 is the cornerstone of successful welfare policy,
3 and now employment assistance and placement is a
4 critical component of the city's efforts to help
5 move homeless families and individuals in
6 temporary emergency shelter back to independence.
7 Together, Commissioner Doar and my predecessor at
8 Homeless Services, Commissioner Hess, testified
9 before this Committee in April of this year to
10 announce modifications to the Advantage Rental
11 Assistance program. The revised requirements are
12 consistent with the city's successful cash
13 assistance program. As you know, HRA's East River
14 job center and HRA's employment vendors have been
15 valuable resources to homeless individuals in this
16 undertaking every day, providing clients with
17 tools to maximize the Advantage rental supplement
18 and help them return to homes in the community.
19 The job center has facilitated 8,714 job
20 placements, which is 17% more clients placed than
21 at the same time last year. The East River Job
22 Center is on pace to achieve nearly 10,000 job
23 placements by the end of 2010. Moving that many
24 shelter clients to employment is quite remarkable.
25 The East River has been the highest-placing job

1 center of all of the HRA centers for five
2 consecutive years. There is no question that
3 people in shelter can work and want to work. Over
4 21,000 households have exited the DHS shelter
5 system on Advantage. Less than 10% of those
6 families and individuals who completed two years
7 of Advantage have returned to shelter. Together,
8 DHS and HRA continue to move families out of
9 shelter and towards self-sufficiency. As I have
10 just explained in my prior testimony regarding
11 data collection, one of the primary tenets of this
12 administration has been to increase access to
13 information about city services and be transparent
14 to the public. Tracking and reporting data has
15 been a central component of the work both DHS and
16 HRA carry out on a daily basis. To bolster
17 efforts to provide public information to New
18 Yorkers, the DHS website contains over 300
19 datapoints, many of which are updated on a daily
20 basis to reflect real time data within our system.
21 Additionally, the HRA website displays key
22 statistics on both caseload dynamics, as well as
23 agency performance on the programs it administers.
24 In addition, the citywide performance reporter,
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2 CPR, and newyorkcity.gov, not only provide monthly
3 updates on a series of critical performance
4 measures for all city agencies, including DHS and
5 HRA. Since the program's inception, both DHS and
6 HRA have provided data and outcomes to the City
7 Council, and we will continue to be responsive to
8 your requests. Commissioner Doar and I look
9 forward to answering your questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

11 Commissioner Doar, do you want to make a
12 statement, or not?

13 COMMISSIONER DOAR: No, I'm happy
14 to be here and to answer your questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, great.
16 Do DHS and HRA make any efforts to determine the
17 status of former Advantage or any other rent
18 subsidy program participants in order to determine
19 the program's long-term effects on the recipients
20 who are receiving them?

21 COMMISSIONER DOAR: I think I'll
22 start with that and see how Commissioner Diamond
23 wants to add anything to it. You're raising a
24 long-standing problem in the public assistance
25 world, where folks who leave cash assistance and

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2 are in the working world and are no longer on
3 public assistance, it's hard for us to keep track
4 of what is happening in their lives. There are
5 data sources at the state level that we are not
6 permitted to use, to see what's going on with
7 their earnings or their wages. And that has been
8 a discussion at the legislature in the state
9 assembly, in the state senate, over many years.
10 And we've not been successful in getting access to
11 those data sources. So when it comes to- -

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

13 The data sources, I'm sorry- -

14 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing) ...

15 issues about people who have left cash assistance
16 or are no longer in the program, we don't ... we are
17 not able to know exactly what has happened to
18 them, except to the extent that they return, and
19 then when they become a part of our program and we
20 track them again.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: The data

22 sources that you speak of at the state level, has
23 there been discussions, and in your exchanges have
24 there been discussions to, you know, you don't
25 want this information to make it public, you want

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2 this information internally to figure out how
3 successful some of the programs that HRA has put
4 in place are. You're not going to release it to,
5 you know, to the general public, so why can't they
6 just, you know, abstractly send you information?
7 They don't ... of what they're- -

8 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing)

9 The reaction at the state level and in any entity
10 that has a legal obligation to secure data
11 involving people, is one of great conservatism.
12 They ... liberal administrations or conservative, it
13 doesn't matter. They are concerned about the
14 inappropriate release of data and statutory or
15 regulatory prohibitions against the inappropriate
16 release of data. And you're right, all we really
17 are asking for is the ability to match data on
18 former assistance recipients to their data, and
19 see what they've got on those cases. But there is
20 a very strong reluctance in the state agencies
21 that manage that data and own that data to release
22 it, and it's for the traditional privacy concerns
23 and inappropriate use of data concerns. I've been
24 involved in those discussions both at the state
25 and the city level, and it's a hard hill to climb,

1
2 to overcome that reluctance.

3 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Does DHS or HRA
4 make any efforts to collect data on former shelter
5 residents?

6 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, former
7 shelter residents who are receiving Advantage, or
8 the rental subsidy program that we administer,
9 there is a renewal requirement, so we do certainly
10 follow them, they have to provide information. In
11 the new Advantage, HRA will be conducting a
12 renewal process, so we will have good information
13 on how people are doing and whether they're
14 working and those kinds of things going forward.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: What happens if
16 one ... if someone who is receiving work Advantage
17 leaves before the two-year mark? What happens,
18 you know, in terms of data reporting? Or are you
19 still tracking them? Or do they just leave and no
20 questions asked?

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Again, as
22 Commissioner Doar was saying, if they're not
23 accessing services, either through HRA or DHS, we
24 don't have a way to follow them, that's- -

25 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

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2 Even if they ... even if, you know, they've been on
3 work Advantage for six months, and all of a sudden
4 they decide to leave the place there, you just
5 close their case and- -

6 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:

7 (Interposing) Well, we don't pay the rent any more
8 because they're not, depending on the situation,
9 they may no longer need it. They may access other
10 services, though. They may need food stamps, they
11 may need Medicaid, and then ... or if they come back
12 to shelter or cash assistance, we will know that.
13 But if they're not accessing any city services, we
14 have no way of being able to follow them.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So for- -

16 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing)
17 If they leave the city.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER DOAR: If they go to
20 another part of the country, we ... it happens.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So- -

22 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing) A
23 lot of people move all the time.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So we're not
25 collecting data at the point where we ... you find

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2 out they're no longer going to need the services.

3 COMMISSIONER DOAR: We know they- -

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

5 You're not asking them why they're not.

6 COMMISSIONER DOAR: If they ... it's
7 a very vibrant world out there, and to the extent
8 that they are no longer there, we do not, and
9 we're not responsible for tracking them down and
10 finding out what happened. I think there's some
11 issues about whether we would want to expend
12 resources on that. And so to the ... but the issue
13 that you asked about, a data match, I wanted to
14 mention that if you wanted us to do a data match
15 on that data, we can't. And so we either can't
16 match on global data, nor can we track it
17 individually.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I guess I asked
19 if you're not collecting additional data, because
20 if, you know, for whatever reason let's say
21 somebody finds employment that pays \$15 an hour,
22 and so after six months they don't need Advantage
23 any more, but a year later they're unemployed
24 again, and therefore have to return to either
25 shelter or HRA, like you know.

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COMMISSIONER DOAR: They come back.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: What do we want to know?

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COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, when they come back, both agencies have intake processes that try and look at what changed in their circumstance that brought them back, either to cash assistance or to shelter. So we would try and get that data at that point. But at the point they leave the services, there isn't an exit interview. And again, it gets very complicated why people leave. Often people, frankly, want to move on with their life and are not open to further questions from the agencies.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Do we know today how many families have stopped receiving the Advantage subsidies?

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Over 20 ... a little, I think about 21,000 families have ... started to receive Advantage and about 6,000 have stopped, for a variety of reasons.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And those reasons being the two years are up, or?

COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The two

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2 years are up, they did not renew, they chose not
3 to renew, a whole variety of reasons, yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

5 Council Member Arroyo.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

7 Commissioner, do you support the legislation, no?
8 The same position you're taking on the other one?

9 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Yeah, I like
10 to be consistent on some things at least. We
11 believe that we provide a lot of information about
12 Advantage, and we have information on our website,
13 we've testified many times before the Committee
14 about it, we've answered requests, so we think
15 that we're fully responsive, we're giving you the
16 information that will be helpful for you to be
17 able to draw conclusions about the success of the
18 program.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay, so
20 the answer is no.

21 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The answer
22 is no.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

24 Commissioner Doar, nice to see you. And thank you
25 for being here. On the ... your complaint ... the

1
2 East River Job Center is touted as being very
3 successful, and has facilitated nearly 9,000 job
4 placements. Do we track the kinds of jobs,
5 titles, the salaries that people earn with those
6 placements?

7 COMMISSIONER DOAR: We do have on
8 earnings, I don't have that in front of me, but we
9 do, to the extent that we have budgeted earnings,
10 we have some data on the extent of the hourly
11 wage, and I could ... I don't have it in front of
12 me.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: The center
14 is run by HRA?

15 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Uh huh.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. so
17 when we place someone in a job, do we capture the
18 title, the company? Are we on placing in private
19 industry, in certain industries, are we looking at
20 where there is opportunity for more placement? Or
21 should we hear in the Council- -

22 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing)
23 We- -

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:
25 (Interposing) There's a method to my madness, let

1
2 me finish.

3 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Yeah, uh huh.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: We fund job
5 readiness programs.

6 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: In the
8 Council, and we're always seeking the providers
9 that are successful, because where there is a
10 significant amount of funding that the Council
11 funds through its workforce development
12 initiative. So it's important for us to have that
13 information so that we can, working with a
14 provider that manages that funding, support the
15 work and/or get other providers to look at the
16 industries that the center is being successful in
17 placing individuals. They're hopefully making
18 decent wages, so that they don't have to come back
19 to the shelter system or to HRA again. So it's a
20 request for information to help us fine tune the
21 work that the Council is trying to accomplish in
22 our workforce development initiative.

23 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Along with my
24 colleagues in the other workforce agencies, we
25 recently produced a quarterly report that came out

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2 of the WIB that had the multiple workforce
3 agencies report in it, and it did talk about
4 percentage of placements in various industries,
5 and the total number globally for the agency as a
6 whole during the previous three months. I'd be
7 happy to get that for you, it just came out as a
8 new product of the city and I'd be happy also to
9 research it with regard to this population
10 specifically, so we can give it to you in that
11 regard.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: That would
13 be helpful, thank you.

14 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Sure.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member
16 Levin.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you,
18 Madam Chair. Thank you, Commissioners. I just
19 have one kind of quick question, is ... and it's
20 kind of an issue highlighted in the article today
21 in the Times. The discrepancy between the
22 numbers, it was between those ... your assessment is
23 they complete the full two years, the other
24 assessment was bringing everyone that had received
25 Advantage. What are the reasons, and it's a big

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2 difference, and I'm wondering what are the reasons
3 why families are leaving the Advantage program
4 before the two years are up? And you know, are we
5 making progress in terms of diminishing that
6 number and getting that number as low as possible,
7 and insuring that families, you know, doing
8 everything that we can as a city to get people to,
9 once they're in the Advantage program, complete
10 the full two-year term?

11 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It sounds
12 like you're talking about trying to identify risk
13 factors to prevent homelessness, which is
14 something we talked about earlier.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Non-
16 scientific.

