

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

and

COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

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March 27, 2017

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B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin  
Chairperson

Laurie A. Cumbo  
Chairperson

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## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Steven Banks  
HRA/DHS Commissioner

Grace Bonilla  
HRA Administrator

Ellen Levine  
Department of Social Services Chief Program  
Planning and Financial Management Officer

Jennifer Yeaw  
Chief of Staff at HRA

David Hansell  
New York City Administrator for Children's  
Services

Eric Brettschneider  
First Deputy Commissioner at ACS

Susan Nuccio  
Deputy Commissioner of Financial Services at ACS

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Felipe Franco  
Deputy Commissioner of Youth and Family Justice

Tracie Robinson  
Human Services Council

Nancy Rankin  
Community Service Society of New York

Danette Rivera  
JITA Community Outreach Center Jamaica, Queens

Rashida Latef  
West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Rachel Sabella  
Food Bank for NYC

Cheryl Rozinski  
Good Shepherd Services

Robert DeLeon  
ATI Reentry Coalition, CASES

Fiodna O'Grady  
Samaritans of New York

Sophine Charles  
COFCCA

Catherine Trapani  
Homeless Services United

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Reed Vreeland  
Housing Works

Zoma Cruz [sp?]  
Project Hospitality

Annie Garneva  
NYC Employment and Training Coalition

Katherine Gerald  
Voices of Women Organizing Project/CWOP

Chelsea Wilson  
CWOP

Estelita Baez [sp?]  
CWOP

Emily Caphlan [sp?]  
CWOP



2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning,  
3 everybody. I'm Stephen Levin, Chair of the Council's  
4 Committee on General Welfare. I want to thank you  
5 all for joining us today for the Fiscal 2018  
6 Preliminary Budget hearing being held for the General  
7 Welfare Committee. Today we will hear testimony from  
8 the three social services agencies here in New York  
9 City, the Human Resources Administration, otherwise  
10 known as HRA and Department of Social Services, the  
11 Administration for Children's Services, otherwise  
12 known as ACS, and the Department of Homeless  
13 Services, DHS, on each of their proposed Fiscal 2018  
14 budgets. The City's Fiscal 2018 budget totals 86.4  
15 billion dollars of which 14.2 billion dollars funds  
16 HRA, ACS and DHS, or roughly 16.5 percent of the  
17 City's total Expense Budget for Fiscal 18. We will  
18 be asking each of these agencies how new needs,  
19 various funding adjustments and new policies in their  
20 Fiscal 2018 Preliminary Budget will impact their  
21 ability to serve and enable them to render the best  
22 possible service to the most vulnerable populations  
23 in New York City. We will begin with testimony from  
24 the Human Resources Administration, also known as the  
25 Department of Social Services. HRA provides cash

2 assistance, food stamps, HIV/AIDS support services,  
3 also referred as HASA, and many other public  
4 assistance programs to aid low-income New Yorkers.

5 The services that HRA provides are essential for  
6 many, many people and many families. Following the  
7 90-day review of the Department of Homeless Services  
8 last year, HRA is working in partnership with the

9 Department of Homeless Services to address the  
10 conspicuous current day issue of homelessness. HRA  
11 is in charge of the Homelessness Prevention programs  
12 which include the anti-eviction and tenant support  
13 legal services and rental assistance programs for the  
14 homeless that work in two ways: helping at-risk New  
15 Yorkers avoid homelessness, and moving individuals  
16 and families from shelter into permanent housing.

17 HRA's proposed Fiscal 2018 Preliminary Budget totals  
18 9.83 billion dollars. When compared to its Fiscal  
19 2017 Adopted Budget, HRA's Fiscal 18 Preliminary  
20 Budget increased by 70 million dollars. HRA's Fiscal  
21 2018 budget reflects commitments in homelessness  
22 prevention, domestic violence services, improved  
23 outreach and public engagement to connect more New  
24 Yorkers in need of services, and creating jobs for  
25 homeless clients. HRA is enhancing funding for

2 rental assistance programs, continuing with landlord  
3 incentive programs to encourage more rental  
4 assistance uptake and assuming DHS contracts and  
5 programs like Homebase within its budget. While I am  
6 very hopeful rental assistance community-based  
7 prevention programs will reduce the number of New  
8 Yorkers who are in shelters or at risk of becoming  
9 homeless, the Council needs insight on how these  
10 programs are performing. We are also requesting and  
11 update on how HRA is planning the DHS restructuring  
12 and what shifts and movements in headcount, contracts  
13 and programs have been completed up to this point.  
14 Each year, over 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on food  
15 pantries and soup kitchens to feed themselves and  
16 their families. The current level of SNAP benefits  
17 are insufficient and there remains uncertainty from  
18 the current Federal Administration surrounding the  
19 SNAP program. Further, the implications of the  
20 waiver for able-bodied adults without dependents,  
21 otherwise known as ABAWD, timing out are also unclear  
22 at this point. I'm very concerned further reductions  
23 in Emergency Food Assistance Program, EFAP, which is  
24 reflected in today's Preliminary Budget, would put  
25 increased strain on the City's Emergency Food



2 Assistance Program. Just to be clear, that's a  
3 decrease from the Adopted 2017 budget. During this  
4 hearing I would like to hear how HRA plans to address  
5 the aforementioned issues and others that the City  
6 faces at this point. Before I welcome the  
7 Commissioner and his team, I would like to thank the  
8 committee staff for their work: Nameera Nuzhat,  
9 Legislative Finance Analyst, Dohini Sompura, Unit  
10 Head, Andrea Vazquez [sp?], Counsel for the  
11 Committee, Tanya Cyrus [sp?], Policy Analyst for the  
12 Committee, as well as my staff, Julie Barrow [sp?]  
13 and Jonathan Bouche [sp?], and Deputy Finance  
14 Director, Regina Poreda [sp?] Ryan, and Latonya  
15 McKinney [sp?], our Finance Director. I also want to  
16 acknowledge former Council Member John Liu who is  
17 here with his class. So, I want to welcome them.  
18 Then at this point I would like to turn it over to  
19 HRA Commissioner Steve Banks, and with that I'll ask  
20 you to-- anyone that's going to be testifying to  
21 please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell  
22 the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth and  
23 to answer Council Members' questions honestly?

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I do.  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

3 I also want to acknowledge members of the committee  
4 at this point, just Barry Grodenchik from Queens,  
5 member of the committee, Barry Grodenchik from  
6 Queens, and with that Commissioner Banks may testify.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good morning. You  
8 have our testimony for the record, and also we've got  
9 a Power Point. I'm going to summarize the testimony,  
10 and appreciate that this part of the day is a focus  
11 on HRA's budget, and then following that we'll have a  
12 focus on the Department of Homeless Services' budget.  
13 I want to thank the General Welfare Committee and the  
14 Chair Steve Levin for giving us this opportunity to  
15 testify today about the Human Resources  
16 Administration's budget and our continuing work to  
17 move forward with reforms of policies and procedures.  
18 My name is Steven Banks and I am the Commissioner of  
19 the New York City Department of Social Services which  
20 oversees both the Human Resources Administration and  
21 the Department of Homeless Services. Joining me today  
22 are HRA's newly appointed Administrator, Grace  
23 Bonilla, the Department of Social Services Chief  
24 Program and Planning and Financial Management  
25 Officer, Ellen Levine, Executive Deputy Commissioner

2 for Finance Erin Villari, and Chief of Staff Jennifer  
3 Yeaw. Under the integrated management structure  
4 implemented following the 90-day comprehensive  
5 operational review of the City's homeless programs to  
6 ensure services are delivered as efficiently and  
7 effectively as possible, in my capacity as the DSS  
8 Commissioner, we appointed Grace Bonilla as the  
9 administrator for HRA, who reports directly to me.  
10 In her capacity as Administrator, Ms. Bonilla  
11 oversees core HRA programs and services, including  
12 Cash Assistance, SNAP food stamps, Employment  
13 Services, Medicaid and Health Insurance Access, Child  
14 Support, Homelessness Prevention, Rental Assistance,  
15 Homebase, and Rehousing Services, Legal Services,  
16 Homecare, Adult Protective Services, Domestic  
17 Violence Services, Disaster Services, and HASA. As  
18 the nation's largest social services district, the  
19 New York City Department of Social Services provides  
20 key supports to low-income and working New Yorkers;  
21 serves over three million individuals annually.  
22 Creating an integrated reporting structure for both  
23 HRA and DHS is providing a more effective day-to-day  
24 management structure and a unified mission across  
25 agencies. Under this integrated management structure

2 that we announced last April, the following are now  
3 shared services across both HRA and DHS: Counsel and  
4 Contracts, Information Technology or IT, Program  
5 Accountability and Audits, Communications and  
6 External Affairs, Human Resources, Infoline, Finance,  
7 Performance Management, Research, and Policy and  
8 Planning as well as IDNYC. Since the adoption of the  
9 FY 17 budget, HRA has come before the Council on a  
10 number of occasions to testify at hearings concerning  
11 the Office of Civil Justice, Three Quarter Housing,  
12 out of school and out of work youth, Supportive  
13 Housing, and hunger. Each of these hearings allowed  
14 us an opportunity to provide detailed updates to the  
15 Council on the extensive work across HRA's multiple  
16 programs aimed at: Providing supports such as SNAP  
17 food stamps and cash assistance, public health  
18 insurance, and emergency grants and eviction  
19 prevention services for working families to remain in  
20 the workforce when their jobs don't pay enough to  
21 cover basic expenses such as rent; assisting New  
22 Yorkers struggling to return to or enter the  
23 workforce by providing a variety of employment-  
24 related services, including access to education and  
25 job skills training, help with job search and

2 placement, and temporary cash assistance; and  
3 providing a safety net for those permanently or  
4 temporarily unable to work. Among those who do  
5 receive cash assistance, half are children, and  
6 nearly half of the adults are not subject to work  
7 requirements under federal and state law because they  
8 are seniors or people with permanent or temporary  
9 disabilities who have barriers to employment. In  
10 addition to cash assistance, HRA provides key support  
11 through the following programs: 3.5 million New  
12 Yorkers receiving Medicaid through HRA or the new  
13 State health insurance exchange; 1.7 million New  
14 Yorkers receiving SNAP food assistance and millions  
15 of meals served through food pantries and community  
16 kitchens; 710,000 New Yorkers receiving home energy  
17 assistance every winter, which the Trump  
18 Administration has proposed to eliminate; and 110,000  
19 receiving one-time cash assistance each year to  
20 prevent evictions and utility shutoffs or provide  
21 assistance with other emergencies. At HRA, we are  
22 targeting services to those most in need and most at  
23 risk. We invested in significant outreach and media  
24 campaigns to ensure that information about prevention  
25 services and other supports is making its way to New

2 Yorkers in need. We've made significant investments  
3 to streamline and expand our outreach efforts under  
4 the Homelessness Prevention Administration. Through  
5 our comprehensive prevention measures, since the  
6 summer of 2014, we have successfully: Reinstated and  
7 expanded rental assistance and rehousing programs  
8 that have helped nearly 55,500 New Yorkers move out  
9 of shelter or avoid homelessness; Funded a tenfold  
10 increase in the investment in tenant legal services  
11 resulting in 27 percent of tenants receiving legal  
12 representation up from just one percent with 14,000  
13 fewer evictions allowing more than 40,000 people to  
14 remain in their homes; Expanded the use of emergency  
15 grants to keep New Yorkers in their homes. In  
16 calendar year 2016, HRA provided rent arrears to  
17 58,100 households at a cost of \$214 million, and  
18 between January 2014 and December 2016 a total of  
19 more than 161,000 households received assistance,  
20 representing a 24 percent increase in cases compared  
21 to 2013. The increase in spending resulted from  
22 increased monthly rents families and individuals have  
23 to pay, additional households being found eligible  
24 due to the increasing gap between rents and income,  
25 and enhanced targeting of these services to prevent

2 homelessness through partnerships with community-  
3 based organizations. We've moved the Homebase  
4 program from DHS to HRA to enhance our coordination  
5 of homelessness prevention services and expanded from  
6 11 to 16 providers operating at 23 locations across  
7 the five boroughs and doubled the program's funding.  
8 As a result of these increases Homebase reached  
9 25,632 households in FY 16, a 115 percent increase of  
10 households served compared to FY 14; and we reached  
11 more than 194,000 New Yorkers through the Tenant  
12 Support Unit, which launched 18 months ago to conduct  
13 proactive outreach on critical services to prevent  
14 homelessness among renters facing housing-related  
15 problems. HRA also helps thousands of the most  
16 vulnerable New Yorkers, by providing shelter and  
17 supportive services to survivors of domestic  
18 violence, support for people living with HIV,  
19 protective services for adults unable to care for  
20 themselves and home care services for seniors and  
21 individuals with physical or mental disabilities, as  
22 well as the most expansive legal services nationwide  
23 to prevent evictions, stop the harassment of tenants,  
24 assist immigrant New Yorkers, and provide legal help  
25 for persons with disabilities and seniors. Let me

2 talk about now the January 18 Plan Overview. The HRA  
3 FY 17 budget as of the January 2018 Plan is \$9.7  
4 billion, \$7.3 billion City tax levy, in FY 17,  
5 increasing to \$9.8 billion, \$7.5 billion City tax  
6 levy, in FY 18. The primary reason for the increase  
7 of \$124 million between FY 17 and FY 18 is a 17  
8 million dollar increase in 2018 compared to 2017 for  
9 the full expansion of Domestic Violence Shelter which  
10 includes 300 emergency beds and 400 Tier II units. To  
11 date, 150 of the emergency beds have already been  
12 brought online with an additional 67 in the pipeline  
13 pending State approval; \$30 million in total funds,  
14 \$22 million City tax levy, for consolidation of  
15 former DHS functions into DSS; \$50 million for  
16 preventive Homebase services and Aftercare that is  
17 transferred to HRA from DHS in 2018; increases of \$15  
18 million in total funds and \$12 million in City tax  
19 levy for additional costs of rental assistance in  
20 2018; a \$30 million increase between 17 and 18 for  
21 supportive housing operations; the net increase in  
22 City tax levy is due to revenue savings in FY 17 that  
23 do not recur in FY 18. This includes \$42 million in  
24 the January Plan and \$70 million in the November  
25 Plan. Funding increases are slightly offset by one-



2 time Council funding. The January Plan increased the  
3 FY 17 budget by \$18 million but produced \$32 million  
4 in City tax levy savings as the net result of the  
5 revenue savings initiatives in the November and  
6 January Plans. The FY 18 budget increased by \$24  
7 million, \$10 million City tax levy; 75 positions were  
8 added in FY 17, and 70 positions were added in FY 18.

9 Let me now summarize the January Plan New Needs.

10 First: job training program to replace Work  
11 Experience, WEP, at the Department of Citywide  
12 Administrative Services, DCAS, and the New York  
13 Police Department, NYPD. Effective December 31st,  
14 2016, HRA has eliminated the Work Experience  
15 Programs, WEP, and replaced it with other work  
16 activity initiatives, including additional Job  
17 Training, JTP slots. In addition to JTP slots at the  
18 Parks Department and the Department of Sanitation  
19 which were already funded, DCAS and NYPD will acquire  
20 105 slots to serve up to a total of 210 cash  
21 assistance participants annually. The annual  
22 increase in funding for this initiative is based on  
23 future increases for these jobs as a result of the  
24 increased minimum wage requirements. Legal  
25 Initiatives: Action NYC is funded at \$1 million in

2 total City funds in FY 18 and out-years. This is an  
3 initiative to fund immigration legal services at  
4 Health & Hospitals facilities. Other Initiatives:  
5 Public Engagement: 80 headcount and \$11.8 million in  
6 total funds and City funds in FY 17; \$13.8 million in  
7 total funds and City funds in FY 18 and out-years.  
8 The Public Engagement Unit identifies and executes  
9 proactive strategies to connect more New Yorkers to  
10 key city services. Relying heavily on data  
11 analytics, the use of new technologies, and large-  
12 scale outreach tactics, this unit identifies New  
13 Yorkers in need of assistance and assists them  
14 navigating and obtaining city services. Thrive NYC:  
15 10 headcount; \$380,000 total funds and City funds in  
16 FY 17; \$761,000 in total funds and City funds in FY  
17 18 and out-years. Thrive NYC conducts outreach to  
18 encourage Mental Health Well-being. Center for  
19 Economic Opportunity Evaluation: \$729,000 in total  
20 funds and City funds in FY 17 only. This funding was  
21 added to the budget to fund CEO to evaluate anti-  
22 poverty programs. Mayor Office to Combat Domestic  
23 Violence Expansion: \$309,000 in FY 17; \$658,000 City  
24 funds in FY 18, and \$255,000 City funds in FY 19 and  
25 out-years. MOCDV is expanding its Domestic Violence

2 Prevention and Education programming. HRA's Five-  
3 Year Capital Plan Budget of \$200 million includes:  
4 \$65 million for facilities and construction; \$116  
5 million for information technology, including  
6 development related to Benefits Reengineering; \$19  
7 million for telecommunications and other capital  
8 projects. The two pie charts in the power point  
9 we've provided to you each show how the percentage of  
10 spending by program area is currently allocated in  
11 each fiscal year. Now I want to update the Council  
12 on HRA reform initiatives in key program areas, first  
13 in homelessness prevention. As you know, and  
14 previously testified, we've adopted a Prevention  
15 First strategy that streamlines and focuses already  
16 successful initiatives recognizing the many benefits  
17 of keeping New Yorkers stably housed and in their  
18 communities. These proven models represent a  
19 comprehensive set of tools aimed at achieving better  
20 outcomes for those who are most at risk of eviction  
21 and homelessness in our city. Following the Mayor's  
22 90-day review of homeless services and programs,  
23 Homebase was moved to DHS to consolidate prevention  
24 programs as I described earlier. And we've released  
25 an RFP to expand Homebase prevention services further

2 in FY 18 and to include community-based Aftercare and  
3 other services. Legal Services: Earlier this month  
4 I testified before the Courts and Legal Services  
5 Committee in full detail concerning the Office of  
6 Civil Justice. That testimony can be found on HRA's  
7 website. In summary, in FY17, for the first time,  
8 New York City's overall investment in civil legal  
9 services for low-income City residents exceeds \$100  
10 million. This fiscal year, Mayoral programs  
11 exceeding \$83 million and City Council awards of  
12 nearly \$28 million fund free legal services for low-  
13 income New Yorkers across a range of areas including  
14 immigration, access to benefits, support for  
15 survivors of domestic violence, assistance for  
16 veterans, and anti-eviction legal services and other  
17 legal assistance for tenants in need. Specifically,  
18 the January 2018 Plan includes: 62.2 million dollars  
19 for legal services for tenants; \$11.2 million dollars  
20 for immigration legal assistance; \$2.1 million for  
21 civil legal services for seniors; \$1.9 million for  
22 legal services related to access to federal benefits  
23 such as SSI. In addition, in FY 17, HRA is  
24 overseeing \$24.4 million in funding added by the City  
25 Council for legal services. Together, the

2 Administration and the Council have invested 111  
3 million dollars in legal services for low-income New  
4 Yorkers with civil legal needs. No other city  
5 allocates even a small fraction of what New York City  
6 is committing to provide access to civil justice.

7 And last month, as the Mayor and the Speaker  
8 announced, we are continuing to build on our tenfold  
9 increased investment in tenant legal services as we  
10 implement over the next five years an unprecedented  
11 universal access to counsel program for all tenants  
12 facing eviction in Housing Court in New York City.

13 With this step, the City of New York becomes the  
14 first city in the United States to implement a  
15 universal access to counsel program for tenants in  
16 Housing Court, with the largest tenant legal services  
17 program anywhere in the country. Let me now talk  
18 about improving access to SNAP food stamps.

19 Currently, 1.7 million New Yorkers receive SNAP,  
20 including more than 650,000 children. Compared to a  
21 year ago, the SNAP caseload increased by 8,371 cases  
22 and 11,192 recipients. Of these nearly 1.7 million  
23 New Yorkers, more than 410,000 of them also receive  
24 Cash Assistance, an important safety net for children  
25 and adults. Many SNAP recipients are employed, but

their incomes are so low that they still qualify for SNAP benefits. This is why the increase in the minimum wage is essential to lifting New Yorkers out of poverty. Over the past three years, we have continued to implement reforms so that eligible New Yorkers can more easily apply, enroll, and recertify for this crucial benefit. In particular, we continue our work to optimize our systems to allow clients to apply and recertify for certain benefits and programs in a more efficient and accessible means online. Our goal is to ensure that every New Yorker who is eligible for SNAP has access to this work support and assistance to alleviate hunger. In January of this year, we testified in detail about our new and improved technology reforms. The goal of these reforms is aimed at removing real barriers to access thereby making it easier for clients not only to apply for benefits, but to recertify for benefits. Those benefits include enhancements to Access NYC. This website allows city residents to not only apply for SNAP online, but to submit SNAP recertification applications. The system now allows clients to access more information. Two new features, My Cases and My Documents were recently added. My Cases

2 displays a 12-month case history, benefits balance,  
3 case status, case members, recent payments,  
4 appointments, eligibility documents needed to be  
5 submitted to HRA, and an online budget request  
6 letter, as well as other case information. My  
7 Documents also records when eligibility documents a  
8 client submitted are added to the client's electronic  
9 file. Launching the HRA mobile app which allows  
10 clients to upload relevant documents instead of  
11 visiting a SNAP Center or a partnering community-  
12 based organization, or faxing or sending documents by  
13 postal mail. This year, HRA plans to build out a  
14 full HRA mobile app with additional features that  
15 provide SNAP and Cash Assistance client's access to  
16 their HRA cases online. Rather than using a  
17 computer, this will give clients the ability to use  
18 their smartphones or tablets to view case status and  
19 benefits issued, read electronic notices, see  
20 upcoming appointments, and receive text messages or  
21 email alerts about their case. Clients who need to  
22 submit documents will be able to see which have been  
23 requested from them, take pictures and upload the  
24 documents, and then view when they are added to their  
25 case file. Expanding self-service document scanning

2 areas at SNAP centers and community-based  
3 organizations: There are currently 15 SNAP centers  
4 and 92 community-based organizations where clients  
5 can quickly and easily submit documents  
6 electronically. Twelve job centers now have scanners  
7 and 10 job centers have self-service kiosks.  
8 Providing self-service PC terminals at all but one of  
9 HRA's SNAP Centers: These terminals allow clients to  
10 use the ACCESS NYC portal to complete and submit SNAP  
11 applications and re-certifications without waiting.  
12 Implementing On-demand interviews citywide: We also  
13 rolled-out on-demand interviews citywide, which allow  
14 clients to conduct their SNAP recertification  
15 applications at their convenience, rather than the  
16 old system of waiting for a call during a four-hour  
17 window, or having to come into a center and wait for  
18 an interview. This month, the current average wait  
19 time for an on-demand interview is just a few  
20 minutes. On Friday it was about a minute and a half.  
21 As an additional enhancement, we plan to introduce  
22 on-demand telephone interviews for new SNAP  
23 applicants by the Fall. These technological  
24 improvements represent significant initiatives to  
25 reduce or eliminate barriers to access to SNAP



2 benefits. HRA's Employment Plan moves away from a  
3 one-size-fits-all employment approach to a new, more  
4 diverse, individualized approach. Following the  
5 December 31st, 2014 approval by the State Office of  
6 Temporary Assistance and Disability Assistance of the  
7 HRA Employment Plan, we began developing and  
8 implementing significant employment program reforms.  
9 Since that time we have steadily rolled out programs  
10 initiatives that are grounded in best practices and  
11 focus on achieving sustainable outcomes. We are  
12 improving employment and training outcomes so that  
13 more clients have an opportunity to achieve economic  
14 stability, secure employment, and move off the  
15 caseload and out of poverty. HRA's new employment  
16 services model connects clients to individualized  
17 education, training, employment and other services  
18 that give them the skills and training they need to  
19 complete the job market and reach the maximum earning  
20 potential. Of the 63,856 employable clients on HRA's  
21 caseload, 44 percent lack a high school diploma;  
22 without a high school education it is difficult to  
23 earn even 20,000 dollars, and in New York City that  
24 will not take you very far. This is why we have  
25 implemented new initiatives permitted under federal

2 and state law to provide clients with the opportunity  
3 to gain a high school diploma or college-level  
4 education. As of February 2017 there were 3,392 HRA  
5 clients enrolled in college or university and 7,232  
6 HRA clients enrolled in a high school or an  
7 equivalent program. In November of 2016, HRA  
8 announced contracts for our new Employment Plan  
9 programs that will benefit more than 68,000 clients  
10 annually. These new contracts will begin next week.  
11 The power point summarizes each of them. It's the  
12 programs we've talked about in prior hearings: Youth  
13 Pathways targeting New Yorkers age 18 to 24 to  
14 provide in-depth assessment, training, education, and  
15 job placement and other services that are  
16 specifically focused on youth; Career Compass which  
17 will assess the skills and experience of clients 25  
18 and over, and help them create a service plan, and  
19 match them with employment, sector-based training,  
20 education, adult literacy, high school equivalency,  
21 or other programs as needed; Career Advance, which  
22 will provide expert sector training, employment, and  
23 retention services in growth industries. Career  
24 Advance includes borough-based contracts as well as  
25 contracts specifically tailored to populations with

2 special needs including homeless and formerly  
3 homeless New Yorkers, domestic violence survivors,  
4 those with previous involvement in the criminal  
5 justice system, those with limited English  
6 proficiency, and immigrants, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,  
7 Transgender, Queer and Intersex New Yorkers, and  
8 older adults. In addition to the services from our  
9 contracted providers, HRA is further developing a  
10 network of partner organizations to ensure that our  
11 clients have access to a multitude of education,  
12 training and community service, internship, and  
13 employment opportunities that will help them succeed  
14 and reach their goals. Let me now talk about HIV  
15 services. On Monday, August 29, 2016, we expanded  
16 medical eligibility for the HASA program so as to  
17 permit all financially-eligible New York City  
18 residents with HIV to seek and obtain HASA services.  
19 Although the financial requirements remain unchanged,  
20 an applicant need no longer have AIDS or be  
21 symptomatic in order to be eligible for HASA  
22 services. The HASA program has successfully  
23 implemented this change. From August 29, 2016  
24 through January 31, 2017, HASA has accepted 3,444 new  
25 clients; compared to 2,034 new clients during the

2 same period in 2015 and 2016. Of the 3,444 new  
3 clients, 1,822 were expansion clients. To  
4 accommodate the increase in caseload, HASA was  
5 provided additional funding to hire 28 new case  
6 managers through FY 18. We've previously testified  
7 and the power point summarizes it. I just want to  
8 highlight assistance for clients with disability.  
9 Following the March 2015, Lovely H. class action  
10 lawsuit settlement, HRA began to implement major  
11 systemic reforms to enhance assistance and services  
12 for clients with disabilities. HRA, working with an  
13 expert consultant, developed tools to assess whether  
14 clients need reasonable accommodations as the result  
15 of physical or mental or physical limitations or  
16 other impairments. Achievements related to these  
17 reforms over the past year include: Developing a  
18 procedure by which clients are referred to WeCARE  
19 within the past 12 months can elect a direct referral  
20 to WeCARE, rather than being called in to a Job  
21 Center. Providing help to obtain remedial  
22 documentation for Home Visit Needed and Home Bound  
23 clients. Accepting documentation from the Community  
24 Based Organizations from DHS's street homelessness  
25 outreach project. Implementing effective appointment

2 rescheduling procedures for clients with  
3 disabilities. Implementing plain language notice  
4 updates. Conducting cross training throughout the  
5 Agency, and so forth. The last slides in our power  
6 point present a number of additional reforms we  
7 implemented over the last fiscal year, some of which  
8 we've already discussed at prior hearings. We've  
9 accomplished a great deal over the past year, and we  
10 will continue with our reform initiatives during the  
11 coming year. Thank you again for this opportunity to  
12 testify, and I welcome your questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
14 Commissioner. So, I'll ask a few questions and then  
15 I'll turn it over to my colleagues. We've also been  
16 joined by Council Member Brad Lander of Brooklyn.  
17 First question: Can you identify where in the HRA  
18 budget is the Homebase program?

19 UNIDENTIFIED: It's in the--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Which  
21 program area?

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's in the FY 18  
23 budget. It's going to be in the Homelessness  
24 Prevention Administration. We can give you the exact  
25 code if that would be helpful.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Homelessness  
3 Prevention Administration.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yep. That was--  
5 remember, you may recall when we first implemented  
6 our reforms in 2014. We created at HRA a  
7 Homelessness Prevention Administration to consolidate  
8 all of the programs at HRA that had something to do  
9 with preventing homelessness, so rent arrears  
10 payments, legal services, rental assistance, and now  
11 with the integration of HRA and DHS we've moved  
12 Homebase into that area. There are still some funds  
13 for Homebase in the DHS budget that will come over  
14 fully in 2018 Fiscal Year.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So what is the total  
16 budget then proposed in Prelim 18 for Homebase  
17 services, reflecting the new RFP, the expanded  
18 programs?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Fifty-nine million.  
20 And the-- if you're looking for it, the U-of-A is  
21 103.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 103, okay. In  
23 addition to Homebase, can you identify all of the  
24 program areas that were moved from DHS into HRA as  
25 part of the reorganization?

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes. Again, just to  
3 step back, what we've done is create a support  
4 process and administration for both HRA and DHS by  
5 integrating council contracts, IT, program  
6 accountability, audits, communications, external  
7 affairs, human resources, Infoline, finance,  
8 performance management, research, and policy and  
9 planning, and in DSS we also have IDNYC.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so that was--  
11 that represents the breadth of bringing-- of the DHS  
12 programs as well.

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes, and I should  
14 say that you know, we announced this in April, and we  
15 completed the functional transfer of all of the  
16 personnel in January in accordance with the Civil  
17 Service Law requirements. We work with the unions in  
18 order to effectuate it, and we now have leadership in  
19 each of these key areas providing administrative  
20 support and operational support for both the  
21 Department of Homeless Services and HRA. And  
22 Emergency Management is also part of that integration  
23 as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In the context of the  
25 rental assistance programs, the new breadth of rental

2 assistance programs, in the recently unveiled plan  
3 that you did with the Mayor this winter, the City has  
4 readjusted its goals in terms of bringing down the  
5 overall shelter census in New York City, and I think  
6 that this has been a persistent issue. I think this  
7 Administration has taken on a significant challenge  
8 that they inherited from the previous Administration,  
9 but nonetheless, more than three years into this  
10 administration we still over 60,000 people in the  
11 shelter system in New York City. That doesn't  
12 include people that are living doubled-up, living on-  
13 - living with their family members, living on  
14 couches. It is something that despite, I think, your  
15 significant efforts and obviously a significant  
16 amount of City funds and federal funds and state  
17 funds that are going towards addressing the issue  
18 remains something that dogs this administration. And  
19 if you could just speak just generally for a moment  
20 about how you are approaching this issue now? What  
21 has led to the readjustment in what we think is  
22 achievable in terms of reducing the number of people  
23 that are living in shelter and why you think that  
24 this is an issue that has not been-- that we haven't  
25 made more of an impact than we have to date?



2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think that  
3 as we pointed out in the Mayor's plan, 34 percent of  
4 the families with children in the shelter system are  
5 headed by an adult who is working or have an adult  
6 who is working in the family, and 70 percent of the  
7 people in shelter are in families, and that's really  
8 reflective of the gap between rents and income, and  
9 economic factors in a sense the face of homelessness  
10 has changed. But let me also go over some of the  
11 data which is behind the plan. So,-- and I know  
12 we'll talked about this more at the DHS hearing, but  
13 there's a chart that we've presented previously that  
14 shows that the trajectory of homelessness would have  
15 been at 70,000 now instead of 59,281, which is the  
16 number of people in the shelter system this past  
17 weekend, and as you know, it peaked at nearly 60,800  
18 just before Thanksgiving. But that comes against a  
19 background of a 38 percent increase in homelessness  
20 between 2011 and 2014, and so the trajectory of  
21 homelessness when the Advantage Rental Assistance  
22 Program was eliminated, that added 14-- nearly more  
23 than 14,000 people to the census between 2011 and  
24 2014, and the trajectory was leading us to what would  
25 have been 70,000 now, and we peaked at 68-- 60,000

nearly 800 people in November and now have 59,281 people in the shelter system this weekend. There are economic factors at play. As we bring in more people from the streets that will have an impact on the shelter system as well, but it's been critical to look at addressing homelessness in the series of important initiatives. First phase was to break that trajectory, and that was done by investing in prevention services, 10-fold increase in legal services, nearly a 25 percent increase in rent arrears payments-- 161,000 households got rent arrears to keep them in with a roof over their heads-- and then the expansion of rental assistance and rehousing initiatives to the point where through December 16. From the summer of 2014 through December 16, more than 51,000 men, women and children had moved out of the shelter system or avoided going into shelter because of the investments in rental assistance programs, and now through February it's more than 55,000 men, women and children. So, the investments have had the impact of stabilizing the census, and as we-- as the Mayor articulated in the plan, we're now able to begin to bend curve downward and there are factors that are driving homelessness, but we have

investments that are moving their curve back downward. Thirty percent of the families coming into shelter have a history of domestic violence. We've been able to drive down the numbers of people coming into shelter as a result of eviction through the investments in legal services, but there are continuing factors that we have to address. Having said that, some of the most significant investments are just coming into play and have not come into play yet. The investment in supportive housing, the unprecedented investment in 15,000 supportive housing units, 550 units of which are coming online this year. So, there are investments that were made at the beginning of the Administration like the investment in 200,000 units of affordable housing that will be part of the effort to bridge the gap between the numbers of apartments that people need and the numbers of apartments that are available.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I take that at face value, that if we had done nothing when this Administration took over and had just kept the programs in place that the Bloomberg Administration had, and didn't do anything else, the situation would be significantly worse. I accept that, and I think

2 that that's right. Nonetheless, despite all of the  
3 significant efforts, and I commend you and your team  
4 and the Mayor for allocating the resources and the  
5 time and the significant administrative effort to  
6 create programs, a myriad of programs, and I will ask  
7 you about them individually in a moment, but is it  
8 something that New Yorkers are going to have to  
9 accept as a-- the new norm that-- I know you talked  
10 about bending the curve, but are we to look ahead to  
11 future years and future generations and accept that  
12 the reality going to be that there will be 50,000  
13 individuals and families living in our shelter system  
14 on into the future? I mean, just realistically, is  
15 that something that New Yorkers should be accepting?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, the plan that  
17 was released just a couple of weeks ago is a  
18 concrete, achievable, truth-telling plan, and the  
19 reality is that there are 10,000 fewer people in  
20 shelter than there otherwise would have been if this  
21 city in partnership with the Council had not made the  
22 investments that have been made. And the plan is a  
23 realistic plan with the realities that we've laid out  
24 of reducing the census by 2,500 people over the  
25 course of the next five years. Part of the challenge

2 is what we talked about in the plan, that for nearly  
3 four decades a shelter system is built up without an  
4 organizing principle, and the plan lays out an  
5 organizing principle which is-- it's borough-based,  
6 connects people back to the anchors of life, housing,  
7 schools, jobs, healthcare, houses of worship,  
8 friends. These are things that we think will help  
9 people get on their feet more quickly, but it's a  
10 plan that's realistic. I've said this before, and I  
11 just want to repeat it, in all my years at the Legal  
12 Aid Society representing homeless people, back to  
13 when Kerry [sic] was the Governor and Koch was the  
14 Mayor, I had a lot of plans that were on my bookshelf  
15 that promised lots of things that just didn't come to  
16 fruition. This is a realistic, achievable,  
17 operational plan to transform a shelter system by  
18 shrinking the footprint by 40-- nearly 45 percent,  
19 closing and getting out of 360 locations and  
20 replacing those 360 locations with a smaller number  
21 of 90 borough-based shelters and expanding 30  
22 existing shelters, and at the end of the day  
23 continuing the efforts that we've done in prevention  
24 first, in rental assistance, in rehousing, and adding  
25 now supportive housing and our efforts to bring

2 people in off the streets and ultimately reduce the  
3 census by another 2,500.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And I agree that it's  
5 important to have realistic expectations. I think  
6 that the previous Administration did a disservice to  
7 New Yorkers by 2005 committing to reducing the  
8 shelter census at that time from 30,000 to 10,000  
9 over the next four years. I think that that did a  
10 disservice because it created unrealistic  
11 expectations, and indeed history didn't bear that  
12 out, and the shelter census as you pointed out  
13 increased to over 50,000 by the time Mayor Bloomberg  
14 left office in 2013.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But also in fairness  
16 to the Bloomberg Administration, the census increased  
17 115 percent from 1994. It's been a two decades old--  
18 two decades making problem, and what we're saying is  
19 we're going to change the way we provide shelter.  
20 We're going to continue to double down on prevention  
21 and rental assistance and rehousing initiatives, and  
22 continue to bring people in off the streets and  
23 provide an unprecedented investing in supportive  
24 housing and make progress.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, to that end, can  
3 we take a moment to look at the various rehousing  
4 programs, and if we could identify-- what would be  
5 helpful to identify is what the utilization is of  
6 each program. This would be LINC's I-VI, CITYFEPS,  
7 SEPS, State FEPS, TBRA, Section 8, NYCHA, you have  
8 all of it, and if you also have or could speak to the  
9 budget allocation for each one, and also the  
10 aspirations for each one, the goals, and how the  
11 numbers match up, the actual utilization numbers,  
12 match up to the goals for each one.

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Let me-- you can  
14 look at the slide 19 which gives you some overall  
15 numbers, and you can see, again this over the course  
16 of the summer 2014 through February. It shows you--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] This is  
18 cumulative for the last three fiscal years.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Cumulative for the  
20 last fiscal years. One column shows you households.  
21 One column shows you individuals. It shows you  
22 20,183 households used-- were able to avoid shelter  
23 or move out of shelter through these programs. I  
24 note that about 15,000 of those households use rental  
25 assistance. About just over 5,000 of those

2 households were relocated into the Housing Authority,  
3 and I think with that information about the numbers  
4 of landlord bonuses, which gives you a sense of the  
5 numbers of different landlords in a year, it's about  
6 67-- approximately 6,700 in a year-to-year, February  
7 to February. I can get you the exact number.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 6,700 annually.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Just in that last--  
10 just in the last year.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm just giving you  
13 an example of a year, but we can give you a closer  
14 snapshot if you'd like. But I think what this shows  
15 you is we have-- it's an overall program, and it  
16 shows you that we wanted to get away from the  
17 Advantage system which was one-size-fits-all, and you  
18 couldn't get-- there wasn't any Housing Authority  
19 relocations. There wasn't Section 8 priority. There  
20 weren't any programs for single adults specifically  
21 like this, and there were limitations on people  
22 having to participate in work programs and so forth,  
23 and this is an array of programs that tries to match  
24 up the kind of programs that different kinds of  
25 clients need.