17 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, that's
18 ... well, let's not rehash, yeah. So there are a
19 variety of reasons why people leave Advantage
20 apartments, and the number that we think is most
21 relevant for evaluating the Advantage subsidy is
22 for looking at people who, once they've completed
23 Advantage, who no longer have it available,
24 whether they came back to shelter. We think
25 that's the best way. If you take another look at

1
2 it, you look at everyone who's received Advantage,
3 6.3% of them have returned to shelter. So if you
4 look at anyone who's received Advantage is
5 actually a lower number, we could use that number,
6 but we use a harder standard for ourselves, which
7 is the people who completed the Advantage time,
8 and we say it's between 9% and 10% who come back.
9 So we try and hold ourselves accountable for the
10 results. For people during the Advantage time
11 period who still come back, it could be a range of
12 issues: domestic violence, it could be problems,
13 the landlord could ... the building could have been
14 foreclosed upon, they could have a variety of
15 situations. Unfortunately, sometimes the same
16 issues that brought them to shelter to begin with.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: But that
18 will ... those types of instances where it's, you
19 know, the building is foreclosed upon or sold or
20 something like that, we're not keeping those
21 people in the Advantage program, they would then
22 be out of the Advantage program? I mean, it goes
23 with- -

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND:
25 (Interposing) Well, they are ... they ... if we can we

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2 actually have an operation at PATH that tries to
3 identify, and maybe Mr. Glickson would want to
4 talk about that a little bit, that tries to
5 identify Advantage-eligible people and do
6 precisely what you're saying. And we could talk
7 about that more if you like, because you're right,
8 if they have Advantage available, that would be
9 the priority. I was only talking about ones where
10 all those efforts have fallen through.

11 MR. GLICKSON: Sure. We work in
12 HRA very closely with the DHS, so if we find that
13 somebody is in foreclosure, we would contact DHS,
14 and a good cause transfer would be given, so that
15 the client could move to another Advantage
16 apartment. But at PATH specifically we have
17 homelessness diversion staff at HRA that work
18 there trying to look for alternatives to shelter.
19 And that's seven days a week, from 8:00 in the
20 morning until 10:00 at night, trying to see what
21 are the issues, not just with Advantage, but with
22 anyone coming in. It's a mandatory process that
23 the city put in, that this staff has to be seen,
24 these clients have to be seen by the diversion
25 staff, and we're looking for any and every way to

1
2 keep Advantage as well as anybody else from
3 entering shelter, if there are other alternatives.
4 And I think we've been successful at it for a
5 number of cases.

6 COMMISSIONER DOAR: If I may, I'd
7 just like to add that when we started Advantage,
8 one of the probably biggest concerns we had was
9 that the value of the subsidy was so great that at
10 the end of the two years people would not be able
11 to go on with their lives satisfactorily. So we
12 really want to concentrate on what happens to
13 people at the end of those two years. And the
14 fact that it's only 10% seems to me really to
15 refute the claims of those who say that you're
16 establishing people in a subsidy that is going to
17 become a lifetime commitment of public assistance,
18 or will need to be because these folks can't do it
19 without that help. And that hasn't been the case,
20 and I think that that's something worth talking
21 about.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Commissioner
23 Doar, I'm sorry, but with all due respect, we
24 don't know that there's a greater number of 10%,
25 the 10% are those that are returning back into

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2 shelter. We don't know how many other people are
3 out there that just ... that have thrown their hands
4 up and say, "We don't want to go through this
5 again, we, you know, this is frustrating enough
6 for us", or you know, they have been part of the
7 200 HomeBase participants who are now denied
8 services. You know, we don't know, because we're
9 not tracking them. So, you know, I know that 10%
10 sounds great, but then, you know, one can argue
11 that we ... without a tracking mechanism to know
12 where the rest of the folks are and how they're
13 doing, we can't, you know, hone in on the 10% and
14 say that it's, you know, it's working great
15 without any flaws.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Just one
17 other question is, what's the number, what's the
18 percentage of Advantage, folks that enter the
19 Advantage program that don't make it two years?

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, we
21 have only data under the old Advantage program,
22 not the new Advantage program, because nobody has
23 reached the ... or not made the full two years. Of
24 the people in Work Advantage, which was the one
25 where people had to be working to qualify, nearly

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2 85% had a work record and got a second year. So
3 85% of the working people qualified for two years.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Made it
5 through the first year and qualified for the
6 second year.

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Correct.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: How many,
9 what percentage made it through the second year
10 then too?

11 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well,
12 there's an authorization at the beginning of the
13 year, and if you're eligible, you're eligible for
14 the entire. Now again, some of them may have
15 dropped out for other reasons that we talked
16 about, foreclosure or other kinds of issues that
17 brought them back in the shelter system. (aside)
18 Okay, so.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: One thing
20 I'm wondering is, if ... what percentage of people
21 are dropping off because of inability to find
22 work, or inability to meet the work requirements?

23 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Again, the
24 ones who had to work, in the old program, which is
25 the only program that we had data because it's

1
2 reached the point where people would renew, people
3 in Children's and Fixed Advantage did not have to
4 work, so there was no condition for that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Right,
6 right.

7 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The only
8 people who had a work requirement were people in
9 what was called Work Advantage, and 85% of them
10 had a work record that would be sufficient to
11 authorize a second year.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Do you
13 expect that that percentage will be going down
14 from 85% as a result of the new requirements, work
15 requirements for the Advantage program?

16 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: It is a more
17 rigorous standard, but we are confident that with
18 support and the proper structure, that we will
19 continue to see shelter families do well. That's
20 the situation and the result, the positive impact
21 of the programs up until now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: So 85% is
23 the number that we're going to be shooting for?

24 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: We're
25 shooting for 100%.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: We're
3 shooting for 100%.

4 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Right.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: But we can
6 measure it by 85%. Thank you, Commissioners,
7 plural, and thank you, Madam Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member
9 Brewer.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Maybe I
11 should know this, but when people are in either
12 the old or the new Advantage, and say for instance
13 you lose your job and you have to think of some
14 other kinds of support, who do you call, if
15 anybody? I mean, is there any support mechanism?
16 Or is it just like, you know, anybody else?

17 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Again, no, a
18 variety of services. If you ... some people remain
19 on public assistance, and so the public- -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
21 (Interposing) Right, and so they have a
22 caseworker, yes.

23 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Right. And
24 some people access HomeBase services, and one of
25 the services that HomeBase provides is employment

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2 assistance. And some people go to the other ... the
3 other resources that Commissioner Doar was talking
4 about that are available in the city's workforce
5 system.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and
7 do ... is there any possibility, like how many
8 people have computers as part ... at home as part of
9 this system, do we know?

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I don't
11 think we have any way of knowing.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you ever
13 ask? Wouldn't that be a good question? The
14 reason I say if you have a home ... we're all
15 working on wireless and we have devices and soon
16 we're not going to have PC's and blah, blah, blah,
17 and so it would be an interesting ... I mean, it
18 would be something to think about, between Per
19 Scholas, you don't have huge numbers here. I
20 mean, they look ... but Per Scholas and others it
21 might be something to think about. And then
22 voluntarily people could be tracked, and
23 voluntarily ... it might help them continue as part
24 of the workforce, I could go on and on about all
25 my broadband studies, showing that if you have a

1
2 home computer, you're more likely to have a job
3 and you can do the homework, you can apply for
4 college, and I could go on. So I'm just saying,
5 is that something that you might think about,
6 Commissioner Doar?

7 COMMISSIONER DOAR: The question is
8 would we- -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
10 (Interposing) Michael ... that Glickson over there,
11 he will get you ... he can do anything, just so you
12 know.

13 COMMISSIONER DOAR: I will consult
14 with Dr. Glickson.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I'm
16 just saying, that's something to think about, then
17 you can do your voluntary tracking, and all these
18 other things, and it is something that we are
19 working on with the Federal government. We just
20 got \$48 million to do children and home computers,
21 it's something to think about in terms of a grant
22 that could then provide that kind of support. I
23 bet you'd keep more people in jobs, in school, if
24 you had at-home computerization.

25 MR. GLICKSON: We'd be happy to

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2 look at it.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
4 very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I'm going to
6 wrap up, Commissioners, so that ... Commissioners, I
7 mean, you've been ... I heard somebody say yea. But
8 before you, I just want to ... what's the average
9 wage for a family on Advantage?

10 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: \$9.40 an
11 hour. That's at the point of renewal. At
12 renewal, so.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: At renewal.
14 And do we know if that family that's making \$9.40
15 an hour, if their wages increase over a period of
16 time? Or they're just stagnant at the \$9.40?

17 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I think
18 that's probably somewhat higher than it was at the
19 average at the point that they began the Advantage
20 program, but we don't track it after that point.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay. And with
22 the restriction of the 20 hours and then to
23 increase to the 35 hours, 35, are we seeing an
24 increase in wages when this changes, or are we
25 seeing they may get an increase in hours, but

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2 their wages don't change?

3 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: You know, I
4 think it's too early, because the new program just
5 began over the summer, to be able to track that
6 data over time, but we can report very positive
7 news that there are over 2,000 families in the
8 shelter that qualify for Advantage. So there was
9 some concern when we began with the more rigorous
10 requirements that people wouldn't be eligible, but
11 that is not the issue. 25%, for example, of the
12 family system, 25% of the households in the family
13 system qualify for Advantage now, based on either
14 working or having someone on SSI in the household.
15 So there are large numbers of people who are
16 working, and there are even more in progress to
17 get to work, so that is not the issue.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Have ... how,
19 what's the percentage of families who are
20 struggling to get past the 20 ... to ... the 20 hour
21 requirement?

22 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Again, most
23 of the families who are working in the shelter
24 system qualify. There are a small number who are
25 working who don't qualify. I don't ... actually I

1
2 don't think I have that number. (aside) Yeah,
3 the average hours is 33, so most people are, are
4 well over the number. (aside) Yeah, it's in
5 there. Okay, so for example, of the families with
6 children, there are nearly 1,900 that are
7 certified, 1,500 of those are Work Advantage. And
8 there are another about 700, almost 800 families
9 that are employed that are not Advantage-eligible.
10 Some of those families, though, it's a timing
11 issue, they recently entered the shelter system,
12 and you have to be in for a certain period of time
13 in order to qualify for Advantage. Some of those-
14 -

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
16 How long?

17 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Sixty days.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Sixty days,
19 okay.

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: And some of
21 those it's because their wages are lower. But
22 again, a quarter of the families in shelter are
23 Advantage-certified now, the overwhelming number
24 of them because they're working.

25 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And so these

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2 1,900 all work either 20 or plus hours?

3 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Most of them
4 are working, there are a small number who are what
5 we call Fixed Advantage, they qualify because
6 they're on SSI. But of ones that are Work
7 Advantage, yes, all 20 hours. And the average is
8 33 hours, so well above the 20 hour requirement.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And for ... I'm
10 just trying to get a sense of ... a better sense for
11 those that cannot break the 20 hour barrier.

12 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Okay.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: What happens to
14 them?

15 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Well, I'm
16 not sure I can talk about this more fully, but
17 they continue to work with those people to try and
18 get them enough hours so that they, if they want
19 to increase their income for a whole variety of
20 reasons, including having them qualify for
21 Advantage.

22 MR. GLICKSON: All of the aspects
23 of the back-to-work vendor and our efforts to help
24 people get placed in employment are in place.
25 That's what we do in the regular cash assistance

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program, and we do it here as well.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So these folks are actually, they're being helped to increase the 20 hour requirement.

COMMISSIONER DOAR: We offer them ways to be helped and we also expect them to seek it themselves. As I often point out, a lot of this has to do with the effort of the people who are receiving the benefit as well. It's not entirely in our hands.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I- -

COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing)
As everyone knows.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I understand that, Commissioner Doar. I have a part-time employee in my office right now, and I'm pretty sure that that person would like to be a full-time worker. I just can't afford to have him full time. So what happens in that case? I mean, it's not that a person doesn't want to, the employer is just not giving them the opportunity.

COMMISSIONER DOAR: I'm just saying there's a combination of efforts, both on the part of the agency and the vendor and the person. I

1
2 didn't want to give the impression that the agency
3 was doing it all.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Right.

5 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Because Mark
6 and I run into- -

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
8 No, and I- -

9 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing) ...
10 people who say- -

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing) I
12 understand that. So if the client goes to HRA and
13 says, "I cannot get my employers to give me
14 additional hours".

15 COMMISSIONER DOAR: We then- -

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
17 Is HRA then directing them- -

18 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing)
19 We direct them to the Back to Work vendors who
20 look at job openings and try to place them into
21 interview situations where they can get more
22 hours, or a full-time position, as well as we can
23 do that.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And this person
25 is not in any way, shape or form losing benefits,

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2 or, you know, sort of getting a strike for not
3 increasing their hours?

4 COMMISSIONER DOAR: If they're
5 cooperating with the Back to Work initiatives and
6 they're in the shelter, no, there's an opportunity
7 to find greater hours.

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: The Back to
9 Work vendors that you work with are clear of the
10 work requirements that- -

11 COMMISSIONER DOAR: (Interposing)
12 Oh yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: ... the hours?

14 COMMISSIONER DOAR: Oh yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: The hours that
16 you have?

17 COMMISSIONER DOAR: They are clear
18 of what we expect from them in the general cash
19 assistance program and they are very clear as well
20 of what is the expectation, as is the client, for
21 the Advantage program.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So that they
23 can go, you know, they're out there, they're
24 actually seeking employers that know they
25 eventually have to move.

1
2 COMMISSIONER DOAR: We don't
3 generally go looking for part-time work anyway, we
4 look for full-time positions.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Right.

6 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: The Back to
7 Work vendors have a 20 hour minimum requirement to
8 be paid for the placement. So they have an
9 incentive also to place people at hours above 20.

10 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But then, you
11 know, I hope that ... because there's a 20 hour, but
12 then they have to increase to 35, so.

13 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Absolutely.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We don't want
15 to get stuck with placing people at 20 hours, and
16 then can't move them.

17 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Absolutely.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And then risk
19 them losing their Work Advantage.

20 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: I agree with
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Anything else I
23 should ask? No. I thank you so much for your
24 time, Commissioner Diamond and Commissioner Doar.

25 COMMISSIONER DIAMOND: Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We'll follow up
3 with some additional questions, as always, and I
4 look forward to seeing you soon. In a better
5 mood, yes. Our next panel is Patrick Markee from
6 the Coalition for the Homeless, Jane Bock from
7 Legal Aid, Stephanie Gonzalez, and Laurel Eisner
8 from Sanctuary for Families. (crosstalk) You can
9 begin.

10 MR. MARKEE: Oh, thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And in the
12 order you guys choose.

13 MR. MARKEE: Thank you, Chair
14 Palma, my name is Patrick Markee, I'm the Senior
15 Policy Analyst at Coalition for the Homeless.
16 I'll try and make my comments as brief as
17 possible, since it's been a long afternoon. We
18 submitted an extensive written testimony, in
19 conjunction with the Legal Aid Society, that
20 addresses both pieces of legislation, and we're
21 very grateful for the opportunity to share our
22 views also on the controversial HomeBase study. I
23 think with some changes that we'll recommend to
24 the Committee in a separate communication we
25 strongly support the two pieces of legislation.

1
2 But before I get to that, I just wanted to say a
3 few words on the city's deeply misguided HomeBase
4 study. I think most of what needed to be said was
5 said earlier, and I think the questioning,
6 particularly by the Committee, both of the
7 academic researchers and of the Commissioner, was
8 very, very enlightening in terms of what's really
9 at stake here with this study. I think at the end
10 of the day it's about the effects on children and
11 families. We know from experience, we know from
12 research, the huge human cost to children and
13 families who undergo homelessness, who experience
14 homelessness, who experience housing crises, the
15 impact on education, the impact on health. All of
16 these things are well-documented, and it just
17 seems that the failure of both the city and the
18 researchers to consider the ethical questions
19 here, the harm and the hardship that's going to
20 come for these families, is really, just really so
21 troubling. And I think also the questioning
22 particularly from Council Member Levin about, was
23 this really informed consent. It sounded to me
24 very much like blackmail. It sounded to me like
25 the 200 families when they walked into those

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2 offices had lost, no matter what, whether they
3 agreed to do the study or whether they didn't
4 agree to do the study, they weren't going to get
5 any services. And these were families that
6 clearly qualified for the services. I think one
7 of the researchers even testified to that, that
8 they were deemed eligible for the services. The
9 only piece of good news I have found in all of
10 this is that one of the families that was part of
11 this control group, who was first featured in the
12 Daily News article that broke the story, and was
13 also discussed in the New York Times article on
14 this today, Ms. Almadovar, we were able to help
15 her in collaboration with a Legal Services lawyer,
16 and the City Council's Homelessness Prevention
17 Fund, which the Council has funded through an
18 initiative for several years now, helped us fund,
19 to pay her rent arrears, and to help her. Again,
20 I just ... it leaves us still wondering why did this
21 have to happen to her, why did she have to go
22 through this crisis. She's one of the fortunate
23 few, though. The community-based organizations
24 out there that we heard so much talk about, that
25 these families were going to be referred to, do

1
2 not have the resources to help these families. We
3 all of us are struggling, particularly in this
4 ongoing economic crisis, with overwhelming
5 requests for need and very limited resources.

6 With regards to Intro 444, the bill that would
7 require the city to provide accurate and complete
8 information about the numbers of homeless people
9 residing in city shelters, we're in strong support
10 of the bill, we think there are some changes that
11 could be made that we'll recommend in a separate
12 communication. Again, it's really about
13 transparency. I was very frustrated by the
14 Commissioner's testimony, because it just, once
15 again, was not straightforward. First of all, he
16 talked repeatedly about a daily report that's
17 supposedly updated on a daily basis on the DHS
18 website. That's absolutely not true. Yesterday
19 when I checked it, they still had the daily report
20 for November 26th. It's not archived, it's not
21 available, you can't go and find past reports.
22 But even leaving that aside, the fundamental issue
23 here is that any student in this city, any news
24 reporter in this city, any citizen of this city,
25 who goes and wants to know how many homeless

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2 people are sleeping tonight in the municipal
3 shelter system, goes to the Department of Homeless
4 Services' website, sees a number right there on
5 the home page, and it's a number that fails to
6 report on at least 2,000 homeless people sleeping
7 in clearly-labeled homeless shelters, most of them
8 administered by the Department of Homeless
9 Services. And then also it's important to
10 recognize that for years the city has failed to
11 account for other homeless New Yorkers who reside
12 in shelters administered by other city agencies,
13 this includes survivors of domestic violence who
14 reside in the domestic violence shelter system,
15 homeless individuals and families living with
16 AIDS, who are in the emergency housing system,
17 homeless youth who are in the DYCD-administered
18 youth shelters. So there's a whole group of folks
19 that are residing in, you know, city shelters.
20 And I was just ... were not being reported by the
21 city. I was again frustrated by the
22 Commissioner's, you know, I just think crosstalk
23 about, well, these are different populations, you
24 know, it wouldn't help to label them all. If you
25 look at that daily report, you're going to see

1
2 labels, "homeless single adults", that number
3 there doesn't include the veterans, it doesn't
4 include the street homeless individuals who are
5 residing in safe havens and stabilization
6 shelters. Why is that? Those are homeless single
7 adults. Homeless individuals does not include all
8 the children in families who are residing in HPD
9 shelters and if a family becomes homeless because
10 of a fire or a flood or a vacate order, they're
11 just as homeless as if they became homeless
12 because of an eviction or because they were
13 fleeing domestic violence. So these answers just
14 didn't make any sense. We're very grateful that
15 this bill, hopefully, which should actually be
16 unnecessary, to have to get the city to report the
17 accurate and complete numbers, we're very grateful
18 that it's been introduced and we want to work with
19 you to get it passed into law. And then finally,
20 on Intro 395, there's been a fundamental dispute
21 about the Advantage program since its inception.
22 The city claims that it has an enormous success
23 rate, that only a small percentage of Advantage
24 families end up back in the shelter system, that
25 it promotes self-sufficiency. Those of us working

1
2 on the front lines, those of us who are working
3 with these families, folks in eviction prevent
4 programs, folks in HomeBase offices, folks in the
5 shelter, who operate the shelters, see a different
6 story. They see families that are having the rug
7 pulled out from under them, they see a program
8 that's a revolving door back into shelter. You
9 know, we were fortunate to be able to obtain a DHS
10 report recently that clearly shows that of all the
11 families, Advantage families, who are not
12 receiving Advantage assistance any more, whether
13 they completed the two years or not, and not
14 receiving section 8 vouchers, which, remember,
15 were an integral part of some of the earlier
16 iterations of the Advantage program, that of those
17 families, if you use that as the measure of your
18 risk pool, the families that are most at risk, one
19 in four of those families are back in shelter.
20 And more than one in three of them have actually
21 applied for shelter. So that's the sort of
22 analysis that I think we need to have done, and
23 that's why it's so critical to have data available
24 to be able to clearly measure the success of this
25 program or not, or its failures. And the city, I

1
2 think, has been ... has failed to be straightforward
3 and transparent with this agency. In previous
4 testimony I heard this commissioner and previous
5 commissioners talk about a 4% success ... failure
6 rate, a 5% failure rate, today we heard about a 6%
7 rate if you look at it one way or a 10% rate if
8 you look at it another way. What are the numbers?
9 These are real families. Let's see. Again, our
10 testimony, you'll see in our testimony that we
11 know that more than a thousand families who had
12 once received Advantage are back in shelter.
13 That's three years into a program, that's a
14 program that is not working, and we need to be
15 doing something to fix that.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: These are a
17 thousand families that have gone through
18 Coalition, through the Coalition's doors or?

19 MR. MARKEE: No, no, these are a
20 thousand families, this is according to the
21 Department of Homeless Services, through an
22 internal report that they have not made public,
23 about more than a thousand families are back in
24 shelter. More than eleven hundred families are
25 back in shelter. Thank you. So again, I just

1
2 want to turn it over to my colleague, Jane Bock
3 from the Legal Aid Society, and if you look in
4 your testimony, our joint testimony, after page
5 thirteen there's a chart there that I think
6 illustrates the real stakes here.

7 MS. BOCK: Thank you. If you could
8 follow along on the chart with me, I'd just like
9 to review with you three different sources of data
10 that, while imperfect, set off alarm bells, as
11 Patrick has said, about the potential future
12 homelessness rate of families who are now in
13 Advantage. Far from being transparent, it has
14 taken dozens of hours to cobble together different
15 sources of data in order to present a very
16 alarming picture, not only of the rates now, but
17 where the rates are going. This particular chart
18 was prepared from data that was provided pursuant
19 to four different FOIA requests by the Legal Aid
20 Society, 220 pages of hard copy, which had to be
21 manually tabulated, compiled, reconciled, because
22 the city would not provide the data in spreadsheet
23 format, which would allow it to be easily
24 analyzed. As you can see from this chart, from
25 the beginning of the Advantage program, which is

1
2 in April of 2007, until the end of September 2010,
3 the city's own data showed that there were over
4 3,000 re-applications from families who had
5 formerly been in Advantage apartments at PATH and
6 at AFIC, the Adult Family Intake Center. In
7 addition, the data shows that 1,400 of those
8 applications were found to be eligible. You saw
9 in the Times, and I believe the Commissioner has
10 testified, that 6,000 families have left the
11 Advantage program. So that is a very worrisome
12 number. Particularly worrisome is the fact that
13 you see on this graph a very dramatic increase
14 starting in April 2009. That's two years after
15 the program began, that's the critical point for
16 when people started timing off, because as you
17 heard, the Commissioner said that 85% of the
18 families who applied for renewal did get that
19 second year. So right when we're reaching that
20 second year point of the very first set of people
21 who got Advantage, is when the numbers start
22 climbing. It is alarming that in July, when the
23 New York Times reported on this issue, Javier
24 Hernandez wrote that the city said that there were
25 6% of the families who had been enrolled in the