2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, actually to that  
3 end, can you just identify which ones match up with  
4 which--

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So LINC I is a  
6 city/state program where there's a work requirement.  
7 LINC II is particular families with multi-system  
8 involvement.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Multi-system  
10 involvement meaning?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Multiple stays in  
12 the shelter system and so forth.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So, in order  
14 for a family to qualify for LINC II they had to been  
15 through the shelter system numerous times.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: For multiple times,  
17 and that also is a city/state program. The first two  
18 were agreed to with the state in 2014.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That draws down Tana  
20 [sic] funds as well?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That, no. The  
22 city/state is financing those with the J.P. Morgan  
23 settlement funds.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, and then the  
25 city is--

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] City is  
3 financing with City tax levy. All of the other  
4 programs are City tax levy programs until you get to  
5 Section 8 and the Housing Authority and home TBRA,  
6 but SEPS and then the CITYFEPS and the various LINC  
7 programs other than I and II are City tax levy funded  
8 programs.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And just so that we  
10 all know, so LINC III is?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'll go through them  
12 with you. So, LINC III is for survivors of domestic  
13 violence in the DHS system. LINC IV is for senior  
14 citizens or persons with disabilities without  
15 children in the DHS system, so adults or adult  
16 families.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Taking a step back  
18 with the LINC III, LINC III is only for families with  
19 a history of domestic violence that are in the DHS  
20 system. So, it-- or within the HRA system as well.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: DHS system.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If--

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] LINC  
24 III, you'll get to it in a couple lines down, is for  
25 the HRA system, the other LINC III.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay?

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, I see.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll get to that.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: HRA LINC III.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, HRA. LINC V is  
8 for adults and working families who have income  
9 similar to LINC I. LINC VI is to encourage  
10 individuals and families to relocate out of the  
11 shelter system with family, and they maintain their  
12 eligibility for rental assistance while they do that.  
13 City-- LINC III, HRA LINC III is for domestic  
14 violence survivors in the HRA system. CITYFEPS is  
15 for families with children who have been evicted or  
16 survived domestic violence in either the DHS or the  
17 HRA system, or also for families with children on the  
18 verge of eviction. It's modeled on the State FEPS  
19 program except the rent levels are higher, and I'll  
20 talk about the state FEPS in a minute. NYCHA and  
21 Section 8 with the restored priorities, they go back  
22 to the Koch Administration, but the priorities have  
23 been suspended prior to this Administration. And  
24 SEPS is analogous to CITYFEPS for single adults with  
25 particular eligibility criteria, and Home TBRA is a

2 federal program for clients with-- families with  
3 disabilities in the DHS or HRA systems. Let me just  
4 say a word about State FEPS. So that's a  
5 longstanding program. There was recently litigation  
6 that was concluded that the Legal Aid Society brought  
7 against the state. The City became involved in the  
8 matter because an underlying issue was the City's  
9 request to increase the rental levels and to expand  
10 to DV survivors, and the settlement will be in place  
11 soon. Once we have that settlement in place, we will  
12 move forward with what we announced. We would do a  
13 streamline of all these programs, but we wanted to  
14 have the parameters of what the State FEPS program  
15 would ultimately look like so that we could be  
16 consistent in moving forward with streamlining the  
17 city program. We think it's important to make sure  
18 that for both clients and landlords it's transparent  
19 what the different programs are. We built this up  
20 very consciously with very specific programs to get  
21 away with one-size-fits-all. Now that we have  
22 experience we want to have a more streamline approach  
23 that will follow the line of the ultimate FEPS  
24 settlement in terms of amounts and eligibility  
25 issues.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If you were to make a  
3 critical assessment of the program up to this point,  
4 which programs are working well and which programs  
5 are not working as well, and why do you think that  
6 would be?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think that  
8 what's important it's the sum of the programs that  
9 have gotten us 55,480 people who have either moved  
10 out of shelter or avoided coming into shelter, and it  
11 was important to us in setting up the programs to  
12 have programs that would fit different clients rather  
13 than screen out certain clients because of the lack  
14 of a targeted program. When we streamline the  
15 programs we'll certainly take input. It'll be  
16 pursuant to-- we implemented all these programs  
17 pursuant to Kappa [sic] rules, and we took input and  
18 we will do the same when we streamline.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, looking at the  
20 slide CITYFEPS obviously is the allocation is-- and  
21 actually that was rolled out after the LINC programs.  
22 It's significantly greater than the family-based LINC  
23 programs. Is there a reason why that is more  
24 applicable than LINC I through III.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, we consciously  
3 named it CITYFEPS because we thought that the  
4 landlord community was very familiar with the State  
5 FEPS program and that it would be seen as a very  
6 similar program, not associated with the Advantage  
7 Program, which for many landlords just the summary  
8 precipitous termination of that program is something  
9 that they still remember. So, by rolling out a  
10 program called CITYFEPS, I think we gave a greater  
11 degree of comfort that this wasn't Advantage again.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So I'm going to ask  
13 you next about the Unit for Source of Income  
14 Discrimination that HRA is putting together. I'll  
15 say this, in my experience working with constituents  
16 who have gone through the system, getting a landlord  
17 to take a program is a herc-- it's a herculean  
18 effort, and it's incredibly-- it's not only daunting,  
19 but it's incredibly demoralizing for a family that  
20 has gone through the trauma of homelessness, losing  
21 their homes, losing their home multiple times, being  
22 on the street possibly, going through the intake  
23 process, being placed in a hotel, being called back  
24 to the path, being placed in a shelter that may be  
25 very far from where their children go to school, I

2 mean we're talking about almost 50 percent of  
3 children placed in the shelter system are not placed  
4 in the borough where they go to school. That is  
5 traumatic for a family, and at the-- to get the  
6 voucher whether it's a LINC voucher or a CITYFEPS  
7 voucher, the end of that process, and then find out  
8 that's not the end of the process, because you have  
9 to go out there and have the door slammed in your  
10 face over and over again, because landlords are  
11 violating the law by, you know, maybe not explicitly  
12 saying no vouchers or no programs, but not returning  
13 phone calls. I mean, it's-- it's a true problem.  
14 And actually, do you have a sense of what percentage  
15 of clients that have the voucher in hand actually  
16 have the apartment, and what percentage are out there  
17 still trying to find, and what the-- what's the  
18 average length for how long it takes somebody with a  
19 voucher in hand to get into that apartment, because  
20 what I'm seeing anecdotally is it's not easy, and  
21 it's-- as I said, just so demoralizing for somebody  
22 that's going through so much and is facing so many  
23 challenges, and a city that is so unforgiving. I  
24 mean, let's be real. I mean, New York City is a tough  
25 town, and to have-- I mean, facing all of those

2 challenges, and then to have it in hand, and to the  
3 credit, the City's credit, that vouchers got to the  
4 person that needed it, but to find out that it's not  
5 that easy to get somebody to take it illegally. I  
6 mean, it's just it's-- and I understand you're taking  
7 the efforts of ramping up what was an underwhelming  
8 effort by the Human Rights Commission to identify and  
9 sanction landlords that are practicing source of  
10 income discrimination, but how are you gauging the  
11 prevalence of that?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, first of all, I  
13 want to agree with your comments about the trauma of  
14 homelessness. I think that is something that our  
15 staff has with them all the time when providing  
16 services to clients, and the picture you painted of  
17 families being uprooted from their borough and  
18 problems of children getting to school, commuting  
19 across borough, this is exactly the underlying  
20 principle of the Mayor's plan to end what has gone on  
21 for decades, this problem of children commuting from  
22 one borough to the next or having children be moved  
23 from school to another and all the trauma that that  
24 entails, so you very movingly described the reality  
25 of what is a motivation for this plan. Having said



2 that, I look at the landlord community in two ways.

3 One, we're very grateful for the thousands of

4 landlords who have participated in these programs,

5 notwithstanding the feeling that the end of Advantage

6 pulled the rug out from underneath us on that. We

7 couldn't have achieved 55,000, more than 55,000

8 people moving in our shelter, avoiding going to

9 shelter without landlords participating in these

10 programs. Having said that, we've created a unit at

11 HRA to supplement the work of the Human Rights

12 Commission, and you know, the Human Rights Commission

13 recently announced a series of actions against

14 landlords of more than 20,000 apartments for

15 violations of the Source of Income Law. Our initial

16 effort at the HRA levels have already intervened in

17 35 cases to address examples that we have seen. We

18 have worked with Housing Works to support them in

19 very important litigation that they have brought, and

20 we stand ready to work with anyone who identifies

21 landlords to address exactly what you've described,

22 and I just happened to have a little piece of

23 information that I want to take advantage of the

24 opportunity publicly which is to say we're going to

25 provide everybody on the committee with a copy of our

2 information flyer that gives a number for people to  
3 call at the Human Resources Administration, 718-291-  
4 4141, 718-291-4141, which is a way in which we can  
5 work with individuals. I know that it is  
6 discouraging when people have had a door slammed in  
7 their face, but I can tell you with the first 35  
8 cases that our lawyers have been involved with, that  
9 when somebody says it's that landlord, that's their  
10 name, this is when it happened, we can do something  
11 about it. So we're going to distribute these to you,  
12 and I hope-- I know that you have been very involved  
13 in individuals cases, and we hope to continue to work  
14 with you to address this scourge.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You have a sense in  
16 terms of what the average length of time it takes for  
17 somebody to get an apartment once they have the  
18 voucher in hand, or how many vouchers are out there  
19 right now that are not in a permanent apartment yet?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It really varies  
21 because clients can have-- be eligible for multiple  
22 vouchers and have multiple vouchers, and they choose  
23 to use-- they ultimately use one of them than the  
24 other. So if you just did a statistic, you would say  
25 well, those vouchers were unused, but they weren't

2 because you know, Steve Levin or Steve Banks was  
3 actually eligible for three or four different  
4 vouchers, and one of them you used ultimately. The  
5 examples in the book of the plan are in some cases  
6 people that took a long time, and some cases people  
7 that right away were able to find apartments. I  
8 think it varies, but the reason why we want to create  
9 this new effort to HRA in partnership with the Human  
10 Rights Commission is to not have these kind of  
11 anecdotes continue to occur and provide redress for  
12 individuals that experience this unlawful conduct.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think it would be  
14 helpful to have some type of metric that we could  
15 look to say okay, this is something that we can hold  
16 up our performance against in terms of our goals and  
17 our achievements, in terms of time and how long it's  
18 taking. Otherwise, you know, we're hearing  
19 anecdotes, which are as I said very discouraging.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. Although I  
21 want to caution against simply voucher issuance is  
22 not necessarily coordinated with voucher use. People  
23 are issue vouchers. They move out and find other  
24 means. They don't come back to the shelter system.  
25 So that voucher is unused. If you simply measured

2 unused vouchers you would get that, or alternatively  
3 the example that I gave where if you or I were  
4 eligible for multiple vouchers, it would be a  
5 deceptive data. I think one of the things that we  
6 can do most effectively is what we're doing which is  
7 stepping up enforcement, but we'll look at metrics  
8 and see what makes sense to try to address your  
9 question.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And we'll get to this  
11 I think in the DHS portion of the hearing, but having  
12 onsite housing specialists whose entire job is to  
13 connect people with open apartments and connect  
14 people with landlords I think is something that-- you  
15 know, I think it exists in some cases. I don't think  
16 it exists in every case, but not a caseworker, but a  
17 housing specialist because as any caseworker can tell  
18 you, you know, there are a number of other issues  
19 that they might be dealing with with a client on any  
20 given day, and having somebody whose entire job it is  
21 to establish if they're in Corona establishing a  
22 relationship with real estate agents and landlords in  
23 Corona. If they're on the upper west side,  
24 establishing relationships with real estate agents  
25 and landlords on the upper west side. Whatever-- you

2 know, the entire job being to get people into  
3 apartments, make those linkages and keep the people  
4 having access to apartments in the communities that  
5 they want to be in.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. I know that  
7 we've talked about this before about as part of the  
8 model budget process we're looking at making sure  
9 that there are people that have that kind of  
10 responsibility in reviewing the budgets, and this is  
11 something that hadn't been done in years, to have a  
12 model budget process. We did a focus group with  
13 leaders from Homeless Services United to look at how  
14 best to pursue model budgets and we're intending to  
15 do that in FY 18. In some locations, the person who  
16 has that responsibility may be called something else,  
17 but it's definitely something that we're going to  
18 address as part of the model budget process.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, but in terms of  
20 that responsibility that it's not number five on  
21 their list of responsibilities.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We think move-outs  
23 are a very important priority, and we'll be  
24 addressing that in model budget process. I think  
25 you'll agree with what we're going to do.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to turn it over  
3 to my colleague Barry Grodenchik for questions, and I  
4 want to acknowledge the members of the committee,  
5 Annabel Palma and Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Good morning.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good morning.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Good morning,  
9 good morning. I first want to-- always happy to see  
10 you, Commissioner Banks. I'm very happy to see the  
11 woman to your left, Grace Bonilla, who is a  
12 constituent of mine and travels even further than I  
13 do to get to downtown, because she lives in  
14 Bellerose, and it's also great to see John Liu this  
15 morning, dear friend. Commissioner, to put it  
16 mildly, I was very disappointed by the Mayor's plan.  
17 As you know, I've discussed this before, my wife's a  
18 math professor, and when you look at the number that  
19 we are projecting as a decrease over five years, it's  
20 almost a rounding error. It is, to put it mildly, an  
21 unambitious goal for this city. We can do better.  
22 We must do better. You know, the Times had a story  
23 today and a nice picture of you and the Mayor, and we  
24 have, according to the Times, we have 23 percent of  
25 the homeless population in the nation, and I don't

2 know if you want to dispute that, but we only have  
3 2.6 percent of the population in the nation, and to  
4 say that's out of whack is to put it mildly, and it  
5 seems to me that this city has committed an immense  
6 amount of resources, and I have not heard a single  
7 person say to me in my district or any other place  
8 that we should not be doing this, but it doesn't seem  
9 like we're getting value for our dollars, and I know  
10 that you've spoken at length about this this morning,  
11 but I feel like I need to speak for people that feel  
12 that way. We're just not getting a bang for our  
13 buck. I'm also concerned when we talk about adding  
14 90 shelters to the system, the logistics of that are  
15 daunting. This is a city that has a problem in  
16 producing a bathroom in a city park in under 10  
17 years, and I don't know how you expect to add 90  
18 shelters to a system that is already immense and do  
19 that within the-- assuming the Mayor gets re-elected,  
20 which I will for the purposes of this discussion, he  
21 has another four years and nine months. It's an  
22 immense undertaking, and I'd like to hear you talk  
23 about the logistics of that for a minute or so.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So let me-- let me  
25 try to address your comments in sequence. It's

2 always good to see you, too. I know we go back a long  
3 time, and I take your question in the spirit of which  
4 it was delivered. New York City has a right to  
5 shelter.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I know that.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, the numbers of  
8 people in our shelter system are measurable.  
9 Jurisdictions that don't have right to shelter, the  
10 numbers of people in the shelter system are not  
11 measurable, and in fact, they end up sleeping in much  
12 greater numbers in the street. As we point out in  
13 the plan, there are more than 30,000 homeless people  
14 in Los Angeles on the streets. New York City has the  
15 reverse. It has homeless New Yorkers in shelter,  
16 because in 1938 when we adopted our State  
17 Constitutional Amendments--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
19 I wasn't born yet, but yes, okay.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Some days I know you  
21 and I feel like we were here in 1938. We put a  
22 provision in our constitution to say that's what's  
23 going on in Los Angeles shouldn't go on in New York  
24 City because we have people sleeping in shanties  
25 along the East River and along the Hudson River and



2 literally in Central Park, actual Hoovervilles. And  
3 so we adopted a constitutional provision to say that  
4 shouldn't happen in New York.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I'm aware of  
6 the history, and I appreciate it.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But that's why, if  
8 you let me finish, that's why when you take a  
9 national survey New York rates high for numbers, but  
10 New York should be rating high for compassion,  
11 because other places don't have shelter systems. If  
12 you look at the book you'll see actually our per  
13 capita homelessness is less than other major cities  
14 in the United States when you rate it against the top  
15 eight cities with population, and Boston and  
16 Washington which both have shelter systems. So, on  
17 comparability are numbers of people per capita who  
18 are homeless or on the streets are very different.  
19 So, if you say we have 23 percent of the homeless  
20 people is because we actually have a shelter system,  
21 but you have to look at per capita numbers. So I  
22 would encourage you to look at--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
24 I will.  
25

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: the chart that we  
3 have. It's actually one in the power point, if we  
4 could-- well, this is for the DHS hearing, so you'll  
5 have to stay for the DHS hearing for that particular  
6 slide. I also want to just make sure that we use the  
7 right language here. We're not adding 90 shelters to  
8 the shelter system. We're getting out of 360  
9 locations, plus the 17-year-old cluster apartment  
10 program that was a failure, the use of commercial  
11 hotels which have been used in New York City going  
12 back to the time of Lindsey. So those two things  
13 account for getting out of 360 locations and  
14 replacing them with a much smaller number of borough-  
15 based shelters, 90, to provide high-quality services  
16 and expanding 30 existing shelters. So the footprint  
17 of our shelter system that's grown up in a very  
18 haphazard way over the last 35 to 40 years will be  
19 reduced by 45 percent. So we'll have fewer shelter  
20 locations in every community in the City. The  
21 reduction in the census, let's also remember that we  
22 started with the 70,000 figure which is real. So we  
23 currently have more than 10,000 fewer people in the  
24 shelter system that we otherwise would have had. The

2 further reduct-- well, you can be skeptical about it,  
3 but--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
5 I mean, listen, I can be skeptical. That's my right.  
6 And I appreciate, you know, I've heard that a lot,  
7 but I'm interested in--

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Well, I  
9 believe--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: actual  
11 numbers.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: the State  
13 Legislature eliminated the Advantage program in 2011  
14 and that resulted in 14,000 more people in our  
15 shelter system than we had in 2011. I don't know  
16 what the rationale for it really was.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I--

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] But it  
19 caused tremendous harm to many New Yorkers and it  
20 caused an exponential increase in our shelter system  
21 with people continually coming into the system who  
22 otherwise would have been able to move out. We  
23 essentially ran an experiment for three years from  
24 2011 to 2014 to see if you could address homelessness  
25 without rental assistance and housing.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Can't.

3 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay. So we-- you  
4 can't do that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Can't.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And that's why--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
8 That's why--

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's  
10 why--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I've been  
12 working with Assemblyman Hevesi, and I know you  
13 support that plan.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, right.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: And--

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] But  
17 that's why the investment that we made is what has  
18 prevented us from continuing that trajectory between  
19 2011 and 2014, and in fact, we had a high point of  
20 60,800 or so people just before Thanksgiving, and  
21 we've got about 59,300 or so in the shelter system  
22 currently, and we will continue to make the progress  
23 that the Mayor articulated in the program, but it is  
24 progress that takes into account the fact that 34  
25 percent of the families with children have an adult

2 in that family that's working, but can't afford  
3 housing. So, the economic realities are real.  
4 Seventy percent of the people in the shelter system  
5 are families with children. Now to go back to the  
6 logistics of 90 shelters to replace the 360 shelters,  
7 360 shelter locations. You know, last year we closed  
8 40 cluster buildings and got out of 647 cluster  
9 units. So we know we can make that progress. We've  
10 opened-- we've already announced two months in or now  
11 three months into the year five shelters toward our  
12 goal of about 18 shelters to open this year so that  
13 we can close clusters on our plan for the rest of the  
14 year, and two of them have already opened, and we're  
15 on our way to opening the other three. So, in terms  
16 of the mechanics of proceeding, these are the numbers  
17 of shelters that per year the City wants opened, and  
18 we're well on our way to doing so.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Well, I wish  
20 you luck. I hope we're successful in bringing down  
21 the numbers. It just seems to me that the goal is  
22 not as ambitious as it could be in reducing the  
23 actual numbers, and as I said, I was disappointed,  
24 but I know you're working hard, and I appreciate your  
25 work and your staff's work.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, I appreciate  
3 that too. Look, I think as the Mayor said and I've  
4 said repeatedly, this is a concrete, realistic goal,  
5 and of course we're going to try to do better, but  
6 it's a concrete realistic goal.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: We've already  
8 done better. I mean, we've reduced the numbers from  
9 the high point in November to today down 2.3 percent.  
10 So if we could do that, I'd like to think we could do  
11 better than four percent over five years.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, of course the  
13 dynamics though of the shelter system are different  
14 for different populations.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I understand.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The family  
17 population through many of the investments we're  
18 making, we've been able to bring it down. The summer  
19 it typically goes up. So we might experience that  
20 kind of variation. The singles population is  
21 continuing to increase in part because of some of the  
22 drivers that you and Assembly Member Hevesi are  
23 trying to address which I appreciate.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Before I turn  
25 it over to Councilman Lander, I was very

2 disappointed, and I can't imagine this was your idea,  
3 that the Emergency Food Program which was highlighted  
4 in a very big way in Speaker Mark-Viverito's State of  
5 the City Address, and which Councilman Levin and I  
6 worked on. We got 48 signatures on a letter, which  
7 is the most you can get. We worked with the  
8 advocates, and we were able to increase the amount of  
9 food. I have the information if you need it. We were  
10 able to increase the amount of spending for emergency  
11 food in this city to 16 million dollars, and now  
12 we're back to where we were, and I don't understand  
13 how this Mayor, this Administration, could make  
14 emergency food, which is the last line of defense for  
15 people, part of our budget dance. It was very  
16 disappointing to me. As I said, I can't imagine this  
17 was your idea, and I would hope, and I know you will  
18 go back to the Mayor and tell him that this side of  
19 City Hall was very disappointed, that we are looking  
20 for an increase, and we look forward to working with  
21 you to get there.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate your  
23 comments. Ultimately, as a commissioner, I take  
24 responsibility for the budgets of my agency, and I  
25 appreciate the spirit in which that question is

2 asked, too. You know, the January Plan was introduced  
3 in January. I was at the Speaker's State of the City  
4 in February in Brooklyn, which is my home borough,  
5 and in terms of funding for emergency food, I know  
6 Council Member Levin is going to ask me about this  
7 too, maybe I'll just answer it this way now. Last  
8 year we worked with you to add additional funds that  
9 in part increase the capacity for the food programs.  
10 We've been working with Helmsley [sp?] Trust and  
11 Redstone and providers to address some of the  
12 realities of the capacity in the feeding programs,  
13 which is if you don't have enough space and  
14 refrigerators and the like, the ability to manage the  
15 program is affected, and we thought it was important  
16 to work with you for some one-time investments to  
17 increase capacity. We are continuing to look at  
18 this. We're mindful of taking into account all the  
19 things that are happening with hunger and food  
20 stamps, and it's a process. We worked very  
21 successfully with you last year to address what we  
22 thought was an important need which was capacity, and  
23 we'll keep working with you this year.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I appreciate  
25 that. I have spoken to some of the advocates, some of



2 whom in this room with us this morning. Is it still  
3 morning? It's still morning.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Still morning.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: And they have  
6 informed me that it's not the capacity issue. In  
7 their opinion it's not as big of deal as some other  
8 people feel it is. The thing that worries me about  
9 emergency food is that I know in the greatest city in  
10 the world we have difficulty doing a lot of things,  
11 but we should not have any difficulty in feeding  
12 every single person in the city. I thank you for  
13 your comments this morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate it. I  
15 appreciate it. Thank you. And I appreciate you  
16 mentioning the providers. There are great providers  
17 in that food program that we really partner with and  
18 appreciate working with.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
20 Member Grodenchik. Council Member Lander?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you, Chair  
22 Levin. Commissioner, as always, good to see you.  
23 Can we go back to slide 19? So, I have a somewhat  
24 different take than my colleague from Queens. I am  
25 enthusiastic about most, as I think I've told you, in

2 the 90's, in the 90 percent's [sic] of the Mayor's  
3 Housing Plan.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Homeless plan [sic].

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: On one area where  
6 we definitely agree and I think you agree too is the  
7 need to do more. On the one hand I appreciate being  
8 realistic. On the other hand, I think we all  
9 appreciate this is an absolute crisis, and we've got  
10 to find ways to do more. So, I just want to talk a  
11 little about some of the areas where it feels like we  
12 could and understand how we can get there, maybe not  
13 as much as why we weren't. And you know, to me, the  
14 biggest of those remain both the NYCHA units and HPD  
15 units, which as far as I can tell have been very  
16 successful placement, are placements kind of across  
17 the income scale, are the biggest number on the chart  
18 here, right? More than 5,000 households, more than  
19 17,000 individuals. So why are we leaving that number  
20 at 1,500 households and not upping it to 2,000/3,000,  
21 which would still be less than half of the turnover  
22 rate in public housing?

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Actually, the number  
24 is 1,800. It's 1,500 for families in the DHS system  
25 without domestic violence, and it's 300 for families

2 in the HRA or the DHS system who are certified by the  
3 HRA program as survivors of domestic violence. So,  
4 it's 1,800 move-outs a year, and that's just about  
5 half the number of vacancies that come available each  
6 year.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: What number do  
8 you have for that, because looking at the NYCHA  
9 turnover rate from their website--

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's about 4,200 in  
11 the coming year.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: They know how many  
13 are going to move out next year?

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm basing it on  
15 their projections.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Alright, I based  
17 it on their actuals, and I mean, the number is being  
18 closer to 6,000. So, it seems to me we could-- we're  
19 about a quarter, not about half.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, this is an  
21 effort that NYCHA and we look at together, and the  
22 1,800 number based upon the projections is about  
23 half, and--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing]  
25 Well, 2,100 would be half if it was 3,200.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, but within--

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] I'll  
4 take those 300.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: but within the other  
6 half, if you look at needs base versus waiting list,  
7 within the other half, the other 300, that includes  
8 HASA clients. That includes ACS Independent Living  
9 clients. That includes clients that are in the other  
10 ACS programs. So those are all the needs-based. So,  
11 if you were to say we'll-- you know, you should have  
12 exactly a half for the DHS system and the HRA  
13 homeless systems. It would affect others of my  
14 clients that I'm trying to get moved into NYCHA.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. But so I'm  
16 not even sure half-- I mean, here's what I would say.  
17 I have deep sympathy for the 250,000-ish families on  
18 the NYCHA waiting list. They for sure want to get in  
19 public housing, but we have a crisis. We have all  
20 these families in the shelter system. They are at a  
21 diverse range of incomes. I just like what's the  
22 logic of not placing more of them into public  
23 housing?

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to also  
25 caution you about the math here. There is a lot of

2 longstanding analysis that a one for one-- there's  
3 not a one for one move-out of shelter. That for  
4 everyone that moves out it does not reduce the census  
5 by a full one. So if you're thinking if only we had  
6 another x number we could reduce the census by that  
7 number, the math actually doesn't work that way.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Alright. I'm  
9 going to-- as tempted as I am to take the side with  
10 you that moving people out doesn't induce people to  
11 move in since I learned every argument about why  
12 that's not true from you--

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That  
14 actually wasn't--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I'm not going to  
16 go there at all.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That actually  
18 wasn't--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] I'm  
20 still am going to ask you to answer the question I  
21 asked you before. What's the logic of not increasing  
22 the number to-- I mean, obviously we have to increase  
23 move-outs. I mean, that's what-- if what you're  
24 saying is increasing move-outs isn't going to help us  
25

2 reduce homelessness, then I really have more  
3 questions about what we're fundamentally doing here.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm not saying that.  
5 I also wasn't making that inducement [sic] point  
6 that--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] I  
8 know you weren't, but it sounded like it.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, just doing the  
10 simple math. No matter what the move-outs are, it  
11 does not reduce the census on a one to one basis. It  
12 just-- if you look at-- I'll be happy to show you the  
13 math. If you look at the math, it does not work--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] I  
15 mean, of course that is true, and like I said, I  
16 agree with all the other things in the plan, but  
17 obviously getting more people out of the shelter  
18 system into permanent affordable housing is if not  
19 the highest priority goal in our homelessness plan,  
20 it sure should be up there. So--

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I'm  
22 not--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I'm looking for  
24 the things we can do to get more people out of the  
25 shelter system into permanent affordable housing, and

2 I know you are too, and I really don't understand one  
3 good reason for not upping by at least several  
4 hundred the number of people who would move into  
5 public housing, and I'm asking you to explain to me  
6 why.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm not going to--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] And  
9 the fact that it wouldn't necessarily reduce census  
10 by one to one is not a reason.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I actually gave that  
12 answer because others have made that argument, so I  
13 thought I would anticipate it by saying if you're  
14 thinking that we could do better than the 2,500--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] I  
16 just want to do every single-- I want to get every  
17 single household we possibly can out of shelter and  
18 into permanent affordable housing, and you got a  
19 chart here of some of what's working, and so I want  
20 to know how we can do more of it.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate your  
22 focus on this. You are my Council Member, so I  
23 always appreciate your focus on this, but I want to  
24 come back to if the allocation of needs based  
25

2 relocation from to NYCHA is about half the vacancies-

3 -

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] Can  
5 you give me last year's numbers so we're talking  
6 about real numbers? How many NYCHA units turned over  
7 last year, and--

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] My  
9 understanding, and remember, we're on the Department  
10 of Social Services, my understanding is that we got  
11 about half the turnover units last year.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So first off, if  
13 you don't have it now, I would just like all of those  
14 numbers, I would like to know. I mean, I guess I'd  
15 like to know for, 15, 16 and through where we are for  
16 17 how many NYCHA vacancies there were and how many  
17 people from each of these categories you guys  
18 referred and they placed.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: With--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] But  
21 my question still remains why wouldn't we do some  
22 more?

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, I'm going to  
24 provide you what you're asking for, but the policy  
25 approach has been to say about half the units are



2 needs-based and that half is going to people that my  
3 agencies serves in a number of different categories.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And what's the  
5 rationale for half? I mean, what's-- to me, it seems  
6 like the-- we obviously want to provide some units to  
7 people on the waiting list who have been there on an  
8 average seven years. So if they wait another few  
9 months, I'm not sure it's a crisis to them. The  
10 crisis that families in shelter are in is bigger than  
11 the crisis that families on the NYCHA waiting list  
12 are in. Given where we are in New York City now, the  
13 rationale for two-thirds of the units, it just seems  
14 sensible if we think of this as of this as a top-  
15 level city emergency.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It is a top level  
17 priority. That's why we reinstated a priority that  
18 had been eliminated for a number of years, and for  
19 needs-based people about half of the units are going  
20 to needs-based people who again are all clients of my  
21 agency, and I'm happy to have those unites. But  
22 again I would tell you I do see, and I see this  
23 personally, people coming in and applying for shelter  
24 who said, "I'm on the waiting list. I can't stay  
25

2 where I am anymore. I can't get in." Shouldn't we  
3 try to make it possible for--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] I'd  
5 be glad to count them. If you want to do rapid re-  
6 housing of folks entering the shelter system, skip  
7 the shelter and move them right into a couple of  
8 hundred NYCHA units; sold.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I hear your  
10 questions, Council Member, but I'm going to keep  
11 focusing on what I'm charged with doing which is  
12 running the Department of Social Services.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. Now, for  
14 HPD vacancies, how close to half are we?

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: HPD vacancies, there  
16 are a number of projects that were built years ago  
17 that had homeless set-asides when those units become  
18 vacant, and those units are provided to us as they  
19 become vacant. In terms of new units, I'd have to  
20 consult my testimony for the DHS hearing which is  
21 next, but there's a couple of thousand units that we  
22 get from HPD for set-aside units. In fact, we got a  
23 substantial number of HPD units that helped us with  
24 the veterans move-out.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Alright, and I  
3 apol-- we have our Seeking Sanctuary Conference,  
4 which you'll be well-represented at.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But sadly, I  
7 won't be here for the DHS hearings. So, but I won't  
8 push further on that. Can I just ask one more  
9 question, Mr. Chair? Thank you. I'm excited to see  
10 the new job training program created. As you know,  
11 we worked together to end WEP. It took a decade.  
12 Big credit to you, to the advocates who have pushed  
13 it. I'm thrilled that the job training program is  
14 ramping up. It also, though, by scale of need seems  
15 very small. So how-- you know, especially relative  
16 to the large numbers you guys cited in your overall  
17 jobs program. So, is there some thought that this  
18 would be something that would grow to a much more  
19 significant scale or integrate with other comparable  
20 programs?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, remember those  
22 JTP numbers are only additive to the existing JTP  
23 program we have which is now in the neighborhood of  
24 more than 2,000 JTP positions, but our-- you know,  
25 all of the back and forth, and you know this well

2 form our prior work together, that all the back and  
3 forth is only about 60,000 people in our caseload  
4 that have a federal or state work requirement, and  
5 you know, more than 20,000 of them, 25,000 of them  
6 are actually working. So, the programs that we put  
7 together include education and training. They include  
8 private sector job placement. They include access to  
9 the public assistance hiring requirement for not-for-  
10 profits that contact with us, and JTP is just one of  
11 the many job options. So I wouldn't want to leave  
12 you the impression that these couple hundred  
13 positions are intended to deal with the entire  
14 breadth of what we need to accomplish, because this  
15 JTP was simply deal with it. Once we phased out WEP,  
16 at certain city agencies there were issues that we  
17 needed to address, so we expanded the JTP program.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And my final  
19 question on jobs as well, you know, a kind of Holy  
20 Grail of city coordination efforts is between HRA's  
21 job placement work and the EDC and Deputy Mayor for  
22 Economic Development. the Mayor in his State of the  
23 City announced a big new focus on jobs, but I have  
24 not yet heard either in what the Mayor and Deputy  
25 Mayor have said about that program or in what you

2 said today about your efforts, what's being done to  
3 integrate our job creating economic development  
4 efforts and our HRA job placement efforts? So, can  
5 you tell me a little about what's being done to make  
6 sure that those things track closely?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure. We actually  
8 have an-- I think it's unprecedented in city  
9 government, partnership between SBS, Small Business  
10 Services, and HRA. In the work-- I testified last  
11 week at the immigration hearing at the Workforce One  
12 Center in Washington Heights that opened is actually  
13 HRA staff there to help non-HRA clients be connected  
14 to food stamps if they need them, but also to provide  
15 access for our clients to jobs. So there's a very  
16 close partnership between SBS and HRA to connect our  
17 clients to jobs. They give us job orders. We have  
18 something called "text to work." We put those jobs  
19 out where we can to our clients, and it's something  
20 that HRA clients never had before, but now with SBS  
21 it has been a very good partner for us.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Alright. So I'm  
23 glad to hear that. I will just end by reiterating my  
24 plea just on the NYCHA units, on the HPD units. We  
25 have to do-- we've got to up those numbers of move-

2 outs. We can move them out. It's not simple, but  
3 we're eager to provide the pushing on our side, and I  
4 just would plead with you to do it on yours as well.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I hear you. We'll  
6 work together I think on this issue for many years.  
7 So, I definitely hear you. I just want to make sure  
8 as you leave that from our perspective in running the  
9 shelter system we're doing everything we can to get  
10 more move-outs from wherever we can find the housing,  
11 and we've gotten support from NYCHA and from HPD in  
12 those efforts. In the Mayor's Plan from a couple of  
13 weeks ago it lays out the numbers which are very  
14 significant. But you know, I think as you analyze how  
15 many units should be allocated to us versus other  
16 individuals, I think it depends on which side of the  
17 coin you're on in terms of, you know, the additional  
18 10,000 units that the Mayor allocated for very low  
19 income people in the plan. That's helping people  
20 that otherwise would come into our system.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I'm sorry, Mr.  
22 Chair. I mean, of course it's a painful zero-sum  
23 game. We're trying to make it bigger and more and  
24 create more units and do more on the prevention side  
25 as well. So, sure, but at this moment just seeing

2 the percent that we're going to bring that  
3 homelessness number down, it is obviously a higher  
4 level priority and it's a hard choice. It's no fun  
5 to make that choice. Thank God we don't have to go  
6 to the next person on the NYCHA waiting list and say  
7 I'm sorry, but we had to house a homeless family, and  
8 you're going to have to wait a few more months. No  
9 one wants to do that, but the choice is obvious.  
10 It's really clear, and as a city-level priority for  
11 addressing emergencies--

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's  
13 why we're allocating 1,800 units that up until  
14 January 1, 2014 were not being allocated to deal with  
15 this need. 1,800 people or households moved out last  
16 year and we'll move out this year.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I know. That's  
18 why it's the biggest number on slide 19. So if we're  
19 going to get more move-outs, it seems like we would  
20 go where we were having success.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Actually, CITYFEPS,  
22 if you look at CITYFEPS closely, the NYCHA move-outs  
23 started a year and a half before we started CITYFEPS.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Let's increase  
25 them both.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're working very  
3 hard to increase wherever we can to move people out.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks, Council  
6 Member Lander. Council Member Cabrera?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
8 much, Mr. Chairman, Commissioner. Good to see you.  
9 Thank you for all you do and all your staff. I know  
10 you have a lot in your hands. You do the job of  
11 literally two commissioners. I want to concur with  
12 you with the situation compared to Los Angeles. I  
13 used to live in LA for a time in my life, and I have  
14 family over there, and it's-- you can't compare the  
15 level of compassion that we have here to Los Angeles.  
16 I'm shocked when I walk downtown. I see the camps  
17 that literally they take city blocks. I don't know  
18 if you have opportunity to see it. It is horrendous.  
19 And part of the problem that we have here is that  
20 we're reaping what we sow, like you mentioned, from  
21 the previous Administration. In talking to my  
22 colleague Annabel Palma, we sat in the General  
23 Welfare Committee during that time and we were  
24 totally frustrated to see what was taking place. So,  
25 thank you for putting the brakes on which I would



2 hate to see what would have happened if you had not  
3 put the brakes on. I do have a follow-up question in  
4 connection to this, which is since we are a  
5 compassionate city, do you fear or do you find in  
6 your data-- I'm sure you do data on this-- that you  
7 have people because they know that we are  
8 compassionated, compared to Texas, LA, wherever,  
9 Florida, that people say, "Hey, let's go to New York,  
10 because in New York they're going to take care of  
11 us." What is your data showing you in regards to  
12 this?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We find that the  
14 people that are in our shelter system are New Yorkers  
15 that-- we looked at families, for example, and found  
16 that in a period of time of the families that were  
17 applying and found eligible we had like about 127  
18 families that came from-- that had no New York City  
19 connection. What we did was we ran the HRA data  
20 against the families, and although they might have  
21 moved out of the City to look for work someplace else  
22 or they have been a victim or survivor of domestic  
23 violence that came back to the City, and we found  
24 they had a connection. But we continue to look at  
25 this and you know, are very focused on making sure

2 that we have a system that works for people who need  
3 our help.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Do you find many  
5 families that say, "Oh, let me go to Florida, you  
6 know, I could get a house or another state at a very  
7 inexpensive price. The move or the lure of a better  
8 life, and then they go there and they find out I  
9 can't get a job, and then they end up coming back,  
10 and now they find themselves in a worse situation, do  
11 we have data on that as to how many?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's a very  
13 familiar set of circumstances that you're describing.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: DO you have any  
15 data as to what's the percentage?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we'll have  
17 to take a look and see what's possible to do there.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But certainly in  
20 experience, that is what happens to some number of  
21 families.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Commissioner, as  
23 you know, I have the most scatter sites, and--

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]  
25 Clusters.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: In the entire  
3 city.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Clusters.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Cluster sites,  
6 I'm sorry. Cluster sites in entire city. I'm very  
7 interested to know-- I'm very happy to hear that  
8 within five years there will be non-existent. What's  
9 the criteria that you're going to use in determining  
10 which cluster sites are you going to make in  
11 transition?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, I just would  
13 say, and I appreciate your help with this, that 70  
14 percent of the clusters are in the Bronx, and it's  
15 more than 200 locations, and we will be out of all of  
16 them as part of this plan and replacing them in Bronx  
17 and across the city with smaller number of high-  
18 quality shelters to give people the opportunity to  
19 remain connected to their boroughs. And we've closed  
20 600-- we've gotten out of 647 of them over the last  
21 year, and we're continuing on that pace this year.  
22 Our criteria is really prioritizing those with the  
23 most significant conditions problems, although we  
24 brought down violations by 83 percent in traditional  
25 shelters. We've been inspecting and enforcing and

2 putting violation-- posting additional violations as  
3 part of our enforcement efforts in the clusters, and  
4 part of that process is leading us to prioritize  
5 getting out of specific units.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And most of  
7 those the criteria you just mentioned, are those--  
8 most of those are in the Bronx, though we have the  
9 most, but our those who fit that criteria in the  
10 Bronx?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, most of the  
12 clusters are in Brooklyn and the Bronx, 70 percent,  
13 of course, in the Bronx. We've been prioritizing  
14 both the Bronx and Brooklyn.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay, great. I  
16 wanted to ask you last-- actually, two quick  
17 questions. Domestic Violence shelters, a lot of the  
18 shelters are very full. I have a few in my district,  
19 and that literally get phone calls every day to see  
20 if there is space. This is what the nonprofits are  
21 telling me. What's the next step to alleviate that  
22 level of pressure?