1
2 Advantage program had entered the shelter system.
3 But today DHS admits it's 10%, that's a very big
4 jump, to go from July until today. And you can
5 see the trajectory here, which I don't think we've
6 seen anywhere in all of DHS's data before, and I
7 think it demonstrates very visibly the need for
8 the bill that Council has proposed. Now, it's
9 important to note that the data in this chart is
10 duplicated, meaning that more than families, as we
11 testified in other hearings before, are frequently
12 found ineligible multiple times before the city
13 will admit that they actually are in need of
14 shelter. And so some families may even have been
15 found, in this data may have even been found
16 eligible more than once. However, the summary
17 data at the end of the four datasets produced
18 pursuant to the FOIA request show that there are
19 1,290, almost 1,300 families who are unduplicated,
20 who were in Advantage apartments, who are now back
21 in shelter. That's nearly ten families a day
22 applying for shelter at PATH who are coming from
23 Advantage apartments. This sharp increase is even
24 more alarming because we know that the Advantage
25 program started very slowly, there wasn't a huge

1
2 enrollment back in the spring of 2007, and then
3 the program picked up speed. So there are going
4 to be more and more people timing off. In
5 addition, the Commissioner testified the program
6 is more rigorous now. That means it's going to be
7 much harder for families to stay in the program,
8 much harder to get the renewal. As Tina Moore
9 wrote about in the article about Pamela Yearwood,
10 there are families who are coming back into
11 homelessness from Advantage because of
12 increasingly poor conditions, which appears to
13 caused anecdotally by a worsening of the
14 inspection system for the Advantage apartments.
15 So Ms. Yearwood, for instance, she moved into an
16 Advantage apartment that had passed DHS
17 inspection, which she was required to move into,
18 which had both lead paint and had been illegally
19 subdivided, as a different city agency, HPD,
20 determined. So, and in addition, we know
21 anecdotally of many families who have not ...
22 Advantage families who have been unable to access
23 the HomeBase services, which could have helped
24 them obtain subsidies such as FEPS, which might
25 allow them to stay in their apartment. And since

1
2 we know that HomeBase is not available to
3 everyone, whether due to the study, or due to this
4 lack of availability, that's a serious issue when
5 people are against facing homelessness. So thank
6 you for this opportunity to testify, and we
7 strongly support the data-reporting bills that
8 you've proposed.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Jane?

10 MS. BOCK: Yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Jane,
12 right?

13 MS. BOCK: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: As I'm
15 sitting here, and I ... the HomeBase study and all
16 the things that make us so nervous about that,
17 should we be concerned about the city facing legal
18 action because we're denying services to people?
19 Have you gotten contact by any of the families
20 that received the letter advising them that
21 they're not going to be receiving services for two
22 years, or are not eligible for services? And what
23 would that cost if we have to face legal action
24 where the city is sued because they're denying
25 services?

1
2 MS. BOCK: I don't know of ... that
3 that's a legal claim. There's certainly an
4 ethical issue with that story, there's certainly
5 academic issues. Under the Boston consent decree,
6 however, the city has a legal obligation to
7 provide shelter to any family who does not have
8 housing which is safe and adequate. And if
9 families are being denied shelter at the PATH
10 office, as we've discussed at previous hearings,
11 there is a legal claim, and it's a tragedy that
12 families who could receive HomeBase services and
13 thereby avoid entering the shelter system again,
14 are being denied those services because of this
15 study, or because of the general lack of effective
16 HomeBase services.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: It's just
18 not a good practice, not illegal.

19 MS. BOCK: There are many legal
20 issues involved. The exclusion from the study may
21 not be a primary legal issue before us now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: The next
24 speaker.

25 MS. EISNER: Okay good, thanks.

1
2 Hi, I'm Laurel Eisner, I'm the Executive Director
3 of Sanctuary for Families. I know a number of
4 you, and I must say I appreciate enormously having
5 the opportunity to listen to your questions of the
6 Commissioner, both commissioners, actually. And I
7 think it was very helpful. I have a fairly simple
8 comment about Intro 395, which is my concern, and
9 that is that it has apparently inadvertently
10 ignored the fact that domestic violence victims
11 who are in domestic violence shelters are subject
12 to the identical programs. They have somewhat of
13 a waiver from Work Advantage, where they got six
14 months of housing before they had to get a job.
15 Under this program they have to get a job right
16 away when they come into shelter, and they have to
17 have a job for four weeks, as everybody does in
18 the homeless system. But for our clients that is
19 a huge problem, because unlike the homeless
20 system, which is subject to the Boston consent
21 decree, after the long history of the McCain
22 litigation, our clients are subject to the time
23 limits in shelter that are designated by state
24 regulations. And a domestic violence victim
25 coming into an emergency shelter, she is running

1
2 for her life, I see them every day in the waiting
3 room in our agency. She comes with shopping bags
4 and maybe a couple of teddy bears, everybody looks
5 very frightened, very stressed. They are hoping
6 that they're going to get into one of the slots in
7 a domestic violence shelter. Sometimes we're able
8 ... you know, we accommodate them as much as we can,
9 and we do whatever we can to make sure somebody
10 gets them into a shelter. They then have a
11 maximum of 135 days, four and a half months, not a
12 day more, to stay in an emergency domestic
13 violence shelter. There are a small number, about
14 18% of those who come into emergency shelter, are
15 able actually, after the 135th day, to move in to
16 what's called the domestic violence transitional
17 shelter system, where they can stay for up to six
18 months. But even if they do that, even if they
19 get the four and a half months, and another six
20 months, for the most part they're not going to be
21 able to stay as long as those who, on average, who
22 are in homeless shelters. In addition, just to be
23 really clear, and I know you all know this, so I
24 don't want to, especially at this late hour, say
25 too much, it is a nightmare for domestic violence

1
2 victims. They are literally running for their
3 lives. They cannot just say, "Uh, this is really
4 too much work. Let me just go back to that guy
5 who has told me he is going to kill me", and who
6 is now really angry at them because they have
7 tried to go into shelter, and they have ... she has
8 left him and has taken the children. So what's at
9 risk for them in terms of personal danger, the
10 lack of alternative choices, and the situation
11 with their kids, because overwhelmingly the
12 literature and the research shows, domestic
13 violence victims ultimately, after trying several
14 times, will leave a violent batterer, because in
15 the final analysis they realize, oh my God, this
16 is so bad for the children. And that's what they
17 do. So they're coming with the kids. The kids
18 are totally in turmoil. I mean, the kids have
19 seen all of this violence, they've heard it,
20 they've heard the screaming and the crying, they
21 know there's trouble at home. They've seen the
22 bruises, they've sensed the tension. I mean,
23 we've had kids come into our shelter system who
24 literally have stopped speaking. We had a kid who
25 has hallucinations that the batterer in his dark

1
2 cloak was telling her to kill somebody. We've had
3 kids who are terrified to leave their mothers,
4 because they think, well, you know, I'm six, I've
5 got to be mommy's protector. So those kids are in
6 all kinds of turmoil. And the mom is really
7 worried about them. So she comes into shelter,
8 she's left everything behind. She has to go into
9 a secret location, she can't tell her family where
10 she is, if she does, we have to ask her to leave
11 the shelter, and try to place her somewhere, even
12 if it's totally an accident, because it threatens
13 everybody there. The place is very carefully
14 guarded and sheltered. So she goes in, she has to
15 get on public assistance. If she was working, she
16 probably can't possibly afford the cost, so she
17 goes on public assistance. If she was working,
18 chances are he knows where she works, so she can't
19 go into shelter, go to the job, come home to
20 shelter, because the next day he'll be there
21 banging at the door. So she has to leave her job
22 and we actually tell her that. Some of them don't
23 even have orders of protection and we cannot tell
24 them to get an order of protection. She goes to
25 court, he follows her home from court, he knows

1
2 where she is, and then he sues and says she's a
3 bad mother. So she's got everything against her.
4 She comes to Sanctuary, and to the 20 or so other
5 agencies that we are in coalition with, who
6 provide shelter for domestic violence victims.
7 And she has all these hurdles to overcome. And a
8 lot of them do a lot, and we work with them, and
9 we do the kind of third party help that Gale
10 Brewer, Council Member Brewer, was talking about.
11 We try to be the emergency backup, the family they
12 don't have and that they really, that can help
13 them out, and often they're here without any
14 family in New York City other than the batterer's
15 family. And we help them with emergency rent and
16 with their phone system and with utilities. I
17 mean, we do whatever we can, we have food at the
18 agency, we have a clothing boutique for those who
19 have left everything behind. We will pay the
20 stores for the stuff they've left, and we will do
21 all that, but at the 135th day, the game is over.
22 So now they also have to have a job. And the New
23 Destiny Housing Corporation, which I think has
24 testified in other areas for you, which is an
25 organization, a not-for-profit agency that builds

1
2 shelters and permanent housing for domestic
3 violence victims, they did a really interesting
4 study. They got 80% of the domestic violence
5 shelter organizations like ours to give them data
6 on what happened to the families who are in
7 domestic violence shelters between July 2009 and
8 June 2010. And they got 87% to respond. What
9 they found was, 1,700 families during that time
10 period left the DV emergency shelters and of
11 those, 20% actually moved into permanent housing.
12 Another 20% doubled up elsewhere. Interestingly,
13 very few went back to batterers as far as we know,
14 but sometimes of course they don't want to admit
15 that, because they're very embarrassed. But where
16 did most of them go? To the homeless system.
17 Most of them went to PATH, into the PATH center.
18 Some of them were lucky enough to get one of these
19 transitional center beds. And of those, once they
20 left the transitional shelter, where they had the
21 extra six months, 60% went into permanent housing.
22 So that's really quite a difference, and the
23 difference of course is time, four and a half
24 months versus ten and a half months, in effect.
25 But interesting, they looked at the demographic

1 data about the people, actually got the DV
2 Advantage, this was the DV Advantage, the Work
3 Advantage version for DV, they looked at the
4 demographics of them, and they found that the
5 educational level of those who are able to get the
6 DV Advantage and able to get into housing
7 correlated very closely, their educational levels
8 and their work history, correlated with their
9 ability to do this. So 82% of those who got the
10 DV Advantage and got into apartments, and mind
11 you, that's only 20% of the whole population that
12 we are talking about who left in that year, but
13 82% of them had at least a high school diploma, a
14 GED, and some had some college. Similarly, 82% of
15 them had some work history. In contrast, the rest
16 of the domestic violence shelter population that
17 left, of those 1,700 that left in one year, had
18 much less education, 47% had not even a high
19 school diploma, and 55% had no work experience, or
20 less than a year. So you have to ask the
21 question, what is the Department of Homeless
22 Services and Human Resources Administration -
23 which by the way HRA oversees these DV shelters,
24 and they have been fantastic advocates for our
25

1 clients. They are enormously helpful, and when we
2 need a little, two or three more days, please, and
3 she'll get the keys to the apartment, they're very
4 accommodating. But in effect this is a large
5 citywide policy. What is it that they're thinking
6 will happen to these women and children? And the
7 children, of course, are the future. They're the
8 ones who are themselves going to become the
9 batterers or the victims of battering, who will
10 end up with all of the social problems. And I
11 have to say, I really commend you for asking these
12 questions, because it's clear that our data from
13 New Destiny and everything we experience in our
14 own agency is completely inconsistent to what
15 Commissioner Diamond really has testified to. And
16 I have in my testimony and I won't repeat it, but
17 just give it to you, I listed what some of us
18 think are sort of maybe the ten critical
19 questions. And they say, look, we can't answer
20 all these questions, we sort of have a suggestion
21 of what of the ten are really hard ones. And in
22 closing I just want to say, don't forget about the
23 domestic violence victims, there are a lot of
24 them. Several, many thousands every year, and 20

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2 different agencies doing this work. And they, I
3 certainly don't want to say that the people in the
4 homeless system are, you know, have it easy, but
5 they have this special extra issue of the physical
6 danger, of the emotional destructiveness, of the
7 domestic violence relationship, where the batterer
8 said to them every day, you are worthless, you are
9 a bad woman, you are a bad wife, you are a bad
10 mother, and no man will ever have you again, and
11 if you leave me, I'll report you to INS, I'll call
12 the police, I'll claim that you ... I'll try to take
13 the children, and many of them actually do that.
14 So in thinking about this DV Advantage, this
15 Advantage New York, which we have come to call
16 Disadvantage New York, remember us.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Domestic
18 violence victims are always in the forefront of
19 our discussions.