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, our budget  
24 reflects additional funding for 300 additional  
25 emergency beds and 400 additional Tier II domestic

2 violence units. We've already brought on 150 of the  
3 emergency beds. We've got another 67 awaiting or 60  
4 plus awaiting state approval, and we have others that  
5 are being proposed to us in two competitive bidding  
6 processes to be able to deliver on those units, but  
7 we thought it was an important need to meet to  
8 increase the capacity of the system to be able to  
9 handle the needs of domestic violence survivors.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And what's your  
11 forecast as to how many more you're going to need?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think the  
13 projection of the 300 additional emergency beds and  
14 the 400 additional Tier II units was based upon  
15 utilization, and we thought that by bringing them on  
16 and continuing to provide rental assistance and  
17 helping move people out, that that would meet the  
18 need, but in the even that we need more, we'll  
19 evaluate it, but right now we're proceeding with  
20 those two procurements.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay. Thank you  
22 so much, Commissioner. Again, thank you for all you  
23 do.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.  
25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you, Mr.  
3 Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
5 Member Cabrera. Council Member Palma?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you, Mr.  
7 Chair. Thank you, Commissioner for your testimony,  
8 and we know that the issue of homelessness and no  
9 your overseeing DHS and HRA becomes just that much  
10 more complex, and so we thank you for the work that  
11 has been going on. It is definitely a difference  
12 from previous years. So I appreciate the efforts that  
13 are being made. I want to focus my question around  
14 the additional rental assistance initiative that was  
15 announced at the end of 2016 called--

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Homes  
17 for the Holidays.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Homes for the  
19 Holidays, Pathway Home. Is there a difference in  
20 budget from FY 17 to FY 18?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, that's a-- it  
22 was a revamping of the LINC VI program, and we've  
23 found more uptake just in the period of time since we  
24 began it, and we're going to be moving forward with  
25 it, not just as a holiday focus program, but as a

2 year-round focus program. We think there's great  
3 promise in connecting people to friend and family in  
4 the community and still having them maintain  
5 eligibility for rental assistance and providing  
6 assistance to their friend and family to help them  
7 with their rent and other needs that they may have,  
8 that we found success during this past holiday period  
9 and we think that there is a lot of merit moving  
10 forward with the program.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: How many-- how many  
12 people/families were helped in overall?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, I think that  
14 what's significant to us is we had 85 families that  
15 had gotten LINC VI in two years, and in just this one  
16 month period of time, I'll get you the exact number,  
17 but it's more than 30, more than 30 families. So,  
18 the uptake you can see two years 85 and about a month  
19 and a half of more than 30. So we think there's great  
20 promise.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And during the  
22 promotion of Home for the Holiday, there was an offer  
23 of a thousand dollars in gift cards, 500 for the rest  
24 and then 500 for the whole families. Is that still  
25 something that's being offered, or?

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, and that was a  
3 mechanism to help people provide extra furniture and  
4 the kinds of things that might be necessary to have  
5 the two households together.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And has there-- I  
7 know you just mentioned the LINC VI program. Has  
8 there been a decrease in the LINC VI program?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, essentially  
10 this program is a repurposing of the LINC VI program,  
11 and when we ultimately streamline the rental  
12 assistance programs we will be able to combine the  
13 programs.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Do you find this  
15 program more effective than the LINC VI program?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes, we do. Again,  
17 just based upon the uptake, two years 85, a month and  
18 a half more than 30, and I'll get you the exact  
19 number.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: I don't have any  
21 further questions. Thank you, Commissioner. Thank  
22 you, Mr. Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
24 Council Member Palma. Council Member Kallos?



2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Good afternoon.  
3 Thank you for joining us. I want to live in a city  
4 where no one has to go hungry. It's a-- I think it's  
5 something we can achieve, but I'm concerned, because  
6 at a federal level Paul Ryan's been using big words  
7 like block grant and things like that, so I'm just  
8 going to say it plain language and you can correct me  
9 if I've over-simplified any place. Right now, if  
10 somebody needs SNAP, they apply, they get it, and  
11 then the Federal Government reimburses us based on  
12 each person. So it's needs-based. And where the  
13 Federal Government would like to head is to just take  
14 whatever we're currently getting, however many  
15 billion, and then say this is your cap, we're going  
16 to give you this, and that's to cover all the folks  
17 whether you have less or more, and then the Federal  
18 Government would further like to start cutting that  
19 by a legally allowed percentage every year. Is that  
20 accurate of the scape [sic]?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, as we know, a  
22 lot of things have been proposed in Washington, and  
23 there seems to be a gravely fluid situation there  
24 about what actual proposal are, but I am familiar  
25 that one of the many proposals is to convert food

2 stamps to a block grant, but we've seen no concrete  
3 proposal. It's not-- it was not in the budget  
4 documents that the Trump Administration released  
5 about 10 days ago.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, I guess one  
7 top-line question is, are you anticipating a budget  
8 impact from the Republican President and Congress to  
9 SNAP and food access?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, in the doc--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] And  
12 should it be-- and is it recognized in the Executive  
13 Budget or-- sorry-- in the Preliminary Budget or what  
14 plans are there to react or anticipate?

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: In the documents that  
16 the Trump Administration and itself released, there  
17 wasn't a mention of the SNAP program. That doesn't  
18 mean that in subsequent documents there might not be.  
19 There was one of our programs that was mentioned,  
20 that Trump put budget proposals and that's to  
21 eliminate energy assistance. It helps more than  
22 700,000 households. It's about a million New  
23 Yorkers. Benefits range from 50 dollars to 350  
24 dollars to help people with their energy costs, and I  
25 guess the Mayor said, and I think as the Mayor said,

2 we're certainly going to oppose that. We're going to  
3 work with Senator Schumer and Gillibrand and the  
4 Congressional Delegation to oppose that, and  
5 ultimately the final budget is probably not going to  
6 look like what the initial one was, but that's a cut  
7 that would hurt a million New Yorkers, take away from  
8 them a grant between 50 and 350 dollars to help them  
9 with their energy costs.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And with regards  
11 to just federal policy, so New York City has had a  
12 waiver for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents.  
13 That has allowed us to offer hunger assistance for  
14 folks who for longer than three months every 36  
15 months. My understanding is that waiver has expired  
16 as of 2016. What is the budget impact? Do we expect  
17 that Republican Federal Government will give us that  
18 waiver again?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, under the  
20 Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents, ABAWD, New  
21 York State and many states across the country, almost  
22 every state as a matter of fact, accepted the waiver  
23 which allowed the requirements of the ABAWD program  
24 which essentially where if you can't find work for 20  
25 hours a week you lose food stamps. If you can't find

2 work for 20 hours a week for-- you would lose-- you  
3 would only be able to get food stamps for three  
4 months out of a three-year period of time. And New  
5 York State had taken this waiver. New York City  
6 hadn't. It was a commitment of the Mayor's and we  
7 took the waiver. It had been in place in 2014 and  
8 2015. In 2016 because of the drop in the  
9 unemployment rate, which is what the waiver is key  
10 towards, there were parts of Manhattan that were not  
11 covered by the waiver. We worked with the US  
12 Department of Agriculture and with the State Office  
13 of Temporary Assistance and Disability Assistance.  
14 So, ultimately, there was no impact in parts of lower  
15 Manhattan that would have been impacted by the fact  
16 that the unemployment rates did not allow us to  
17 continue to have a waiver. It wasn't just New York  
18 City. There were other parts in New York State that  
19 had the same problem. For 2017, preliminary data  
20 shows that there'll be a problem with continuing the  
21 waiver in other parts of the city, and we're  
22 continuing to work with State Office of Temporary  
23 Assistance and Disability Assistance to make sure we  
24 have as much coverage as possible. The state has  
25 problems in other parts of the state, and we've been

2 working very closely to address this. We have-- we  
3 expect this to be something that we'll address in the  
4 next couple of months.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: How much do we  
6 need to put in the Executive Budget to cover expected  
7 shortfalls?

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the issue  
9 that we need to grapple with as a city is to fight  
10 cuts and to continue to fight them. We're certainly  
11 going to work with the Council, and the Speaker has  
12 been tremendous in leadership and fighting different  
13 federal cuts, and then as the Mayor said, what's  
14 proposed is not necessarily what's going to be, but  
15 the ABAWD waiver is not a budget cut. It's a statute  
16 that's existed for many years.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so I guess  
18 along the same lines and just tying back to what I  
19 was talking about about changing from needs-based to  
20 a possible block, I would like to make sure that  
21 anyone who does qualify for hunger assistance can get  
22 it, and so I want to laud you for and praise your for  
23 improving access to SNAP which is one of the places  
24 that we first began working together, the  
25 enhancements to AccessNYC. I'm hoping that the rules

2 for other third parties who want to build apps are  
3 out there for launching a mobile app for allowing  
4 people to submit documents electronically with their  
5 phones or scan them in at various locations, and a  
6 hearing that has been postponed, but can we use the  
7 fact that people are eligible for oen set of benefits  
8 to qualify them for others? So if they get SNAP,  
9 let's get them SCRIE. If they get SCRIE let's get  
10 them Medicaid. Let's make sure that once a person  
11 stops by and has one need, we take care of all of  
12 their needs.

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the progress  
14 that we had been making on that with you has been  
15 important, but I also think that with the change in  
16 the administrations in Washington, some of the  
17 progress that we might have been able to continue are  
18 going to be an issue, but I think we're going to have  
19 to keep looking at it. I wanted to pick up on one  
20 thing you mentioned, though, which is-- you know, one  
21 of the important components of the federal food stamp  
22 program is that it stands for the proposition that  
23 fighting hunger is a federal priority, and that in  
24 times of difficulty the benefit is flexible enough to  
25 meet what the needs are, because it is an entitlement

2 funding stream, and so that's been one of the  
3 important qualities of the program, and you're right  
4 to point out that there are some that would view that  
5 programs should be block granted, and that would  
6 change the fundamental support of the program which  
7 is that it's flexible to be available in hard times  
8 like after the recession, for example, or after Sandy  
9 and things like that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And I just want  
11 to thank the Chair for his indulgence. The last  
12 question-- and I again want to thank you and your  
13 staff for helping me with constituent service for  
14 each and every individual in my district. We keep  
15 running into situations where folks are being  
16 evicted. We're using all the resources we can, but  
17 the person has no source of additional income, and so  
18 they go from Homebase an HRA program to ostensibly  
19 DHS in order to have access to additional resources.  
20 I think a question I've posed before, but is there--  
21 and once they're in LINC, now they're trying to get  
22 into new housing and there's difficulties with that.  
23 Can we make new dollars available for folks who do  
24 not have a new source of income because it is less  
25 expensive to keep somebody and pay their rent and

2 existing housing that they may not be able to afford  
3 than to pull them out of their housing, put them into  
4 the homeless system, and they trying to get them back  
5 out into that very same type of unit.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, some of our  
7 programs, as you know, are flexible enough to do  
8 that, CITYFEPS, for example, for families with  
9 children, but as we streamline the programs now that  
10 there's a settlement in the FEPS litigation we're  
11 able to move forward streamlining the programs.  
12 We'll certainly look at what's possible to prevent  
13 more evictions.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
16 Member Kallos. Council Member Salamanca? And we've  
17 also been joined by Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez  
18 from Manhattan and Council Member Corey Johnson of  
19 Manhattan and Council Member Vanessa Gibson of the  
20 Bronx.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, Mr.  
22 Chair. Good morning, Commissioner. Commissioner, a  
23 few questions. First, LINC vouchers. I'm meeting  
24 families in my council district who are personally  
25 coming to my office looking for help because



2 landlords do not want to accept LINC vouchers.  
3 They're concerned that eventually the City is going  
4 to run out of funds, and they're just going to have  
5 tenants there where, you know, their vouchers are--  
6 there's no funding in these vouchers. What is HRA  
7 doing to reassure landlords that this would not  
8 occur?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think-- I  
10 appreciate the question, and I know we've talked  
11 about this in other context. I think that the  
12 landlord perspective that you're describing is one  
13 that reflects what happened when the Advantage  
14 program was summarily terminated and landlords felt  
15 as if the rug was pulled out from underneath of them,  
16 and the shelter census increased 38 percent during  
17 that period of time. We are very grateful for the  
18 thousands of landlords that slide 19 shows have been  
19 participating in the program. Some 20,000  
20 households, 55,000 people have been able to move out  
21 of shelter, avoid going into shelter, and about  
22 15,000 of those households are participating in the  
23 various rental assistance programs. So we're going  
24 to keep working with landlords. We've held a number  
25 of forums with landlords. Our Public Engagement Unit

2 reaches out directly to landlords to engage them in  
3 the programs, and we also have a piece of information  
4 that we want to make sure that you have, which is a  
5 card that advises clients of the fact that source of  
6 income discrimination is not lawful, and it gives us  
7 a number that people can call. We very much want the  
8 specifics. I went to x landlord. X landlord's name  
9 is so and so. I tried to rent an apartment. They  
10 said I won't take LINC. That's-- I won't take  
11 whatever it is. I won't take CITYFEPS. That's the  
12 kind of information we need to supplement what the  
13 Human Rights Commission's doing. The Human Rights  
14 Commission has brought action against-- about  
15 landlords that control about 20,000 apartments. We  
16 have set up our own effort within HRA and our hotline  
17 number is 718-291-4141 to get help to people, and I  
18 would love to work with any of these individual  
19 constituents to learn the names of the landlords so  
20 that we can intervene. We've already intervened in  
21 35 cases, and that has had a god impact, and we want  
22 to intervene and help more people.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright,  
24 definitely would like a copy of that.

25 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Great.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So I'll have in  
3 my district office. HASA programs--

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I'm  
5 sorry?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: I'm going a  
7 different subject, the HASA, the HASA programs. I  
8 have not-for-profits in my council district who deal  
9 with the HASA programs, and they get paid on time.  
10 These are-- some of these providers also have  
11 contracts with DHS contracts who are behind a fiscal  
12 year, two fiscal years. Why is it that HASA  
13 contracts pay on time and DHS contracts cannot pay on  
14 time?

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm just looking for  
16 a piece of information to answer your question. I  
17 thought this was going to come up in the DHS hearing.  
18 So, I appreciate that your providers have had a good  
19 experience with HASA. One of the questions that the  
20 Chair asked me was about the integration of the two  
21 agencies, and one of the things I said was we're  
22 integrating. We'd already integrated the contract  
23 programs between HRA and DHS, so now we have an  
24 integrated program. When we began the 90-day review  
25 about a year ago we found that there were contracting

2 challenges dating back to FY 14 for various  
3 providers. I can tell you where we are now. We  
4 have-- let me just tell you. There's a total of 949  
5 DHS contracts or amendments for FY 16 and FY 17. For  
6 FY 16, 98 percent of all of those contracts are  
7 active and providers can be paid under. Ninety-three  
8 percent of the FY 17 contracts are active and can be  
9 paid on, and 82 percent of the contract amendments  
10 are active and can be paid on. Let me sort of take  
11 you through the numbers. So, of the 320 FY 16  
12 contracts that are outstanding, seven are with  
13 providers and we're waiting for things back from  
14 providers. For the FY 17 contracts that are  
15 outstanding there are 21 outstanding. Seven of them  
16 we have the paperwork and we're working it through.  
17 Eight of them are with providers. Six of them are  
18 with the Comptroller, with whom we've had a very good  
19 relationship in moving through those contracts. For  
20 the FY 16 and 17 amendments there are 25 of them.  
21 There are 55 still outstanding, 25 of them are with  
22 the Comptroller, and we've been working very close  
23 with him to register them. Seven are with the  
24 providers, 23 are with us. This is out of 949  
25 contract transactions. So, in less than a year we've

2 addressed any issues from FY 14, from FY 15, and  
3 here's where we are with the 16 and 17. So, for the  
4 first time in years the DHS providers will have their  
5 FY 18 contracts in process when FY 18 begins and all  
6 of this backlog will have been addressed.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, thank  
8 you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
10 Member Salamanca. Council Member Gibson?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you very  
12 much, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon, Commissioner, to  
13 you and your team. Thank you for the work, the  
14 partnership and everything that you're doing to  
15 really provide critical social services to many New  
16 Yorkers. Obviously, myself, Council Member Levine,  
17 and many of us here are extremely excited about Right  
18 to Counsel. Every opportunity I get on record to talk  
19 about the great success we've had over three years,  
20 supporting universal access to legal services for  
21 many New Yorkers living at and below the federal  
22 poverty line, and certainly in your testimony you  
23 alluded to the 62.2 million that we've already  
24 invested in thus far, and when we get through the  
25

2 initial phase of Right to Counsel, we'll be at 155  
3 million dollars, correct?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's correct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, wonderful.  
6 Alluding to a little of what Council Member Salamanca  
7 and Chair Levin talked about, I wanted to ask about  
8 obviously the LINC program. Many of us are being  
9 contacted by clients that are in shelters six to  
10 eight months at any given time. The frustration is  
11 unimaginable, and I wanted to find out what legal  
12 recourse do we have as an Administration to ensure  
13 that landlords are not discriminating on clients that  
14 have a LINC voucher.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, it is against  
16 the law, statute, a Local Law passed by this Council  
17 that the Mayor is a prime sponsor on when he was in  
18 the Council. I want to just hasten to add as I've  
19 said a couple of times in this hearing, there are  
20 thousands of landlords who have accepted rental  
21 assistance and made it possible as part of our  
22 overall effort for 55,000, more than 55,000 New  
23 Yorkers to either move out of shelter or avoid going  
24 into shelter. Having said that, the Human Rights  
25 Commission just brought actions against landlords who

2 have ownership and control of 20,000 apartments in  
3 New York City as part of a stepped-up enforcement  
4 effort to deal with just that source of income  
5 discrimination problem that you have described, and  
6 HRA's been given the ability to create a unit which  
7 we've done, and we intervened already in 35 cases and  
8 had good results. I would very much encourage you to  
9 either connect to us directly or have your  
10 constituents connect to us through the number that I  
11 gave before which is 718-291-4141. That will enable  
12 us to focus on individual cases. And again, I want  
13 to encourage getting the most information we can. I  
14 went to x landlord. X landlord said I don't take  
15 LINC or I won't take LINC, and we'll be able to take  
16 action. We've provided support to Housing Works, for  
17 example, in litigation that they brought against  
18 several landlords who wouldn't take HASA clients and  
19 we really very much appreciate the help that Housing  
20 Works has brought there. So, we'll work with you.  
21 We'll work with your constituents, and ultimately we  
22 will make sure that the law is complied with.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, and I  
24 appreciate hearing that and understanding it. Is  
25 there any information that we have that's available

2 to the larger public to the shelter providers that  
3 provides this phone number, any, you know, PSA,  
4 because I don't think many clients that are living  
5 shelters understand that it's illegal to not accept  
6 that voucher.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: And not until they  
9 hear it from your agency, from any of us, are they  
10 aware of that.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. We'll keep  
12 passing this out to people in the shelter system.  
13 It's as really--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
15 Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: very clearly as I  
17 think you're correctly making sure that it does. Do  
18 you receive housing assistance? It's illegal for  
19 landlords to refuse to rent to you. A landlord  
20 cannot refuse to rent an apartment to you because  
21 you're paying the rent with government assistance,  
22 including housing vouchers such as Section 8, LINC,  
23 HASA benefits, FEPS--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
25 Okay.



2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: SEPS or cash  
3 assistance, and then it goes on to explain forms of  
4 source of income discrimination, like we don't take  
5 payments from this program or we'd prefer another  
6 source to pay the rent. Don't you have any other  
7 income? Okay, that program is fine, but can someone  
8 else guarantee the rent? Or we'll take that program,  
9 but you still have to pay the first month's rent  
10 security deposit and brokers in cash up front. All  
11 these things are prohibited by source of income law.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. So, I'm  
13 putting in my order to have a box sent to my office.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: English and  
16 Espanol.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Gracias, thank  
19 you. I wanted to ask a question about the efforts  
20 that-- this may be a little bit DHS-related, so I  
21 apologize. It's hard to separate. But I just wanted  
22 to get an update on the-- never mind. I'll get to  
23 that at another time. The cluster site, sorry. I  
24 can't help it. These are all the issues that are  
25 important to my district.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's okay.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: And the phasing  
4 out of that. So it's kind of HRA-related, right?

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, you have me  
6 for the day for two agencies, so why not.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Welcome to your  
8 world.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We've been able to  
10 get out of 647 units so far, and we brought the total  
11 number of clusters from 3,600 down to 3,000,  
12 approximately 3,000 by the end of December 31<sup>st</sup>,  
13 2016, and we've continued to get out of additional  
14 clusters, and we're projected to get out of 40. We  
15 got out of 40 buildings last year, and we project to  
16 get out another 40 this year.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. And with  
18 the phasing out, the conversations we're having with  
19 those existing landlords, I imagine the larger  
20 buildings are traditional units of affordable housing  
21 where there is some level of subsidy. So, is there a  
22 possibility when the family vacates that unit, does  
23 it go back to the affordability role or does it turn  
24 into another form of housing?

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, if it was a  
3 rent-stabilized unit to begin with, it should revert  
4 to rent stabilization. We are getting out of units  
5 where we think the conditions are not appropriate to  
6 continue to house families in, but we certainly stand  
7 ready to work with you and any of your colleagues if  
8 in connection with various landlords to convert the  
9 units from shelter to permanent housing and to enable  
10 families that are in the units to stay there. We've  
11 had some landlords who entertained that and others  
12 who have not.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. And my  
14 final two questions are really HRA-related.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: The job training  
17 program--

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Yep.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: that we've  
20 instituted, I've received some feedback from some of  
21 the clients that there is an incredible improvement.  
22 Many times in the past, residents or clients who are  
23 sitting at a computer all day and not really building  
24 the vocational and job training experience. With the  
25 new partnerships you have particularly with many of

2 the clients working at the NYPD for example, to what  
3 extent are any of these clients after the terms of  
4 the, you know, the program are satisfied, are any of  
5 those clients picked up to get fulltime and gainful  
6 employment with the City?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Actually, the NYPD  
8 has been a great partner with us in the past, and we  
9 have had a number of our clients who have been able  
10 to get fulltime employment thereafter. Those JTP  
11 slots that we've added--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
13 Right.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So we now have job  
15 training positions at Parks, at Sanitation, at NYPD,  
16 and DCAS, those are in addition to the private sector  
17 employment opportunities that we are connecting  
18 people to through the public assistance hiring  
19 requirement for not-for-profits, and job  
20 opportunities that our partnership at SBS including  
21 at the center up in Washington Heights that we've  
22 been able to engage in, and also more clients are  
23 participating in education and training. The new  
24 contracts for employment services are just going into  
25 effect in the coming month during April. So we'll

2 start to see the impact of the improved services to  
3 an even greater extent than your constituents may  
4 already be experiencing, but ending WEP by the end of  
5 the year and replacing it with new activities was a  
6 high priority. We told you we would do it, and we  
7 did do it.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, great, and  
9 I'm happy to hear that, and I know we're tracking the  
10 data on the number of clients that do get gainful  
11 employment with a city agency.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yep.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: They're less  
14 likely to return to the system. So, I think as we  
15 embark on greater partnerships, particularly with  
16 more agencies, I think we will continue to see the  
17 benefit of how a program like that can really help  
18 clients that are doing most of the work that the City  
19 municipal staff are doing anyway, so I think it's a  
20 good progression, a great step of, you know, progress  
21 getting into long-term employment.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, and then my  
24 last question is focused on DV. I do a lot of work  
25 with many providers that are providing service for DV

2 clients, including long-term housing for survivors,  
3 and within the climate we're working in immigration  
4 has become even more important and paramount to the  
5 work we're doing, but my concern, as many of us have  
6 the same concern, are potential victims of DV are now  
7 less likely to come forward because of a potential  
8 immigration issue that they may have or a loved one  
9 or a friend. I think the fear is there, and I've  
10 mentioned to you and your staff before and everyone  
11 that I talk to that it's really important for us that  
12 as we promote services to be creative and try to  
13 reach clients where they are. They're not always  
14 coming into a municipal building, the Family Justice  
15 Center, places where you have to go through, you  
16 know, security measures, etcetera. So within the  
17 domestic violence expansion that you're talking  
18 about, where are we going to see those services? Is  
19 it the Mayor's Office to Combat DV? Are we going to  
20 see it within the provider network, and how are we  
21 going to address some of those very challenging  
22 issues with immigration to make sure we bring out  
23 more victims and provide them and their families with  
24 services?

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, in a couple of  
3 ways. First of all, we have HRA oversees the City's  
4 legal services programs through the Office of Civil  
5 Justice created by the Local Law and partnership  
6 between the Administration and the Council, and  
7 through that initiative we have legal services,  
8 providers directly in the Family Justice Center  
9 offices that partnership with the Mayor's Office to  
10 Combat Domestic Violence, and that's particularly  
11 focused on preserving housing and preventing  
12 unnecessary evictions. We also fund immigration legal  
13 services through our various programs to focus on the  
14 needs of immigrants, including domestic violence  
15 survivors and the various forms of immigration relief  
16 that are available for domestic violence survivors  
17 are areas in which our providers focus. But I also  
18 want to add that there's been no change in law in  
19 terms of the benefits and services that HRA and DHS  
20 provide immigrants, and it's been the longstanding  
21 policy of the City to maintain confidentiality. We  
22 recently reinforced our longstanding policy with  
23 respect to client confidentiality with respect to  
24 immigration status, and I would encourage New Yorkers  
25 who would seek our services in the past to continue

2 to do so without fear with respect to the immigration  
3 status.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. Thank you  
5 very much, Commissioner, and thank you, Chair Levin.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
7 Member Gibson. Council Member Rodriguez?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you,  
9 Chair. Commissioner, thank you for the great  
10 leadership. As I said before, you know, you are one  
11 of the finest commissioners that we have, especially  
12 running an agency that is so responsible to serve the  
13 underserved New Yorkers and the whole team that you  
14 have. I, as a former Chairman of the Higher  
15 Education Committee, you know, I always appreciate  
16 that under your leadership for the first time you  
17 brought back, with the support of Mayor de Blasio,  
18 the opportunity for a student going to community  
19 college to be able to make their hours to get the  
20 public assistance with the homework and all the  
21 assignments that they do in their own college, not to  
22 be for to work 35 hours in order to qualify for  
23 public assistance. So, I know it makes a big  
24 difference. I had a question on how-- again, and  
25 this is all about knowing that we have an



2 Administration, probably the most progressive that we  
3 have ever met in our history, where we can see the  
4 legacy from the UPK, Afterschool for All, housing,  
5 frozen [sic] the rent, and I'm always looking for  
6 other areas on how I believe that our Mayor can also  
7 leave the legacy. In one area where I have a concern  
8 is about how are we calculating the investments on  
9 New Yorkers when it comes to transportation. So, my  
10 question is does HRA look into percentage of  
11 household budget that transportation costs make up as  
12 compared to housing, food and clothing?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, it's an  
14 important question. The benefits that we provide,  
15 the benefit levels are essentially set by the state  
16 or Federal Government, so the Public Assistance Grant  
17 by way of example is a set amount of money that was  
18 calculated a number of years ago, and I hear what  
19 you're asking, but our provision of benefits is  
20 essentially governed by state statute and state  
21 regulation.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: But as someone  
23 that received public assistance at some point, and  
24 when I was taking classes at City College, I know one  
25 of the requirement that we have [inaudible] here

2 today, you know, the public assistance benefit that  
3 New Yorkers [inaudible] receive also encourage New  
4 Yorkers for them to go out and look for jobs, because  
5 that's a mission of the temporary assistance that we  
6 are committed to provide. So, are we calculating the  
7 cost of transportation for those who benefit from  
8 public assistance?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But as part of our  
10 employment programs for anyone who has a federal or  
11 state law requirement to participate in work  
12 activity, we do provide transportation for that group  
13 of clients.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay. Can you  
15 speak to the cost that based on the information that  
16 your agency have, your client incur when it comes to  
17 transportation?

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We spend about 40  
19 million dollars on transportation costs for clients.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And how does--  
21 how do they use those?

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: In connection with  
23 appointments and assignments related to employment  
24 services.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay. I just  
3 believe that, and I'm pretty sure that you also  
4 agree, that if we provide additional 700 dollars per  
5 year to those especially New Yorkers living under the  
6 poverty line, it would make a big difference, because  
7 I-- you know, the City's doing the best we can, but I  
8 also know that we have limited resources. But when  
9 it comes to individuals that they get their public  
10 assistance, you know, they are getting any amount  
11 that they use to buy the food to cover all the  
12 expense, but they have to take their children to  
13 museums. They also have to, you know, go out and  
14 look for the jobs. They also have to go to a school  
15 meeting, and I think that if we can find a way or how  
16 from the HRA office calculate the cost that incur  
17 transportation and provide an additional subsidy to  
18 those New Yorkers who live on the poverty line, that  
19 spend 700 dollars per year on transportation. I  
20 think that can help them a lot.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I hear what you're  
22 asking. Again, what we're currently doing as the  
23 social service agency is we're spending 40 million  
24 dollars on transportation related to employment  
25 services mainly, and we also provide apartment search

2 grant for people in our shelter system, and those are  
3 the focuses that we as a social services agency are  
4 able to do, and I'll see what kind of data we might  
5 have in relationship to what you're asking.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: But what-- do  
7 you-- how much is the average that someone who get  
8 public assistance get every month?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, these are  
10 state-set amounts. So, cash assistance benefit for a  
11 household of one is maximum 398 dollars. Cash  
12 assistance benefit for households of three, cash  
13 assistance only, maximum is 789 dollars. Then there  
14 are federal food stamps in addition to that, but  
15 those are the, sort of, the maximum benefit. The  
16 average benefit for a household of one including  
17 shelter grants is 465 dollars, and the average cash  
18 assistance benefit for a household of three including  
19 shelter grant is 796 dollars.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And--

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]  
22 Typically a household of one gets 146 dollars in food  
23 stamps on average, and a household of three gets 438  
24 dollars in food stamps on average.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And I  
3 understand that you follow state and federal formula,  
4 but when the average let's say 300-- cash benefit at  
5 398 does-- and I assume that you, again, you  
6 calculate the need of those New Yorkers who receive  
7 those 398. Does money resources for transportation  
8 is also calculated in that 398?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: In the state grant  
10 there was a state calculation for transportation  
11 embedded in those dollars.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And how much  
13 in [inaudible] calculating that formula?

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I would have to get  
15 you the breakdown. It was calculated a number of  
16 years ago at the state level.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Okay. Thank  
18 you, Commissioner.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you,  
21 Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
23 Council Member Rodriguez. Council Member Johnson?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Good to see you,  
25 Commissioner. Thanks for being here.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good to see you,  
3 Council Member.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: It's always good  
5 to work with you. I'm going to ask some tough  
6 questions today. It's not personal. It's just that  
7 I think, you know, we're in a difficult spot right  
8 now in the city.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So, to start  
11 off, I think, with good news, the HASA expansion that  
12 you mentioned in your testimony, I'm really, really,  
13 really proud that working alongside you and other  
14 folks in this Administration we were able to  
15 formulate a plan that I think eventually got the  
16 Governor to issue some regulations, which really  
17 accomplished what we had already been talking about  
18 for a couple of years, and now an additional 1,800  
19 people are getting HASA benefits, and most of those  
20 folks are people that are pretty poor in New York  
21 City and now have housing assistance. Do you see  
22 this as a success?

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We do. We think  
24 it's a-- it was an important partnership with you and  
25 with the Council to get to this point, and it's

2 having an impact for people that would otherwise not  
3 get this help. We think it's a very important  
4 program and a very important program and a very  
5 important reform.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I don't want to  
7 pat myself or you or anyone else in the back.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You were the leader.  
9 You should pat yourself.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: No, but I just  
11 want to say that, you know, the Chairman and I were  
12 talking about this last night, and I feel very, very  
13 proud that we were able to do this, and the countless  
14 number of New Yorkers who are living with HIV and  
15 AIDS who were poor or are poor and were not able to  
16 take advantage of the benefits that existed for  
17 technical reasons that I think were not good reasons  
18 of why they were ineligible. I think we helped a lot  
19 of people that really needed help.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [interposing]  
22 And I'm really proud of the Administration, of you,  
23 and of Chair Levin and of the Speaker and of the  
24 Mayor for working on an issue that doesn't get great  
25 headlines that most New Yorkers don't think about

2 because it doesn't affect them, but communities of  
3 color where HIV and AIDS is still a big, big issue,  
4 this is now a disease of poverty and race in many  
5 ways, and for us to be able to expand a program that  
6 we know works that keeps people healthy and in their  
7 homes, it's probably one of the prouder things that  
8 I've done in three plus years on this council, and it  
9 was a real partnership with you, and I'm really  
10 grateful that we've been able to do that.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thanks. I really  
12 appreciate your kind words, but it took a partnership  
13 and it took leadership by you as Chair of the Health  
14 Committee and Council Member Levin as Chair of this  
15 committee and the Speaker and the mayor, and Budget  
16 Director Dean Fuleihan to make all this happen. Of  
17 course, Dan Tietz, the Special Services Officer and  
18 the advocates groups that we worked with [inaudible]  
19 Coalition, Housing Works--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [interposing]  
21 Charles King, and yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, it was an  
23 effort of a lot of people coming together and saying  
24 that this has been a problem for many years, how can  
25 we solve it.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So, I want to  
3 start off with my thanks, and now I'm going to be a  
4 little more tough, but it's not personal. So, how  
5 many people are currently living on the streets in  
6 New York City? What's the most accurate detailed  
7 count of the street homeless population in New York  
8 City?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The quarterly counts  
10 and the Hope count would tell you about 2,800 people  
11 are on the streets, but I want to emphasize this, and  
12 I know you have a hard-hitting question coming, but  
13 before you say it, I want to just say that the-- we  
14 count not to get numbers, but to actually try to  
15 serve people one-by-one. It's the reason why we got  
16 690 people off. It's the reason why we're going to  
17 keep working to get people off the streets throughout  
18 the city, because it's not about numbers. It's about  
19 human beings.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I agree with that  
21 wholeheartedly. I think it's important for us to  
22 know what that accurate number is, because as you  
23 said, these are not just numbers. They're  
24 individuals, many of whom-- I think it's too easy,  
25 and I don't want to be caught in the trap of

2 stereotyping homeless people, because it is a  
3 complicated problem with a lot of different  
4 socioeconomic race-based issues attached to it and  
5 how we've gotten to where we are. Mental health  
6 issues, substance abuse issues, the cost of living in  
7 New York City, all of these things contribute to it,  
8 but in my district, and I don't say this in an  
9 antagonistic way towards homeless people, on most  
10 blocks in Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen there are  
11 homeless people, on most blocks. The highest  
12 concentration of the chronically street homeless in  
13 New York City, I think the New York Times did a map  
14 about 18 months ago, is in Chelsea and in Hell's  
15 Kitchen, and any day you walk down the streets, when  
16 I walk to the subway in the morning, when I walk to  
17 the grocery store at night there are homeless people  
18 living on the streets. I talk to them. I ask them how  
19 they're doing, and what I find is that most of these  
20 folks are not folks that are just out panhandling for  
21 the day or have a place to live at night but are  
22 coming out during the day just to hang out on the  
23 streets. These are people that are refusing shelter  
24 for whatever reason, and the number is much higher  
25 than it was four years ago. At least it seems that

way. I mean, if you walk down the streets it seems higher, and I want to get a baseline to understand how much that number has increased. Put the shelter population aside for a moment, folks that currently have a roof over their head at night, and there are plenty of problems that you're trying to deal with as it relates to the shelter population and getting the capacity that we need. But when it comes to the chronically street homeless, the folks that New Yorkers see and interact with or don't interact with because they ignore them every single day, how has that number increased?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, that's why I think it's important to do what you want to do, which is to focus on the numbers of people which is why we added the quarterly counts in addition to the Hope count. The Hope count number year over year has been on a downward trend, but our focus is again on counting to see if we can serve people.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Do you believe that number is accurate?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, it's the most accurate standard we have. It's a HUD-approved number. We instituted quarterly counts to add to it,

2 but we don't celebrate the number. What we focus on  
3 is celebrating each individual we get off the street.  
4 Last week I was out with Goddard Riverside and  
5 Breaking Ground, two providers I know that you're  
6 familiar with, and you know, we spent an hour to  
7 convince someone to come off the streets. That was a  
8 victory for one person.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: That's a huge  
10 success.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And that's what they  
12 do each and every day. It's the reason why we doubled  
13 the number of outreach workers last April from, you  
14 know, almost-- to almost 400, and that's played a  
15 role in helping get 690 people off the streets. But  
16 whether the number is 2,800 or some other number  
17 we're not going to stop until we keep bringing people  
18 in. Now, having said that, the tools to bring people  
19 in are critically important, and you talked about  
20 chronically street homeless people. One of the  
21 things that we did when the mayor-- when we  
22 implemented the Mayor's HomeStat Program was to  
23 eliminate the chronic requirement. It used to be you  
24 had to be on the street for at least nine months out  
25 of every two years in order to get the help. We

2 eliminated the chronic requirement, and that is an  
3 important step forward. We also are bringing the  
4 first 550 supportive housing units online out of this  
5 year out of this historic commitment of 15,000 units.  
6 That's the way that we're going to help get people  
7 off the streets, the combination of the additional  
8 safe haven beds that we added, plus supportive  
9 housing, and to continue to work person-by-person to  
10 bring people off the streets, in your neighborhood  
11 and across the City. I know Council Member Kallos is  
12 someone that we've done meetings with him and we  
13 have-- we constructed a bi-name [sic] list of the  
14 people in his district and we talk to him fairly  
15 regularly about the specific people that we're  
16 working on to get off the streets, some of whom we've  
17 had successes with, and we'll do the same thing with  
18 you, because we don't accept that it's-- that we  
19 should continue to do everything we possibly can to  
20 bring people off the streets, and that's why this  
21 investment in HomeStat is so unique nationally.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I hear you, and I  
23 don't disagree with anything you said, Commissioner,  
24 I just think we can do both. I think it's important  
25 for New Yorkers and for the City to have as accurate

2 a number that we can have, and I understand there's  
3 no way to be totally 100 percent accurate; it's not a  
4 fool-proof system. You have to canvas the streets.  
5 You have to try not to double-count. You have to try  
6 to find folks that are in the subways or hidden away  
7 in some places, but I think it's really important to  
8 understand what that number is.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I do agree with you.  
10 So, I don't mean to imply otherwise. I completely  
11 agree with you. We're going to keep counting. You  
12 know, we're using a HUD-approved gold standard best  
13 practices type methodology. We've added the  
14 quarterly counts to try to get a better handle on the  
15 numbers, but we think we can do both things at the  
16 same time, keep counting, keep trying to get as  
17 accurate as possible, but every day use the fact  
18 we've double the number of outreach workers to bring  
19 people in off the streets as we're doing every day.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Well, I want to  
21 say that I'm grateful for the work that you're doing,  
22 and you know this. I'm not trying to, you know,  
23 preach to you about this, because you're in this work  
24 for the right reasons, and you have probably the most  
25 difficult job in the entire Administration, but it's

2 disturbing when you walk down the streets every day  
3 and see homeless people on nearly every block. It's  
4 disturbing, and we can sit here and talk about all  
5 the great things, and I'm not discounting those at  
6 all, but even seeing that this programs are being  
7 implemented, executed and having a difference in  
8 homeless prevention, it still feels like we are not  
9 being successful when you walk down the streets every  
10 day in these neighborhoods and you see homeless  
11 people every other block living on the streets. It  
12 just doesn't feel like we're doing the best job, and  
13 that's not personal towards you. It just-- it feels  
14 like we're increasing the budget. We're doing all  
15 these things. The Mayor's come up with a plan, and  
16 still chronic street homelessness that New Yorkers  
17 witness every single day.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, let me ask to  
19 you look at this way. Supportive housing is a proven  
20 track record of getting people off the street and  
21 having them stay off the street. Up until this new  
22 initiative of the Mayor's there was a huge gap in the  
23 numbers of supportive housing units available for  
24 those who need it, one to four by some counts, one to  
25 five by other counts. A coalition of terrific

2 organizations calculated that New York City needed  
3 30,000 units of supportive housing. The Mayor  
4 stepped up and said we'll do half, and we're bringing  
5 the first 550 on this year. That will start to have  
6 an impact on what you see, because we want to make  
7 sure that there's a tool to help bring people in.  
8 The people that you're seeing are not going to come  
9 into traditional shelters. It's the reason why we've  
10 created smaller low-demand shelters, but ultimately,  
11 the way to get those individuals off is into  
12 supportive housing. Now, it takes an average of five  
13 months to get someone off the streets. That's an  
14 average. So that means some people it takes a lot  
15 longer. It could take 10 contacts. It could take  
16 more than 200 contacts.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: If you look at  
18 the Times Square Hotel in my district, 43<sup>rd</sup> Street  
19 and Eighth Avenue, hugely successful model of  
20 supportive housing in getting people off the streets.  
21 I'm really proud it's there. A lot of formerly  
22 homeless people that actually were homeless in that  
23 area are living in that hotel, which is considered  
24 supportive housing, that's great. I talk about this  
25 a lot because I think it's important to. You know, I



got sober on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009. This July will be eight years sober. Best, most important thing I've ever done for myself. I easily could have ended up in an institution, in a jail. I used alcohol. I used drugs. I did a lot of stupid things. I didn't pay my rent some months, and I'm lucky that I didn't end up homeless. Got sober at 27 years old. So for me, I'm lucky. I'm a white guy who had pretty good jobs with benefits. Didn't come from a wealthy family, but I'm lucky. So this is like personal to me when I see people living on the streets and they have substance abuse problems and have not been connected to the treatment that they need, you know, I sometimes see myself in them. I don't know what it was. It was sort of a moment of grace at 27 years old on July 13<sup>th</sup> that I decided I was going to quit drinking and quit using drugs, and I stopped. I wouldn't have been able to stop if I didn't have a roof over my head. There is no way that I would have gotten sober if I did not have a roof over my head. It just wouldn't happen. So, I don't want to pile on. I just want to say that we can pat ourselves on the back and we can feel good about the work that we're doing, but you walk the streets of New York City or

2 at least my district and you still see a massive  
3 problem every single day. There's cognitive  
4 dissidence in reading the great work that's being  
5 done and actually walking the streets of New York  
6 City and still seeing the suffering and the number of  
7 folks that are still chronically homeless, and that's  
8 heartbreaking to me, and I think we need to do  
9 better.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think-- I really  
11 appreciate your courage and speaking out about your  
12 own circumstances, which is frankly an example to  
13 others about the situation we find ourselves in, and  
14 we've known each other a while. So I appreciate your  
15 continuing to speak out on this, but I also want to  
16 reassure you that we consider our report today to be  
17 just that, a report. It's not a resolution of  
18 things. It's simply saying we put in place programs  
19 that are going to continue person by person to have  
20 an impact and ultimately address this problem in a  
21 way that will satisfy you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Well, I don't  
23 want to--

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] And all  
25 New Yorkers.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I don't want to  
3 take up any more time. I know the Chair has more  
4 questions. I apologize for being late, Mr. Chair,  
5 today. I hope this plan's successful that you all  
6 rolled out. I have my doubts. Given the opposition  
7 we've seen in some of the areas where we've tried to  
8 site shelters already. My district has the fifth  
9 highest number of homeless beds in the City of New  
10 York, I believe, fifth highest number. We have  
11 supportive housing. We have shelters. We have  
12 women's only shelters. We have all sorts of stuff.  
13 My community has been I think for years actually, 30  
14 years-- long before my time. Tom Dwayne [sp?]  
15 probably talks about it of his time in the Council.  
16 We've always been welcoming of these type of  
17 facilities, and I look forward to working with you on  
18 creating supportive housing and getting more housing  
19 in the district to get people off the streets. It's  
20 not about politics. It's about doing what's right  
21 for those without a voice, and there's those who are  
22 most vulnerable in New York City. So I look forward  
23 to working with you on that.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Very much appreciate  
25 your support and leadership and just again, by way of

2 example on 14<sup>th</sup> and Seventh Avenue we're opening a  
3 drop-in center that's going to help us bring people  
4 in off the streets.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And I support  
6 that.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But that took-- but  
8 that took leadership to make that happen, and you're  
9 a very important partner to make that happen. That's  
10 an important tool for us to help bring people in off  
11 the streets, and--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [interposing] And  
13 I live a block from there, so no one could say I'm  
14 nimby [sic].

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate that.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I live at 15<sup>th</sup> and  
17 Seventh.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. Thank you,  
20 Commissioner.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you. Thanks.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
23 Member Johnson. Commissioner, I just have two quick  
24 questions, and then we're going to take a three-  
25 minute break and then we'll do our DHS testimony. As

2 you can see obviously we're running late, but we  
3 answered a lot of-- we asked and you answered a lot  
4 of DHS-related questions.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I thought this was  
6 the DHS hearing.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I know. For  
8 everybody, we still have to do our DHS portion of the  
9 hearing. Just two things. RHY, when are they going  
10 to be able to-- Runaway Homeless Youth, when are they  
11 going to be able to qualify for LINC vouchers, or are  
12 they able to qualify yet?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As part of the  
14 streamlining after the FEPS settlement we'll be  
15 issuing rules and that will provide that assistance  
16 that we committed that we would do.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In the next few months  
18 do you expect that? In the next few months?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm only hesitating  
20 to answer you because I'm trying to calculate how  
21 long it takes to do the capital [sic] rule-making  
22 process, but once we do that we'll be able to provide  
23 that assistance.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: As part of that  
25 streamlining process, what happens to individuals and

2 families that already have LINC vouchers? If they  
3 have, you know, a LINC X voucher and LINC X voucher  
4 gets folded into LINC Y voucher, what happens to  
5 their voucher?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That'll be taken  
7 into account. There's absolutely no intent, interest  
8 or even consideration of someone who has a voucher  
9 paying rent, able to stay out of the shelter system  
10 having that situation disrupted.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Moving over to source  
12 of income discrimination, what's the estimated budget  
13 for the new Source of Income Discrimination Unit?

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I will get you that  
15 number.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then other thing  
17 about source of income discrimination. Does-- one  
18 thing that I think might be helpful just in the  
19 process of locating apartments for individuals,  
20 families that are suffering from this source of  
21 income discrimination, does DHS just have a list of  
22 the landlords that have taken it? You said that  
23 there are thousands of landlords that have taken  
24 vouchers. We should have a list and say, okay, you  
25 know, in various Community Boards if you are looking

2 in this Community Board, talk to that landlord; if  
3 you're looking in that Community Board, talk to the  
4 other landlord.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. That's one  
6 of the things we're looking at. There are some pros  
7 and cons I just want to caution which is somebody  
8 that's periodically got an opening. It's part of  
9 relationship building. We get units from that person  
10 and we make them available versus having his office  
11 or her office be called constantly when they don't  
12 have that many openings. It's part-- it's a good  
13 idea, but there are some operational issues. For  
14 someone that's got lots of apartments it makes a lot  
15 of sense. For someone that's got very few it may  
16 actually break the relationship with--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]  
18 Honestly, like as a-- I'm Council Member. I got a  
19 constituent. She's looking for an apartment. I  
20 don't even know where to send her. I'm just like  
21 randomly calling people, you know like, "Do you know  
22 a landlord that has an apartment anywhere in  
23 northeast Brooklyn or northeast Queens?" You know,  
24 there's got to be a better way.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll work-- we're  
3 making some of these changes, and we'll work with you  
4 on that constituent.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But generally, I  
6 mean, just structurally there's got to be a way in  
7 which--

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I  
9 understand what you're saying.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: people are able to  
11 identify, streamline that process. That's the  
12 process that needs to be streamlined. And then, just  
13 lastly with regard to EFAP, that is a-- we cannot at  
14 a time like this where we are seeing emergency food,  
15 you know, thrown out there as a political football,  
16 SNAP benefits thrown out there as a political  
17 football, who knows what's going to happen. I mean,  
18 really, seriously, who knows what's going to happen  
19 in the next year or so where we have a Republican  
20 Congress that is essentially hijacked by ideologs who  
21 want to get rid of all entitlement programs that  
22 exist in the United States going back to like the New  
23 Deal and a President that is, you know, one day  
24 tweets nasty stuff about them; the next day is  
25 coddling them. Who knows? Who knows what's going to



2 happen. We need at our-- we need to get our house in  
3 order and make sure that we are providing the  
4 necessary funding for emergency food so that nobody  
5 in New York City goes hungry and if the Federal  
6 Government is going to do their drastic things that  
7 they're threatening to do, we are protected here in  
8 New York City. So I'll just leave it at that.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're certainly  
10 going to take all these things into account as we  
11 look at the Executive Budget.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We're going to take a  
13 very short break.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [inaudible]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Three-- five minutes,  
16 and then we'll come back with the DHS testimony. We  
17 are expecting to-- we know you have to leave by two  
18 o'clock, so we'll try to keep those questions  
19 limited. Thanks.

20 [break]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning, or good  
22 afternoon, everybody. I'm Council Member Stephen  
23 Levin, Chair of the Council's General Welfare  
24 Committee. This is the second of our Preliminary  
25 Budget hearings. At this point we'll be hearing

2 testimony from the Department of Homeless Services,  
3 also referred to as DHS, regarding its Preliminary  
4 Budget and general agency operations within the  
5 proposed 1.43 billion dollar budget as well as  
6 updates on the restructuring of the agency and its  
7 programs resulting from the 90-day review of DHS that  
8 was completed in March of 2016. DHS provides  
9 emergency shelter, rehousing support and services to  
10 single adults and families with little to no  
11 alternative housing options. As the homeless  
12 population continues to grow to unprecedented levels  
13 in the City, so does the demand for financial  
14 resources required to meet the needs for this  
15 vulnerable population. The proposed Fiscal 2018  
16 Preliminary Budget for DHS increased by 133.9 million  
17 dollars when compared to Fiscal 17's Adopted Budget.  
18 This increase in funding can largely be attributed to  
19 the new needs for the agency which include additional  
20 shelter costs to accommodate the current shelter  
21 census, increased investment in shelter security and  
22 more resources at intake centers to accommodate the  
23 influx of shelter entrance. The City's been making  
24 substantial investments in rental assistance and  
25 anti-eviction legal services since Fiscal 14, since

2 Fiscal 16-- actually, since Fiscal 14, and we have  
3 yet to make-- which have yet to make an impressive  
4 impact on the population entering the shelter system.  
5 I will commend the city though for this Preliminary  
6 Budget of Department of Homeless Services for putting  
7 these needs up front in the Preliminary Budget  
8 identified as new needs instead of identifying them  
9 later on in the year through budget amendments. It's  
10 important that we address these issues head-on, and I  
11 commend the Mayor for this taking that on in his new  
12 plan. In December 2015, Mayor de Blasio commissioned  
13 a 90-day review of DHS to assess how the agency can  
14 address the current homeless crisis more effectively.  
15 The 90-day review period ended on March 14<sup>th</sup> of 2016  
16 and produced 42 much-needed reforms that involved  
17 shifting prevention programs and rehousing into HRA,  
18 combining backroom functions between the two agencies  
19 and improving conditions of DHS-administered  
20 shelters. As a result, DHS would focus on adult and  
21 family shelter operations, shelter security,  
22 maintaining shelter conditions, and enhanced outreach  
23 efforts. While DHS and HRA are still implementing  
24 these reforms on the February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007-- on  
25 February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Mayor unveiled a new

2 borough-based plan to reduce the footprint of New  
3 York City's homeless shelter system and drive down  
4 the population of homelessness in New York. This  
5 plan lays out substantial investments in building new  
6 shelters in a timeline adjustment to the phase out of  
7 hotels and cluster sites. DHS's 2018 Capital  
8 Commitment Plan includes 263 million dollars in  
9 Fiscal 2017 to 2020, and 10-Year Capital Strategy  
10 provides 350.3 million dollars in Fiscal 18 to 2027  
11 to the Department of Homeless Services. DHS's capital  
12 Plan allocates funding towards repair and maintenance  
13 of DHS's shelters and other facilities, but not  
14 towards building new shelters. I look forward to  
15 hearing from Commissioner how the Fiscal 18 budget is  
16 accommodating this new plan and how the new plan is  
17 building on the reforms of the 90-day review. We are  
18 hoping to have a hearing on the 90-day review last  
19 month. Unfortunately, I was out on paternity leave  
20 but I'm back now, so we're going to be having that  
21 hearing in the coming months. We support updating  
22 strategies in the provision of shelter services and  
23 ensuring capacity remains adequate to accommodate  
24 everyone who needs it while taking initiative to  
25 prevent more people from becoming homeless. Before I

2 welcome the Commissioner, I would like to thank the  
3 committee staff for their work: Nameera Nuzhat,  
4 Finance Analyst, Dohini Sompura, Unit Head, Andrea  
5 Vazquez, Senior Counsel to the Committee, Tanya  
6 Cyrus, Senior Policy Analyst for the Committee, as  
7 well as Regina Poreda Ryan, who's the Deputy  
8 Director, and Latonya McKinney, our Finance Director,  
9 and my staff, Julie Barrow, my Legislative Director,  
10 Johnathan Bouche my Chief of Staff. I would now like  
11 to acknowledge members of the Committee who are here,  
12 Vanessa Gibson of the Bronx, Barry Grodenchik of  
13 Queens, Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx, Ben Kallos,  
14 who is not a committee member but is here none the  
15 less, from Manhattan, and Council Member Rafael  
16 Salamanca, as well of the Bronx. I'd now like to  
17 welcome Commissioner Steven Banks and members of the  
18 Administration. If you could raise your right hands  
19 very quickly? Do you swear to tell the truth, the  
20 whole truth and nothing but the truth and to answer  
21 Council Member questions honestly?

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

24 Commissioner, you may begin.  
25

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you very much.  
3 You have testimony for the record before you, and we  
4 have a Power Point. We covered a number of points in  
5 the HRA hearing relating to homelessness, and so I'm  
6 going to try to summarize our testimony to give some  
7 time for questions. Since the adoption of the FY 17  
8 budget, the Department of Social Services comprised  
9 of both the Human Resources Administration and  
10 Department of Homeless Services has come before this  
11 committee on a number of occasions to testify in  
12 regards to our programs. Appreciate an additional  
13 opportunity to do so. I'm joined with me at this  
14 hearing with Ellen Levine, Erin Villari and Jennifer  
15 Yeaw who were with me for the earlier hearing this  
16 morning. Last month the Administration announced a  
17 comprehensive borough-based plan titled, "Turn the  
18 Tide on Homelessness in New York City" to shrink the  
19 footprint of the City's homeless shelter system by 45  
20 percent and reduce the shelter census over five  
21 years. Our vision relies on three approaches.  
22 First, doing more to keep people in their homes by  
23 stopping evictions, helping families and individuals  
24 remain with family members in the community, and  
25 making housing more affordable. Second, continuing

2 to enhance our HomeStat program to bring people in  
3 from the streets. Third, a re-imagined approach to  
4 providing shelter that ends use of the 17-year  
5 cluster apartment program by the end of 2021 and the  
6 decades' old use of commercial hotel facilities by  
7 the end of 2023; cuts the total number of shelter  
8 facilities by almost 40 percent by getting out of 360  
9 cluster apartment commercial hotel locations and  
10 replacing them with 90 new high-quality shelter in  
11 all five boroughs. It provides homeless families and  
12 individuals with an opportunity to be in shelter as  
13 close as possible to their own communities and the  
14 anchors of life like schools, jobs, healthcare,  
15 houses of worship and family to help them get on  
16 their feet and out of shelter more quickly. The  
17 homelessness crisis we face is the result of decade  
18 of changes in our economy and past choices made in  
19 New York City, Albany and Washington. From 1994 to  
20 2015, the DHS Shelter Census skyrocketed 115 percent.  
21 At the same time, the City lost tens of thousands of  
22 affordable rent stabilized units. This steady  
23 decline in housing affordability coupled with the  
24 decline in real wages that I will touch on later has  
25 driven many working families and individuals into

2 homelessness. In April 2011, this affordability  
3 crisis was made worse when the city and state ended  
4 the Advantage Rental Assistance Program which had  
5 offered subsidies for people in shelters if they took  
6 part in job training. In less than three years after  
7 the end of the program, the shelter population  
8 increased 38 percent, some 14,000 people. our efforts  
9 to-date have stabilized the number of people in our  
10 shelters which are now trending downward, and without  
11 our initiatives would have reached some 70,000  
12 instead of the 59,281 in shelter this weekend. Even  
13 before announcing this new plan we had moved ahead of  
14 schedule on the largest affordable housing plan ever,  
15 the City's landmark Housing New York Plan to build or  
16 preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing;  
17 Committed to adding 10,000 affordable apartments for  
18 seniors, veterans and New Yorkers earning less than  
19 40,000 dollars per household; created a new Elder  
20 Rental Assistance Program planned to be funded  
21 through the Mansion Tax Proposal for Albany that  
22 would help more than 25,000 seniors with monthly  
23 rental assistance of up to 1,300 dollars; stopped in  
24 immediately to fill the gap left by the cancellation  
25 of Advantage by creating three new rental programs



2 and reinstating rehousing programs, implementing the  
3 Living in Communities, LINC, City Family Eviction-  
4 Prevention Supplement [sic], Family Exit Plan [sic]  
5 Supplement, otherwise known as CITYFEPS, and a  
6 Special and Exit and Prevention Supplement, SEPS,  
7 rental assistance programs, and restoring Section 8  
8 and New York City Housing Authority priorities which  
9 have helped 51,500 people from the summer of 2014  
10 through December 2016, most of them homeless, secure  
11 permanent housing, and additional 4,340 so far in  
12 2017; provided Emergency Rental Assistance to 160,000  
13 households, helping rent-burdened New Yorkers at risk  
14 of evictions stay in their homes; launched the  
15 largest municipal commitment ever to build and expand  
16 supportive housing by committing to building 15,000  
17 new units in 15 years, with the first 550 units  
18 coming online this year; aggressively expanded free  
19 legal assistance for New Yorkers in danger of illegal  
20 eviction by increasing funding for legal services for  
21 tenants to 62 million dollars, a more than ten-fold  
22 increase. Evictions then dropped by 24 percent and  
23 more 40,000 New Yorkers were able to stay in their  
24 homes in 2015 and 2016. We made a commitment to  
25 phase in over the next five years the funding

2 necessary to provide universal access to legal  
3 services for all New York City tenants facing  
4 eviction in Housing Court; implemented 46 systemic  
5 and management reforms to streamline how we address  
6 homelessness; conducted almost 16,000 shelter  
7 inspections in 2016, and 84 percent increase from  
8 2015, and fixed more than 14,000 code violations with  
9 help from not-for-profit shelter providers thanks to  
10 the work of the Shelter Repair Squad, a multiagency  
11 taskforce. The number of outstanding violations  
12 within traditional shelters dropped 83 percent since  
13 January 2016. We've gotten out of 647 cluster sites  
14 through December 2016, prioritizing units with the  
15 most serious problems and moved towards ending the  
16 use of cluster units altogether by reducing the  
17 number of cluster units from 3,658 to 3,011 by the  
18 end of 2016; doubled the previous investment in DHS  
19 shelter security with a total annual security budget  
20 of 217 million for Fiscal 2017; put the New York City  
21 Police Department in charge of security at DHS  
22 shelters which includes standardizing and  
23 professionalizing security, surveillance, staff  
24 training, and deployment, and placed 3,153 homeless  
25 veterans into permanent housing. Our reimagined

shelter strategy will now overhaul our shelters to distribute resources and responsibility in a more equitable way across the city and finally begin to reduce the shelter population for the first time in a decade. To achieve this we will get out of all 360 cluster apartments and commercial hotel facilities, thus shrinking the shelter footprint by 45 percent; replaced these 360 shelter units with a smaller number of 90 new high-quality shelters by opening approximately 18 to 20 new shelters annually in the next five years; expand shelter capacity in 30 existing shelter sites with the renovation of the first sites beginning in 2018 and taking place on a rolling basis over the next seven years; fund the new shelters to provide a wide range of social services so that resident have access to social services and mental health counseling when needed, as well as education and career training, and ensure that shelters are well-maintained and secure. Our borough-based approach will provide families and individuals the opportunity to be placed near their home communities, keeping them connected to their support systems including schools, jobs, healthcare, houses of worship and families. This borough-based

2 approach will also achieve a more equitable  
3 distribution of shelters over time and we will site  
4 new shelters by providing appropriate notice and  
5 seeking community input. To give you a clearer sense  
6 of this plan, I want to talk a little bit more about  
7 the rise of homelessness in New York City,  
8 particularly over the last two decades. As I  
9 mentioned, the average monthly census of DHS shelters  
10 increased 115 percent during that time, rising from  
11 23,868 men, women and children in January 1994 to  
12 31,009 in January 2002 before reaching 51,470 in  
13 January 2014. Had the Administration not stopped  
14 this trajectory, the DHS shelter would likely have  
15 reached 70,000 in December 2016 rather than that  
16 59,281 this weekend. As the City's new plan attests,  
17 this Administration has stemmed the tide of  
18 homelessness shelter growth in New York City. We're  
19 now focus on achieving a sustained reduction in the  
20 shelter census. Nonetheless, while structural forces  
21 drive homelessness in New York City, poverty in the  
22 lack of affordable housing are similar to other urban  
23 areas of the City to scale of the problem in the City  
24 now faces is unique in its intensity and scope. A  
25 few statistics emphasize the severity of the problem.

2 Between 2000 and 2014, the median New York City rent  
3 increased 19 percent in real dollars, and household  
4 income decreased by 6.3 percent in real dollars.

5 Meanwhile, between 1994 and 2012, the City suffered a  
6 net loss of 150,000 rent-stabilized units. Combined,  
7 these and other trends mean that by 2015 the City had  
8 only half the housing it needs for about three

9 million low-income New Yorkers. As a result, these  
10 New Yorkers end up sacrificing a great deal to stay  
11 in their homes and maintain their connections to

12 their communities. Some 360,000 New York City  
13 households pay more than 50 percent of their income

14 on rent and utilities. Another 140,000 households  
15 pay more than 30 percent. This means that a total of  
16 a half a million New York City households are paying  
17 an unaffordable amount of their income for housing.

18 Many people who face these rent burdens cycle in and  
19 out of poverty, living just one personal crisis away  
20 from homelessness. In fact, an ongoing longitudinal

21 study suggests that nearly half of all New Yorkers  
22 lived in poverty at some point between 2012 and 2014,

23 the three-year period studied. As a result of these  
24 economic factors, 70 percent of the shelter system

25 census now consists of families, and 34 percent of

families with children have an adult who is working. At the same time, domestic violence is a major driver of homelessness with some 30 percent of families with children in the DHS shelter system having a history of domestic violence. To address these problems, the Administration is taking a prevention first approach. Not only is preventing homelessness before it occurs critical to meeting the overarching goal of the City's new plan, namely reducing the number of families and individuals living in shelter. It is also a cost-effective common sense response to New York City's homelessness problem. The City's 2017 investments are focused in three areas with proven track record of keeping New Yorkers in their homes, preventive rental assistance, free legal assistance and the Homebase program. The steps we will take to build on our existing preventive rental efforts include streamlining the City's vital rental assistance programs to improve their effectiveness and efficiency, expanding these programs to include for the first time youth living in DYCD Youth Shelters at risk of entering DHS shelters, continuing to offer and look for ways to expand support to families who house family members with them as an

2 alternative to entering shelter, and strengthening  
3 the City's efforts to prosecute landlords who  
4 illegally refuse to take rental assistance vouchers.  
5 Regarding legal services to prevent evictions, the  
6 City will build on its commitment of 62 million  
7 dollars per year in free legal assistance by phasing  
8 in an additional 93 million over the next five years.  
9 These expanded legal services will, when fully ramped  
10 up in 2022, provide an extraordinary 155 million  
11 dollars in services to stop unlawful evictions, serve  
12 and estimated 400,000 New Yorkers a year by providing  
13 universal access to legal assistance, and continue to  
14 pursue cases in communities around the City where  
15 tenants are most at risk of harassment. There's also  
16 an unprecedented commitment to permanent housing.  
17 All of the efforts support the goals of preventing as  
18 many people of entering the shelter as possible, but  
19 another critical goal of our plan is to make shelter  
20 stays as short as possible by providing eligible  
21 families and individuals with assistance they need to  
22 return [sic] quickly to their communities. In-- we  
23 go forward. The City will focus on realizing the  
24 full benefits of the Mayor's landmark plan to fund  
25 15,000 additional supportive housing units over the

2 next 15 years, specifically by implementing the  
3 recommendations of the Mayor's Supportive Housing  
4 Taskforce and bringing the first 550 units online in  
5 2017. As I said, we will streamline existing rental  
6 assistance programs, and we will stay on track to  
7 provide 200,000 affordable units, having already  
8 financed more of them in 2016 than in any year in the  
9 past 25 years. In 2017, the City also announced two  
10 major initiatives to help seniors and veterans and  
11 low-income families afford rent in New York City.  
12 The first is the 10,000 number of apartments for  
13 Housing New York serving households earning less than  
14 40,000; 5,000 of these will be dedicated to seniors  
15 and 500 for veterans. The second is the proposed  
16 Elder Rent Assistance Program, helping 25,000  
17 seniors. Taking additional approaches will allow us  
18 to achieve this goal. The City will also continue to  
19 prioritize targeted number of homeless households in  
20 New York City Housing Authority public housing and  
21 expanding community support services for households  
22 transitioning from shelter to permanent housing.  
23 With respect to street homelessness as we described  
24 at the HRA hearing, the City is addressing this sort  
25 of comprehensive program to provide immediate and



2 long-term services to approximately 2,800 New Yorkers  
3 living on the streets. Having proved the  
4 effectiveness of these programs by helping 690  
5 individuals come off and stay off the streets in  
6 2016, the City is committed to continuing to expand  
7 these efforts in 2017. Throughout 2017 we will  
8 continue to bring more people off the street by  
9 identifying New Yorkers living on the street through  
10 canvassing and quarterly counts so that outreach  
11 workers can find them and offer services, adding  
12 those identified through citywide by name list which  
13 helps the city and outreach workers share information  
14 about each client across multiple city agencies and  
15 service providers. This in turn ensures that each  
16 client is approached appropriately and offered the  
17 services to most likely to help them come off the  
18 streets, expanding new partnerships and libraries and  
19 hospitals to reach street homeless individuals who  
20 spend time in these locations, building on the  
21 success of the expanded NYPD Crisis Outreach Unit  
22 which focuses on assisting homeless individuals both  
23 directly and in partnership with our HomeStat  
24 outreach workers and other city agencies. Using  
25 increased numbers of street outreach workers, we've

2 doubled the number of workers to nearly 400 in order  
3 to serve more street homeless individuals providing  
4 more of the resources outreach workers need to  
5 succeed, including transitional programs that offer  
6 more effective services for many street homeless  
7 individuals who are resistant to going into shelters,  
8 specifically safe havens, drop-in and respite centers  
9 such as the one that we're opening on 14<sup>th</sup> and  
10 Seventh Avenue, beds and houses of worship.

11 Strengthening the case conference process which  
12 brings street homeless providers and city agencies  
13 together to develop solutions for individuals who  
14 share similar hurdles, and in implementing Street  
15 Smart, one of the first products to leverage the  
16 first-ever citywide confidential data sharing  
17 framework to provide street outreach workers with  
18 critical information on clients, thereby making it  
19 easier for them to provide services. To provide some  
20 context, the slide that we're about to show you  
21 addresses the per-capita rate of unsheltered homeless  
22 population in major US cities. Of the top eight  
23 cities based on population as well as Washington D.C.  
24 and Boston, New York City ranks eighth out of these  
25 top 10 cities in terms of the per-capita rate of

2 street homelessness. When we moved someone off the  
3 street and into shelter, from the street and into  
4 shelter or when despite our efforts to best efforts  
5 to prevent homelessness, families and individuals  
6 lose their homes and unavoidably end up in a shelter,  
7 it's our goal to provide shelter in a way that  
8 enables New Yorkers to stabilize their lives and move  
9 back on the street-- back into the community. As we  
10 described earlier, I want to acknowledge the  
11 realities of the current shelter system. it's built  
12 up over in a haphazard way over the last 35 to 40  
13 years, but we also have a number of excellent high-  
14 quality shelters run by responsible, outstanding  
15 social services providers. Over the last 20 years,  
16 the City's approach to sheltering New Yorkers,  
17 though, has made it a challenge to provide families  
18 and individuals with quality shelter that is clean  
19 and safe as onsite social services and when  
20 appropriate is located in the community close to  
21 schools, employment, healthcare, and houses of  
22 worship. These are exactly the kinds of social  
23 supports that help families get back on their feet  
24 and stabilized. We-- as part of the plan that I  
25 described in general terms earlier, we will have a

plan that's borough-based so that homeless New Yorkers can and when appropriate be sheltered in the boroughs near their schools and workplaces, medical care and other community supports, at a time when they need that familiarity and stability. Over this time-- over the time, this more equitably distribute shelters citywide in all five boroughs, aiming-- achieving this aim will take time. The City will phase in this approach over five years as new shelters are opened. As I said, we'll get out of 360 cluster apartment sites and commercial hotel facilities, and replacing them with a smaller number of 90 high-quality shelters, thereby shrinking the DHS footprint by 45 percent. When we opened new shelters to add capacity, we will be developing at least five purpose-built [sic] shelters annually over the next five years, yielding at least 25 such shelters. Relying on purpose build shelter not-for-profit owned facilities will help ensure that shelters are safe and optimally designed to serve clients, make efficient use of city resources and provide capacity to meet the needs of clients with disabilities. And we also touch on the process of engaging communities and notification. As part of

2 the plan, the City will be notifying communities at  
3 least 30 days in advance of when a shelter needs to  
4 be opened and take into account reasonable  
5 neighborhood needs and community concerns. DHS will  
6 form community advisory boards for each shelter to  
7 ensure open dialogue around shelter issues directly  
8 after new sites open, and the NYPD Management Team is  
9 already helping manage safety in our shelters and  
10 will continue to work with local precincts, ensure  
11 safety for both shelter residents and the community.  
12 The City will also continue its plan to provide more  
13 affordable and supportive housing, both of which are  
14 critical to achieving the goals of our plan. I'm  
15 going to leave the rest of the testimony for the  
16 record with respect to specific budget provisions  
17 given the current hour. I'm happy to take any  
18 questions that you have.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
20 Commissioner. So we're going to have members on the  
21 clock for five minutes. Depending on how quickly we  
22 go through, we might be able to get a second round,  
23 but I think the Commissioner needs to leave by around  
24 two o'clock, and we do need to start ACS around then  
25 as well. So, first up, Council Member Salamanca. I

2 also want to acknowledge Council Member Bill Perkins  
3 who has joined us as well from Manhattan.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you,  
5 Mr. Chair. Commissioner, how are you, Commissioner?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good. How are you?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: I have-- I want  
8 to talk a little bit about safe havens. Can you  
9 explain to me briefly how does a safe haven work?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes. One of the  
11 things that we found in our not-for-profit, street  
12 outreach workers have found is that to bring people  
13 in off the streets we want to be able to have smaller  
14 facilities that have very specialized services for  
15 street homeless New Yorkers, and we have been  
16 steadily opening additional beds as a tool to help  
17 bring New Yorkers in off the streets. That's how  
18 we've been able to bring in 690 additional people  
19 during--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: [interposing]  
21 Alright, and do--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: the past year.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: they have  
24 curfews, or can they just come in and out on a 24-  
25 hour basis?

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: There are-- these  
3 are essentially low-demand shelter, because that's  
4 what we've found is the best way to bring people in  
5 off the streets. I want to give you just an idea of  
6 where we've been able to bring people in from the  
7 streets during 2016, 33 from Queens, 41 from  
8 Brooklyn, 83 from Staten Island, 255 in Manhattan,  
9 and 44 in the Bronx, and we're opening additional  
10 safe havens in locations because we think that that  
11 will give us the ability to bring in even more people  
12 from the streets in all five boroughs.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: How many safe  
14 havens do we have in the borough in the-- of the  
15 Bronx?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I can give you that  
17 information. There are beds that we have literally  
18 at every-- all five boroughs.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, so in  
20 my district I have two safe havens. I have one in  
21 the Pyramid, and I also have one in Hunts Point, and  
22 this Administration wants to open up a third safe  
23 haven in my district as well at 1790 Marion Avenue,  
24 Marion Street, a building that used to be a drug  
25 rehab center. For years the community has suffered in

2 terms of, you know, what was surrounding that. The  
3 Pyramid had 125 beds. They were reduced to 75 beds,  
4 and then later on I was contacted by this  
5 Administration informing me that the other 50 beds  
6 were going to be transferred to this location. I'm  
7 still trying to find out why were the beds reduced  
8 from 125 to 75, and why are you taking 50 new beds  
9 and putting them somewhere else in my council  
10 district to open up a third safe haven location?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'd be happy to sit  
12 down with you and talk through the operational issues  
13 there. I think as came up in the HRA hearing, a lot  
14 of the questions from Council Member Johnson were  
15 very focused on what we can do to help bring more  
16 people in off the streets, and want to have as many  
17 beds as possible in each of the boroughs to do that,  
18 and the numbers of beds that we're opening in the  
19 Bronx are really targeted to be able to bring people  
20 from the Bronx in off the streets.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So, again,  
22 Commissioner, I'm just not getting an answer to this.  
23 Why am I getting a third safe haven bed in the South  
24 Bronx?



2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Given the numbers of  
3 people that our outreach team up there, the Bronx  
4 Works team works with and has on their caseload,  
5 there's a real need for additional safe havens to  
6 bring people in off the streets.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: In the Pyramid  
8 House, it's my understanding-- just correct me, just  
9 want to get some clarity. Out of the 75 beds it's my  
10 understanding, and I'm hearing from the provider,  
11 that only five beds are allocated for individuals  
12 from the Bronx. Is that a true statement?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm going to have to  
14 look at those numbers, but I can certainly tell you  
15 the following which is a true statement, that there's  
16 a need for more safe haven beds for Bronx residents.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So, you know,  
18 Commissioner, across the street from the Pyramid  
19 House we have Boricua, our college. I met with their  
20 students this weekend at the SOMOS [sic] conference,  
21 and they were concerned. They were concerned about  
22 there not being proper security. They were concerned  
23 about in the safe havens. You know, it's a 24-hour  
24 so they can come in and out as they please, and we  
25 have students who are going to school in the

2 evenings, at nighttime, it's a little dark and  
3 they're being harassed by-- this is an all-men's  
4 shelter in the Pyramid House. How can your agency  
5 ensure security for this specific college that's  
6 directly across the street?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, when we sit  
8 down with you we'd be happy to talk through the kinds  
9 of security that we can put in place. I think when  
10 we spoke about the drop-in center that we're opening  
11 on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, that  
12 we're putting in place a full operational plan to  
13 ensure that we can help bring people off the streets  
14 and maintain an orderly operational facility. We're  
15 going to do the same thing at the new facility that  
16 you're asking me about.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright. You  
18 know, and you and I have a good relationship,  
19 Commissioner, and I just feel that the South Bronx is  
20 just overburdened with shelters. You know, in my  
21 district alone I have over 484 units of cluster  
22 sites, 1,700 people. We have five hotels and  
23 multiple shelters. I want to work with your agency  
24 to see how we can provide adequate housing for these  
25 families that are in need, but to continue to just

2 add safe haven programs in my district, it's a real  
3 concern of mine and my constituents.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I hear you, and I  
5 want to also acknowledge what you've said. I think  
6 we've had a good working relationship in addressing  
7 issues that have arisen in the district, and I  
8 appreciate that. Part of the plan I think is going  
9 to address some of the concerns that you have  
10 appropriately had, which is the concentration of  
11 cluster units in the Bronx, in your district and some  
12 of the other districts. I know Council Member Gibson  
13 and Council Member Cabrera have the same issue. By  
14 shrinking the footprint of the shelter system 45  
15 percent we will be getting out of those cluster units  
16 and replacing shelters all over the city including in  
17 the Bronx with a much smaller number of locations  
18 than has built up over many years, and I think that  
19 will address some of the very valid concerns that  
20 you've raised about the clusters, as the plan also  
21 provides for getting out of commercial hotels during  
22 the course of the plan that the City's used since  
23 Lindsay was the Mayor in terms of that. So, your  
24 constructive criticisms about those two things have  
25

2 been very appropriate and the plan really addresses  
3 them.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
5 Member Salamanca. Before we move on, I just want to  
6 acknowledge former Council Member John Liu who is  
7 here with his class. This is the government-- this  
8 if the Finance and Budget class, Columbia Graduate  
9 students. So, welcome Professor Liu, great to see  
10 you here.