20 MS. EISNER: I know, I appreciate
21 that.

22 MS. GONZALEZ: Good afternoon, I'm
23 Stephanie Gonzalez, Associate Executive Director
24 at Citizens' Committee for Children, we just
25 wanted to thank you for holding this hearing on

1
2 this really important topic and for introducing
3 these two really important pieces of legislation.
4 I just wanted to mention a few of our ethical
5 concerns about the methodology of the HomeBase
6 program. As has been discussed, we don't really
7 believe that it's informed consent if the only way
8 you can get into the program is to consent and
9 sign the form. The families that didn't consent
10 would not have received HomeBase, so we don't
11 believe that that's really informed consent. We
12 also don't think that what happened to these
13 families is the same as the 1,500 families who
14 were not able to be served based on running out of
15 the service, because those families could come
16 back in a few months when there was funds again,
17 and these families will not be able to get
18 services for two years. To that end though, we do
19 believe in an evaluation of some sort of HomeBase,
20 and in 2008-2009 CCC began background research in
21 preparation for our own qualitative assessment of
22 HomeBase. We had hoped to collect data on
23 participant demographics, program experiences,
24 etc., through survey interviews of the providers
25 and focus groups of the families that were

1 participating in HomeBase. Over several months we
2 reviewed the DHS data that was available, their
3 policies and procedures, we met with providers, we
4 met with DHS, and we developed a job survey
5 instrument that was shared with DHS. Our intent
6 was to conduct a qualitative analysis of the
7 program and then issue a report that was very
8 similar to what we did with Preventive Services at
9 ACS, where both the providers and ACS embraced our
10 report, our findings and our recommendations.

11 While CCC met with DHS staff in the summer of
12 2008, held a policy briefing in 2008 that the DHS
13 staff participated in, when we met with DHS in
14 early 2009 to share a draft survey instrument,
15 they expressed many concerns with our project.
16 Specifically, they explained they did not believe
17 our work was necessary, because they were about to
18 engage in their own evaluation of HomeBase, where
19 they were going to have an institution, an
20 academic institution, as the evaluator.

21 Furthermore, they told us that we wouldn't be able
22 to administer our qualitative survey of the
23 HomeBase providers without going through DHS's IRB
24 process. We believed that would be very time-

1
2 consuming for us to try to go through DHS's IRB
3 process, and we actually didn't believe we needed
4 to go through an IRB process to talk to their
5 providers. That said, we did not want to go
6 forward because we did not want to put the
7 providers in the precarious situation of talking
8 to CCC while trying to keep their contracts with
9 DHS. Clearly, we were very disappointed that we
10 were not able to do our study, and now we feel
11 extremely disappointed, seeing what the study has
12 turned out to be. Lastly, with regard to the 200
13 families who are not receiving services, the only
14 thing that seems to be tracked, that's going to be
15 tracked about them, is whether or not they end up
16 back in shelter, and maybe some other data with
17 HRA. We urge DHS to find out what happened to
18 these 200 families, where they are, whether
19 they're sleeping on the streets, whether they've
20 moved out of New York, and whether they're out
21 there in need of services, and if so, we hope that
22 the city will provide them. With regard to Local
23 Law 395, we support tracking what's happening with
24 Advantage. If you look at the DHS data, you can
25 see that 86% of the families that left the shelter

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2 to housing in August did so to Advantage, and so
3 many families are leaving to Advantage. When we
4 look at the numbers that DHS talks about, we don't
5 see how this program is going to work. If the
6 families are making \$9.40 an hour and working 35
7 hours a week, I calculated that on my paper before
8 and came up with \$17,108 a year, for apartments
9 that are about \$1,000 a month. So I don't see how
10 that can work. And lastly, I just wanted to take
11 this opportunity one last time to say that we're
12 really disappointed in the elimination of the
13 children's Advantage program. We believe that for
14 families reunifying from foster care to at the
15 same time as get your children back is to have to
16 find a job, as well as child care, which we could
17 have a whole other hearing about, the lack of
18 child care, is really difficult and really hampers
19 the reunification process. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you so
21 much for your testimony. And, you know, as
22 always, I'm so glad to be able to ponder with you
23 and be able to collaborate on, you know, solutions
24 that we can offer to the administration, and I can
25 look forward to continuing working with you guys

1
2 on behalf of the people of the City of New York.
3 Our next panel is Louise Seeley, Housing Court
4 Answers, Amina Nelson, Aminsia Nelson. Sure.

5 MS. FEELEY: I'm going to be very
6 brief.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You can just
8 come up to the panel, and then you can speak last.
9 Natalie Johnson, Levonne Johnson, Meshawn Danes
10 and Linda Brilliant. (crosstalk)

11 MS. FEELEY: Good afternoon
12 Council, thank you for giving me the opportunity
13 to speak today. I'm going to be very brief, and
14 really just focus on the HomeBase study. However,
15 I think if we had that other data, it might make
16 that study less necessary. So why not give us the
17 data and not ruin people's lives. Much of the
18 problems with the HomeBase study were discussed.
19 I do think one point that was not brought out that
20 needs to be brought out is, I don't see how
21 effective this study is going to be, given the
22 methodology used. If you take 200 families and
23 you don't give them services, but you tell them to
24 go elsewhere for services, they may end up
25 actually getting help, which is what we hope.

1
2 They live in Gale's district, Gale will stop their
3 eviction. So you're not going to know that the
4 reason they didn't enter shelter is because of
5 HomeBase, working or not working, or because they
6 got somewhere else. By only looking at whether
7 they enter shelter, you're not sure what happened
8 to them. The other problem is, by only looking at
9 whether they entered shelter, you don't know that
10 they didn't become homeless. They could have
11 become homeless and gone to the streets, they
12 could end up in the hospital, they could end up in
13 terrible conditions, they could be living in
14 illegal basement apartments with, you know,
15 getting an eviction order and then ending up in an
16 HPD shelter. We don't know what happened to those
17 families. So even if this study were ethical,
18 it's not useful. You're not going to get data out
19 of that study that's going to tell you whether
20 HomeBase is effective or not, or whether
21 homelessness prevention programs are effective or
22 not. The other concern I have is that different
23 HomeBases dealt with the families differently.
24 Some of them are really, really good at hooking up
25 those families with other services. So they'd

1
2 say, well, you can't get help from our HomeBase,
3 but you know, we have this other program right
4 next door, and they're going to help you do the
5 One Shot deal, and they're going to help you get
6 money from the charities, and they're going to
7 Housing Court with you, while other ones just sort
8 of let people out and sort of said, sorry, I can't
9 help you, hands up, go. If this study ends up
10 evaluating different HomeBases, you're going to
11 get really skewed results that are going to show
12 the HomeBases that did the thing that was right,
13 that helped those families to get help other ways
14 are going to look less effective than the
15 HomeBases that didn't do anything. And so I think
16 not only is the study unethical, I think it's
17 completely useless. And the amount of money spent
18 on it, the amount of money we in the community had
19 to spend fighting this study, certainly could have
20 been better used actually helping prevent
21 homelessness.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,
23 Louise.

24 MS. DANES: Hello, my name is
25 Meshawn Danes and I am a homeless person, and I'm

1
2 also a Chair of a committee under the National
3 Action Network, and being that I'm homeless, we
4 started a project called Homeless Nation, and you
5 have a few women here and her daughter, who's also
6 homeless too. And my experience is horrendous,
7 horrific, and traumatizing and tormenting to my
8 family, and it still is. I would like to state
9 that it is a crime against humanity to unstabilize
10 people, which is happening now between DHS and the
11 greedy landlords. I'm going to open up by saying
12 I was illegally evicted, ordered to vacate, and I
13 went to, prior to my illegal eviction, I went to
14 HomeBase, this is back in 2008, for assistance,
15 and she said I- -

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
17 Meshawn, what borough are you from?

18 MS. DANES: The Bronx, I'm sorry.
19 The Bronx.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I just wanted
21 to see.

22 MS. DANES: Okay. Catholic
23 Charities did help me out when I first started,
24 and I was referred to Citizen Advice Bureau, which
25 is now Bronx Works. I was deemed eligible and

1
2 qualified for the services, but when it came down
3 to bringing the checks to the court, the landlord
4 stated he didn't want the money. Then when the
5 landlord changed his mind, the CAB HomeBase worker
6 made a mistake on my case, and so I became
7 homeless. Now, I went back to HomeBase in 2008 to
8 speak to the director of the HomeBase service
9 provider to find out what kind of services I could
10 get to remain in my apartment, because my
11 apartment was still available, I was just ordered
12 to vacate. They couldn't help me. But what they
13 did was give me a list of realtors. Fine. And
14 when I called the realtors, they couldn't help me
15 either, they did not want any programs. So prior
16 to that I- -

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

18 The realtors that contracted.

19 MS. DANES: The realtors.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Said no
21 programs?

22 MS. DANES: No programs, it's
23 either- -

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

25 The landlord said no program.

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MS. DANES: Yeah, no program.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I just wanted
to- -

MS. DANES: (Interposing) This list
came from HomeBase itself. These were their
landlords, so I thought I could get help, but I
didn't. and then prior ... after that I did enter
into PATH, which is Preventive Services. So when
I told them my story, I thought that they would
help me get back into my apartment. The HomeBase
person at PATH onsite said they will forward my
case to the state. But otherwise, I still didn't
get any services, because they also gave me a list
from DHS of landlords to call, which I called, and
I couldn't get anywhere. So they sent me to an
apartment, a two-bedroom in Brooklyn, but then I
was denied services. So I went back to PATH to
re-apply, and then from then I've been to six
shelters. After that experience I did contact the
commissioner, which he did ... and Mayor Bloomberg,
and the rest of the elected officials. He did
respond to a letter, he did respond to my letter,
said maybe someone would be able to assist you.
But this is what happened. They did send a Selena

1
2 Dowry, which is director of policy at DHS. She
3 called me and said, well, we'll help you. I said,
4 well, how are you going to help me? She said,
5 well, did you try to help yourself? Well, yes I
6 have tried to help myself. I've been to 300
7 apartments and realtors and cannot get an
8 apartment anywhere. So I know you have a list of
9 landlords who also have shelters. Okay, so she
10 comes to the facility where I am, but I'm asking
11 her, well, how are you here to help me get an
12 apartment for my family? I didn't get any help,
13 you know what happened? They said I have to move
14 to another shelter. And I said it's within my
15 right not to move to another shelter, because I've
16 been to too many already. And what they did was
17 have NYC police take down my shelter door where I
18 was staying at the time, to say that they came to
19 forcibly remove me, with two policy directors from
20 DHS, which they started grabbing my bags, and they
21 also had handcuffs and they had laser guns and
22 they had their guns out, which was very
23 disturbing. They moved me forcibly, broke in the
24 door, said I had to go. They put me into a next-
25 step shelter, which something needs to be looked

1
2 at with the next-step shelter, a lot of families
3 have been in the system for a lot of years, but
4 they're supposed to give you 30 days to find an
5 apartment, if not you're thrown into the street.
6 And they give you all these documents to fill out
7 and sign, which I did not sign, which is my right.
8 Because when you sign those documents, they will
9 say, oh, you sign this document that states that
10 you will find a place in 30 days or two weeks,
11 which won't happen. Prior to that ... I mean, not
12 prior to that, but going into the next phase- -

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

14 Meshawn- -

15 MS. DANES: (Interposing) Go ahead.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You refused to
17 sign the documents because you felt you didn't get
18 any help prior, so by signing the documents you
19 were going to be put in a position where, you
20 know, you were going to be locked into a timeframe
21 to find an apartment, if not, see yourself in the
22 street again?