11 [applause]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, I want  
13 to ask a couple questions around shelter conditions  
14 and contracts here for a second. You mentioned at  
15 the-- during the HRA testimony that significant  
16 increase of registered contracts have taken place in  
17 the DHS system-- this is for our shelter providers--  
18 and you put out numbers of over 90 percent for the FY  
19 16 and 17 contracts, and the significant number of  
20 the FY 18 contracts. Are these-- when you say  
21 they're registered, those are registered with MOCS,  
22 or those are kind of registered on DHS's end, but not  
23 necessarily registered through MOCS?

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: These are registered  
25 and active for payment to the provider.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, the pay-- so let  
4 me just give the--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]  
6 Registered with MOCS.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: They're registered  
8 by Comptroller. They're registered at MOCS. They're  
9 registered at the Department of Homeless Services,  
10 and they're active for payment. So, I'll just go  
11 through the numbers again. When we began the 90-day  
12 review just about a year ago there were issues with  
13 FY 14 contracts, issues with FY 15 contracts that  
14 were not in place, let alone the FY 17 contracts.  
15 Today, there are no outstanding issues with any FY 14  
16 or 15 contracts. Ninety-eight percent of the FY 16  
17 contracts are registered and active for payment.  
18 Ninety-three of the FY 17 contracts are registered  
19 inactive for payment. Eighty-two percent of the FY  
20 16 and 17 amendments are registered inactive for  
21 payment. This includes by the way members of  
22 Homeless Services United and other providers, and  
23 then I could go through the handful of numbers, but  
24 it's essentially 949 contract transactions, and if  
25 you look at what's outstanding you've got 27 from FY

2 16, all of which are with the providers. Twenty-one  
3 from FY 17, seven with DHS, eight are with the  
4 providers, and six with the Comptroller. When all of  
5 those relatively small numbers out of 949 are done,  
6 there'll be no outstanding contracts from 17 or 18  
7 that aren't active and ready for payment, and then  
8 with respect to amendments there are out of 309  
9 amendments-- that's a subset of the 949-- there are  
10 55 that are outstanding, 23 with DHS, seven with a  
11 provider, 25 with the Comptroller. We expect to have  
12 all of this addressed so that we're going into FY 18  
13 for the first time in years where the FY 18 contracts  
14 in process for providers.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In process, but-- in  
16 process but not registered with MOCS and Comptroller  
17 on the day of the-- on July first?

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Some may be. Some  
19 may be, but I want to just say if you look back over  
20 a year to have a process in which 949 contracts--

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: and amendments were  
23 dealt with, and we're going into FY 18 shortly with  
24 another 320 contracts or so. They'll either be in  
25 process and therefore so that advance-- so that a

2 loan could be provided or registered so that an  
3 advance can be provided.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not doubting that the  
5 strides have been made. Speaking of Comptroller, I  
6 forgot to acknowledge that Professor Liu also is our  
7 former New York City Comptroller as well.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And I should have  
9 said before, that part of this process is by working  
10 collaboratively with the Comptroller's Office to  
11 address this contract registration issue.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, I  
13 wanted to ask about within our-- within the cluster  
14 universe, what percentage-- I-- we had a significant  
15 tragedy this year, two little girls, Skylie [sp?] and  
16 Ivanez Ambrose [sp?] died in a tragic accident that--  
17 I'm not ascribing blame necessarily to anybody for  
18 that tragedy where a furnace exploded.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It actually wasn't a  
20 furnace that exploded. It was a--

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] The cap.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: a cap came off of  
23 the radiator.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible]  
25

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Something--  
3 obviously a tragedy, something that HPD, the  
4 Buildings Department and the experts in there had  
5 just never seen happen before.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, and that's what  
7 the Fire Department said, and I can accept that. My  
8 question is: The setup of that cluster site, was  
9 that a triple-net lease, cluster? Was that's what  
10 referred to, a triple-net lease where there's a not-  
11 for-profit that assumes a certain responsibilities  
12 from an owner. The owner kind of has this what they  
13 call a triple-net lease where it's taxes and  
14 maintenance and so on and so forth that are the not-  
15 for-profit's responsibility?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, those were--  
17 that building, there were some 40 apartments and a  
18 not-for-profit had rented several apartments within  
19 that building.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For buildings like  
21 that were the not-for-profit does not own it, DHS  
22 does not own it, but there are capital needs that  
23 have to be done, significant maintenance. How is  
24 that funded? Can that be funded through our--  
25



2 through the capital funds at DHS, or those have to be  
3 funded through expense fund?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, there are  
5 different kind of buildings, and I want to make sure  
6 the record's clear with respect to those cluster  
7 buildings. So let's just start with the city-owned  
8 buildings. The capital repairs are funded through  
9 the capital budget.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Private not-for-  
12 profit-owned buildings are things that we're dealing  
13 with in the context of the model budgets and new  
14 needs to deal with expense funding, and the  
15 buildings, though, that you're describing the cluster  
16 units--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Those are units  
19 where they're essentially apartment buildings, and  
20 there are individual apartments that are rent-- have  
21 been rented by not-for-profits in this program that  
22 was begun 17 years ago under the Giuliani  
23 Administration. Those units are units that we have  
24 been increasing our inspections in. HPD has the  
25

2 ability to use the emergency repairs in order to  
3 address conditions there, and--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And are  
5 they doing that?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: then take a lien,  
7 and they have been doing that.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now, originally when  
9 the Administration announced that they were phasing  
10 out clusters, the idea was that that would be phased  
11 out by 2018. Now--

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Three  
13 years.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Three years. And now  
15 that has been pushed back. Why-- what-- why was that  
16 not realistic to think that that could be done by  
17 2018?

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It would require  
19 more use of commercial hotels in the years four and  
20 five, and by taking the approach that we're taking it  
21 won't require that kind of--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Both bad  
23 options.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: expansion.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Both--

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]

3 Correct.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: not ideal.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But it would be  
7 possible to phase out all use of clusters if the City  
8 were to enter into contract with more hotel units.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, that was our  
10 original plan. We think based upon continually  
11 evaluating this situation that the best route is to  
12 phase out the use of the clusters over the five-year  
13 period of time and phase out the use of commercial  
14 hotels and the way they would have laid it out.  
15 We're prioritizing getting out of the clusters that  
16 have the most problematic conditions and we've been  
17 making progress at doing that. There are now less  
18 than 3,000 cluster units in operation. We closed 647  
19 or stopped using 647 units last year and additional  
20 units in the last two months.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: From a budget  
22 perspective, how-- what's the average cost of a hotel  
23 room per night?

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The average cost of  
25 commercial hotel room included services, social

2 services, for families 220 dollars and for single  
3 adults it's 140 dollars per bed.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is-- Does DHS--

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Again,  
6 including services.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Does DHS have the  
8 concern that hotels are-- knowing that DHS is looking  
9 for units often because you're facing a capacity  
10 crunch that hotels essentially will gouge the city in  
11 asking for significant higher than market rates on a  
12 commercial hotel unit.

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We've been  
14 evaluating what the market is at particular times  
15 during the year and making sure that we don't pay  
16 above market.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So that does not  
18 happen?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We've been making  
20 sure that we don't pay above market.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is that--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] And we,  
23 I think as you know, we--

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Does  
25 that factor into your calculation of not being over-

2 reliant on hotels in order phase out clusters because  
3 the cost on hotels is higher than it would be for  
4 clusters, or?

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, I think our  
6 approach is we want to phase out use of both kinds of  
7 shelter. You know, clusters have been used for 17  
8 years. Use of commercial hotels goes back to Lindsay  
9 Administration, and I want to also remind just for  
10 the record make sure that it's clear that I talked  
11 about in a prior hearing that we have issued an RFP  
12 for hotels as a way of improving services and  
13 controlling costs, and that's a competitive bidding  
14 process, so I want to be careful what I say publicly  
15 about it, but that process is proceeding.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then one other  
17 question, and then I'll turn it over to my  
18 colleagues. You mentioned in your testimony on page  
19 four, part of the new plan is to fund the new shelter  
20 to provide a wide range of social services. Are  
21 those social services, is that-- is this a call for  
22 expanded social services identified in the FY 18  
23 budget?

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, the social  
25 services that are required are social services that

2 are provided under, they're provided in accordance  
3 with state regulation, but I think as the experience  
4 of the 17-year-old cluster program has shown that  
5 those services weren't always provided in accordance  
6 with what we all think should have been provided. So  
7 as we opened a smaller number of shelters, which we  
8 just want to emphasize that they're going to have  
9 high-quality services as a requirement, and those  
10 services are all funded through our rate payments.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, rate--

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Those  
13 services are funded through our shelter rate  
14 payments.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So then there's not  
16 going to be a broken out unit of appropriations  
17 specifically for social services at new family  
18 shelters.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's part of the way  
20 that we provide services already in, you know, take  
21 WIN, or Help [sic] or Henry Street.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Those are high-  
24 quality shelters and they provide social services as  
25 part of their operations. Contrast that to clusters.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What's the process?  
3 What do you have in place to assess the quality of  
4 social services within say the family shelter system,  
5 clusters, hotels, purpose-built shelters, because you  
6 know, I think the reality out there is that there's a  
7 wide range of quality of services, and somebody could  
8 be-- could luck out and be placed with their children  
9 in a shelter that has an afterschool program that has  
10 significant social services that is an organization  
11 that has independent fund raising and can do-- can  
12 pay for stuff on their own, or they could not luck  
13 out and be in a cluster, in a hotel that's only  
14 tangentially affiliated with a social services  
15 agency, if somebody comes around once a week, says hi  
16 to the kids, and don't come back again for another  
17 week.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think your point  
19 is very well taken. It's exactly the reason why, and  
20 we've made it very clear in the plan that we want to  
21 shrink the footprint of the Department of Homeless  
22 Services shelter system by 45 percent and get out of  
23 360 locations and replace them with smaller number of  
24 90 high-quality sites. I think as we found what  
25 happened with--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In the meantime,  
3 though.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, let me finish.  
5 What we found happened as the shelter system grew 115  
6 percent between 1994 and 2014 that alongside of the  
7 very high-quality providers, a number of providers  
8 have not been providing the kind of services that we  
9 think are appropriate. I think we've announced that  
10 we stopped providing doing-- we've stopped placing  
11 families in any facilities run by an organizations  
12 called We Always Care, and we are phasing out various  
13 facilities operated by BEDCO, and we're continuing to  
14 identify providers that we want to phase out as part  
15 of an ongoing review of the providers that we  
16 currently have.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, thank you.  
18 I'll turn it over to my colleague Ben Kallos for  
19 questions. Ben left? Okay. Barry Grodenchik for  
20 questions.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
22 Mr. Chair. Thank you, Commissioner, for-- we're  
23 getting on four hours now, and I appreciate your  
24 time. I know the committee does. I do remain, as I  
25 said this morning, very concerned about-- despite all



2 the efforts we're making, we just barely seem to be  
3 treading water in this city with regard to homeless  
4 people. Obviously, the city has a big heart and has  
5 a lot of compassion as you talked about this morning.  
6 One of the things that concerns me, I'm looking at  
7 the bottom of page two of your testimony, and you  
8 plan to fund the Elder Rental Assistance Program  
9 through the proposed Mansion Tax. I'll be generous  
10 and I'll say what happens when that Mansion Tax, if  
11 the Mansion Tax is not passed Albany. It take two  
12 house of the legislature. It takes the Governor to  
13 sign that, and so far the Senate hasn't shown the  
14 slightest bit of interest in passing it, and we're  
15 talking about 360 to 400 million dollar a year tax,  
16 and I was wondering if you have a plan B for that?

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As you know, I was  
18 at the Legal Aid Society for 33 years, so I'm an  
19 optimist by nature, and I know that--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
21 So am I.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: working together with  
23 you and your colleagues in the remaining days that we  
24 can achieve something for 25,000 senior citizens who  
25

2 really could use a 1,300 dollar a month rental  
3 subsidy.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I have been  
5 working in a number-- been working with Assemblyman  
6 Andrew Hevesi on his home stability support plan  
7 which is-- I guess this is the week that we hope to  
8 pass a budget in Albany. Have you or your staff gone  
9 and examined what that might mean in terms of a  
10 positive effect on keeping people in their homes and  
11 creating less individuals who need to seek shelter in  
12 our system?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As you know, the  
14 Mayor in his budget testimony back in February  
15 supported, or late January, supported this. Both the  
16 Mayor and I have spoken out in support of it as  
17 Budget Director, and on the other hand the plan is  
18 changing as there's been negotiations back and forth,  
19 and we're anxious to see what the final plan is going  
20 to look like, and then we'll make calculations and  
21 see what if any impact it actually has on our ability  
22 to prevent people from coming into the system in the  
23 first place and move out. I think one of the areas  
24 that there is great promise is, we've talked about  
25 this at other hearings, in the area of three-quarter

2 housing where so much of a driver in that area is the  
3 215 dollar state-set shelter allowance, and there is  
4 certainly an impact on homelessness as a result of  
5 the issues with respect to three-quarter houses.  
6 We've put in place programs to inspect and remove  
7 people from overcrowded conditions and provide our  
8 own city-funded rental assistance to such  
9 individuals. The Hevesi proposal was to only have a  
10 positive impact there and it's one of the reasons why  
11 we're supporting it.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I won't ask  
13 you to hazard [sic] a guess, but if it passes I'll be  
14 happy to hear what you have to say about it at a  
15 future hearing. Lastly, Mr. Chair, Commissioner,  
16 before the Legal Services and Courts Committee I had  
17 asked you that day, you had expressed to me that 11  
18 percent of the people in the shelter system were  
19 there because of evictions, and another 30 percent  
20 were there because of domestic violence situations.  
21 Can you tell me where the other 59 percent are coming  
22 from at this point?

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, they're  
24 coming out of overcrowded living situations. They  
25 are coming out of situations in which they just can't

2 maintain their living circumstances anymore. So  
3 they're there because for the reasons that the 34  
4 percent of families with a head or an adult that's  
5 working are there because the gap between rents and  
6 income. They didn't get evicted. They're not  
7 domestic violence survivors, but they're casualties  
8 of the economic circumstances that are confronting us  
9 as a city and confronting them as individuals or  
10 families. So, they may not have been evicted. They  
11 may not be a survivor of domestic violence, but  
12 they're in the shelter system because of the  
13 economics, the gap between rents and income.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: So they're  
15 victims of circumstances maybe or--

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]  
17 Absolutely.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Seems like a  
19 broad number, but I'll take you at your word for  
20 that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you,  
21 Commissioner.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
23 Member Grodenchik. Council Member Kallos?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you,  
25 Commissioner Banks, for joining me on Friday with the

2 former Speaker Christine Quinn, Senator Kruger,  
3 Congress Member Maloney, Assembly Member Seawright,  
4 and children from 91<sup>st</sup> Street where we're slated to  
5 get supportive housing. So, thank you for that. And  
6 first question being, can I have more supportive  
7 housing in my district?

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look forward to  
11 working with you to open more units like the units  
12 that we announced on Friday.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so along the  
14 same lines, and I also want to thank you for working  
15 with us on the Eastside Taskforce for Homeless  
16 Outreach and Services. We're working closely. So,  
17 we've been working quite closely specifically down to  
18 constituents in trying to help one another, but a lot  
19 of that has been happening, not in public, not at  
20 hearings like this. So, if you can-- if we can talk  
21 about specific issues. So, we have worked with you  
22 to identify about 30 different constituents,  
23 residents, homeless who are in the neighborhood, and  
24 what kind of resources are available, and with  
25 regards to the fourth branch over at the New York

2 Post, they've devoted a lot of ink including their  
3 cover to concerns about individuals in the  
4 neighborhood. What has the City already done to try  
5 to help these individuals? And additionally, there's  
6 been concern about illness, but we haven't had any  
7 reports about any crimes or criminal activity with  
8 regard to other residents. If that happens, what  
9 additional resources come to bear? And then just  
10 another question that I often get is why, why do you  
11 have to wait for somebody who has a mental illness or  
12 others to actually harm another person before we can  
13 actually do anything?

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, again, I want  
15 to just acknowledge the partnership with your office.  
16 In many respects it's a model. You identified  
17 particular individuals in your district that you were  
18 concerned about and your constituents were concerned  
19 about, and our outreach teams were aware of some of  
20 them, and we've had success in getting some of them  
21 off the streets, and it's been a very good process  
22 working with you and your staff and also the Police  
23 Department. In terms of criminal activity, one of  
24 the core components of HomeStat, the Mayor's program,  
25 is to double the number of outreach workers to give

2 people a helping hand and bring them off the street,  
3 but where there's criminal conduct to have NYPD  
4 public safety intervention. So, the local precinct in  
5 our district and our outreach workers work very  
6 closely together to make sure that we can give  
7 everybody who needs a helping hand a helping hand,  
8 and we've had some success in bringing individuals  
9 off the street in your area. In terms of forcibly  
10 removing people from the streets, we're all governed  
11 by the Mental Hygiene Law which sets forth a standard  
12 for removal of someone from the streets. Our  
13 outreach teams have licensed social workers who do  
14 effectuate removals, but the removal is then to a  
15 hospital where there's an evaluation by a  
16 psychiatrist to determine whether or not the person  
17 meets the Mental Hygiene Law standard for being  
18 removed from the streets, and if the psychiatrist  
19 determines that that is the case, then the person is  
20 entitled to a due process hearing. We do our part on  
21 the street and we-- our part is enhanced by your  
22 efforts by making sure we double the number of  
23 outreach workers and that the teams have licensed  
24 social workers who can intervene and help people.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: If you can  
3 elaborate more on the Mental Hygiene Law?  
4 Constituents are concerned because they see somebody  
5 with a-- what appears to be a mental illness. They  
6 have uncontrollable outbursts. They are engaging in  
7 spitting behavior. So, I guess the questions is what  
8 is the standard for Mental Hygiene Law? Why doesn't  
9 it apply here, and what additional resources are  
10 available if this person were actually to spit on  
11 somebody or actually make a physical contact with  
12 them?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think that's where  
14 the partnership of the Police Department and the  
15 outreach teams is so important, which is that there  
16 are people on the streets who are known to both the  
17 Police Department and the outreach teams, and the  
18 Police Department is very focused on ensuring that  
19 our outreach teams are able to connect individuals  
20 who need a helping hand, and both the Police  
21 Department and our workers are very much focused on  
22 if someone violates the law that there is a criminal  
23 justice response.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Does the Mental  
25 Hygiene Law or Kendra's Law, does that provide



2 additional resources where somebody has become a  
3 danger to themselves or others?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, that is the  
5 Mental Hygiene Law standard, and we do use it when we  
6 need to in order to effectuate removals. Again, to  
7 bring someone in from the street for an evaluation by  
8 a psychiatrist to determine whether or not they  
9 should be kept in the street.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I just want to  
11 thank you. You've got 60,000 people in the shelters  
12 for whom you're responsible. You've got 2,700 folks  
13 who we know who are unsheltered on the streets, plus  
14 every panhandler, anyone with mental illness even  
15 though it is not under the vertical of the Department  
16 of Social Services. We all look to you, and we  
17 appreciate your support, and we look forward to  
18 continuing to work with you to help every single  
19 person in the city who needs it. Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you very much.  
21 I appreciate at the hearing this morning having an  
22 opportunity to talk about the three million people  
23 that receive our HRA services, too. So, the two  
24 hearings are good for us today.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
3 Member Kallos. Council Member Gibson?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you very  
5 much, Chair. Good afternoon again, Commissioner.  
6 Wanted to get into again the cluster site in the  
7 phase out. You gave a number earlier, and I just  
8 wanted to get that number because one of your slides  
9 really shows the borough-based approach, and  
10 obviously the most are in the Bronx, and you  
11 acknowledge myself, Council Member Cabrera and  
12 Salamanca. And so the reason why we always bring it  
13 up obviously is because we have to do a lot more to  
14 keep driving these numbers down. So, what I'd like to  
15 know-- it's page 33. In the phase out and the numbers  
16 to date that we have successfully reduced in cluster  
17 housing, do you have numbers on where those units  
18 are? Is it Bronx, Brooklyn or elsewhere?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we can get  
20 you those numbers. The majority of clusters are in  
21 the Bronx and Brooklyn. When, you know, we began the  
22 process there was 215 in the Bronx, 48 in Brooklyn,  
23 13 in Manhattan.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.  
25

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And we're  
3 prioritizing getting out of units that have the most  
4 problems, and we can give you--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing] The  
6 most problems meaning the most violations and?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Either the most  
8 violations or social services challenges, or for  
9 various reasons landlords in some cases are  
10 determining to stop being in this area, and given the  
11 conditions and services issues it's another factor we  
12 have to work with, but on the other hand it's also  
13 driving some of the units we're getting out of.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, great. And  
15 you know, along the same lines and the multiple  
16 conversations that we're having around the Mayor's  
17 new plan to build and identify more shelter sitings,  
18 you know, understand where the Bronx comes from and  
19 the fact that not only do we have the highest  
20 concentration of cluster housing, but if you also had  
21 a graph that showed the number of DHS shelters and  
22 private shelters, you'd also see more saturation in  
23 the Bronx. So moving forward and looking at the  
24 need, the Mayor talked about identifying the families  
25 that are in shelters which we know predominantly

2 single parents with children, many of them are  
3 working, as in have a job. We're looking at their  
4 last residential address trying to connect them back  
5 to their communities. So with those indicators in  
6 mind on new shelter sitings, how are we going to  
7 ensure that all of these sites we identify there's  
8 equity across the City. If we're saying that the  
9 City is going to shoulder a citywide issue, meaning  
10 five boroughs are going to look a new shelters,  
11 understanding some of the factors that we're looking  
12 at, how am I to ensure that my district is not going  
13 to face a greater and added burden of more shelters  
14 in my district?

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well I think the  
16 fact that the plan annunciates a clear borough-based  
17 approach principle--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
19 Right.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: is a break from the  
21 past. We have said that there are homeless New  
22 Yorkers and homeless people from all areas of the  
23 city.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Everywhere,  
25 right.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And so we're going  
3 to be taking a borough-based approach which means  
4 just what it says, and we want to once and for all  
5 break the situation in which, you know, children from  
6 the Bronx are placed in Queens and commuting back to  
7 school, or children--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
9 Right.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: from Staten Island  
11 are placed in Brooklyn and commuting back to school.  
12 This has gone on for decades. This is a pan and a  
13 roadmap to stop that from happening, but also  
14 shrinking the footprint 45 percent will eliminate 360  
15 cluster and commercial hotel sites, many of which are  
16 in the Bronx.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right. Ba

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And we'll be  
19 replacing those 360 locations with a small number of  
20 90 high-quality sites.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. And in the  
22 same line of the question, the only intake location,  
23 formerly EAU, now called PATH is in the Bronx. There  
24 was conversation before around looking at intake  
25 facilities and other parts of the city. Is there a

2 plan or are we still shuffling families to the Bronx  
3 to enter the shelter system?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, as part of the  
5 reforms that we announced less than a year ago in  
6 April, we said we would look at new ways to address  
7 prevention and shelter entry.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So we're opening in  
10 Staten Island a new program that CAMBA is running  
11 that is addressing ways in which we can prevent  
12 people from coming into shelter, but also if they  
13 need to come into shelter how to better connect them,  
14 and as we see how that program works they may be  
15 promise to operate in other boroughs, too.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: And my last  
17 question as my time runs down, District Nine, School  
18 District Nine and School District 23 have the highest  
19 concentration of students in public schools that live  
20 in temporary housing, and I've said many times that  
21 their housing status should not determine their  
22 academic success. So DOE is working with DHS on  
23 major infusion of revenue focused on attendance  
24 monitors, literacy coaches, working with DHS shelter  
25 providers. Can you give me an update on how that's

2 going because again we're talking about a  
3 concentration in the Bronx and Brooklyn? So once  
4 again, we have two boroughs that are facing the  
5 greatest challenges, and we're trying to drive these  
6 numbers down, but to me, the response has to  
7 obviously be a lot more aggressive, because the Bronx  
8 and Brooklyn cannot continue to shoulder the burden  
9 of citywide issues, nor should we have the highest  
10 concentration of children that are living in  
11 temporary housing.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely. That's  
13 why again this is a five-borough borough-based  
14 approach to connect people to schools, to jobs, to  
15 healthcare, to houses of worship, family and friends  
16 to help them stabilize and get on their feet more  
17 quickly.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Some of the  
20 challenges you have in your school districts relate  
21 to children from other school districts or other--  
22 I'm sorry-- children from other boroughs placed in  
23 your district because of the location of the  
24 clusters. So going to a borough-based approach is  
25

2 going to ultimately have the greater equity across  
3 the entire city.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, and I'd  
5 certainly love to have another conversation about  
6 that offline and further updates. I've talked to  
7 Chancellor Farina about it. So it's something that  
8 I'm very passionate about, and I want to make sure  
9 that we can bring these families into long-term  
10 housing just like everyone else.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Of course.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you,  
13 Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
15 Council Member Gibson. Council Member Cabrera.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
17 much, Mr. Chair. Commissioner, good to see you  
18 again. I have a series of quick questions. I'm  
19 curious to know exactly where the 20 new shelters  
20 will be this year and next year.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: A total of 40.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, the first five  
24 that we've already announced, two of them are already  
25 open. One of them is in Council Member Torres'



2 district. It's a shelter for LGBTQI youth. He has  
3 been a leader in saying this is an important shelter  
4 to have in my community. He's not here and I don't  
5 mean to butter him up in his absence, but it was  
6 important. He was the first shelter that we opened  
7 and it was a shelter that he felt very strongly  
8 about, and when he was asked this question at the  
9 announcement of it last week, he pointed out that  
10 this shelter was opening and the clusters were  
11 closing and it was part of an overall plan. Second  
12 shelter opened just about 10 days ago in Prospect  
13 Heights on a block of brownstones, open without  
14 incident, ready to go. Third shelter is scheduled to  
15 open for senior citizens from Brooklyn, men over 62.  
16 Right now I have 104 beds that I could be using.  
17 Instead we're going to have to use hotel rooms while  
18 a particular-- that we wouldn't otherwise have to use  
19 while a particular litigation proceeds. Next sites  
20 is in corner of Carroll and President in Crown  
21 Heights. We've got 120 families with children in the  
22 shelter system that will be given an opportunity to  
23 come back to the neighborhood, the district, that  
24 part of the borough where they used to live as a  
25 result of that, and then a fifth shelter also in the

2 area of Council Member Torres' district, and that's  
3 the first five, and we're continuing to move forward  
4 with our plan. We operate in the following way: We  
5 have an open-ended RFP. That means that not-for-  
6 profit providers bring to us proposed shelter sites.  
7 We are again blessed in the city with excellent,  
8 outstanding not-for-profit providers, and they serve  
9 our clients. They know well where our clients lost  
10 their housing, and we expect to be able to receive  
11 the kind of proposals we need to move forward with  
12 the borough-based approach.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And the next 15,  
14 do you have any for Queens, Staten Island, Manhattan?

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We certainly expect  
16 to. The Mayor has said and I have said as well that  
17 we expect to receive proposals for Staten Island. We  
18 have 1,100 people from Staten Island in the shelter  
19 system. We only have one shelter that houses just  
20 over 40 people there. So, as part of a borough-based  
21 approach, that is something we're going to need. In  
22 Queens, about 50 percent of the commercial hotels are  
23 there in the same way that the Bronx has 70 percent  
24 of the clusters, and as we close them down and shrink  
25 our footprint we're going to need to have replacement

2 sites. Similarly in Queens as we eliminate 50  
3 percent of the commercial hotels that have been  
4 located there, we'll be expecting to receive from  
5 providers through the open-ended competitive bidding  
6 process proposals for shelters there as well.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So just to be  
8 clear, Commissioner, in my own head, you're looking  
9 at where they're presently at and where they came  
10 from and then you're trying to decide where the  
11 majority of people who were, for lack of better term,  
12 displaced, or when the exodus to other boroughs bring  
13 them back to their neighborhood and putting the  
14 shelters there, is that the master plan?

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]  
17 [cross-talk]

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The borough-based  
19 approach, and you know, by way of example I gave you  
20 five shelters that are opening right now. Two have  
21 already opened. Three are on their way to open. And  
22 there'll be additional proposals we expect to receive  
23 from not-for-profit providers for the communities  
24 where we need to open shelters, but some of the  
25 planning particularly for Purpose Built shelter which

2 I talked about in the testimony earlier where a not-  
3 for-profit provider is not just taking a building and  
4 renovating it or converting it which can be done in  
5 relatively short order, but actually creating a space  
6 that has the potential for community space for the  
7 community in addition to a shelter. One of those  
8 examples is WIN is developing a shelter in Coney  
9 Island. We've got a couple hundred people from Coney  
10 Island in the shelter system and no ability to keep  
11 people close to that community. So, it's a borough-  
12 based approach that really focuses on reconnecting  
13 people to the anchors of their lives, schools, jobs,  
14 healthcare, houses of worship, and family.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And I appreciate  
16 that, Commissioner. I have students-- I'm in the  
17 Bronx, as you know-- from Staten Island. I have yet  
18 to meet, to be honest with you, anybody-- I'm a  
19 pastor also, so I have-- you know, I deal in another  
20 world. I've yet to see somebody who was from my  
21 neighborhood who's staying in shelter in my  
22 neighborhood that I have met personally. So I'm  
23 happy to hear that there's going to be a systemic  
24 shift.

25 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Great.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
3 much.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: This is essentially  
5 transforming and reimagining a shelter system that's  
6 built up over nearly four decades in a very haphazard  
7 way.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Very good.  
9 Thank you so much.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
11 Member Cabrera. Council Member Barron? And we've  
12 been joined by Council Member Inez Barron of  
13 Brooklyn, Council Member Laurie Cumbo from Brooklyn.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, Mr.  
15 Chair. Thank you for coming to present your  
16 testimony. We know that there is a historic  
17 disregard for the requirement for fair share in terms  
18 of services that are given to the districts, so much  
19 so that there are particular neighborhoods that are  
20 oversaturated with shelters, three-quarter housing,  
21 cluster sites, and other arrangements for people who  
22 are need of temporary shelters. How is the new plan  
23 going forward going to remediate that in equity and  
24 ensure that even as you say there's a concentration  
25 of people in need of shelter at a particular area

2 that they are now then required to take on more  
3 shelters? That's the first question. And the second  
4 question is how is this Administration addressing the  
5 issue of homelessness by creating more shelters?  
6 People need permanent housing. So what is this  
7 Administration doing to address the almost 60,000  
8 people who need permanent housing?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So let me try to  
10 address each of those, and turn if I may, and I  
11 appreciate your support and focus on this. You've  
12 been a longstanding advocate for many of these issues  
13 and very supportive over the years. I really  
14 appreciate everything that you have done. The  
15 shelters are only a part of the overall plan. The  
16 plan really takes a homelessness prevention first  
17 approach by increasing when we're all done by 25  
18 times the amount of funding for legal services to  
19 prevent evictions. So going from six million dollars  
20 which was in the baseline budget in FY 14 to 155  
21 million dollars when the full five-year phase in  
22 Universal Access to Counsel is put in place.  
23 Expansion of rent arrears payments nearly a quarter  
24 increase. So 161,000 households now have gotten rent  
25 arrears as a result of these changes. The provision

2 of rental assistance and rehousing initiatives which  
3 have enabled 55,000 men, women and children to either  
4 stay out of shelter or either move out of shelter.

5 That is a part of the approach. The 15,000 units of  
6 supportive housing that is part of the Mayor's plan;  
7 550, those units have already been brought in line,  
8 and the overall housing plan. It's a prevention

9 first. It's a providing resource into housing, but

10 it's also an approach that says, so, we have 360  
11 shelter sites, shelter locations that are not ones

12 that we should be continuing to operate. So, the

13 plan closes down or gets out of 360 locations and

14 shrinks the footprint of the DHS shelter system by 45

15 percent and replace those 360 locations with 90 high-

16 quality sites that will have whenever possible

17 community space with communities and will enable

18 people to be connected to very important stability.

19 It really addresses something that I experienced when

20 I was, you know, just beginning as a Legal Aid lawyer

21 many, many years ago. The phenomenon of, you know, a

22 family becomes homeless in Brooklyn and gets housed

23 in Queens and they're commuting back and forth with

24 their kids. Kids miss school. Kids fall behind, and

25 all the clients I ever represented always wanted to

2 be closer to what had been home. But it also is a  
3 proposal and a plan, and you're absolutely right, to  
4 focus on this. It says we've got 1,100 people in our  
5 shelter system from Staten Island and only one  
6 shelter that accommodates 40 families. We're going  
7 to address that. It says that there are 300 people  
8 now. It used to be 250 now. It's 300 in our shelter  
9 system from the Maspeth area, and we're going to  
10 address that. So, I think you'll find as this  
11 implemented over time that addresses equity issues  
12 very much directly.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I appreciate the  
14 response in terms of prevention, and I think that  
15 that's important, but I think that there needs to be  
16 construction to address the overflow, the crush of  
17 people that we have who are homeless. I think it's  
18 incumbent on the City to provide for housing that's  
19 affordable, not relying on developers to come and  
20 then giving them subsidies to go ahead and build  
21 units that are less than 300 square feet for  
22 individuals that have a studio. I think it's  
23 incumbent on the City to look at addressing its need  
24 to create new construction or new model construction,  
25 but I didn't hear you address the question that I



2 raised about how are we going to correct the inequity  
3 of siting in certain communities.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay, so let me come  
5 back to that. For example, the Staten Island example  
6 is a good one. There are 1,100 people from Staten  
7 Island in our shelter system, and a borough-based  
8 approach means that we have to find sites in Staten  
9 Island for providing an opportunity for those Staten  
10 Islanders to be housed close to home, schools,  
11 community, and so forth, and that is an integral part  
12 of this plan. Similarly parts of Queens where here  
13 have not been these kinds of facilities and people  
14 have had to be placed in other parts of the city.  
15 We're going to expect to open shelters in those  
16 facilities, too. There has not been a shelter in  
17 Coney Island, and we are supporting and have accepted  
18 the proposal to open a shelter there. So, I think as  
19 you'll find that when we transform the system and  
20 close 360 places that the 90 new locations will have  
21 a far more equitable distribution than has existed  
22 for the last 40 years.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you. And  
24 then with that understanding, understanding of course  
25 my position is that we shouldn't-- we should move

2 from shelters, but understanding your response we can  
3 expect that we won't have any more shelters coming in  
4 East New York based on the number that we already  
5 have of shelters, clusters, three-quarter houses,  
6 etcetera.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I have to answer no,  
8 and here's the reason why I answered no, because  
9 we're closing clusters. There are hotels in East New  
10 York that we're closing.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And we don't want to  
13 leave people from East New York without the ability  
14 to be sheltered in East New York if we're closing the  
15 things that are bad.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: If those families  
17 don't have children that are living in East New York,  
18 and if they came from other localities, then I think  
19 that that needs to be put into the equation as you  
20 talk about that consideration.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Understood,  
22 understood.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, Mr.  
24 Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
3 Council Member Barron. Commissioner, I just have one  
4 last question of my own, and then I'm going to turn  
5 it over to Council Member Cumbo for last question. I  
6 know that you need to leave. There are just two  
7 things I want to put out, three things that are going  
8 to be follow-up items, we just want to confirm those  
9 for the record. One is rental assistance program  
10 break-down by year, not cumulative. This is going  
11 back to the HRA.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, I'm listening.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Continued  
14 conversation to assess how long it takes for clients  
15 to secure housing with rental assistance vouchers.  
16 This is either an MMR indicator or otherwise, and the  
17 Source of Income Unit budget as well as eventually an  
18 update on waiver of ABAWD. So, those are just items  
19 that we want to be following up with. A budget item  
20 here, in Fiscal 17 the Department of Education has  
21 10.3 million dollars in order to better support the  
22 needs of homeless students. Funds were used to place  
23 attendance teachers to target chronic absenteeism,  
24 provide literacy support for afterschool tutoring and  
25 shelter, and to have social workers in schools.