23 MS. DANES: Yes, because the next-
24 step shelters, I've seen families thrown out in
25 the street, bags thrown out in the street. And

1
2 it's very disturbing to me. And these people
3 don't have no place to go. As a matter of fact,
4 when they're thrown out, they have 30 days, they
5 cannot report back to PATH. They have to wait out
6 the 30 days to see if they qualify for shelter.
7 So now to that offense, we, you, like me, speak
8 out and advocate. They try to intimidate you,
9 which they did harass me, which they did use
10 enforcement, by making me, forcing me, to move
11 physically out of one shelter to the next. My
12 question to them is, why move me to another
13 shelter, to shelter, to shelter? Move me into an
14 apartment, it's more cost effective. These
15 landlords are getting \$40,000 a month for one-
16 bedroom scatter site, which I can be in an
17 apartment and pay \$2,000 a month for a three
18 bedroom. So that was my argument with DHS on a
19 constant basis. That's like I said is cost
20 effective. Now, in that shelter, the next-step
21 shelter, they had excessive fire drills, which are
22 like operation lockdown in a prison system, where
23 they will have three or four fire drills, and it
24 will be like noise and right before the children
25 go to school and people go to work. They cannot

1
2 even exit the building with these fire drills,
3 which was unnecessary, and which was a form of
4 harassment. And which I would videotape and take
5 pictures of, because it was so disturbing. The
6 women and children would come out and cry because
7 of the loudness of the noise and ssh, it's just an
8 alarm. That's the effect that they gave to the
9 kids. And this was three times a week, which was
10 disturbing also. Prior to that I had an
11 altercation with the director, because I said to
12 her, this is not a prison system, these families
13 need help. And on those terms and basis, DHS
14 moved me to 78 Catherine Street, which is walking
15 distance from the Mayor's office, the ceilings are
16 falling down, it is a (inaudible) one, which is
17 illegal for families. They have a family of five
18 in one room. The city space is 80 per square
19 feet, and with the state I know it's like 160 per
20 square feet per person, which is like
21 unacceptable, and they're getting away with it.
22 So there has been no proven case or study to show
23 how DHS is helping families to receive apartments.
24 They're getting people on the street, but I don't
25 see that a large majority of them are going into

1
2 apartments without re-entering the system. There
3 is nothing that, no type of safety net that's put
4 in place, so when they exit the system that they
5 won't exit again. And that is my issue, because I
6 don't want to get into an apartment and be told
7 that, which is another issue, the Work Advantage
8 will drop a couple of hundreds of dollars, which
9 will put me in arrears, which just happened to me
10 also. I had an apartment- -

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

12 You were working, when you lost the apartment you
13 were employed?

14 MS. DANES: I was, I had SSI.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And you
16 couldn't ... you couldn't make- -

17 MS. DANES: (Interposing) And I had
18 a third party also. And I still got evicted. You
19 see what I mean? And so I had all the documents
20 to prove everything to the HomeBase worker so it
21 didn't happen. But what I wanted to say about the
22 Advantage program, I got a three-bedroom apartment
23 through NYCHA, it was \$1,200, which was good. No
24 ... yeah, \$1,200. My Work Advantage was \$1,316.
25 When they wanted to move me in an apartment, the

1
2 Work Advantage dropped to a thousand dollars. So
3 they said, oh, Ms. Danes, we'll move you even to a
4 four-bedroom apartment, which is on Popham Avenue
5 in the Bronx. The voucher dropped to a thousand
6 dollars, so that threw me off the loop, you see
7 what I mean? So how were they trying to get me
8 into an apartment, when I had \$1,316, all of a
9 sudden they dropped the amount to \$1,000. And
10 then my share is \$600. And then you have an
11 expiration date of 30 days, that doesn't make
12 sense. The Advantage is not working. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,
14 Meshawn. Who's going to speak next? (crosstalk)

15 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: Hello, my
16 name is Levonne Johnson, I'm homeless, I'm in an
17 HPD family home. I sat here all day and listened
18 about the HomeBase, and I went there and I asked
19 DHS for help, and nobody helped me. And I
20 listened to everybody's testimony about keeping
21 families from losing it, but what about the
22 families that already lost their homes? I lost my
23 home two years ago due to a fire, as of February
24 2011 I've been in the shelter system in the same
25 place for two years. I came in there with section

1
2 8, I was waiting for an upgrade from a two-bedroom
3 to a three-bedroom, and I would go there every day
4 to ask them, you know, about my upgrade. You
5 know, I was waiting for it, and then I decided to
6 go one day when I found out that they had
7 cancelled it. Nobody didn't tell me why. My
8 worker told me the new person that was there, you
9 know, they lost funding, there was no money. But
10 I shouldn't have lost mine because I wasn't in the
11 category to get section 8 all over, already had
12 section 8, so why was mine taken? I thought when
13 I started section 8, you all were stopping it for
14 people who was trying to get it. I already had
15 it, I was waiting for an upgrade. So then I
16 applied for HPD section 8. I was waiting, my
17 worker at the shelter was working with me, and
18 then right before the summer I get a paper under
19 my door stating that there's no more HPD section
20 8. I listened to ... I figured that's not fair. My
21 daughter is in college, she has problems, you
22 know, where she's messing up, because she has to
23 go from place to place to try to do her work. The
24 place that I'm in, I'm on the one flight. I have
25 lupus, I have diabetes, I sleep with a machine,

1
2 I'm in and out of the hospitals, and I sit here
3 and I ask for help, nobody helps me. My son is
4 thirteen, his grades is going down because he has
5 to cry, he's talking about, I hate this place,
6 where the water in the morning is cold or mice,
7 every time they ... I mean, mice is crawling around
8 in the room where my son told me, mommy, something
9 crawled on my leg. And I didn't believe him until
10 I looked under and seen their droppings. And
11 everybody, I understand about domestic violence,
12 but what about children that watch their mommies
13 in and out of the hospital? There's no cure for
14 lupus, and like I told my worker, I want help. I
15 don't mind paying the bills, I just need somebody
16 to help me. I would not sit here and die in no
17 shelter. I would rather close my eyes being in a
18 home with my children. I have to have two or
19 three different operations, but I would not get it
20 so nurses could come see me in the shelter where
21 the water is barely hot. I got to boil water in
22 the morning. I mean, come on, in the summer we
23 had hot water, the winter the water is cold? I
24 got to watch my daughter not wanting to be there
25 because she can't sit here and get back and forth

1
2 to college. I got to watch my son drag because he
3 doesn't want to leave me, or he cries, he says,
4 mommy, I hate this place, I hate this place. It's
5 not fair to them, it's not just domestic violence,
6 it's for people like me that are sick that also
7 got children.

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Ms. Johnson,
9 the workers that you talk about, they're onsite at
10 the shelter?

11 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: Yes, the
12 workers that I have for helping me try to find ...
13 that helped me with HPD and whatnot, she's onsite,
14 she's been doing the best she can, but it's not
15 too much she can do. She can't go rogue, she's
16 got to follow protocols. But my thing is, like
17 with the HomeBase, when I hear that, you know,
18 helping people not to lose their homes, but what
19 about people who lost their homes? I didn't ask
20 to lose my home, it was due to a fire. I can pay,
21 I mean, I'm on SSI, but I can pay whatever I can
22 pay, just give me a chance, somebody just give me
23 a home. Why did I lose my section 8? Why- -

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
25 Were you up for, while you were in the shelter,

1
2 were you up for renewal and the worker didn't fill
3 out the paperwork for you?

4 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: No,
5 everything was filled. I had to ... I was looking
6 for a two-bedroom, but I was getting an upgrade.
7 They told me to look for a three-bedroom while we
8 was getting ... while the upgrade was coming, then
9 all it was something due out this summer, nobody
10 said anything. I went into the worker- -

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
12 Well, did you find a three-bedroom?

13 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: I was looking
14 for them, but I had to wait, I mean, how could I
15 go to somebody and say, can I have this three-
16 bedroom, when I don't got the proper voucher to
17 show them? That's just my word that I'm getting
18 it.

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So you never
20 received- -

21 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: (Interposing)
22 Never received it. And when I went one day to
23 Fordham Rd. on Plaza, my worker there pulled me to
24 the side and said it was cancelled and I asked
25 her, when were you all going to tell me, were you

1
2 all going to send me a letter? It took me to come
3 up here for you to tell me this, so you're saying-
4 -

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
6 Did she tell you why it was cancelled?

7 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: No, she just
8 told me there was a new ... her new boss that was
9 put in there, you know, Councilman, and it was
10 more than me, it was more than 80 people that was
11 cancelled, they said due to money. And the place
12 that I was living in had violations. And then
13 when they gave section 8 back, they was given
14 section 8 to people back, I went to Fordham Rd.
15 Plaza to ask them, you know, can I get my back,
16 and they told me, no, because I wasn't in my
17 apartment. Now, when my apartment was finished,
18 they told me they wasn't going to pay for my
19 apartment, because it had been under violations so
20 long that they'd been stopped paying it. When was
21 you all going to tell me this? I didn't know.
22 And then they talked about some code. You've got
23 to talk to me like a child. What is a code? I'm
24 coming to you for help, I'm coming to you to get
25 section 8 so I can get my family into a home. I

1
2 don't know what a code, none of that is. I'm
3 asking you for a voucher back because it shouldn't
4 have been taken from me, to put my kids in a home.
5 And I listened to everybody, you know, no offense.
6 Everybody, they get their little giggles in, they
7 don't, the panels don't sit here and give straight
8 answers to you. But at the end of the day, these
9 handfuls of people are going back to the shelters
10 while everybody else is going into a home that's
11 theirs. And it's not fair.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You're
13 absolutely right.

14 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: And it hurts.
15 And I'm tired of going into the hospital and
16 coming home and my kids being scared, not wanting
17 to be there, whether I'm going to close my ... they
18 go to school and they come home to the shelter and
19 I'm gone. I don't want to be there, I've asked
20 help from everybody. How could everything I try
21 get taken from me? And it looks like nobody tells
22 me to my face, I have to come and find out about
23 section ... because I'm coming to see when are you
24 going to call me in for an upgrade, that she had
25 to pull me to the side to tell me. So if I didn't

1
2 come here, you wouldn't have told me? When I
3 found out about HPD being cancelled, I got a
4 letter under my door, nobody called me in to say,
5 I need to talk to you. I got a letter under the
6 door, that's not how you do business. I came to
7 you for help, you should have come to me and told
8 me.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I can't promise
10 you, I can't make any promises, because, you know,
11 I can't ... I just can't make any promises, but you
12 leave here today, and you're absolutely right,
13 you're going to go into a shelter, but I'll make
14 sure that my office works with whoever we need to
15 work with to get your problem addressed and your
16 family into some sort of decent housing.

17 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: And the thing
18 about it, you know, I can barely walk up half the
19 time on the first flight. Like I said, they've
20 been coming in and out of my apartment to try to
21 stop the mice, this and that, the roach bombs, and
22 it doesn't work. And I tell them, I stay sick.
23 The mice, all the mice, it's toxic, so me and my
24 kids have to breathe that up. That's a bad ...
25 that's bad for my health as it is. And then the

1
2 first thing they want to do is tell me, well, you
3 got to work with us. How am I going to work with
4 you all? Oh, we're going to send you to another
5 floor. Now, in that same shelter, sometimes the
6 elevators break down. My thing is, how you ... if I
7 can't make it up the first flight, how are you
8 going to send me to the next two flights? If I
9 can barely do it.

10 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I'll make sure
11 that we have your information before you leave,
12 and I will follow up, my office will follow up
13 with you, and we will work with whoever we need to
14 work to get you some help.