2 That's not reflected in the FY 18 Prelim Budget. I  
3 know it's not your budget, but it helps the kids that  
4 are served by your agencies.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, some of the  
6 things that are being done to address educational  
7 needs of children were one-time expenses. Some of  
8 the things were ongoing services. I'll have to get  
9 back to you on exactly what the interplay is with our  
10 services in terms of the Department of Education  
11 budget.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, because they  
13 were hired up [sic]. There's a--

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] You're  
15 talking about staffing.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: headcount of-- in FY  
17 17. If we don't fund it in FY 18, those 43 people  
18 are--

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]  
20 Understood.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: not going to be--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I was  
23 focusing on--  
24  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] are  
3 going to be without a job and those kids will be  
4 without services. So we can't let that happen.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Apologies. I was  
6 focusing on other things. We'll certainly be taking  
7 a look at that for the Executive Budget.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it. Council  
9 Member Cumbo?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair.  
11 I will make it brief. I know that you will be  
12 leaving shortly. One of the questions that I wanted  
13 to ask was in terms of in my district in the 35<sup>th</sup> and  
14 Crown Heights, man of the tenants have raised issues  
15 in terms of repurposing of our shelters. So a  
16 shelter may open up as a family shelter, and then it  
17 can be transitioned into a women's shelter or it then  
18 can be transitioned into a male shelter. So I've  
19 seen in my own district, for example with the Auburn  
20 shelter, that that shelter was transitioned within  
21 this administrative period. What is the process for  
22 if a community should say, become supportive of a  
23 women's shelter moving into their district or a  
24 family shelter and then while they're supportive of  
25 it, the dynamics of that shelter change and either

2 the provider changes or the type of families or  
3 individuals change mid-stream or in process.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: By the way, we  
5 appreciate your support and assistance as we've tried  
6 to make some of those changes. We really-- I really  
7 do appreciate your help with that. Let me give you a  
8 little bit of the context. As we are operating the  
9 shelter system with no vacancy rate, the plan  
10 provides for us being able to develop a three percent  
11 vacancy rate so we can make the kinds of shelter  
12 placements that families and individuals want. We  
13 have had to repurpose a number of existing shelters  
14 to deal with in the winter time there's a greater  
15 need for shelter for single adults, for example, and  
16 we've had to be very nimble in changing the  
17 operations of some of our facilities as these things  
18 have occurred on the ground, but I think the benefit  
19 of the long-term plan that we've put forward is it  
20 increases our ability to operate the shelter system  
21 without having to make some of those week-to-week,  
22 night-to-night decisions that we've had to come to  
23 you with and talk you about the changes that we've  
24 been making. So I think going forward the approach  
25 is to reimagine the shelter system and not be in the

2 position that we've been in on some nights and some  
3 weeks and come to you and say we're making a change.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I think that poses  
5 a huge challenge, particularly in any community where  
6 a community may be accepting of a particular type of  
7 shelter, and then that shelter were to change, and it  
8 may change five years from now, 10 years from now, 30  
9 years from now. Individuals kind of came forward in a  
10 community, accepting something as-is, but the  
11 challenge is they have no input or discussion in  
12 terms of what the future of that shelter will be  
13 moving forward, and so if they should receive a  
14 shelter in their community, under one pretense,  
15 changing to another pretense could be very impactful  
16 and counter-productive to the dynamics of that  
17 community.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I certainly  
19 understand that. I think your point's is very well  
20 taken, but we're fundamentally changing the way this  
21 system is operated. In the short run we have  
22 operational challenges every night to operate it on  
23 the construct that's been in place for 40 years. As  
24 we move forward, we're going to get away from those  
25 kinds of operational challenge that caused us to make

2 operational changes at Auburn number of times over  
3 the last year.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: What will the  
5 cluster sites be replaced with?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well for the Cluster  
7 sites, wherever we can we want to engage the  
8 landlords to see if they'll return the units back to  
9 permanent housing and allow the family in the unit to  
10 stay with an upgrade conditions, but we're  
11 eliminating the cluster locations. Altogether, the  
12 clusters and commercial hotels are at 360 different  
13 locations, and we're replacing them with a smaller  
14 number of 90 shelters. So, for example, there are  
15 families from Coney Island in clusters in different  
16 borough of the City and we're going to be opening a  
17 Purpose Built shelter that WIN will be operating in  
18 that neighborhood, and that will provide a much  
19 better resource for those families. So, you'll see  
20 part of the 45 percent shrinkage. We'll be getting  
21 out of clusters, and then there placement will be a  
22 smaller number of 90 shelters. About 40 percent of  
23 the shelters will probably be families with children  
24 shelters and the remainder for women, or for men, or  
25 for adult families.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I just want to  
3 close because I know that we're in limited time. I  
4 think one of the greatest challenges that we've had,  
5 particularly in my district or in Central Brooklyn,  
6 is that what people see and know as a shelter,  
7 because they pass it almost every day coming to and  
8 through Brooklyn, New York, is the Bedford Armory  
9 Shelter on Atlantic Avenue. So, coming back and  
10 forth it seems as if however that particular shelter  
11 is run and operated they see many individuals that  
12 are outside that have no place to go. People when  
13 they drive by fear that they're going to be car  
14 jacked so they lock their doors. So it's this visual  
15 of a shelter that really has everybody up in arms in  
16 terms of the concept of a shelter coming into their  
17 community. It appears as though many of the men that  
18 are there don't have direction or a plan or being  
19 given proper services. That's just the optical view.  
20 Is there anything that's going to be done about those  
21 current shelters and how they're operated within our  
22 community, because that is a very visually optically  
23 challenging shelter system, and one can only imagine  
24 how it's being operated inside of what people see on  
25

2 the outside is rally counterproductive to the  
3 viability of a community.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I don't know if you  
5 were expecting this answer, but thank you for asking  
6 that question, because as part of the changes that  
7 we're making we're very consciously addressing the  
8 kinds of things that you just raised. First of all,  
9 having the NYPD oversight of our security is giving  
10 us more options to ensure that their residents are  
11 safe, but also we've gotten additional NYPD  
12 neighborhood policing patrols around the shelter.  
13 We've also hired community outreach workers to engage  
14 people in the streets. We're finding that many of  
15 the people on the streets are not shelter residents,  
16 and by addressing conditions on the streets we can  
17 improve the situation for both shelter residents but  
18 also for the community. And even more importantly,  
19 the Mayor has provided us with resources as part of  
20 the 90-day review of the shelter system to have  
21 daytime programming. It used to be that during the  
22 day residents were told that they couldn't remain in  
23 the shelters. We reversed that. One of the first  
24 things we did during the 90-day review is to say  
25 people do not have to leave the shelter during the

2 day, and in fact we're putting in recreational  
3 services, counseling services and employment services  
4 at that particular shelter. We didn't get to this  
5 place overnight, so overnight we're still making  
6 changes, but I think your point is very well taken,  
7 and I hope to show you the results that you're  
8 looking for.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
11 Member Cumbo. Okay, Commissioner Banks--

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] It was  
13 four and a half hours. I have no place else to go  
14 now.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
16 for you testimony. We're going to have follow-up  
17 items. We had a lot of questions that we didn't get  
18 to, but we do appreciate you being here and answering  
19 all of our colleagues' questions in a forthright  
20 manner. We look forward to seeing you at the  
21 Executive Budget hearing where you're going to  
22 describe all the wonderful things that are part of  
23 the Executive Budget that weren't part of the  
24 Preliminary Budget, but we look forward to seeing you  
25 then as well as another hearing that we're going to

2 be having in the near future on update on the 90-day  
3 review.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Appreciate it. Thank  
5 you, Chair and the Committee, for your support. We  
6 really do appreciate it.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And I want to thank  
8 members of the public for your patience, and I see  
9 Deputy Commissioner Brettschneider coming in and  
10 Commissioner Hansell coming. Thank you very much for  
11 patience, gentleman, and we will take a three-minute  
12 break and then we'll start with ACS. Thanks.

13 [break]

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon,  
15 everyone. Good afternoon. May I please have your  
16 attention? Good afternoon. If you are here for the  
17 ACS part of the hearing, please fill out an  
18 appearance slip if you're going to testify. We're  
19 going to begin shortly again. We're going to  
20 continue the committee hearings, so please find a  
21 seat and put your cellphones on vibrate or silence.  
22 We are going to continue shortly. So if everyone can  
23 exit the room quietly, and if you're here for the ACS  
24 part, please have a seat and fill out an appearance

2 slip if you are going to testify. Thank you very  
3 much.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hi, everybody.  
5 Welcome back. Good afternoon. I'm Council Member  
6 Steve Levin, Chair of the Council's Committee on  
7 General Welfare. We will now examine the Preliminary  
8 Budget for the Administration for Children's  
9 Services. This hearing is being held jointly with  
10 the Committee on Women's Issues, Chaired by Council  
11 Member Laurie Cumbo, and the Committee on Juvenile  
12 Justice, Chaired by Council Member Fernando Cabrera.  
13 We'll hear from both of them. I'd like to first  
14 welcome the new ACS Commissioner, David Hansell, to  
15 his first hearing here with the Council. Today, we  
16 will be hearing testimony from the Administration for  
17 Children's Services on the Expense and Capital Budget  
18 for Fiscal 18 and the Fiscal 17 Preliminary Budget  
19 Mayor's Management Report. ACS has proposed Fiscal  
20 18 Executive Budget totals 3.30 billion dollars, an  
21 increase of 55.6 million when compared to the Fiscal  
22 17 Adopted Budget. ACS's Fiscal 18 Prelim Budget  
23 does not include any new need funding. While it is  
24 understandable that with the current shift in  
25 leadership at ACS that the Prelim Budget may not

2 reflect the new priorities at the agency, it still  
3 gives me concern that given the number of high-  
4 profile deaths in recent months and recommendations  
5 that came from the investigations into these deaths  
6 from OCFS and DOI and the Comptroller, that more  
7 resources were not allocated to ACS immediately. I'm  
8 interested in hearing today about what additional  
9 investments we can expect to see in the Fiscal 18  
10 Executive Budget coming out next month based on these  
11 recommendations. The recent increase in caseload  
12 ratio for Protective Services is also cause for  
13 alarm. Protective workers investigate allegations  
14 and report of child abuse, maltreatment and neglect.  
15 These workers are the frontline in protecting one of  
16 the City's most vulnerable populations, and yet, not  
17 enough resources are allocated for their services.  
18 We want to acknowledge the important work that they  
19 do on the frontline day in and day out. From the  
20 third quarter of 2016 to the fourth quarter, the  
21 citywide average for caseload went from 9.19 to 13.69  
22 and the number of caseworkers with an average  
23 caseload of more than 15 jumped from 38 to 313. As  
24 the new Commissioner of ACS, I want to hear today how  
25 Commissioner Hansell, how you plan to address the

2 caseload ratio and the significant causes for  
3 concern. Preventive Services funding is also a  
4 concern. While we know that ACS does not encourage  
5 providers to keep wait lists, there are families that  
6 have been referred for a certain Preventive Service  
7 Model and are awaiting services. Families in need of  
8 preventive services should not be on a wait list.

9 There should be services provided to them in a timely  
10 fashion when they need them to help prevent tragedy,  
11 and I would like to see this issue addressed in the  
12 coming fiscal year. In addition, I want to better  
13 understand ACS's practices in evaluating providers  
14 for all of their services. With the newly appointed  
15 internal monitor at ACS, coupled with the  
16 recommendations from several reports including the  
17 Department of Investigations, this is the time to  
18 understand and assess how we measure and evaluate  
19 providers and what more can be done around this.

20 Before we hear from Chair Cumbo and Chair Cabrera,  
21 I'd also like to thank the Committee Staff who worked  
22 on this hearing, Doheni Sampora [sp?], Finance Unit  
23 Head, Andrea Vasquez, the Counsel to the Committee,  
24 Tanya Cyrus, the Policy Analyst, and well as Regina  
25 Poreda Ryan our Deputy Finance Director, and Latonya

2 McKinney, our Finance Director. And with that, I'll  
3 turn it over to my colleague, Council Member Laurie  
4 Cumbo, Chair of the Committee on Women's Issues.

5 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you, Chair  
6 Levin. Thank you all for being here today. Good  
7 afternoon, and I want to wish everyone a happy  
8 Women's Her-story Month. We're continuing to raise  
9 boundaries and shatter glass ceilings and do  
10 phenomenal things each and every day. It is  
11 certainly our time and it's certainly our time for  
12 pay parity and pay equity, and that's what I'm going  
13 to be focusing on today. I'd like to welcome  
14 Commissioner Hansell. I'm Laurie Cumbo, Chair of the  
15 Women's Issues Committee. I'd like to thank Chair  
16 Levin for his support and collaboration with the  
17 Committee. I'd also like to thank my Committee Staff  
18 Finance Unit Head, Doheni Sampura [sp?], Counsel  
19 Amenta Killawan [sp?], and Policy Analyst Joan  
20 Polvoni [sp?], for their work in preparing this  
21 hearing. One of my main concerns as the Chair of the  
22 Women's Committee is ACS's Early Learn Program. Last  
23 year, during the Preliminary Budget hearing for ACS I  
24 raised questions and concerns along with Chair Levin  
25 and many other members about the inadequate funding



2 of Early Learn teachers and staff who mold children  
3 during their formative years. This is an issue that  
4 we continue to bring up without resolution. Staff  
5 and teachers within the Department of Education  
6 Universal Pre-K program are paid more than their  
7 peers in the Early Learn system as if we value one  
8 age group of children over another, despite  
9 performing the same work and often in the same  
10 centers. Many of these providers are also women of  
11 color. Many of their students are children of color.  
12 In addition, current Early Learn contracts are set to  
13 expire in Fiscal Year 2018. ACS has yet to release a  
14 concept paper or RFP for Early Learn once these  
15 contracts expire. This is creating a lot of anxiety  
16 in our communities, as many people do not know the  
17 future of our Early Learn program. It is my hope  
18 that given all of the issues that happened last time  
19 ACS issued an RFP for Early Learn that the agency  
20 will look at lessons learned and apply a more  
21 thoughtful, inclusive and transparent process when  
22 issuing the RFP that engages the provider community  
23 as well as looking at the needs of the communities  
24 that are served under this program. Previously, in  
25 the last year we had daycare centers after daycare

2 centers, children, parents, families here protesting  
3 on the steps of City Hall to keep their daycare  
4 center in place. We hope that this will not be the  
5 trend that continues moving forward. Our young people  
6 deserve to be within the classroom and not on the  
7 steps of City Hall protesting. Thank you, and I look  
8 forward to hearing from you, Commissioner Hansell.

9 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you, Chair  
10 Levin and welcome, Commissioner Hansell to your first  
11 budget hearing. Good afternoon. I am Council Member  
12 Fernando Cabrera, Chair of the Juvenile Justice  
13 Committee. I am going to keep my opening remarks  
14 short in the interest of time. As Chair of the  
15 Juvenile Justice Committee, general oversight of the  
16 juvenile justice programs continue to be a concern of  
17 mine, while I commend ACS on the investment in close  
18 to home monitoring, I feel that we could all do  
19 better, especially in light of recent indicators that  
20 show an increase in assaults at juvenile justice  
21 facilities. I also am interested in hearing an  
22 update on the consolidation of the Horizon Juvenile  
23 Detention Center in the Bronx and the Crossroads  
24 Juvenile Detention Center Brooklyn and what is now  
25 the timeline for the consolidation as well as the

2 specifics of the feasibility study being conducted by  
3 ACS, the Department of Construction and Design, and  
4 the Department of Corrections. Before I turn it back  
5 to Chair Levin, I wanted to thank Doheni Sampora  
6 [sp?] Finance Unit Head, Beth Golub [sp?], our  
7 Legislative Counsel, and William Angoch [sp?], our  
8 Policy Analyst for the work they did in putting  
9 together today's budget hearing. I look forward to  
10 hearing from the Commissioner. Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Commissioner,  
12 and anyone that's planning to testify or answer  
13 questions, could you please raise your right hand as  
14 I swear you in. Do you swear to tell the truth, the  
15 whole truth and nothing but the truth and to answer  
16 Council Member's questions honestly?

17 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I do.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.  
19 Commissioner Hansell, you may begin. Welcome.

20 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Thank you very  
21 much. Good afternoon Chair Levin, Chair Cumbo and  
22 Chair Cabrera and members of the Finance, General  
23 Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Women's Issues  
24 Committees. As you know, I'm David Hansell, the new  
25 Commissioner of the New York City Administration for

2 Children's Services. With me today are Eric  
3 Brettschneider, our First Deputy Commissioner, Susan  
4 Nuccio, who is our Deputy Commissioner of Financial  
5 Services who is celebrating her birthday today, and  
6 Felipe Franco, who is our Deputy Commissioner of  
7 Youth & Family Justice. I'm delighted to have them  
8 with me. I appreciate this opportunity to introduce  
9 myself to the Council for the first time in this  
10 role, and to brief you on ACS' Fiscal Year 2018  
11 Preliminary Budget. I'd also like to take some time  
12 this afternoon to share with you my vision for ACS  
13 and my plan to move the agency forward to improve our  
14 work in protecting and supporting children and  
15 families. As many of you already know, I have  
16 dedicated most of my life and career to serving  
17 vulnerable communities. I began my career advocating  
18 for the rights, visibility and well-being of  
19 children, families and communities of all backgrounds  
20 affected by HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s. Working  
21 on the frontlines in the fight against that epidemic,  
22 I learned the tremendous difference that government  
23 can make in caring for our most defenseless, and I  
24 have carried those lessons with me throughout my  
25 career. I served as Commissioner of the Office of

2 Temporary and Disability Assistance, which  
3 administers New York State's public assistance,  
4 income support, child support and homeless housing  
5 programs, and I've also served in leadership  
6 positions at the New York City Human Resources  
7 Administration and the Department of Health & Mental  
8 Hygiene. I was tremendously honored to serve in the  
9 Obama Administration, leading the Administration for  
10 Children and Families, a complex agency charged with  
11 overseeing over a dozen offices with many functions  
12 that parallel ACS', from child welfare, child care  
13 and Head Start, to other functions like family  
14 assistance, and community development. While at ACF  
15 I helped implement the landmark Fostering Connections  
16 to Success Act to promote better services and support  
17 for older youth in foster care. So, having led  
18 social service agencies for the City, the State and  
19 Federal governments, I have intimate knowledge of the  
20 complexities of these systems, and I also understand  
21 the importance of maintaining positive and  
22 constructive relationships between and among them. I  
23 have learned many lessons over the course of my  
24 career in public service and have tried to apply  
25 those lessons in running government agencies,

2 energizing them, spurring them to innovation and  
3 working to improve their performance, and this is  
4 something I intend to continue here at ACS. I am  
5 both honored and humbled to return to city service to  
6 lead the Administration for Children's Services. As  
7 the Council certainly recognizes, there are few  
8 missions more important than that of Children's  
9 Services, and I am committed to moving ACS forward  
10 and to building on the Mayor's historic investment in  
11 our agency and our reform agenda. I also recognize  
12 that this is enormously challenging work, and that  
13 ACS cannot fulfill its mission alone. We must work  
14 closely with our partner city agencies, our  
15 communities, and with key stakeholders like non-  
16 profit provider organizations and, of course, with  
17 you on the City Council, all of whom understand the  
18 challenges our families face and are committed to  
19 helping families thrive. This is a critical time for  
20 ACS, and I believe that a strong vision must be met  
21 with effective management in order to move the agency  
22 forward. My job is to build on ACS' accomplishments  
23 and the things we are doing well, but also to  
24 identify the things we need to do better and the  
25 things that we need to fix because they're not

2 working. I recognize that our success rests on our  
3 agency's more than 6,000 committed and courageous  
4 staff, so it is imperative that our staff is well  
5 equipped and fully supported in their work, whether  
6 they're on the frontlines or advancing the agency's  
7 mission in another way. With this in mind, I am  
8 paying close attention to agency and system-wide  
9 issues including data metrics, policies, procedures,  
10 tools, trainings and technology. When the Mayor  
11 appointed me last month, I announced a four-point  
12 plan that will identify strengths and gaps, and make  
13 the necessary changes in areas that significantly  
14 impact our ability to protect and safeguard children,  
15 and I'd like to review this for you. First, I have  
16 initiated a top to bottom review of the agency,  
17 particularly our protective and preventive functions,  
18 and will be making any structural changes necessary  
19 to strengthen what's working and to change what  
20 isn't. We've engaged three outside entities to  
21 independently and comprehensively evaluate our work  
22 on a system-level. To assess our safety practices,  
23 Casey Family Programs and Eckerd Kids, two nationally  
24 recognized organizations with deep child welfare  
25 experience, are completing an in-depth review of the

2 way we handle our cases, using a statistically valid  
3 sample to assess our child welfare practice. The  
4 goal of this review is to revise and strengthen our  
5 child protection and preventive practices and  
6 policies. They will also be reviewing all of our  
7 current and emerging safety initiatives, including  
8 the work of our Investigative Consultants who are  
9 former NYPD detectives that are now ACS employees and  
10 provide crucial law enforcement guidance to assist on  
11 child protective investigations. Casey and Eckerd  
12 will also review our quality assurance tools, and the  
13 Child Advocacy Centers which, as you know, are  
14 located in each borough and provide a child friendly,  
15 neutral and supportive setting where professionals  
16 from multiple disciplines, including ACS Child  
17 Protective Specialists workers and NYPD detectives,  
18 coordinate and expedite the investigation,  
19 prosecution, and delivery of treatment services in  
20 cases of child sexual abuse and serious physical  
21 abuse. We anticipate these assessments to be  
22 completed this Spring. In addition, I've retained a  
23 management consultant, the former head of the Los  
24 Angeles County Department of Children and Family  
25 Services, a jurisdiction very similar to our own in



2 many ways, to analyze and help streamline the  
3 agency's management structure to ensure that the  
4 agency leadership is fully aligned with our reform  
5 vision. This work will be done alongside the work of  
6 Kroll Associates, the independent monitor appointed  
7 to ACS by the state by OCFS. We welcome the  
8 opportunity to work with Kroll, and look forward to  
9 the insight that we will gain from the outcomes of  
10 all of these reviews. Second, we are conducting a  
11 full-scale review of all of the findings and  
12 recommendations from external reviews and reports  
13 issued over the past few years, including in  
14 particular those issued by the Department of  
15 Investigation, and will analyze our progress in  
16 implementing recommendations, identify those that  
17 need to be expedited, and determine the impact of our  
18 new assessments and reforms on this process. Third,  
19 as these reviews are underway, we are restructuring  
20 our Child Stat quality assurance program, a critical  
21 tool that helps us identify and respond to issues of  
22 risk, safety, and performance. I am making Child  
23 Stat a central part of our operations at ACS and have  
24 partnered with the NYPD to apply the best practices  
25 from Comp Stat to our Child Stat model to ensure a

2 robust program that encompasses meaningful data  
3 metrics and appropriate accountability. Fourth, in  
4 addition to our collaboration on Child Stat, we are  
5 working more closely with the NYPD to strengthen our  
6 ability to protect children on the frontlines. One  
7 area of focus is making sure that the NYPD is  
8 sufficiently involved in our investigations where  
9 there are allegations of criminal activity. Another  
10 area is around maintaining the safety of Child  
11 Protective Specialists as they work in the community.  
12 Our CPS staff work around the clock in often very  
13 challenging circumstances and we have an obligation  
14 to make sure that they are safe and protected as they  
15 work to make sure our City's children are safe and  
16 protected. Both initiatives will be bolstered by the  
17 NYPD's expansion of their Neighborhood Policing  
18 Program, and we're pleased that our Borough Offices  
19 are building stronger relationships with the NYPD's  
20 Neighborhood Coordination Officers. All four  
21 components of this plan are well underway and I am  
22 confident they will build on our solid foundation of  
23 safety reforms and strengthen our safety net, and I  
24 look forward to sharing our progress with the Council  
25 at our Executive Budget Hearing. Moving on to the

2 budget. Children's Services' budget for the Fiscal  
3 Year 2018 preliminary budget plan provides for  
4 operating expenses of 3.03 billion dollars, of which  
5 approximately \$899 million is city tax levy funds.  
6 Since the beginning of the de Blasio Administration  
7 the City has made, at full implementation, a 155  
8 million dollar annual investment in ACS. That  
9 includes \$122 million to strengthen and improve  
10 outcomes for children and families in our Child  
11 Welfare system. This funding bolstered ACS' training  
12 capacity for our own staff and for our provider  
13 agencies by over 300 percent. The funding also  
14 included a historic expansion of prevention services,  
15 from 12,500 slots at the end of the previous  
16 administration to almost 16,000 slots when fully  
17 ramped up by Fiscal Year 2019. For the first time,  
18 families receiving services through our Foster Care  
19 and Preventive agencies will receive support from  
20 Clinical Consultants, doubling the number of  
21 Consultations to 14,000, and providing intensive  
22 support to families before and after their children  
23 return home from foster care. Last summer ACS  
24 launched the Fostering College Success Initiative,  
25 enabling over 40 youth in Foster Care to attend

2 college, and we will expand the program to benefit  
3 200 youth in Fall of 2018. Like all agencies across  
4 the City, ACS has been asked to identify efficiencies  
5 in our budget, and I'm pleased to say that we are  
6 able to identify savings of 13.3 million dollars in  
7 recurring savings in the January plan that will in no  
8 way impact services to families. Before I leave  
9 budget, I think it's important to talk about  
10 potential impact of the Federal budget. And while the  
11 full implementation of the Trump Administration's  
12 proposed budget remains unclear at this time, that,  
13 Administration's proposals so far are deeply  
14 concerning to us. The Administration has proposed  
15 steep reductions in many of the programs on which our  
16 most vulnerable families rely, reductions which could  
17 dramatically increase economic hardship for them. We  
18 stand by and fully support the Mayor and the City  
19 Council in fighting against any detrimental impacts  
20 the federal budget may pose to the City of New York  
21 or its children and families. The FY 2018 budget  
22 includes additional resources to enhance our ability  
23 to support children, families, and our dedicated  
24 workforce. These funds will allow us to strengthen  
25 the city's safety net for struggling families. As a

2 child and family serving agency with a wide continuum  
3 of services, ACS is uniquely positioned to help  
4 create a stable, more equitable foundation of  
5 opportunity for those we serve. I will dedicate my  
6 remaining testimony to highlighting several  
7 innovative initiatives. As we implement reforms in  
8 our child protective practices, we are continuing to  
9 strengthen our support and services for families.  
10 We're making significant strides in expanding our  
11 preventive services, the whole continuum, to include  
12 primary prevention, which engages families and  
13 provides support before maltreatment might occur and  
14 without involvement in the child welfare system at  
15 all. This summer, ACS will pilot our first Family  
16 Enrichment Centers in three high-need neighborhoods  
17 around the City. These centers, embedded in the  
18 community and operated by three non-profit  
19 organizations, will offer an open, welcoming door to  
20 all families with programming, classes, activities,  
21 and coaching at no cost. They're designed to promote  
22 family strength and stability by building community  
23 connections and by helping families meet concrete  
24 needs, such as housing, financial management, and  
25 health. We aim to serve at least one thousand

2 families at each center annually, and I look forward  
3 to working with the Council to extend the reach of  
4 these new community-based services. As you probably  
5 know, a significant proportion of child fatalities  
6 are attributed to unsafe sleep practices, and in 2015  
7 ACS created a dedicated Office of Safe Sleep to help  
8 prevent these fatalities. Last year, 2016, our  
9 borough-based staff conducted activities in 38 of the  
10 53 zip codes with the highest rates of sleep-related  
11 infant injury deaths. We distributed educational  
12 materials to 7,000 New Yorkers, and reached out to  
13 over 129 agencies and organizations. To reach even  
14 more New Yorkers, we are working with DOHMH to launch  
15 a public awareness campaign in May, which will  
16 include bus shelter ads, social media promotion, as  
17 well as a video and brochure that can be shown to  
18 parents of newborns before leaving the hospital.  
19 These materials will also help hospitals comply with  
20 a new state law that the City advocated for, which  
21 requires hospitals and birthing centers to provide  
22 information on infant safe sleep practice and crib  
23 safety to maternity patients. Funding for our safe  
24 sleep initiative is recurring, and that will allow us  
25 to continue this important work on an ongoing basis.

2 All of our young people in foster care deserve to  
3 reach their full potential, and the City is committed  
4 to expanding pathways to success for our young people  
5 transitioning out of foster care. Last year, ACS  
6 made the extraordinary promise to provide financial  
7 assistance for over 40 young people to attend a CUNY  
8 college with tuition, year-round housing and living  
9 expenses covered by the City. Through our Fostering  
10 College Success Initiative, they are also connected  
11 to academic, employment and internship  
12 opportunities, and support services to help them  
13 succeed. We have created a dedicated Office of  
14 College Bound & Support Programs and are delighted  
15 that we will be expanding year-round housing to a  
16 third CUNY campus later this year. We're also  
17 expanding the program to 100 youth this Fall and up  
18 to 200 youth next fall. In addition, we have  
19 broadened financial supports to youth attending the  
20 SUNY system as well as the CUNY system. As you know,  
21 the City Council awarded 250,000 dollars to ACS in  
22 Fiscal Year 2015 to implement the Cure Violence  
23 Crisis Management Initiative. The goal of this  
24 initiative is to reduce gun violence in the city and  
25 to enhance borough-based support for youth in

2 neighborhoods that are most at risk by addressing the  
3 underlying contributors to violence. A vital  
4 component of Cure Violence engagement strategies is  
5 access to community activities and "credible  
6 messengers" with whom youth engage when they return  
7 to the community. The five Crisis Management System  
8 providers who implemented the Cure Violence model,  
9 one from each borough, each initially received  
10 \$90,000, totaling \$450,000, in FY 17 to enhance  
11 programming in DYFJ's continuum, as well. Since the  
12 contracted period beginning on August 15 last year,  
13 the CMS providers have run workshops to serve our  
14 youth in secure detention, in the Passages Academy,  
15 and in Non-Secure Placement. With the assistance and  
16 input of facility directors, CMS providers have  
17 facilitated workshops with youth and families at our  
18 Horizon and Crossroads detention facilities during  
19 family days, and also engage youth at scheduled times  
20 during the day. In the Close to Home program, CMS  
21 providers also provide mediation assistance to our  
22 staff, and engage our youth in weekly pro-social  
23 mentoring groups while on aftercare. To date, the  
24 initiative has served 73 youth in detention, and 46  
25 youth in Close to Home. DYFJ and ACS welcome the



2 Council's support for ACS' Cure Violence Initiative  
3 in 2018, bringing in two additional providers to  
4 support Secure Detention facilities. This will allow  
5 us to continue engagement with youth and families  
6 within the juvenile justice continuum to keep young  
7 people connected to programs that will meet their  
8 needs and provide appropriate and positive enrichment  
9 activities once they return to the community. Last  
10 fall, and for the first time since 2006, District  
11 Council 1707 Local 205 and the Day Care Council of  
12 New York reached a new Collective Bargaining  
13 Agreement to increase wages and provide health  
14 insurance through MetroPlus for teachers in ACS'  
15 Early Learn system. This monumental agreement  
16 affects about 2,700 child care staff and expands  
17 funding to another 2,000 union and non-union  
18 employees for a total of 4,700 child care staff  
19 across 127 contractors, including both EarlyLearn New  
20 York City and City Council funded programs. This  
21 agreement brings the salaries of child care teachers  
22 into alignment with the starting salaries at  
23 community-based Pre-K for All programs by  
24 2020. The agreement, in effect from October 1, 2016  
25 until September 30, 2020, consists of three major

2 components: Wages, Health Insurance, and Career  
3 Ladder. Let me explain a bit about each of them. In  
4 the area of wages, on average, teachers will receive  
5 increases of 20-27 percent from the last collective  
6 bargaining agreement. Non-classroom staff will  
7 receive the greater of either a 10 percent wage  
8 increase or the \$15 minimum wage scheduled as  
9 announced by the Mayor in January 2016. The  
10 agreement funds 500 dollar initial incentive payments  
11 for each staff member for ratifying the agreement. In  
12 the area of health insurance, in partnership with the  
13 Health and Hospitals, the City developed a health  
14 insurance plan through MetroPlus Gold that will  
15 provide low cost, high quality coverage to the  
16 majority of our child care staff, including part time  
17 employees who work 20 or more hours per week. This  
18 new plan will significantly reduce employee premiums  
19 by over 50 percent for the vast majority of  
20 EarlyLearn staff. Career Ladder is an initiative  
21 that provides ongoing professional development  
22 opportunities for those staff. To help support and  
23 sustain highest possible quality in our EarlyLearn  
24 staff, Mayor de Blasio allocated 2.25 million dollars  
25 towards a Career Ladder program that will be managed

2 by the Day Care Council of New York and Local 205  
3 Welfare Fund. When we invest in our staff, our  
4 children and families benefit the most. As I said  
5 earlier, our staff carry out some of the toughest,  
6 most challenging work in this city. Last week, I  
7 shadowed two of our Emergency Children's Services  
8 Child Protective Specialists on their job well into  
9 the night to experience what the life of a CPS worker  
10 is like and to gain a better perspective on their  
11 challenges, and I can tell you, it was an  
12 extraordinary experience and certainly deepened my  
13 understanding and appreciation of the work that they  
14 do. I will also be visiting every DCP borough office  
15 and meeting with our Child Protective Specialist, and  
16 I've begun that process actually in Bronx North two  
17 weeks ago, because I want to listen to them and I  
18 want to use their expertise and their suggestions to  
19 make specific changes and inform our larger reform  
20 agenda. I am committed to ensuring that our  
21 workforce is afforded consistent opportunities to  
22 deepen their professional skills. The ACS Workforce  
23 Institute is a 12 million dollar investment which  
24 provides ongoing professional development on core  
25 competencies including interviewing and investigation

2 skills, and interpersonal skills that are necessary  
3 for effective family engagement. As of March 10th of  
4 this year, the Institute has trained a total of 6,666  
5 ACS and provider agency staff, and we are on track to  
6 deliver two key refresher trainings by June for our  
7 CPS workers, Managers and Supervisors related to  
8 proper assessment, investigation, and analysis of  
9 evidence to help deepen their decision-making skills.  
10 We are also pleased that ACS has received approval to  
11 offer Continuing Education Credits and Units to  
12 licensed social workers, and we are one of the only  
13 child welfare agencies in the country to be  
14 accredited to do so. In addition, as the Council  
15 suggested last October, we are proceeding with a  
16 staff engagement survey which will help us identify  
17 areas to dedicate more resources for staff, whether  
18 it's related to supervision, to professional  
19 development, to workspace, or other needs. I am also  
20 paying particular attention to supporting the work of  
21 our non-profit partner provider agencies. Our  
22 providers are among the best in the nation. While we  
23 hold them to high standards, our non-profit providers  
24 do great work and I am proud to partner with them in  
25 serving the City's children and families. So, in

2 conclusion, I am enormously honored to serve the  
3 children and families of our City as Commissioner of  
4 ACS. The work that ACS and our partner agencies are  
5 tasked with and must carry out every day is nothing  
6 short of extraordinary, and I want to take a moment  
7 to again express my profound gratitude to the  
8 thousands of women and men who keep our children  
9 safe. I look forward to sharing more about our child  
10 welfare, juvenile justice, and early care & education  
11 developments in our Executive Budget. I would expect  
12 to brief you then in greater detail about the  
13 important work and accomplishments of our Family  
14 Permanency Program and its foster care providers, our  
15 full range of Preventive Services programs and  
16 interventions, and a whole range of other  
17 initiatives, but I thought that today it was more  
18 important to give you a sense of who I am, how I'm  
19 approaching this role, and I hope I have conveyed my  
20 deep appreciation for what a sacred trust and  
21 responsibility I have been given. I would also like  
22 to thank the City Council for your advocacy on behalf  
23 of the children of New York City and for supporting  
24 our agency's efforts, and I look forward to working

2 with all of you, and I welcome your questions. Thank  
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
5 Commissioner. Welcome. So we'll delve right in. I  
6 appreciate again everybody's patience here. There's  
7 a good chance that we're going to have to move  
8 shortly over to the next room, the Committee Room,  
9 because this room is going to be needed for another  
10 event, but I'll keep you informed as to when that's  
11 going to happen. Commissioner, I wanted to ask about  
12 new needs identified or lack thereof here in this  
13 Preliminary Budget. Obviously, in light of a number  
14 of recent tragedies involving children who were in  
15 some way involved with ACS who were killed at the  
16 hands of their parents or caregivers there seems to  
17 be obviously a need for an increase in programming  
18 and services, and I very much appreciate the fact  
19 that you have engaged outside consultants or  
20 augmented reviews that were maybe happening already,  
21 but also bringing in new outside consultants to do a  
22 top to bottom review. What have you been able to  
23 identify without, you know, without maybe officially  
24 requesting those new needs at this moment? What  
25 areas are you looking at in ACS programming for the

2 Executive Budget being that that's just in a couple  
3 of weeks?

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well, I obviously  
5 was not involved in the preparation of the  
6 Preliminary Budget since it took place before I  
7 arrived, but I can tell you that in the process  
8 leading to taking this position and certainly in my  
9 first days in this role, I had many conversations  
10 with the Mayor, with Deputy Mayor Palacio with the  
11 Budget Director about what I-- even in advance of  
12 entering into the position, anticipate it being  
13 significant areas in which we would need to invest in  
14 ACS, and I'm happy to say that I've received  
15 assurances from the Mayor that I will have the  
16 support I need including financial support as well as  
17 other resources to implement the reform agenda moving  
18 forward. In the areas in which I think the Mayor's  
19 and my views are very much aligned is in investment  
20 in really three very high level areas, and obviously  
21 when we present them and have the opportunity to talk  
22 about the Executive Budget we'll see this in more  
23 detail, but those three areas are supporting our  
24 staff and our workforce as I talked about quite a bit  
25 in my remarks. I think that's critical. There's

2 nothing we can do that doesn't ultimately depend on  
3 our workers, especially our frontline workers,  
4 especially our child protective workers. So, I want  
5 to make sure that we are providing them with the  
6 support, the tools, the training, the technology,  
7 everything that they need in order to do their jobs  
8 as well as they possibly can. So that will certainly  
9 be one area of investment, already has been, and the  
10 Mayor has invested quite a bit in that already, but I  
11 anticipate we'll be making more investment in that  
12 area. Second is in our Preventive Services. That  
13 has been an area of investment. It's one-- I think  
14 it is part of the reform vision, and we want to  
15 continue to invest there. We want to continue to  
16 make sure that families in need of preventive  
17 services can receive those services when they need  
18 them and the services that they need, as you  
19 indicated in your opening statement, and I'm  
20 completely in agreement with that, and we want to  
21 make sure that those services are at the highest  
22 possible quality. So, a second area of where I  
23 anticipate we'll be looking at for future investment  
24 would be around supporting the scope, the range, and  
25 the quality of our Preventive Services. And the



2 third area has to do with accountability and quality  
3 assurance in general. I-- it will be some time  
4 before I complete the review, but I anticipate that  
5 we will identify some areas where we want to  
6 strengthen our accountability mechanisms and that  
7 there will be some resources attached to doing that,  
8 and that's a third area I would anticipate we'd be  
9 looking at some areas of investments. So, those are  
10 three areas that are top of mind for me. I know  
11 they're top of mind for the Mayor, and I look forward  
12 to talking with you more about them when we come to  
13 the Executive Budget.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'll ask a non-budget  
15 related question here. So, you mentioned reforms,  
16 and I appreciate that you're approaching-- oh, and  
17 I'm sorry, I want to acknowledge my colleagues here  
18 at the committee, Ben Kallos, Fernando Cabrera,  
19 obviously Co-chair, Laurie Cumbo, Co-chair, Inez  
20 Barron, Barry Grodenchik, Vanessa Gibson, and we also  
21 had Council Member Liz Crowley of Queens. Back to  
22 the question. In approaching the issue of reform at  
23 ACS, and you go back now 20, 25 years, what happens  
24 at ACS seems to be that there is a child fatality  
25 that is tragic and could have been prevented and may

2 have involved a child with involvement at ACS, and  
3 then there are reforms after that. And then a couple  
4 years go by and that happens again. And there's a  
5 new round of reforms, and that's a pattern that seems  
6 to have repeated itself, and we all know the names of  
7 the children, Marcello Pierce [sp?], Nixzmary Brown  
8 or Zymere Perkins or Miles Dobson; you know, after  
9 these incidents reforms follow. And it has struck me  
10 that it's probably not the best way to approach  
11 reform of an agency. ACS seems to be an agency that  
12 is always going to need perpetual reform, almost that  
13 it's a maintenance issue. It's not necessary-- you  
14 know, it's-- if there are issues that are identified  
15 that are problem issues that resulted in the death of  
16 a child, that is an issue that should have probably  
17 been addressed prior to. For example, when this  
18 young boy Jaden Jordan was killed recently, and then  
19 it was identified that some of the technical-- it was  
20 over the weekend, and he was-- the people that do the  
21 technical searches don't work on nights and weekends,  
22 and so it was up to CPS to try to do that, and  
23 couldn't find the right address and this child  
24 tragically was not found until it was too late.  
25 Something like that, you know, probably should have

2 been identified as an area that would have needed  
3 reform prior to a tragedy. So, just in terms of how  
4 you're approaching the concept of reforms at ACS,  
5 does that kind of seem in line with how you think  
6 about it, or am I off on that?

7 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: No, I think you're  
8 raising questions that go to the heart of what we do,  
9 both philosophically and on a day-to-day basis, and I  
10 think they're hard questions to answer. You know,  
11 every child's death is a terrible tragedy, and our  
12 goal is to do everything in our power to prevent that  
13 from happening, and so part of our responsibility  
14 when there is a tragic fatality is to learn what we  
15 can from that to prevent tragedies like that from  
16 happening again. So, I think it is important for us  
17 to go through the process of doing very serious  
18 intensive review as we do, as we're mandated to do of  
19 every fatality to identify whether there's something  
20 that we could have done differently. Sometimes there  
21 is, sometimes there isn't, but if there is to put in  
22 place the protocols and the policy changes and the  
23 practice changes to keep that from happening again.  
24 But you're right, what-- you know, we investigate  
25 60,000 complaints a year, and now two complaints, no

2 two allegations are identical, no two families are  
3 identical. So we need to have the protocols in  
4 place, and they need to be tight enough and based enough  
5 on good, solid grounded practice so that we make the  
6 right decisions in those cases, and that's why I  
7 think we also need to be focused on making sure that  
8 we are starting with the right set of metrics about  
9 the performance we're trying to achieve and then to  
10 make sure that we are constantly evaluating what  
11 we're doing against those metrics. We've got to have  
12 that kind of systemic practice improvement in place  
13 all the time. So, I don't think it's either/or, but I  
14 agree with you that ultimately what we want to do is  
15 have good, sustained, high-quality practice which  
16 then can be informed and refined by things we learn  
17 from particular situations. I'm a believer in, you  
18 know, metrics-based management, as I've said, that's  
19 why I believe in ChildStat. I've seen it work in  
20 other settings, and I think having those kinds of  
21 accountability and monitoring tools in place really  
22 are the things that help you assure that you are  
23 doing what you need to do every time you interact  
24 with a family or a child. The other thing I'll say  
25 is, and I think it's just important, its context, and

that is that if you look over time the number of child fatalities and cases that ACS had some involvement in actually has not been going up over time. it's been fairly constant over time. That obviously doesn't in any way abrogate the fact that every child fatality is a terrible tragedy we want to prevent, and that's the bottom line. Numbers ultimately are numbers. Lives are lives, and that's what we really have to focus on, but I think it is important to keep an eye on the broader context which is that if we look overall, those numbers have been fairly constant over time, and that then allows us to make sure that we're focusing on the practice that will enable us to try to keep reducing them, which is where we'd like to go.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: A couple of other questions and then I'll turn it over to my colleagues. There's an issue around headcount vacancy. So, in January 2017, ACS' actual headcount totaled 6,191 positions, 6,191 positions, a difference of 990 positions compared to the FY 17 budgeted headcount of 7,181, and the agency adjusted in FY 17's adopted plan its hiring spending by 19.5 million down. Is-- why-- is this something that

2 you've identified and looked at, why the vacancy rate  
3 is so high? That's obviously-- you know, that's  
4 close to a 20 percent vacancy rate for ACS positions,  
5 and also we don't know. That's just an aggregate  
6 number. We don't know which positions there  
7 vacancies are in. So that's something that we would  
8 obviously want to see, but does this mean you've  
9 identified in how you're approaching, and then can  
10 share with us a little more specifically where those  
11 vacancies are?

12 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah, let me say a  
13 few things about that, and then Susan may want to  
14 chime in with some additional detail. This is an  
15 issue of great concern to me. I actually-- I think  
16 our vacancy rate is about 15 percent. It's about 900  
17 staff out of a total budgeted headcount about 7,000,  
18 but that's high, and it is of great concern, and one  
19 of the things I've already begun to do, and this will  
20 be part of my overall review, is to understand very  
21 specifically where those vacancies exist and why. I  
22 know we know that some of them have to do with new  
23 needs from the last year where we're still hiring up.  
24 One of the things I intend to take a very close look  
25 at is our hiring process and why it takes as long as

2 it does for us to hire new staff and whether there  
3 are opportunities for us to expedite that process and  
4 make it more efficient than it currently is. You  
5 know, where we're most concerned about vacancies, of  
6 course, is in frontline staff, because those are the  
7 folks that have to work on the frontline every day,  
8 have to work with families and children every day,  
9 and that's where it has ramifications for things like  
10 the caseloads of our CPS workers. We, I think, are  
11 beginning to do a better job of hiring in advance of  
12 attrition in that area. We have hired about 600  
13 additional CPS workers over the course of last year.  
14 We expect to hire a couple hundred more before the  
15 end of this fiscal year. It takes some time before  
16 they come online because of training requirements,  
17 and then they ramp up to carrying a full caseload,  
18 but in that area I'm concerned not just about our  
19 rate of hiring, but also our rate of attrition. We  
20 need, you know, we want to make sure that when we  
21 hire talented, committed CPS workers, they continue  
22 to want to do those jobs, and we're doing everything  
23 we can to help retain them in those jobs so that we  
24 don't need to do as much hiring in that area as we  
25 might otherwise. So, I'm very focused on it. I'm

2 really doing the analysis that actually you suggested  
3 of exactly where and why the vacancies exist and then  
4 developing responses that help us address that based  
5 on the specifics that underline those dynamics, and  
6 Susan can probably speak to that a little.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: I just would  
8 add that the Fiscal Year 18 budget does not have any  
9 of those reductions for the PS accruals. So, it  
10 anticipates that we would be fully hired.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is-- in the context,  
12 so when, as I've heard, when there are high-profile  
13 child fatalities or multiple high-profile child  
14 fatalities, often there are a couple of things that  
15 happen. One is more calls come in. Caseloads go up,  
16 and CPS workers are-- opt out of the system, leave.  
17 Are those things that you have seen since September,  
18 and are they areas of kind of ongoing concern at this  
19 point now in late March?

20 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well, to confirm  
21 what you said, this is one of the things that I know  
22 from my national experience overseeing child welfare  
23 is that the pattern you describe is one that we've  
24 seen over and over again around the country, that  
25 when there are high-profile, highly publicized



2 fatalities as there were in New York City last fall,  
3 reports go up, the caseloads go up because those  
4 reports have to be investigated, and that creates  
5 caseload issues and pressure and workload issues on  
6 frontline child protective staff. So that is what we  
7 have seen in New York City, and that tends to last  
8 for a while. We expect frankly that that trend is  
9 not going to dissipate very quickly. We expect we'll  
10 see that through a good part of 2017 before those  
11 numbers to start to recede, and so there are a number  
12 of things that we're looking at to deal with that,  
13 because we do want to make sure that our CPS workers  
14 are handling a caseload that allows them to give the  
15 amount of attention that they need to give to every  
16 family, every child, and to make sure that they can  
17 follow the appropriate protocols in investigating  
18 those cases, and so there's a number of things we're  
19 doing to address those sort of short-term caseload  
20 issues that result from kind of the bulge that we've  
21 seen, and then we're also looking at longer-term  
22 issues that we have to address as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can-- you don't  
24 dispute that, you know, we saw the third quarter to  
25 fourth quarter, 2016 citywide average went from 9.19

2 to 13.69 in terms of the average caseload, and the  
3 average-- the number of caseworker average caseload  
4 of more than 15 jumped from 38 to 313. Those are--  
5 those numbers I think we got from you guys from the  
6 MMR.

7 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: That sounds-- the  
8 average-- I think our average caseload number that  
9 we're using today is about 13.8, which is--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Right.

11 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: close to what you  
12 indicated.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So that's quite a  
14 spike.

15 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah. No, it's  
16 been quite an increase, and it's because of the  
17 dynamic that you identified. And while we are still  
18 below the state threshold and below the statewide  
19 average actually in comparison to other social  
20 services districts around New York, we are higher  
21 than our target which is 12, and we want to get back  
22 to that level, and so there are number of things that  
23 we're doing to make that possible. We are-- we're  
24 doing the hiring that I mentioned. So we're trying  
25 to hire to bring those numbers down again, and we're

2 also looking at ways that we can manage caseload  
3 dynamics so that we relieve the pressure on the CPS  
4 workers at the investigative stage. So we're looking  
5 at the process of moving cases both within our  
6 Department of Child Protection, from the  
7 Investigative Units to the Families Services Units.  
8 We're looking at the possibility where we can safely  
9 move cases from protective to preventive services.  
10 We're looking at our ability to do that as a way of  
11 relieving some of the stress on the caseload, and then  
12 as I said, we'll be looking also at whether there are  
13 things that we can do to provide better support for  
14 the staff so we can address some of the attrition  
15 that we're seeing in our CPS staffing. So there's  
16 quite a number of both short-term and longer term  
17 things that we need to do, but our intent is  
18 absolutely to get those caseload numbers down to what  
19 we consider to be acceptable levels.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And have you been in  
21 contact with the union Local 371 that represents CPS?  
22 Because, you know, they-- I would strongly encourage  
23 you to get-- make sure you're on the same page of how  
24 you're calculating the caseload, whatever that might  
25 be, because what we've heard from-- you know, we had

2 a hearing on Protective Services in the fall, and  
 3 after the Commissioner of ACS left, then we heard  
 4 from caseworkers that said, well, you know, depends  
 5 how you-- you know, depends how you count the  
 6 caseload, because we experience in real terms a much  
 7 higher caseload, and that was when the average was,  
 8 you know-- this was in third quarter, the average was  
 9 at eight. So, you know, eight or nine. So that's--  
 10 that's certainly something I would just encourage to  
 11 make sure that you're-- whatever it is, you're on the  
 12 same page as the union, on the same page of whoever  
 13 else is counting the caseloads to make sure that  
 14 we're using the same metric.

15 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah, I take that  
 16 advice very much to heart. We work very closely with  
 17 the union leadership, and as I indicated, one of my  
 18 goals, and I've already started this process, is to  
 19 reach out and meet with a lot of our CPS line staff.  
 20 I will tell you that for the first session I did, as  
 21 I mentioned, which was in Bronx north a couple of  
 22 weeks ago, I got quite a lot of input, very helpful  
 23 input from actually all levels, from line caseworkers  
 24 to supervisors to managers about things that we could  
 25 do to address caseload and to make it easier for them

2 to do their jobs, and we need to get that kind of  
3 input from our workforce from line all the way up to  
4 the union leadership, and I certainly intend to make  
5 sure that we do that.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Two questions on  
7 Preventive Services, and then I'll turn it over to  
8 Chair Cabrera. First one is, we had a hearing in the  
9 fall on Preventive Services as well, and you know,  
10 one of the things that struck me from that hearing  
11 was the amount of training that a Preventive  
12 caseworker has versus a CPS is stark, the contract,  
13 and where CPS goes through months of training before  
14 they're out in the field in addition to having a  
15 better salary, and essentially a different trajectory  
16 in terms of promotions, you know, room for growth  
17 within the agency. Preventive workers who are  
18 increasingly acting as all types of-- I mean, acting  
19 as protective workers in some cases. I mean, there--  
20 the amount-- obviously, the universe of cases, of  
21 preventive cases has vastly increased as the foster  
22 care census has decreased, we are increasingly  
23 turning to evidence-based models and general  
24 preventive models, and yet a starting salary for a  
25 preventive worker is 38,000 a year here in 2017, and

2 they're just jumping into the pool feet first. They  
3 don't-- into the deep end, and they don't have four  
4 months of training, and I just think, you know, God  
5 help them. I think back to when I came out of  
6 college, you know, my first job, you know, I didn't  
7 have that type of responsibility, and that's a lot of  
8 responsibility to be commensurate with 38,000 dollars  
9 a year, somebody coming out with a Bachelor's Degree.  
10 And are we looking at increasing the level of  
11 training, essentially paying them a greater salary  
12 all the way up the chain, and allowing for  
13 professional development? The other thing that I've  
14 heard from preventive providers is they don't have  
15 the time to go to the Workforce Institute because  
16 they have a lot of cases. They're working 10 hours a  
17 day, and it's just not-- it's not realistic to think  
18 that frontline preventive staff even have the time.  
19 So, there needs-- the thing that creates that type of  
20 buffer for professional development, training, is  
21 all-- it's resources, it's funding. So, is that  
22 something we're looking at?

23 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well, let me start  
24 by affirming the premise of your question, I think,  
25 which is that Preventive Services workers have become

2 a more and more integral part of our system. So,  
3 absolutely we consider them to be vital to the work  
4 that we do and to our ability to serve children and  
5 families and that means we have an obligation to make  
6 sure that they have the right kind of training and  
7 expertise to do that. I'll say a few things, and I  
8 think Eric can add to them. I-- you know, there are  
9 a couple of things that I think we have done recently  
10 as an agency that move in the right direction in that  
11 regard. One is that we have made the Workforce  
12 Institute available which was not the case in the  
13 past. There may be challenges in access to that as  
14 you've indicated, but that is a very important  
15 resource that is now available not just to our own  
16 internal city staff, but also to our preventive and  
17 our, for that matter, our foster care agency  
18 caseworkers. So I think that's a very important step  
19 in the right direction. Another is that we are for  
20 the first time making our Investigative Consultants  
21 available to them so that when they are dealing with  
22 challenging cases and we require consultation around  
23 investigatory issues around mental health issues,  
24 domestic violence issues, medical issues, whatever,  
25 they also now will have access to those on the same

basis as our internal caseworkers. That I think is, again, a step in the right direction. But there's certainly more that we need to do. Part of my overall review will be looking at whether we are appropriately supporting our prevention providers and their staffs. As I said earlier, this is one of the areas where the Mayor and I are aligned that it's an area of priority for us, and so as we-- as I complete my review and as we look toward the future and potential new investments at ACS, one of the areas we'll certainly be looking at is what we may need to do to ensure that preventive providers are able to give their staffs the kind of training and support that they need to do the jobs as well as they possibly can.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: The only thing that I would add, first I would repeat the comments that were made earlier about the budget, the upcoming budget and the Mayor's support, because I think we have heard very clearly in different ways from different agencies that preventive agencies as a whole are in need of support. That includes financial support, but it's a very different picture depending on the agency that we're talking about. I also, as



2 historian here, or maybe elder is more accurate  
3 term, suggest that-- the Child Protective Academy was  
4 first established in 1988, and until the beginning of  
5 this Administration, all of the training was to child  
6 protection from ACS or from its predecessor agencies,  
7 but we now have these 6,600 who were trained. So  
8 whatever more we could get if we made it easier for  
9 them to get to the training and relieve them from the  
10 day and day burdens, I think we can do a lot more  
11 using this new, brand new, method of reaching those  
12 staffers. And the last thing to say is as we reduce  
13 protective caseloads and increase the number of  
14 workers and reduce attrition and hire in advance of  
15 attrition, the workload on everybody lightens up as  
16 well as the chance to get the stories out about why  
17 this is one of the most challenging, but maybe one of  
18 the most rewarding jobs that you could get coming out  
19 of college or long after coming out of college.

20 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Let me just  
21 correct myself. I should have referred to clinical  
22 consultants rather than Investigative Consultants  
23 because the issues here for preventive workers are  
24 really around making sure that the right kind of  
25 clinical interventions are being used with families.

2 And so it's really our Clinical Consultants that have  
3 the expertise that they can tap into to do that.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: And  
5 we've added 83 just in the last year.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'll turn it over to  
7 my co-chair, Council Member Cabrera.

8 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much  
9 to my Co-chair Levin. I want to start my questions  
10 regarding juvenile justice, but before I do that I  
11 can't help myself to date myself as well. I was doing  
12 Preventive Services in 1988 and Chair Levin you're  
13 going to be shocked. I was making, I think, less than  
14 16,000 dollars back then, and I was lost. I shared  
15 this with the Commissioner when we met this last  
16 week. I was very, very lost. To be honest with you, I  
17 was scared, and I had a fantastic support system. I  
18 think we're doing it backwards. We're getting people  
19 in and then say let's train them instead of having  
20 already trained at a Master's level, and then hire  
21 them, pay them what they're worth. I think that one  
22 option that I just thought about right now, never  
23 thought about it, in having been a college professor  
24 and ran-- started the first and only counseling  
25 online program in the entire state of New York at

2 Mercy College. You may want to consider an online  
3 component, because what it does, it gives them the  
4 flexibility to go, you know, at the leisure of home.  
5 It's not for everybody. Not everybody has that  
6 discipline. It's actually harder to get an online  
7 degree than it is to go in the live class, but in  
8 this situation I think it might be a bridge until we  
9 get to that place, and hopefully one of these days we  
10 will hire people with a Master's level. These are  
11 our most precious treasure in the City of New York,  
12 which are the children. So with that, let me jump  
13 real quickly right here. I have just a few questions  
14 here, and I have to say, Commissioner, I know you  
15 just started three weeks ago. You have a fantastic  
16 Deputy Commissioner, Felipe Franco. He's done a huge  
17 job to staff our first-class, you know, Crossroad,  
18 Horizon, and all his support staff. They're just  
19 really wonderful, very open to ideas. I just wanted  
20 to say that publicly, but I did want to ask you, as  
21 you know, many of the advocates had asked for  
22 external oversight of ACS Juvenile Justice Services,  
23 can you give us an update of where we're at with  
24 that, and how do you feel about it?

2 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Certainly. Well,  
3 let me begin, Chair Cabrera, by two things. One is,  
4 you had raised-- when we met last week you raised the  
5 issue of educational credentials for work, and I  
6 think it's a very important issue for us to look at,  
7 and I think it's true both internally and externally.  
8 We want to make sure that we are recruiting the best  
9 caliber people we can get. Our work is too important  
10 not to. So, I entirely agree with you. This is  
11 something we need to continually look at, and it's  
12 not an easy thing to change credentials, especially  
13 for civil service positions where there are lists and  
14 lot of requirements that apply to the selection  
15 process, but it's something we absolutely need to  
16 take very seriously. And the other thing I wanted to  
17 say is I completely agree with you about Deputy  
18 Commissioner Franco, and while I'm new to ACS, we are  
19 not new to each other. We actually worked together  
20 in Albany when he was at OCFS and I was OTDA. So I  
21 have seen him in operation before. I know how  
22 talented he is, and I feel extraordinarily lucky to  
23 have him and his team as part of my team at ACS. Let  
24 me just say a couple thing, and actually then I will  
25 turn it over to Deputy Commissioner Franco to talk a

2 little more. Oversight, I think we have actually  
3 ramped up oversight of our DYFJ programs both, again,  
4 both externally and internally. We do operate under  
5 starting from the top down, we operate under federal  
6 standards, but OCFS monitors our programs very  
7 carefully and has a dedicated staff that oversees  
8 both our detention programs and our close to home  
9 programs, and then we have also increasingly invested  
10 in our own internal monitoring and accountability.  
11 In fact, my very first day as ASC Commissioner, and  
12 this is by purely serendipitous, Felipe was having a  
13 meeting of the Close to Home providers to review with  
14 them the data and the metrics that we use to review  
15 and assess them on their performance. So I had the  
16 opportunity to kind of see that process firsthand  
17 from the very beginning of my tenure, and it really  
18 does-- it parallels very well the work we do in child  
19 staff, for example, on the protective side. So I  
20 think that both externally and internally we're in a  
21 very good position, and actually we have the numbers  
22 that we monitor show that we're moving in the right  
23 direction on almost all of the important metrics that  
24 we monitor, monitoring the census, return of AWOL  
25 kids, incidents in the facilities. We not only have

2 a better handle on them, but as we focus on them in  
3 conjunction with providers we see things moving in  
4 the right direction, but let me ask Felipe to--

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: [interposing]

6 Yeah, thank you, Commissioner. I think, you know,  
7 juvenile justice in New York City is unique, and I  
8 think as Commissioner Hansell mentioned to the  
9 providers the first time that he met with them, you  
10 have this unique challenge of actually balancing  
11 better outcomes for children while achieving better  
12 public safety in the community. We do that through a  
13 series of different indicators that the Commissioner  
14 kind of alluded to. In the last few years we have  
15 actually really enhanced our monitoring practice.  
16 You know, it's very strict and robust. I mean, for  
17 example, last year we visited the facilities 348  
18 times. This is only 29 of them. So we actually know  
19 everything that happens in every facility at every  
20 moment.

21 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: That's very--

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: [interposing]

23 We begin the day actually looking at every incident  
24 that has to be reported within an hour, and on top of  
25 the amount of oversight that we provide, which again

2 from a public safety perspective, the structure that  
3 the Commissioner alluded to is particularly unique.  
4 So we need to abide by the federal stature of foster  
5 care, because these young people actually have to  
6 abide by those regulations. We abide by the  
7 regulations of the state on the foster care, and  
8 particular one [sic] for Close to Home, and we  
9 actually have the oversight of the State of New York  
10 with an office which is the Close to Home Oversight  
11 and Improvement Office that actually has a staff of  
12 30 individuals just looking at how well or how bad I  
13 do. I think something else that the Commissioner has  
14 been talking to me about is the importance of  
15 bringing expertise. So he's committed to continue  
16 the Juvenile Justice Oversight and Advisory Board,  
17 which we hope to meet soon.

18 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much.  
19 I wanted to ask you about the consolidation of the  
20 Crossroads and Horizon Detention Centers. Can you  
21 give me details regarding the feasibility study? As  
22 I remember the last time, and I'm getting conflict  
23 [sic] or maybe I didn't hear right in the last  
24 hearing, but the feasibility study was going to come  
25 out very soon, and then at the same time I'm hearing

2 that the project is set to be completed in six years.  
3 Am I getting accurate information? Is there anything  
4 that you can enlighten with?

5 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well, I wasn't at  
6 the last hearing. So I'm sure you were absolutely  
7 correct in what you heard. What I can say is that we  
8 are very close to completing the feasibility study.  
9 It's actually-- it's a joint project that we're doing  
10 in conjunction with the Mayor's Office of Criminal  
11 Justice with Department of Correction and with the  
12 Department of Design and Construction which will  
13 actually be responsible for overseeing a lot of the  
14 work. So we should have-- we should be able to share  
15 that with you very shortly, but the general plan is,  
16 and as you may know, is that we absolutely would like  
17 to consolidate all of our detention into one  
18 facility, and we expect that to be crossroads. At  
19 the same time, as you know, the Mayor has committed  
20 to moving 16 and 17 year olds from Rikers regardless  
21 of what happens with Raise the Age, moving them from  
22 Rikers, and so the expectation is that they would  
23 move ultimately into Horizon. And so our general  
24 high-level plan is that we will initially move all of  
25 our young people into Horizon as we do the



2 renovations at Crossroads to make it the sole  
3 facility that we would use for our detention  
4 facilities, and then ultimately move there, and then  
5 Horizon would be available to Department of  
6 Correction to move you from Rikers, and then of  
7 course, if Raise the Age does happen, and we may know  
8 that later this week, we'll take that into  
9 consideration in our planning. So, I don't have a  
10 specific timeframe for you. That will depend on how  
11 we finalize the feasibility study, but we should have  
12 those details quite soon.

13 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So, it is not for  
14 sure that the timeline for the project is six years  
15 then?

16 UNIDENTIFIED: It's not for sure.

17 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: It's not for sure.

18 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I'd like to see it  
20 sooner than later, Commissioner.

21 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Understood.

22 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: In light of the  
23 fact that I'm starting to, for the first time,  
24 starting to believe that Raise the Age is going to  
25 pass. I'm going to be an optimist here, but I think

2 it's based on recent movement that we see at the  
3 state level, and we're the last one, the last-- I  
4 cannot believe it. New York State, the last one to  
5 still have 16 and 17-year-old in this position. But  
6 in light of that, I think that it would make sense if  
7 we could expedite this project. I think it will  
8 speak very, very loudly. Let me go to the next piece  
9 which is related to which I spoke about, Raise the  
10 Age. Former ACS Commissioner Carrion stated that the  
11 agency had a commitment from the Governor that the  
12 state would cover costs associated with implementing  
13 Raise the Age if this legislation is passed. Is this  
14 still the case, or have you had communication with  
15 the State, and what are they communicating to you?

16 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: That is still our  
17 understanding from the Executive. Obviously, we  
18 won't know until the legislature acts on the budget,  
19 which we hope will be this week, what the actual--  
20 whether it will in fact happen and then what the  
21 specific details, parameters, timelines, and budget  
22 are for that, but it's certainly our expectation, and  
23 certainly it's our interest that whatever population  
24 of young people are transferred out of the criminal  
25

2 system into our system, the support for that,  
3 financial support for that will come from the state.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Commissioner I had  
5 two more questions, but I'd love to share my time,  
6 and I don't like to hog all the questions. So with  
7 that I'm going to pass it to my Co-Chair Cumbo.

8 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Thank you so much,  
9 Chair. I wanted to jump right in into the EarlyLearn  
10 program as we spoke about earlier. One of the  
11 challenges that we had previously was rent increases  
12 on our daycare centers and the Administration having  
13 a hesitancy in terms of communities such as mine,  
14 Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Crown  
15 Heights, and parts of Bedford Stuyvesant where rents  
16 are going up at astronomical rates, and where the  
17 Administration had previous contracts feeling a  
18 hesitancy to continue with those lease arrangements  
19 in communities where rent increases are happening  
20 quite rapidly. Are you aware of a practice that ACS  
21 is doing called Licensing Agreements?

22 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I am not. I do  
23 know that we are in the process of renegotiating  
24 leases for some of the exact reasons that you have  
25

2 mentioned, but I'm not familiar with that particular  
3 initiative.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: The way Licensing  
5 Agreements were explained to me is that these  
6 Licensing Agreements are-- they're somewhat short  
7 term leases, and it's something that-- and I'll read  
8 to you. The City proposes to enter into a Licensing  
9 Agreement with the landlord, and that that agreement  
10 is scheduled to expire on April 30<sup>th</sup>. In the event  
11 that the parties are unable to negotiate a long-term  
12 agreement at that time, there will be an automatic  
13 one-year renewal of the Licensing Agreement.  
14 However, this Licensing Agreement does not have the  
15 legal status of a lease and may be terminated without  
16 penalty by either party on a mere 25 days' notice.  
17 It appears that DCAS and ACS may be working together  
18 on this matter, but the challenge with this  
19 particular licensing agreement is that in order to  
20 qualify for the RFP, you have to have a traditional--  
21 you have to have a traditional lease in place, and if  
22 you just have this Licensing Agreement, you could be  
23 knocked out of the process of qualifying for an RFP  
24 to renew your EarlyLearn contract. Now, I recognize  
25 that you're new and this is probably like a nuance,

2 but in my district it's a critical nuance that many  
3 daycare providers are very fearful of.

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah. No, no, I  
5 appreciate it. It's more than a nuance. It is  
6 essential, and you can't run a program without a  
7 contract to provide the services and without an  
8 affordable site control. So, I appreciate--

9 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: [interposing] Correct.

10 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: that it's critical  
11 to the programs, and as we move to the next  
12 generation of the program, it's certainly something  
13 that we're going to take into consideration. I would  
14 actually be delighted to talk with you further about  
15 issues that affect particular providers either in  
16 your district or others that you heard from because  
17 if there are particular provider issues that we can  
18 help address, I'd like to hear them. What I am  
19 learning is that in some cases where we have not been  
20 able to or DCAS has not been able to fully negotiate  
21 a new lease before an old lease expires, they are  
22 using a license mechanism purely as an extension to  
23 get to a new lease agreement. So no one is expecting  
24 it to be a permanent arrangement. It's simply a  
25

2 bridge to make sure that the program stays in place  
3 while a new lease is being negotiated.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: I think that seems  
5 like an amicable concept, except we want to make sure  
6 that on our end in terms of the daycare providers,  
7 that wherever they fall in this EarlyLearn RFP  
8 process that his Licensing Agreement is going to  
9 serve the same role as a formal lease.

10 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah, no, I can  
11 totally understand why they would have that concern,  
12 and what I will say is as we develop the next round  
13 of competition for these programs, we'll certainly  
14 make sure that no one is disadvantaged because  
15 they're in that situation.

16 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. And this goes  
17 into my next question because it says current  
18 EarlyLearn contracts are set to expire in Fiscal Year  
19 2018. ACS has yet to release a concept paper or RFP  
20 for EarlyLearn once these contracts expire. What is  
21 the future of the EarlyLearn program, and given all  
22 the issues with the last EarlyLearn RFP, how is ACS  
23 approaching contracting out EarlyLearn once the  
24 current contracts expire?

2 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: It's an excellent  
3 set of questions. We are going through an assessment  
4 process right now that will inform the next round of  
5 EarlyLearn contracts. First of all, we want to learn  
6 from the experience we've had to date, absolutely  
7 that's number one. Number two, we want to look at as  
8 we move into another iteration of the program, we  
9 want to look at what we may be able to do in order to  
10 improve the quality of services-- excuse me-- that we  
11 offer to children in the EarlyLearn program. Number  
12 three, we are looking very closely at the age  
13 distribution of demand for services. One of the  
14 things that we have seen is that as Pre-K for All has  
15 rolled out across the City effectively, that has  
16 tended to skew the need for EarlyLearn services more  
17 towards the younger end of the spectrum, towards  
18 infants and toddlers, because more and more four year  
19 olds are now receiving services through Pre-K for  
20 All. So we want to make sure that in the next  
21 iteration of the program we are responding  
22 appropriately to the age distribution of need, and  
23 then we're also looking very closely at the  
24 geographic distribution of need. We want to make  
25 sure that as we put together a new plan for services

2 around the City, we're reflecting a current sense of  
3 where the families are that are most in need of these  
4 services, and we're looking at that at a fairly--  
5 quite a detailed level, even below the community  
6 district level down to the neighborhood tabulation  
7 area level. So there are a lot of things that we're  
8 factoring into the assessment of EarlyLearn before we  
9 decide to go forward with the next iteration of the  
10 program. What I can assure you is they'll be an  
11 opportunity for input from the community, from the  
12 providers, from stakeholders before we make final  
13 decisions about what that next round will look like  
14 and what the timing of the RFP will be.

15 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: You're sounding to be  
16 on the right track. One of the challenges that we had  
17 with the last RFP process was that organizations that  
18 had been providing service for 30, 40 and 50 years,  
19 that may have and often-- and in these cases almost  
20 every organization scored very high, ranked very  
21 high, in the low 90's or the mid 90's, but maybe a  
22 new provider from an outside community may have come  
23 in and beat them by one or two points. And so we  
24 want to have a greater understanding that there is  
25 going to be-- although there is some category that



2 kind of says experience in the community, we want to  
3 have a further understanding and confirmation that  
4 real community investment in our-- real community  
5 investment from our daycare providers is valued at a  
6 premium in the evaluation process, because that's  
7 what knocked out the majority of the organizations  
8 that we in the Council then had to provide resources  
9 so that they could continue to operate and provide  
10 those services.

11 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah. No, I hear  
12 the concern. I have heard this concern. Actually I  
13 have, in other roles, I have overseen procurement  
14 processes where similar issues have been raised, and  
15 so I'm actually quite sensitized to this. And I  
16 guess I'll say a couple things. One is obviously  
17 once we issue an RFP we are then bound by the City  
18 procurement rules, we have to evaluate everybody on  
19 the same basis. However, instruction in the RFP,  
20 what we can look at is the rating scale, how many  
21 points an applicant or a proposer receives for things  
22 like roots in the neighborhood, neighborhood ability  
23 to serve the neighborhood demonstrated, cultural  
24 relationship to the community that are serving things  
25 like that. So we can address some of those issues,

2 and as we structure the program we can think about  
3 what we think is essential for a provider to be able  
4 to provide quality services, and we can make sure  
5 that the scoring that is embedded in the RFP reflects  
6 that. Once we issue the RFP and receive proposals,  
7 of course we have to use the scoring that the City  
8 procurement rules require, but there are ways that as  
9 we structure the program and put the RFP together, we  
10 can take some of those things into consideration.

11 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: So, just to close on  
12 that point. I want to see two things moving forward  
13 in that, that not only is the experience within the  
14 community taken into account, but also cultural  
15 competency is also taken into account in a very real  
16 way, and also want to make sure that evaluations that  
17 providers receive are also taken into account in the  
18 process, but most importantly, I also want to see  
19 that there's transparency in terms of internally.  
20 Who's making those decisions on that RFP process?  
21 Because when we asked questions in terms of who's  
22 actually making those decisions, it was kept very  
23 internal, and we also want to have safeguard and  
24 provision so that the same individuals that are  
25 deciding on those RFP's after the RFP's are awarded

2 don't then turn around and wind up working for the  
3 organizations that were awarded the RFP. So there's  
4 a lot that needs to be taken into account in terms of  
5 this system, because we don't want to have licensing  
6 agreements, cultural competencies, experience and all  
7 those things thrown out the window, and we're back on  
8 the steps of City Hall with three-year-olds  
9 protesting to keep their center open. So, wanted to  
10 express that, and then I also have some additional  
11 questions. I know that my colleagues have questions  
12 also, and I want to turn it back over to them as  
13 well. I wanted to go into the ACS internal monitor,  
14 switching gears. So after the death of Zymere  
15 Perkins, the state ordered an internal monitor to be  
16 appointed for ACS. I know Council Member Levin  
17 touched on this. In February, the New York State  
18 Office of Children and Family Services announced it  
19 had approved an internal monitor. The monitors  
20 responsibility will be to evaluate all policies,  
21 practices and procedures and determine the reasons  
22 for the troubling failures that we have seen in  
23 handling of high-risk cases to follow basic  
24 protocols. Thus far, what practices and policies has

2 the monitor reviewed, and what recommendations have  
3 been made?

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well, we actually  
5 now have two monitors that we're working with at ACS.  
6 The first is the internal monitor that you referred  
7 to which was one of the results of the  
8 recommendations that grew out of one of the earlier  
9 fatalities. The internal monitor has been in place  
10 for some time now, and she's well along in her  
11 initial work, and actually has thus far made  
12 recommendations and reported in three areas. The one  
13 that is to me most critical because it's going to be  
14 essential to my internal review is that she is  
15 maintaining a tracker of all of the external  
16 recommendations that we have received from our  
17 oversight agencies, from Department of Investigation,  
18 from the Comptroller, from OCFS. So that is going to  
19 be really the baseline for me to use in doing my  
20 review of how we're coming along on implementing the  
21 recommendations that we've received from outside  
22 third parties. So that's one of the three things  
23 that our internal monitor has done initially. She has  
24 also done a report on responding to issues that have  
25 been raised by our external provider agencies. We

want to make sure that they have a clear mechanism to submit concerns, report complaints to us, and that we are handling them appropriately. So, she has done an initial report on the process for doing that, and then also on our rapid response to critical incidents and making sure that we are doing an expeditious and a serious process to facilitate the reflection on the kinds of actions we need to take after there has been a critical incident or a fatality within the organization. So, she's focusing I think on the right high-priority areas, and I have no doubt as time goes on that she will take on more and more of them.

Secondly, we have just recently begun our engagement with the independent monitor that OCFS has required us to work with. That is Kroll Associates, and we had our initial engagement meeting with them last week, and we have-- it was a very congenial meeting, and we've agreed on a process for them to start their engagement which will consist of documentation review, interviews with people within and outside the organization, and then we anticipate that they will be also issuing reports to us, and as I said, I look forward to seeing their reports as part of my overall assessment of the organization. So, we actually now

2 at this point are working with both our own internal  
3 monitor and an external monitor as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. I'm going to  
5 turn it back to Chair Levin. I have additional  
6 questions, but in the interest of time of our  
7 colleagues that are still here, I'll have to give  
8 them an opportunity to ask questions. Thank you,  
9 Commissioner.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
11 Chair Cumbo. Commissioner, one question I want to  
12 ask and then I'll turn it over to my colleague, Barry  
13 Grodenchik. One of the immediate recommendations  
14 after the Zymere Perkins case, before even we knew  
15 really what happened it was announced that ACS would  
16 require a CPS worker sign-off to close a preventive  
17 case. That was just one of the first recommendations  
18 that came out. Is that-- Deputy Commissioner,  
19 Brettschneider, you were just shaking your head.  
20 That was when they came, right? I was back in, you  
21 know, immediately after the--

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHNEIDER:  
23 [interposing] Right, there was--

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] October  
25 or November.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: It  
3 was in fact a process that was put in place to review  
4 all closings so that no case would be prematurely  
5 closed, and in fact, some of what we experienced in  
6 terms of the demands made that additional step a step  
7 that we needed to hasten our work around. So, we are  
8 now carefully reviewing the closings, particularly of  
9 the high-risk cases.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: And  
12 we have also begun doing that quickly, which is  
13 important so that we don't build a backlog and we  
14 reduce whatever waiting period there is.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's what I was  
16 going to ask about. So that's not the case then for  
17 every general preventive case that a CPS has to be  
18 present.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: It  
20 is not. There is a review process and a sign-off,  
21 but not the kind of case conference review that--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] You'd  
23 have to go to a case conference--

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: for  
25 the most serious cases that are being closed.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And are you seeing  
3 currently that there is a backlog of case closings  
4 because of this?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
6 There was one, and we're--

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: and  
9 it still exists, but we're reducing it in a variety  
10 of ways, including by expediting the process for  
11 those reviews, but we're also moving cases more  
12 quickly out of protective services, and we're also  
13 working with agencies that have had difficulty in  
14 staffing up to make sure there's availability, and  
15 maybe most importantly you know we have some  
16 additional slots that we were authorized to provide,  
17 and we're rolling those out as well.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Along these  
19 lines, as you're doing these external reviews and  
20 assessing new needs, potential new needs, within the  
21 preventive system in terms of a slot, you're going  
22 out and seeing what each program is experiencing and  
23 if the program in Northeast Bronx that's a  
24 specialized program for teens is the-- you know,  
25 whichever is an evidence-based program that is



2 experiencing a-- you know, that they're over  
3 capacity. Is that something that we're reviewing to  
4 identify where there needs to be new capacity in the  
5 system?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They're not just  
8 throwing new capacity at--

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
10 [interposing] Yeah, I think you said the Bronx, and  
11 you probably are on the mark there, and we are in  
12 fact doing exactly that. We've also done something  
13 just to make sure there is no one waiting for their  
14 services who's providing it in a timely way is  
15 critical, and so we've also turned to other community  
16 providers, clinical providers for example, and we're  
17 also using our consultants that we-- our clinical  
18 consultants to beef up what might be a referral to a  
19 general preventive program, but strengthen its  
20 clinical capacity.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. My  
22 recommendation is as you're looking at the Executive  
23 Budget new needs, don't be shy. You know? Go for  
24 it. Go for it. If you-- we want to-- what we would  
25 love to see is that in FY 18 that the resources are

2 in place within the preventive system to meet all of  
3 the needs so that a year from now we're not going  
4 back and looking and saying, "Well, probably could  
5 have asked for a little bit more. We didn't, and now  
6 we're stuck with a program that's over capacity."  
7 So, my advice: Go for it.

8 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I appreciate that  
9 advice, and we'll certainly take it to heart. You  
10 know, I-- we should say, we have made a significant  
11 investment to date and I think it's important to  
12 acknowledge, you know, the Mayor has already made a  
13 49 million dollar investment increasing prevention.  
14 But as I said, he and I have talked about the fact  
15 that this is an area of top priority for him, and so  
16 we'll certainly be looking very, very closely at it.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: And  
18 I just have to highlight something you said earlier  
19 about evidence-based. Also thinking back, even when  
20 we had Preventive Services, it's only in recent years  
21 that we have evidence-based programs and more generic  
22 or general preventive programs, and that combination  
23 is extremely powerful.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely, and  
3 evidence-base is more cost-intensive, and is, you  
4 know, it's more expensive, but it's important.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: But  
6 also comes with additional training which we talked  
7 about earlier today.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely. Okay,  
9 I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Barry  
10 Grodenchik.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
12 Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr.  
13 Chair. Thank you, Commissioner. It's a pleasure to  
14 meet you. Frankly, I think some of us who were here  
15 at the last few hearings regarding ACS, certainly  
16 myself, were kind of depressed when we left the room.  
17 There has been an onslaught of bad news regarding  
18 some of the children in this city, and I'm glad to  
19 see that somebody with such an impressive resume and  
20 obvious caring has taken over this agency, and I look  
21 forward to working with you at least for the next  
22 eight months, and then we'll see what happens if I  
23 get re-elected. In the meantime, I want to ask you,  
24 I am concerned about the starting salary. We did  
25 hear at previous hearings from some of the

2 caseworkers, and this has got to be one of the most  
3 challenging jobs that any city employee has. I knock  
4 on a lot of doors when I'm campaigning, but I'm not  
5 going to doors where there may be child abuse or  
6 other issues going on. It's very, very difficult  
7 because oftentimes we know there's nothing going on  
8 and there are bad reports that are called in, and  
9 other times there are horrors behind that door. I  
10 want to ask you, have you met yet with the leadership  
11 of the union that represents the caseworkers to get  
12 their input?