15 MS. LEVONNE JOHNSON: All right.
16 And I've talked about with HPD, you know, my
17 worker and the people there, they're trying to
18 help and they was, I thought they was going to
19 send my paper to the commissioner, but they sent
20 it to Pat Joyce of HPD, and yesterday she was
21 supposed to come, but she didn't, she sent her
22 representative, and nobody never gave me an answer
23 about, you know, my paper, and like they told me
24 to get a doctor's note, I got all ... I keep all my
25 doctor's papers and what not, I have nothing to

1
2 lie about. I got nine ... I take nine different
3 medicines, I have a machine, I have an asthma
4 machine, I have an oxygen machine that I sleep
5 with. Without sleeping with that, that's it. I
6 do not have my kids watch me. I got my daughter
7 playing nursemaid, like she's my mother. She has
8 to go to school and worry about herself, not
9 worrying about if mommy is going to drop dead or
10 not. My thirteen-year-old son that wants to stay,
11 that I can't even make go outside, because he's
12 worrying about if he's coming through the door,
13 mommy is gone. But then I sit here trying to work
14 hard to get into a home and I can't even do that.
15 But yeah, you don't want papers to be sent to the
16 commissioner, you want papers to be sent to you,
17 but here it is two or three weeks, and you haven't
18 even called nobody and tell them that you can give
19 me, making a session to give me emergency voucher.
20 But yet you got that position, you can squeeze
21 something out, it's every day that somebody gets
22 something. Like you know what, I'm going to make
23 a session, just give one more, why can't you give
24 me that? What's the holdup? It's either yes or
25 no. why is my papers, my files, still sitting on

1
2 your desk, and you're not saying one word, we'll
3 give you one? Why?

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you, Ms.
5 Johnson, for your testimony.

6 MS. NATALIE JOHNSON: My name is
7 Natalie Johnson, my mother is Levonne Johnson.
8 I'm a homeless full-time college student. After
9 hearing all of this, I may be 19, but it seems
10 like we're, homeless people are put in a category.
11 Anyone can be homeless, whether you're rich and
12 famous, a doctor, a Council person, anybody. I
13 can't go to school half the time because I have to
14 share my Metrocard with my mom, because my income
15 is based on financial aid in general. Without us
16 living in the shelter, I wouldn't even have gotten
17 financial aid. I've watched ... I've been in the
18 shelter process twice, when we first moved to New
19 York, because of domestic violence, and now
20 because of a fire that occurred when we weren't
21 even home, due to a negligent act.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Negligent.

23 MS. NATALIE JOHNSON: Thank you.
24 Of the management of our building. And I've been
25 taking care of my mom since I can remember. I

1
2 wonder what happens to my brother if something
3 happens to us. I stay sick, I'm the firstborn,
4 and I have asthma, I have juvenile rheumatoid
5 arthritis. So that place is cold, our windows
6 have been taped three times, which is a health
7 code violation, which I like to read, I'm a
8 business major. And it seems like I've been in
9 the HRA building more than the average John Doe.
10 Since I was 18, since I wasn't a student any more,
11 and I did independent study, due to the fact I
12 couldn't get to a computer very often to finish
13 high school in time, so I had to graduate six
14 months later. I'm finally in college, and I still
15 can't get there. I've missed classes because I
16 have to go to HRA to meet their requirements, but
17 I still get no answers. I have to attend the Back
18 to Work program, because I wasn't ... I went this
19 summer and I also didn't have a job. But once I
20 completed, I was on the last day of my five-day
21 introduction period, I went to see my worker for
22 the first time, and she told me I couldn't
23 complete the program because my case had been
24 closed. So I went through all of that just to
25 have to go back to HRA to figure out what

1
2 happened. And now, because I'm in college, I
3 don't receive public assistance at all any more,
4 even though I'm on my mom's case, because I'm in a
5 four-year school. They're basically telling me as
6 a person, I'm even counting that I'm a minority,
7 that I need to be in a two-year school to get
8 money from them. I'm trying to better myself to
9 take care of my mom and my little brother, but I
10 can't get anything. All I have at the moment is
11 Medicare, and they keep sending me back and forth
12 saying I'm not complying, I'm not complying. I'm
13 doing everything I have to do, but I even gave
14 them a list of my schedule, and they still give me
15 days to come in on days I have classes. Everyone
16 who has been in school knows that a professor does
17 not make ... teachers do not like to repeat
18 anything. If I can't get there, what am I
19 supposed to do? I'm on the verge of being kicked
20 out of the SEED program in my school because I do
21 not meet ... I'm not a full-time student at the
22 moment. I lost ... I haven't had my school benefits
23 in two months, so I've missed almost two months of
24 school so far because of not having a way to get
25 there, and not having enough clothes to be warm.

1
2 I watched my little brother cry because he's tired
3 of being cold. I'm anemic, I'm cold in that
4 place. I sit up all night, because of rats going,
5 crawling through the wall, crawling through my
6 clothes, under the bed. And because of the reason
7 we moved here, domestic violence, I sleep light.
8 I'm a very light sleeper, and I just can't think
9 about, if something happened to my mom, where does
10 that leave me? My little brother has a father,
11 where am I going? I'm 19, which will mean I will
12 have to go back and start the whole shelter system
13 all over again, which is what they're so-called
14 trying to ... HomeBase is saying they're trying to
15 prevent, they're doing the study to prevent it.
16 What about us who are already there? I'm 19 and
17 don't understand too much yet, but that made no
18 sense to me at all. I've been a business major
19 since high school, and they're not doing anything,
20 I've been with my mom through all of the ... I go to
21 her doctor's appointments, I try to cook, clean.
22 I can't stay in that place due to the fact I can't
23 get any homework done. I'm going from a 3.0
24 average from the summer course I took to God knows
25 what, due to the fact I can't get to school at

1
2 all. Because if I go to school on a day my mom
3 needs to go somewhere to see about apartment
4 stuff, I have to figure out which one is the more
5 important, and right about now it's my mom and my
6 little brother being somewhere safe where I know,
7 if I go out, my little brother has keys to be
8 there. He doesn't have to wait, I don't have to
9 stay home on a school day if my brother is sick
10 and my mom has to go someplace, because he's a
11 minor. It's like I'm looked at as I have no say
12 in it because I'm not an adult, my mom is the head
13 of the case, but it's affecting ... people don't get
14 it, that is affecting children most of all. I've
15 watched people bounce, I watch my friends complain
16 about the little stuff, but they don't understand
17 how it is to not have something that's yours. I
18 sleep in the kitchen/living room with my little
19 brother. And I'm 19 years old, I have no privacy
20 whatsoever. And it gets harder and harder, it's
21 like I can't speak the way I want to, I can't be
22 comfortable. I have to watch out for the guards
23 who want ... who are sometimes very inappropriate.
24 It's like I can't come in ... like I've almost
25 gotten mugged right around the corner from where I

1 live, and I don't feel safe to go in there.
2 They're not going to do anything, the guards are
3 not always there. We have to be buzzed in three
4 different doors. The longest I stayed outside a
5 gate was 15 minutes in the winter, just to get
6 inside the first door, the first gate. You then
7 have to wait for the next one, and the next one.
8 And it's like I have things to do, I want to go
9 inside. The web is not ... I'm supposed to do the
10 web program, but I couldn't, due to the fact that
11 I'm a student. But since now I'm not considered a
12 full-time student yet, I might be called again to
13 do that, and it's frustrating. I'm ... I want to be
14 an entrepreneur, I want to do all types of
15 businesses, even ... I want to give back to my
16 community, give people, give the things that I
17 didn't have. And it seems like they're making it
18 harder due to the fact that I can't even attend
19 class regularly. My professors are wondering
20 what's going on with me, and it's hard to explain
21 it if I can't even show up. My semester is over
22 next week, and I have a feeling that I didn't even
23 reach the C-'s that I'm supposed to be at a level
24 with, and it makes me feel bad. It already took
25

1
2 me a whole extra year, I graduated, I was supposed
3 to graduate at 17, it took me a whole extra year
4 just to finally get there. I'm the first in my
5 family to attend college, and I can't even be
6 there. Now, from February ... from now to February,
7 I have to figure out what I'm going to do, or I'm
8 going to have to do it all over again. And it's
9 hard, and ...

10 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you for
11 your testimony. Hopefully we'll be able to get
12 you guys some help and alleviate some of the
13 stress that you're going through.

14 MS. DANES: Ms. Palma, I just
15 wanted to say something about the Board of Ed and
16 what Bloomberg is trying to pass a policy of
17 children missing school, and it goes straight into
18 Family Court, which brings out an ACS case, and
19 homeless families are targeted for ACS cases, and
20 I've seen children removed unfoundedly, because
21 they don't meet the income requirements and
22 because they are in the shelter system. So that
23 is unfair. When a family is being placed from one
24 shelter to another shelter to another shelter,
25 it's also affecting my children. My daughter

1
2 cried and screamed, did not want to go into the
3 shelter. So that's something that needs to be
4 addressed before the Bloomberg administration, so
5 we can prevent ACS cases.

6 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I have had
7 conversations with Commissioner Mattingly from ACS
8 to address some of those issues that you're
9 raising, so we're discussing those issues.

10 MS. DANES: Okay, good.

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Anyone else
12 that's going to testify?

13 MS. BRILLIANT: Hi, my name is
14 Linda Brilliant, and this situation is new to me,
15 because I live in a normal building, since 1980
16 with my parents. My father passed away and my two
17 sisters moved out, and I was living with my
18 mother. And my mother would work at night, but
19 the landlord would harass us. He has a son, since
20 2005 non-stop he's been harassing my mother and I.
21 they watch when we're home alone to do certain
22 stuff. My mother would work at night, and as soon
23 as my mother would leave, the water would start
24 dropping from the ceiling, like a river. I would
25 go to the super, he would slam the door in my

1
2 face. I would go back, he slammed the door in my
3 face again. And finally I had to call 311, the
4 Fire Department came and they shut off the water.
5 But you can't really tell if they're doing it on
6 purpose, which they are. And about two times I
7 came home, I found my clothes were wet. The first
8 time I said to myself, maybe I put them in there,
9 you know, not knowingly. And then the second time
10 I found out it was wet again. And it's a one-
11 bedroom apartment, but we use it as a two-bedroom,
12 I'm in one room, my mother is in the other room,
13 and we constantly have to move things around,
14 because at a certain spot I wouldn't keep my bed
15 there because I didn't want my bed to get wet,
16 because I have eczema and now I have asthma. And
17 what this mess are doing is that one time he came
18 to the door at night, he didn't press the bell, he
19 said, "This is Mr. Henry". Why are you coming to
20 the door at night? You know?

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Linda, are you
22 receiving any subsidy funds for being in the
23 apartment?

24 MS. BRILLIANT: No, it's a regular
25 apartment. I don't know the word, the meaning,

1
2 you know, the different terms, but I've never been
3 on public assistance before.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So you're not
5 on public assistance?

6 MS. BRILLIANT: Now I am.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay.

8 MS. BRILLIANT: Now I am. Because
9 we were being harassed. I would come home, I
10 found my mother, she lost her voice. I asked her
11 what's the matter. The son and another guy came,
12 told her they were coming in to fix something.
13 One went in the kitchen with her, and one went in
14 the bedroom and started taking pictures.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So I'm just
16 trying to understand, yeah, I'm just trying to
17 understand like, you know, what we were discussing
18 here was the HomeBase program and- -

19 MS. BRILLIANT: (Interposing) No,
20 I'm not any of those, but now I'm heading that
21 way. Because I couldn't stand that apartment.
22 When I was- -

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
24 So you're looking to move out of that- -

25 MS. BRILLIANT: (Interposing) I'm

1
2 going to get to the point. Because they would
3 look to see when one of us is home alone to harass
4 us, okay? like I was telling you that my ... they
5 said they were coming to fix something. One went
6 in the kitchen and one went in the bedroom and
7 started taking pictures. When my mother saw that,
8 she ran after him. And then when I came, I saw
9 she lost her voice, and the staircase I called
10 this lawyer I know, and this white-shirt cop came
11 and said to me, come down here before he drags me
12 down the steps. The lawyer said to me to tell him
13 that I'm speaking with my lawyer. That stopped.
14 Another time I was in the apartment by myself, I
15 was already getting ready to go out, I was also in
16 school, and the son named Kenneth would start
17 banging on the door. I didn't open the door, and
18 I called the lawyer. And then suddenly the lights
19 were turned, cut off. The lawyer told me to call
20 311, but the son was banging on the door with the
21 police. Why are you banging on somebody's door
22 with the police trying to get in? we've lived
23 there since 1980. The man never made any decent
24 repairs. All he ever did was paint the walls and
25 that's it. Okay? we had to fix the floor, my

1
2 father put something on the bathroom floor. If
3 you go now and you look at the thing on the
4 bathroom floor, you see how the bathroom floor.
5 There's animals, little creatures, underneath,
6 okay? And it was constant harassment, him
7 grabbing my hand in the (inaudible), grabbing my
8 hand in the street. He just ... I was walking in
9 the street, he just grabbed my hand and put a key
10 in my hand and said, give it to my mother. He
11 would ... when my mother is not home, I don't let
12 him inside the apartment. He was pushing me at
13 the door, I had a phone in my hand, I called the
14 police, and when the police came, they just took a
15 report. Before when they were crossing the line,
16 I called the police, the police said ... when I
17 opened the door to make a complaint, the police
18 said, take them to court to throw them out.

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Before you were
20 on public assistance, were- -

21 MS. BRILLIANT: I was working.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You were
23 working, your mother was working?

24 MS. BRILLIANT: Yeah, my mother was
25 working, I was working during the weekend and I

1

2 would go to school during the week.

3 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So you've been
4 in this apartment since 1980?

5 MS. BRILLIANT: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You were
7 working, there was no harassment. The harassment
8 started when you got on public assistance, and- -

9 MS. BRILLIANT: (Interposing) It's
10 always been something, that he would never want to
11 fix anything. When my mother would speak up, it's
12 like she didn't have a right to speak. It's like
13 he's over people. And if you speak to anybody who
14 lives in the building, they will tell you the same
15 thing, that he comes whenever he feels like making
16 repairs.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, so what
18 I'm going to do is I'm going to make sure that you
19 get your information before we leave, and we can
20 follow, you know, follow up with you from my
21 office and you can actually have time to like show
22 us what's going on and explain to us what's going
23 on?

24 MS. BRILLIANT: Can I tell you
25 another thing? On December 24th, what he would do

1
2 with that, I'm coming down the street, he would
3 get out of his car. I knew that was him getting
4 out of his car, so I stand at the middle of the
5 street, the block, I stand at the middle of the
6 block to see what his intentions were. When he's
7 walking towards the building, but he didn't see me
8 coming, so he turned, he turned back coming at the
9 corner, looking at me, holding onto his cell
10 phone. And on December twenty something, December
11 20, I saw him doing the same thing. I went back
12 towards Flatbush, and I went to a store and I
13 stayed there. On December 24th, he came inside the
14 apartment, he grabbed me, he grabbed my face, he
15 was choking me, he sent me to the floor.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Did you call
17 the police?

18 MS. BRILLIANT: I'm not finished
19 yet.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I just want to
21 know if you called the police, you should have
22 called the police.

23 MS. BRILLIANT: I have to ... he sent
24 me to the floor, he was squeezing my neck. When
25 my arms dropped, he went to open my legs. When he

1
2 went to open my legs, I called help. When I
3 called help, he ran out of the apartment. I'm not
4 going to tell you any more details, but I went, I
5 called a neighbor. I had a ... when I went out, I
6 had a knife- -

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
8 Okay, I'm going to follow up with you from my
9 office. I don't think you should continue, you
10 know, telling me this story on public record.
11 I'll follow up with you separate and apart from
12 this hearing.

13 MS. NELSON: Should I speak from
14 here, or should I speak from there?

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: No, I need you
16 to speak into the mic, introduce yourself and
17 speak into the mic.

18 MS. NELSON: Good afternoon
19 everyone, my name is Aminsia Nelson, I'm just
20 going to go briefly about who I am. I've been in
21 this country like for 27 years. I live on Long
22 Island in a beautiful home. Why I'm saying this
23 is because it's such an (inaudible) to see how
24 people live in the shelter. My school is directly
25 across the street right here, Pace University.

1
2 I'm in school for my doctorate degree. I'm here
3 to support these families who are in shelters.
4 Every time when I look around in the news it hurts
5 me in a way to know that it's always not only
6 people getting put in the street and people have
7 nowhere to live, it's just families that they're
8 putting out in the street. And I believe that
9 there should be a law for anybody who runs for any
10 congressional seat, they should live at least one
11 year in a shelter and see how it feels, so that
12 when they come out on the ballot to speak for the
13 people, they would know exactly how it feels. I
14 have never been there myself, but I'm running for
15 legislator on Long Island where I live at right
16 now, and I was a part of Bill Thompson's campaign
17 manager when he was running against Bloomberg.
18 And I'm also an activist on Long Island, and yes,
19 I'm also a cardiologist. I'm 35 years old, I got
20 three beautiful children. My son is 17 years old,
21 he's going to be 17, he goes to college part-time,
22 and my daughter she's seven and my other son is
23 nine. And I work extremely hard for everything I
24 want, and yes, the sisters were right when they
25 said when everybody leaves they go home, but they

1
2 go back to the shelter. This is something that
3 needs to be addressed that why is it that
4 everybody is talking about shelter, shelter,
5 shelter, people is not- -

6 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
7 Okay.

8 MS. NELSON: It's the system
9 providing jobs for the people in the shelter,
10 because if you don't provide jobs for the people,
11 it's going to lead to poverty. And then the next
12 thing is you have addiction. Some people when
13 they get very stressed and they have a lot of
14 money, they will blow it out, because they have no
15 mutual understanding of how the future is going to
16 be like. The reason why I get involved with all
17 these stories is because I always said to myself
18 I'm next, you're next, anybody can be in poverty,
19 anybody can be in a shelter. And we should not
20 sit here and criticize or belittle or talk down at
21 anybody. Everybody needs to get involved,
22 according to how society, with this fake recession
23 that's going on. They want everybody, and mostly
24 a lot of people, especially the minority people,
25 to be homeless, and certain people to be on stuff.

1
2 But it's wrong. Everybody needs to speak out,
3 everybody needs to know what's going on, and
4 everybody needs to start getting involved with
5 something in their community and stop acting like
6 we are aristocratic or we're better from everybody
7 else, because we are not. Because when the table
8 turns and when the shoe is on the other foot, how
9 would you feel if that were you? How would you
10 feel? Tell me how would you feel? It irks me.
11 This sister right here, she lives in a shelter,
12 and was down to the jail house, because the same
13 shelter she was in, the landlord kicked her in her
14 back, and put her in jail. And I had to go get
15 her out of jail. This sister back here, the
16 landlord tried to rape her, and tomorrow she's
17 going to court for that. These two families I
18 just met, but it doesn't matter. Why are all
19 these things always happening to us? Who is
20 behind this? I'm asking everybody today, who is
21 behind all these scams?

22 FEMALE VOICE: That's right.

23 MS. NELSON: Who is behind this and
24 who is getting paid under the table, just like
25 when you was asking that man that was in here,

1
2 that (inaudible) man that was in here, he was
3 talking about 200 this and 200 that, but yes, he's
4 pretending he's pushing it forward, and then he
5 puts the rest in his pocket. And I don't care,
6 because I see money all the time it goes around
7 the table. It's so sad, the majority of our
8 children are going to have to go through it,
9 because our children do not have a future. What
10 they have is either a jail cell or shelter. And
11 we have to put a stop to this nonsense. And if
12 you can't put a stop to it, you can ... I can give
13 you my personal phone number, and I will come and
14 speak out. Because Obama, Barack Obama, the
15 President of the United States, he knows me
16 personally. I speak out when I have to speak out,
17 and you probably know me. I was the one who did
18 the (inaudible) rally, shut it down, fifty
19 bullets. Reverend Sharpton knows my position.
20 Okay?

21 FEMALE VOICE: Okay, fine.

22 MS. NELSON: When it comes to
23 speaking out for the people, I'm for the people, I
24 don't care what color it is. People need to stop
25 doing these things to people, because people have

1
2 feelings, and people don't understand, the poor
3 people are the ones who make the rich people have
4 money. And it hurts. So what are we going to do
5 about it? Are we going to stay here and just look
6 about it, and then go home to a beautiful palace
7 and say, come on children, come into your bed?
8 Everybody says, what are we going to do about it.
9 How can I work with you, my sister? What's your
10 name, sister Annabel?

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We ... I tell
12 you- -

13 MS. NELSON: (Interposing) Your
14 name is up there, your name is Palma?

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Yes, my name is
16 Palma, I just want to make sure your name is
17 Nelson. That's exactly what we're doing here,
18 trying to figure out how we can work with DHS to
19 prevent things that are- -

20 MS. NELSON: (Interposing) Can I
21 ask you another question? Why is it that we've
22 always got to wait for the other sessions to take
23 place before the people speak? I think the people
24 should speak first, and let the people afterward
25 voice their opinion as to where the money is going

1
2 out. Because these are the people who are getting
3 \$40,000- -

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
5 Ms. Nelson, I've been in this Council since 2004-
6 -

7 MS. NELSON: (Interposing)
8 Beautiful.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And I've always
10 ... I've often asked myself that too, but that's
11 just the process, the protocol that it is. We
12 need to make sure, you know, we need to bring the
13 administration in. We need, you know, to present
14 them with questions. We need to hear their
15 testimony. I think today, you know, in my view
16 it's a bit frustrating, but we got to hear, you
17 know, something ... the public got to hear, you
18 know, the process that we go through. So that's
19 just the process that's in place. I mean, we need
20 to make- -

21 MS. NELSON: (Interposing) If we
22 could change it, if we could change it- -

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)
24 If we need to make changes. (crosstalk)

25 MS. NELSON: Because we the people.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We can change
3 it, so- -

4 MS. NELSON: (Interposing) We are
5 the people who put the people in place, so we can
6 change it.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But I think
8 that, you know, it's important that, you know, we
9 need to make sure that they're here to have us ask
10 questions and raise concerns.

11 MS. NELSON: Do you need my phone
12 number? I put it on camera, it doesn't matter to
13 me, I don't care, I can give you my phone number,
14 because this is something that needs to be
15 addressed. And believe me, there's a majority of
16 our people are going to be homeless, and the plan
17 was, and the plan is, for the new world order and
18 the secret society and the Illuminatis, all these
19 people who are up in place and the Freemasons, all
20 these people who are up in place, who's taking the
21 poor people and taking advantage of them. Do you
22 get what I'm trying to say?

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We are going to
24 continue to make sure that we work with this
25 administration to reduce the population of

1
2 homeless people that are in our shelters, and that
3 no one has to, you know- -

4 MS. NELSON: (Interposing) Why pay
5 \$40,000 a month for one family to stay, when they
6 could just put them in an apartment?

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: ... be in
8 shelter, you know, one more night that needs to
9 be. I want to thank everyone who came to testify.

10 MS. NELSON: And don't tuberculosis
11 is going around inside our shelters.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I would like to
13 thank everyone who came to testify, and I'm going
14 to adjourn this meeting.

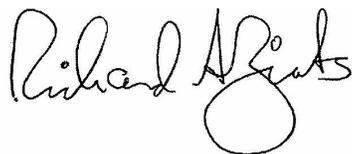
15 MS. DANES: And I want to thank
16 Annabel Palma for staying, you're always there at
17 the last minute, she is. She stayed through the
18 whole thing.

19 MS. NELSON: Thank you very much
20 for giving me the opportunity to speak, Ms.
21 Annabel Palma. Thank you.

22
23
24

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Richard A. Ziats, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature _____

Date _____ December 25, 2010 _____