13 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I have actually--  
14 before I go to your question, I do want to just say  
15 for the record, because I think it's important to do  
16 this, that Commissioner Carrion and I work together  
17 in Albany when she and I were both there, and I am an  
18 enormous admirer of hers. I think the work that she  
19 did at OCFS around reforming the juvenile justice  
20 system was absolutely groundbreaking, and I now being  
21 at ACS I have even more appreciation and respect for  
22 the work that she did there. So, I know the past few  
23 months, the past-- the final few months of her tenure  
24 were difficult, but she did an extraordinary job.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I appreciate  
3 that.

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: And I want to  
5 really acknowledge that. I think it's important to  
6 say. On your other point, I have met with  
7 leadership. I've--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
9 Is that a yes, or? I'm sorry?

10 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I have met with  
11 leadership.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: That's a yes,  
13 okay.

14 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: The President of  
15 371 [sic]. Actually, I had worked with him when I  
16 was at HRA some years ago. So we've known each other  
17 for a number of years. I actually met with him even  
18 before I started the position because I wanted to get  
19 his input from the very first moment, and I  
20 absolutely expect that I will be consulting with him  
21 very frequently because as I said before, I think  
22 it's important for me to get input from the very top,  
23 from the union leadership all the way to the bottom  
24 from line staff about what we can do to improve  
25 working conditions, salaries, whatever we need to do

2 to make sure workers can do the job as well as they  
3 need to.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I appreciate  
5 that very much. I think it's important, and I think  
6 we tend to overlook that sometimes, whether it's in  
7 government or private industry, and I think that's  
8 extremely important. These people are dedicating  
9 their lives to the children of our city, and I want  
10 to thank you for being so progressive and forward  
11 thinking in doing that. I would ask you to comment,  
12 and maybe some of my colleagues have asked this  
13 already. I have heard from, you know, people in the  
14 Family Courts, and I've heard from some of the  
15 providers that I've met with that we are-- I don't  
16 know how to phrase this elegantly, so I'll just say  
17 it, that we're going to court and taking more  
18 children out of families. I wonder if you could  
19 comment on that. I don't know if this is something  
20 that is actually happening, and if it is happening,  
21 do you see it as a temporary phenomenon? It's been  
22 my experience in my almost 30 years in and around  
23 government sometimes we tend to do a little too much,  
24 but I wanted to hear what your thoughts about that  
25 without, you know, without prejudice.

2 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah. Well, of  
3 course, there are situations in which we do go to  
4 Family to ask that Children be removed from their  
5 families because we don't feel like they can safety  
6 remain there, but that is not something that we do  
7 lightly, and in fact, this is an area in which I  
8 think we have made enormous progress. The number of  
9 children in New York City in foster care today  
10 because they've been removed from their homes is at  
11 the lowest level it has been in decades in New York.  
12 We were under 10,000 at the end of Fiscal Year 2016.  
13 We were actually under 9,000 in February of this  
14 year, and what makes this particularly heartwarming  
15 is that not only are those numbers lower which means  
16 that fewer children are being removed from their  
17 families, from their homes, but at the same time  
18 we're seeing other indicators move in the right  
19 direction. We're seeing that the rates of children  
20 who recidivate to foster care after they're reunited  
21 with their families is down, meaning that they-- we  
22 are making good decisions about when to remove and  
23 when to reunify children with their families, and  
24 we're also seeing rates of maltreatment go down so  
25 that we're not seeing any indication that this is

2 causing any greater danger for kids. So, in that  
 3 regard actually I think we're seeing a very, very  
 4 positive trend in New York City. That doesn't mean  
 5 that in a situation where we feel that a child must  
 6 be removed for their own protection we will-- we'll  
 7 take, either take that action on an emergency basis  
 8 or request the Family Court to allow us to do that.  
 9 But increasingly what we're discovering, and this  
 10 really goes to the conversation we were having a few  
 11 minutes ago about Preventive Services, we're  
 12 discovering that it's possible to keep children in  
 13 their homes safely because we have a much broader  
 14 array of effective and evidence-based preventive  
 15 programs that can make that home environment safe for  
 16 the kids without having to remove them.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I got one  
 18 more question. It's about engaging the NYPD. I  
 19 thought I heard the last time we were here, and I  
 20 just ask you to comment on this, that it's up to the  
 21 individual caseworkers to decide whether or not to  
 22 ask the local precinct, and if I'm wrong I'll be  
 23 happy to stand corrected. Who makes that decision  
 24 when caseworker X is going to see family Y, does the  
 25 caseworker, or are there two caseworkers? How does



2 that-- do we have a different protocol for what we  
3 might consider a high-risk case?

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Let me start on  
5 this one and then I'll ask Mr. Brettschneider to  
6 elaborate, but the answer is no, that there are some  
7 very clear protocols--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
9 Okay.

10 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: about when NYPD  
11 needs to be engaged, and actually some of those have  
12 ramped up significantly as a result of the reforms  
13 after the fatalities last fall. So there are now  
14 clear categories of cases where the NYPD does need to  
15 be engaged. We have more mechanisms now for doing  
16 that. We have our child advocacy centers where in  
17 cases that involve potentially serious abuse to  
18 children, physical violence or sexual abuse in the  
19 child advocacy centers. We have collaboration  
20 between NYPD, our investigative consultants, our CPS  
21 workers who can collaborate on how those cases ought  
22 to be handled. We have closer engagement with NYPD  
23 at the neighborhood level through their Neighborhood  
24 Policing initiatives. So, increasingly, our borough-  
25 based staff work with PD on a borough on a

2 neighborhood and community level to make sure that  
3 they're both coordinating around the safety of the  
4 children, but also around the safety of the  
5 caseworker which is critically important. So, no  
6 there are some now increasingly clear protocols about  
7 when and how NYPD is engaged in our investigations.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:

9 There are cases where a worker will feel in danger or  
10 feel someone is in danger as part of the  
11 investigation, and one of the things that we would  
12 congratulate our union 371 for doing is encouraging  
13 relationships between the community patrol officers  
14 and our workers, so that when there is an encounter  
15 or there is a need, that there is also some personal  
16 connection that they have in the community to the  
17 police who they often depend on for their safety and  
18 the safety of children and families.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: And who gets  
20 to make that call? Is it made by a caseworker? Is  
21 it made by supervisors?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: It's  
23 generally made with consultation and supervision, and  
24 sometimes involves our independent consultants or  
25 investigators.

2 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: But it is, you  
3 know, if a caseworker who's in the field feels  
4 endangered, they have the ability to make that  
5 decision.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: They're calling  
8 911 or if they have a connection with a neighborhood  
9 policing officer to contact them directly.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
11 We're also encouraging the use of teams to go out  
12 when there is anticipation that they may be going  
13 into a situation where there's heightened danger, and  
14 we've encouraged supervision to support workers who  
15 feel that they need that team member. So its police  
16 are there, but it's also important that they feel  
17 that they might be strengthened by the presence of a  
18 colleague.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you  
20 very much. I look forward to working you, as I said,  
21 for at least the next eight months and week, and  
22 hopefully longer than that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
24 Member Grodenchik. Council Member Barron?  
25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you to the  
3 Chairs for having this hearing, and thank you for  
4 coming to present the information. I just wanted to  
5 reiterate what my colleague had said regarding the  
6 RFP process, and there were groups that received the  
7 awards based on the fact that they had a professional  
8 grants writer who was able to add to the grant, but  
9 in fact when they got the award, had to go back to  
10 the organizations that had been providing the service  
11 to find out how do you do this, how do you make it  
12 work, and subcontract some of those same people who  
13 had run the program. So, in addition to what has  
14 been said before, I would like to know what  
15 specifically community organizations will have in  
16 terms of shaping the RFP's, and what are the  
17 qualifications? We never did get an answer when we  
18 asked it previously. What are the qualifications of  
19 the people who are reviewing the applications? It's  
20 fine for you to tell us, "Okay, we'll be transparent  
21 and let you see." Who were the people who rated  
22 them? What were their qualifications, their  
23 experience, and what was the criteria that was used  
24 to select them? In some instances we were told it  
25 was just staff people who were there. So, we need to

2 be very mindful of that as we go forward. But I  
 3 particularly have questions about foster care. I  
 4 think that when it's necessary for children to be  
 5 removed and placed in a foster care home that that's  
 6 a very sensitive process, and we need to make sure  
 7 that the people who are the foster parents in fact  
 8 have been very clearly, strongly vetted to make sure  
 9 that we can avoid any kind of situations that might  
 10 put children in jeopardy. My parents served as  
 11 foster parents and they had two foster children which  
 12 they took into their homes and eventually adopted  
 13 after a few years. So they pulled them out of the  
 14 foster care system, and I do have brothers and  
 15 sisters through that adoption process. And you talk  
 16 about the Fostering College Success Program, and you  
 17 say you have established an Office of College-bound  
 18 and Support. Who staffs that office? How many  
 19 people are there? What do they do? Where are they  
 20 located, and what's the budget for that office?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:

22 Sure. The head of that office which was just created  
 23 a number of months ago is Sonja Gonzales [sp?] who  
 24 comes from-- I believe she worked at Teach for  
 25 America before joining, has background in some

2 research most immediately before joining us. She is  
3 currently solo, but she works with our educational  
4 office that has 10 or 15 people in it, and she works  
5 with all of the folks in our Foster Care and  
6 Permanency Unit. But there is a contract that we  
7 will be letting for an organization to support this  
8 program in the future. Right now what I can tell you  
9 is that there are 40 young people who for the first  
10 time in dormitories at City University, at Queens  
11 College and Staten Island, and they are there for 365  
12 days a year if they want to be, and that means that  
13 they don't have to look for a place to go in the  
14 summer or look for a place to go on Thanksgiving, and  
15 it also means that they have tutors and specially  
16 trained dorm advisors that is part of that program,  
17 in part thanks to the support of the New York Family  
18 [sic] Hospital who donated many of the services that  
19 we provided to the first 40, 50 youth. By next year  
20 we will have 100 youth aging out of foster care who  
21 will be in one of three dormitories, and a year after  
22 that there will be up to 200. In addition, some of  
23 the funds that have been provided through City Tax  
24 Levy funds are available to other youth going to  
25 other schools, and we partner with New Yorkers for

2 Children to obtain scholarships for those who are  
3 attending non-CUNY, non-SUNY schools.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you. In  
5 terms of the number of students who are participating  
6 this year, CUNY had said to me that there were 50  
7 slots that had been allocated.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: There  
9 are 50, and--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: [interposing] So,  
11 my question is--

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
13 [interposing] Yeah.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: You say there are  
15 40. Are there 40 or 40 slots? How many Stuyvesant  
16 are actually participating? Because I've gotten  
17 conflicting information on that.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
19 There are 50 slots and currently 40 youth.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So there are 40  
21 youth, okay. And so what outreach are you doing so  
22 that-- I would imagine there would be at least 100  
23 times more students who qualify who might be  
24 interested in doing that. So what is the outreach  
25

2 that's being offered to those students who would be  
3 eligible, and what is the eligibility?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: I  
5 just got correct. There are actually 43 youth--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: [interposing]  
7 Okay.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: and  
9 50 slots. Thank you. The outreach is mainly through  
10 all of the nonprofits that provide foster care  
11 programs. There are approximately 800 young people  
12 who age out of foster care or become college-eligible  
13 each year. Our intention is to reach every one of  
14 them who has an interest in a college education or a  
15 career track, and that's why the office was  
16 established about career and college-bound youth.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So what can we  
18 concretize? What can we put in place to assure that  
19 every student knows, gets something in their hand or  
20 signs a document or receives a document as a part of  
21 their involvement in the agency to let them know so  
22 that students don't miss the opportunity?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
24 Reaching the young people directly is one of our  
25 goals for this coming year, and also reaching them



2 while they're in high school, and I should mention  
3 that we also have a program that we started at Staten  
4 Island for high schoolers in the summer, and that's a  
5 program that is going to be rolled out as a year-  
6 round program to reach foster care youth in high  
7 school. So, the-- in terms of tangible, we'll make  
8 sure everyone gets the brochure, and we'll make sure  
9 every agency helps us get the word out. But I also  
10 think that we are trying through the agencies and  
11 through our own effort to reach youth who are still  
12 in high school and turn them on to the prospects of a  
13 college education. And I also want to shout out to  
14 City University who's been an extraordinary partner  
15 in this effort and all of their programming, the ASAP  
16 [sic] program and every other program that many of  
17 you has supported has been dedicated to youth in  
18 addition to what we're bringing.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: And finally, in  
20 addition to tuition we know that there are lots of  
21 other related costs that students bear. In addition  
22 to tuition and room and board we know there's a cost  
23 of textbooks which can go-- according to CUNY can go  
24 as high as 1,364 dollars, cost of transportation  
25 which can go as high as 1,054 dollars, and personal

2 expenses amounting to as high as 1,816 dollars, not  
3 to mention the fact that there are hungry students.  
4 People like to say food insecure. We're talking  
5 about hungry students. So are there any kinds of  
6 opportunity for additional assistance so that  
7 students who yes, have tuition and room and board can  
8 get the other funds that they need to help them be  
9 successful to at least stay in school and get through  
10 school and graduate.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: So  
12 you will have to help me tell my colleagues that I  
13 didn't get you to ask that question, but one of the  
14 things that we're proudest of in this program is that  
15 in fact I think it's more than 28 dollars a day per  
16 child. It's now-- 28 dollars, I got that answer  
17 right, 28 dollars, and I think the thing that we've  
18 heard about--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: [interposing] And  
20 that's 28 dollars that they're given?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER: That  
22 they're given, and you know, depending on the agency  
23 they are with they get it in different forms in  
24 different ways, but that is their money. That is for  
25 them to spend on the very things that you listed.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you very  
3 much.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
5 Including food, and including, by the way, in the  
6 dormitories being able to get help to go grocery  
7 shopping and learn how to cook some of the items that  
8 they may not have had the exposure to learn in the  
9 past.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Good. Thank you  
11 very much to the Co-Chairs.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
13 Council Member Barron. Obviously, that is a great  
14 program that we-- you have our commitment at the  
15 Council that we want to-- we'll be there to partner  
16 with you and ensure that the funding is in place to  
17 keep those resources there. It's so vitally important  
18 and so many of the young people that have been  
19 through the foster care system and are aging out of  
20 the system have been told for far too long that they  
21 can't do things, and we need to reinforce that they  
22 can and they can achieve.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRETTSCHEIDER:  
24 Yeah, and I also want to thank, if you'll forgive me,  
25 Casey Family Programs who introduced us to major

2 incorporations who are arranging for mentors and  
3 career coaches for those youth in that program as  
4 well.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And I want to thank  
6 Council Member Barron, Chair Barron, for her  
7 leadership on the Higher Education Committee. So, I  
8 just have a couple of more questions on my end, and  
9 whatever we don't get to we can follow up on with a  
10 letter. But I wanted to ask about an issue that we  
11 haven't gotten to yet which is vouchers, and I'm  
12 looking at you, Susan. So, I would like to get a  
13 clear picture. So, as-- if you've been here for a  
14 couple of years you know that we've had a bit of a  
15 tug-of-war with the previous Administration over non-  
16 mandated vouchers, and for those of you that don't  
17 know, categories one through four, priorities one  
18 through four vouchers are mandated vouchers. There  
19 were-- there are non-mandated vouchers as well that  
20 there's a universe of. They used to be what was  
21 called Priority Seven Vouchers. The Bloomberg  
22 Administration did away with the Priority Seven  
23 Vouchers. There still exists Priority Five Vouchers,  
24 and they have their own set of requirements in terms  
25 of work requirements for parents. Those are non-

2 mandated vouchers, but what I would like-- and then  
3 over the last couple of years the de Blasio  
4 Administration has created a new category called  
5 SCCF, which I can't even remember what it stands for,  
6 but there's-- Special Childcare Fund Vouchers, which  
7 in some ways are supplanting Priority Five. But what  
8 I would like to get a sense of is how many Priority  
9 Five Vouchers exist today in the system? And because  
10 the issue is that Priority Five Vouchers back in  
11 2014, the number was around 14 or 15,000. That  
12 number gradually decreases as children age out of the  
13 system, and if you're not being re-issued, that  
14 number will continue to just decrease. SCCF is  
15 capped right now because the amount of funding is  
16 capped, and what I would like to know is how many  
17 Priority Five Vouchers are there today compared as  
18 well to say a year ago, or you could do a point in  
19 time comparison, and then how many SCCF vouchers are  
20 being utilized today as well?

21 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well, first of  
22 all, Chair, I know this is a priority for you since  
23 you and I talked about this last week when we met,  
24 and--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] No pun  
3 intended.

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Sorry?

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No pun intended,  
6 priority five.

7 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Right. So, I--  
8 we'll get those numbers for you. We don't have those  
9 numbers at our fingertips in terms of the Priority  
10 Five Vouchers, but we'll get--

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] You  
12 don't have them now?

13 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I don't have them  
14 now, but we will get them for you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you have how many  
16 SCCF--

17 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: [interposing] We  
18 got the SCCF vouchers, yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

20 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: There are 1,700.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 1,700 are being  
22 utilized right now.

23 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So then that would  
25 be-- so there's 17.5 million dollars, 17 or 17.5

2 million dollars is the allocation. So that's-- and  
3 roughly there are about 10,000 dollars of vouchers.  
4 So those are all-- the funding is being utilized and  
5 they're essentially maxed out, is that right?

6 UNIDENTIFIED: Correct.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: That's right.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's good to know.

10 Now, there's another issue that came up recently  
11 which is that the state, OCFS has let the City know  
12 that for existing Priority Five vouchers, and I don't  
13 believe SCCF, but correct me if I'm wrong, for  
14 Priority Five vouchers that are being utilized at a  
15 legally exempt provider, the rate has been cut by 25  
16 percent from OCFS which means in real terms that  
17 about a quarter of the funding that goes to those  
18 providers is no longer coming to those providers.  
19 That's my understanding. Am I wrong about that?

20 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: That's basically  
21 correct that the rates are established by the state.  
22 We have no discretion, and the state actually had  
23 some time ago directed us to implement those rates.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

2 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: We have finally  
3 done that so that there are certain categories of  
4 providers who because of the state mandated rate of  
5 experience decreased.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now my question is,  
7 so now that-- that means a quarter of that funding is  
8 not going to the providers that was before this  
9 change was made going to the providers. That's a  
10 savings that somebody is realizing. Is it ACS that  
11 is realizing the savings or is it OCFS that is  
12 realizing those savings? Is it the City or the  
13 State? Do we get a lump sum from OCFS to--

14 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: [interposing] We--  
15 yes, we receive an allocation from OCFS. When we  
16 implemented the state rates, rates for some  
17 categories or providers went up. Some went down. We  
18 continue-- as I understand, this will be still be  
19 above our state allocation. So we're still  
20 supplementing the state allocation with some CTL. So  
21 there are-- in that sense there are no savings in the  
22 aggregate. We are still spending more money on  
23 vouchers in total than we receive from the state.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: At the same time as  
25 they decreased the rate for legally exempt, they



2 increase the rate for some other types of providers,  
3 right?

4 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: For other  
5 categories, yes, of licensed programs.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that-- have you  
7 gauged whether that evens out, or is that just it's  
8 all the same because ACS is over the cap anyway?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: I just  
10 wanted to say for the SCCF vouchers we've kept the  
11 rate the same as the market-rate for 2014. We have  
12 not changed them.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, right. But  
14 Priority Five--

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: [interposing]  
16 Okay, so there are no savings [sic].

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: which is still  
18 probably if I were to guess there's still probably 8-  
19 10,000 Priority Five vouchers out there. That is--  
20 that rate is decreasing which means--

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: [interposing]  
22 If they're in that category, yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.  
24  
25

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: And so as  
3 your question about increase and decrease, we project  
4 that they would be about even in our projections.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, alright. We  
6 can-- if it's possible, I would like to kind of  
7 follow up in maybe more of the details and be able to  
8 get a better sense of the numbers.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: Sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We're hearing from  
11 providers in our districts, it's, you know, it's  
12 important for us to be able to have a clear-eyed  
13 picture of exactly what's happening, because  
14 ultimately that's-- those are resources that are not  
15 going-- you know, are not going to the providers or  
16 the communities where they previously were, and so  
17 that has an impact on the level of service that's  
18 being provided for sure. We can't-- I never-- I  
19 always say you can't do more with less. You can only  
20 do less with less. It doesn't really work out. So,  
21 love to be able to follow up.

22 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah, we could  
23 certainly work with you and your staff to give you  
24 the information that you need.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, do any of my  
3 colleagues have any-- okay.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you to my--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] So, both  
6 Chairs Cumbo and Cabrera have further questions. I  
7 will just make a quick announcement. There's some  
8 good news and bad news. Good news is that we're  
9 getting to the public testimony very shortly. The  
10 bad news is we have to move across the street to the  
11 16<sup>th</sup> floor hearing room because they're doing a  
12 performance in this room, and they have to-- there's  
13 going to be loud music and it would be very  
14 distracting as you're giving your testimony. So,  
15 with that I'll turn it over to Chair Cumbo. Oh,  
16 Chair Cabrera?

17 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Ladies first.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Whoever wants to?

19 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I'm old fashioned.  
20 Ladies first.

21 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Just wanted to go  
22 over the pay parody issue. You talked about it in  
23 your testimony, and pay parody has been an issue for  
24 ACS for several years now. As the Department of  
25 Education's Universal Pre-k, Kindergarten teachers

2 earn more than EarlyLearn teachers, and both teachers  
3 provide similar instruction to young children. What  
4 is ACS doing to retain qualified teachers, and what  
5 more can be done, and how much would it cost to pay  
6 EarlyLearn teachers equal to DOE UPK teachers? Has  
7 ACS worked with OMB to examine the cost? If not,  
8 why? And I heard in your testimony when the increase  
9 to 15 dollars as far as the minimum wage would  
10 address homes of those issues, but again, the 15  
11 dollars as a minimum wage is just that. It's  
12 recognizing that there has been a pay gap that has  
13 been not allowing families to get ahead. This is,  
14 you know, to go to 15 dollars is really still  
15 bringing us back to the baseline again, and they  
16 would simply be minimum wage workers again, and we  
17 know that they're so much more valuable than that.  
18 So can you talk about the pay disparities between DOE  
19 and EarlyLearn teachers?

20 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah, well  
21 certainly in terms of retention, recruitment and  
22 retention, I think that the actions that have been  
23 implemented will go a long way in that regard. The  
24 15 dollars applies to non-teaching staff. For  
25 teaching staff, they now are eligible for-- they all

2 will receive increases in the 20 to 27 percent range  
3 and will be eligible to go as high as 44,000 for  
4 those with a BA and 50,000 for those with a Master's.  
5 So, significantly higher than that rate. In terms--

6 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: [interposing] Can you  
7 compare that to what the UPK is so that I have a  
8 clear reference in my mind right now?

9 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Well that will get  
10 by 2020 comparable to what the community-based UPK  
11 Pre-K for All providers now receive. So the idea is  
12 to get to parity with the community Pre-K for All  
13 programs by 2020.

14 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: For teaching  
16 staff.

17 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: For teaching staff.

18 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: For teaching  
19 staff.

20 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: So by 2020, in your  
21 estimation in the direction that you're headed for  
22 teaching staff, those pay disparities will be  
23 equalized on the community level.

2 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Between-- right.  
3 Between our EarlyLearn providers and the community  
4 programs that provide Pre-K for All education, yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay. And what about  
6 for other staffers outside of the teachers?

7 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: Yeah, I don't think  
8 we have that information. We can find that out for  
9 you, for the non-teaching staff.

10 CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Okay, thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Just have two  
12 questions, and one is related-- as you know, in 2017  
13 in your Preliminary Budget we added 3.6 million  
14 dollars in Fiscal 2017 to provide 35 full-time  
15 positions to better monitor the daily census of youth  
16 and to make more site visits and so forth. I'm just  
17 wondering how many of those positions have been  
18 filled?

19 COMMISSIONER HANSELL: I know it's the  
20 vast majority. I'll let Deputy Commissioner Franco  
21 speak to--

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: [interposing]  
23 All of them.

24 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: All of them,  
25 fantastic. That's the kind of answers I love to

2 hear. The other-- and part of that was the eight  
3 Quality Improvement Specialists?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: Exactly. So  
5 I think we mentioned before that actually with that  
6 staff we're able to do a few things. We actually  
7 check on the census of each one of the facilities six  
8 times a day so we can ensure that we know where kids  
9 are at. And I think I mentioned that we have  
10 actually gone 348 times to our 29 sites to check on  
11 public safety issues.

12 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay. And then real  
13 quickly if you could give the short answer to these  
14 two because I know we have to move to 250 Broadway.  
15 And that is, youth on staff assaults with injury rate  
16 increased when comparing to the first four months of  
17 Fiscal 2017 compared to the same time period 2016.  
18 Can you talk to me about how many additional front  
19 staff, frontline staff, will be hired to address the  
20 youth on staff assault with injury rate increase?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: Are you  
22 looking at detention numbers now?

23 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Am I looking at  
24 what, sorry?  
25

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: Are you  
3 looking at detention?

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: What I have was from  
5 the PMNNR.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: So, we  
7 didn't found a significant increase. I think it's  
8 0.03 percent increase in youth on youth assaults in  
9 detention. We have done three things pretty quickly.  
10 We have invested in Safe Crisis Management, which is  
11 a national proven technique to help de-escalate  
12 behavior in young people. We're actually working  
13 very closely with Bellevue and others to develop the  
14 competency skills in the young people to regulate  
15 their emotions and behavior, and I think to your  
16 third point we need to hire more staff.

17 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: So the  
19 Commissioner and I are looking at trying to invest in  
20 significant number of giving counselors that are  
21 needed in detention.

22 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And my very last  
23 question is, the average-- and by the way it was at  
24 the detention centers. But related to the average  
25 cost per youth for day has significantly increased



2 during the same time period as last year. Actually,  
3 let me go back here. The total admission to  
4 detention has decreased from 3,126 in Fiscal 2014 to  
5 2,528 in Fiscal 2016, yet the average cost per youth  
6 per day has significantly increased during the same  
7 time period from 773 dollars to 1,431. Is that  
8 because we have--

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: [interposing]  
10 We're managing those same two because--

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: [interposing] The  
12 economy scales has been reduced. Is that going to  
13 affect future hiring? I mean, how does this work?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: No, we have  
15 a commitment by OMB and the Commissioner to hire  
16 those staff as soon as we can get them.

17 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: It's costing us the  
18 same, but we have less kids, so it costs us more per  
19 kid.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: We have more  
21 child [sic] increase than ever before.

22 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So what is the  
23 average daily cost per youth per day? How is it  
24 calculated?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRANCO: For security  
3 pension [sic], do we have that?

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: How is that  
5 calculated?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NUCCIO: It's all the  
7 fixed costs that are associated with the facility, of  
8 course, in the numerator plus the staff, and then the  
9 care days are the days that the youth are in care.

10 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay, very good.  
11 That was my last question. Again, thank you for all  
12 that you do. You guys do marvelous work, and I know  
13 you have a big, big challenge before you. And  
14 anything we can be here to support you at least in my  
15 committee, and I know my Co-chairs would be more than  
16 glad to do so. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
18 Chair Cabrera. Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, I  
19 want to thank you very much for your testimony and  
20 for your patience and for answering a lot of our  
21 questions so thoroughly. We look forward to  
22 hearing from you at the Executive Budget, and as I  
23 said, don't be shy with the new needs. We want to  
24 make sure that we are getting all the resources to  
25 our city's children as they need, and so we look

2 forward to hearing from you, and we'll see you all  
3 across the street on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor at 250 Broadway.  
4 We're going to make an exception for Stephanie  
5 Gendell because it's her birthday, so we're not going  
6 to make her go across the street and testify so she  
7 can go ahead and enjoy her birthday. And then also I  
8 just want to-- if-- I believe that my six-week-old  
9 Francis is maybe watching on TV right now on channel  
10 74, so I just want to say hi Francis. So, alright,  
11 everybody we'll see you in a few minutes. Okay.

12 [break]

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Everybody, thank you  
14 very much for coming across the street. Nice to see  
15 all of you. So, we're going to have-- we have, I  
16 believe, about 20 to 25 people scheduled to testify.  
17 I understand that some people might have left, and my  
18 apologies, it's been a long day for everybody. I want  
19 to thank you all for your patience, though, for  
20 sticking with it and for staying for the whole  
21 hearing. The first panel we'll call up now is Tracie  
22 Robinson from Human Services Council, Nancy Rankin  
23 from Community Service Society, Danette Rivera from  
24 Food Bank JITA Community Outreach, Rashida Latef from

2 Westside Campaign Against Hunger, and Rachel Sabella  
3 from Food Bank for New York City.

4 RACHEL SABELLA: Okay, well sure. We'll  
5 just make it easier. Good evening. I'm going to  
6 change my testimony. Thank you, Chair Levin, and  
7 welcome back. Thank you, Council Member Cabrera, for  
8 the opportunity to testify this evening. My name is  
9 Rachel Sabella, and I'm the Director of Government  
10 Relations for Food Bank for New York City. I am going  
11 to be brief in my remarks because there's a lot of  
12 people here, and we know you've had a long day, but I  
13 do want to thank you and your colleagues for showing  
14 how important it is and being here and listening and  
15 hearing to what the public has to say about this.  
16 Food Bank is the City's largest major hunger relief  
17 organizations. We work with a network of more than a  
18 thousand food pantries, soup kitchens and charities  
19 across the City. I am so delighted that you're  
20 actually going to hear from three of our member  
21 agencies today, and we will be submitting testimony  
22 on the record for many more agencies as well. What--  
23 we want to first thank the Council for your continued  
24 support. This Council at every chance possible has  
25 prioritized anti-hunger funding from EFAP funding

2 last year to the creation of 16 new school pantries  
3 to the DYCD initiative to advocating for universal  
4 school meals. This Council has continued to make  
5 hunger one of their top priorities. We're grateful  
6 for that and for the Speaker's State of the City that  
7 really focused on this as well. Food Bank's work  
8 would also not be possible without the partnership  
9 with HRA that we forged in the earliest days of our  
10 organization's history. It's allowed for productive  
11 collaboration on SNAP outreach, on the SNAP taskforce  
12 and on food distribution. We're grateful to have  
13 them as our partners. Today, what I want to talk  
14 about is hunger in New York City and budget  
15 priorities moving forward on hunger. 1.4 million New  
16 Yorkers rely on emergency food. When Food Bank  
17 surveyed our network in September of 2016, what did  
18 we find? Half of food pantries and soup kitchens  
19 reported running out of food. One-third had to turn  
20 people away, and almost half reported reducing the  
21 number of meals provided in their pantry bags. What  
22 does that show? A lot of people need help, and  
23 there's not enough food to support them. In order to  
24 close our City's 242 million meal gap it's going to  
25 take a variety of programs and sources, and one of

2 the big ones is EFAP, New York City's Emergency Food  
3 Assistance Program. It plays an important role  
4 because it's a steady year-round supply of food for  
5 more than 500 food pantries and soup kitchens across  
6 the City. We were extremely disappointed that the  
7 Mayor's Preliminary Budget rolls back the entire  
8 increase of 4.9 million in EFAP food funding and  
9 returns to baseline amounts of 8.2 million which was  
10 last adopted in the FY 2012 budget, significant cuts.  
11 There's been no abatement of need to justify these  
12 cuts, and in addition we've heard anecdotal reports  
13 of immigrant families turning away from SNAP for fear  
14 that it will affect their residency status. Our  
15 City's food-- but where will they turn? To food  
16 pantries and soup kitchens, and our food pantries and  
17 soup kitchens already struggling with insufficient  
18 food are ill-equipped to meet this additional need.  
19 Nevertheless, we are heartened by recent public  
20 statements from the Mayor himself that the  
21 Administration does not intend to cut the program. We  
22 look forward to continuing to engage the  
23 Administration and the Council to increase EFAP  
24 funding. There is one more point I do want to  
25 address, and we remain concerned by remarks made both

2 by the Administration during the Oversight hearing in  
3 January of 2017 and during this morning's hearing  
4 where the Administration seemed to assert that the  
5 capacity of emergency food providers to distribute  
6 food would limit and potentially prevent any  
7 additional increases to EFAP beyond the current  
8 year's funding amount. We strongly disagree with  
9 that, and we strongly disagree that our network is  
10 incapable of distributing more. When our network was  
11 surveyed and asked what was the number one need, 73  
12 percent said it's more food. That's what they can do.  
13 You're going to hear from our network today. I am  
14 going to stop talking, but we want to thank you again  
15 for your continued support and urge you to support 22  
16 million in baseline food funding for EFAP. Thank  
17 you.

18 NANCY RANKIN: Good evening Chairman  
19 Levin and Committee Members. We're going to have a  
20 change in subject and I guess go back to food  
21 security. I'm here to urge you to include funds in  
22 the budget to subsidize half-price metro cards for  
23 New York City residents living in poverty. So, thank  
24 you for the opportunity to testify this evening. I'm  
25 testifying at this hearing because the issue of

2 transit affordability is not just a transportation  
3 issue, but it is fundamentally about combatting  
4 income inequality. It's about prevention of the  
5 family financial stress and homelessness that you  
6 spent most of the day talking about today. My name  
7 is Nancy Rankin. I'm Vice President for Policy,  
8 Research and Advocacy at Community Service Society, a  
9 nonprofit organization that works to advance upward  
10 mobility for low income New Yorkers. Mayor de Blasio  
11 recently said people are so fundamentally challenged  
12 by the affordability crisis that this city must do  
13 more and must do it quickly. So here's one thing we  
14 can do. CSS along with Rider's Alliance, transit  
15 advocates, labor, grassroots immigrant and worker  
16 groups, criminal justice organizations, workforce  
17 development agencies have all come together to call  
18 for half price metro cards for New Yorkers living  
19 below poverty, which is less than 20,000 a year for a  
20 family of three. About 800,000 New Yorkers would be  
21 eligible for half-priced metro cards, helping them  
22 save 726 dollars a year off the cost of 12 monthly  
23 passes. That money could go to stave off  
24 homelessness, buy more groceries for an entire family  
25 for more than a month. Few ideas have garnered this



2 much consensus. A week ago, 40 of New York City's  
3 leading progressives released an open letter urging  
4 funds be included in the Fiscal 18 budget for fair  
5 fares. They included Reverenced Michael Walrun [sp?]  
6 Chair of the Mayor's Clergy Advisory Council,  
7 Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, FPWA's  
8 Jennifer Jones Austin [sp?], Bill Lipton [sp?],  
9 Javier Valdez of Make the Road, every Hispanic member  
10 of our congressional delegation and more. Our  
11 proposal for fair fares has drawn editorial support  
12 from the Daily News, the New York Times, El Diario  
13 [sp?], the Amsterdam News, AM New York, indeed even a  
14 New York Post columnist said, "It's not a bad idea."  
15 Mobility means opportunity. City and State named  
16 fair fares one of 2016's best ideas. It's supported  
17 now by 37 members of your body, four of the five  
18 Borough President, the Comptroller and the Public  
19 Advocate, by major unions including our WDSU 1199, 32  
20 BJ, NYSNA, TWU, as well as the fiscal watchdog,  
21 Citizen's Budget Commission, but most importantly,  
22 it's supported by the public, 73 percent of your  
23 constituents. It will cost about 212 million a year  
24 when fully phased in, but initially it would be a lot  
25 less. Moreover, the city stands to reap millions in

2 savings from making fares more affordable. We spend  
3 more than 50 million a year, not even counting the  
4 cost of Rikers, dragging the indigent through the  
5 criminal justice system or giving them summonses and  
6 100-dollar fines for one [sic] of \$2.75 to pay the  
7 fare. HRA that you heard from this morning spends  
8 about 48 million annually to help public assistance  
9 recipients get to the programs. It requires them to  
10 attend a tassick [sic] acknowledgement that poor  
11 people simply cannot afford to use public transit  
12 now. Making transit affordable will benefit our local  
13 economy, enabling employers to draw from a vast  
14 citywide labor pool. The Mayor has called the  
15 proposal for half fare discounts a noble idea, but  
16 has said paying for it should be the state's  
17 responsibility. However, existing law explicitly  
18 gives the Mayor the power to secure a discount for a  
19 class of riders as long as the City makes up the  
20 foregone fare revenue, and the sample precedent for  
21 the City stepping up to subsidize fares. The city  
22 already subsidizes half-priced fares for seniors, for  
23 the disabled, and reimburses the MTA for student  
24 passes. In addition, the Council and Mayor recently  
25 expanded transit tax benefits to give the break to

2 middle and higher income commuters. So, my question  
3 really is, why not help those who need it the most?  
4 Our city should be a progressive leader. We should  
5 not criminalize poverty, especially today when being  
6 charged with fare evasion could put someone at risk  
7 for deportation. Instead of ringing our hands and  
8 resisting, we should be raising our hands and  
9 existing on positive actions within our power to do.  
10 So, I urge you to please make our transit system  
11 affordable for all New Yorkers. Thank you.

12 RASHIDA LATEF: Good afternoon and thank  
13 you. I'm Rashida Latef, the Advocacy Coordinator at  
14 West Side Campaign against Hunger. I'd like to thank  
15 Council Member Steven Levin, Chair of the General  
16 Welfare Committee for the opportunity to submit  
17 testimony on behalf of the Fiscal Year 2018 New York  
18 City Preliminary Budget to advocate for increased  
19 baseline funding of the Emergency Food Assistance  
20 Program to 22 million. Founded in 1979, West Side  
21 Campaign Against Hunger is the Country's first  
22 supermarket-style multi-service food pantry, and one  
23 of the largest emergency food providers in New York  
24 City. In the last year we provided nearly 1.7  
25 million pounds of food which included over 280,000

2 pounds of fresh fruits and fresh vegetables to over  
3 33,000 people. But our customers come to us for more  
4 than groceries. WSCAH combines access to healthy  
5 food with support services, job training, policy  
6 advocacy to work in partnership with our customers by  
7 emphasizing their right to self-determination and  
8 dignity. WSCAH serves a diverse population of low-  
9 income New York City residents to whom we provide  
10 services regardless of their citizenship status,  
11 including those who are undocumented. Fifty-eight  
12 percent of our customers are women, a majority of  
13 whom are mothers to the 26 percent of children who  
14 rely on the fresh food and wrap-around services we  
15 provide to help our customers not only survive, but  
16 thrive. As a result of adverse local and national  
17 policies, our customers and New Yorkers in general  
18 are increasingly food insecure and more afraid. Last  
19 April, the federal waiver for ABAWD expired,  
20 affecting residents in Manhattan who live below 110<sup>th</sup>  
21 Street on the West Side and below 96<sup>th</sup> Street on the  
22 East Side. This year, the ABAWD provision will also  
23 impact the entire borough of Queens with the  
24 exception of community district 12. Unemployed  
25 ABAWDs who previously qualified for SNAP are forced

2 to rely solely on emergency food providers to  
3 supplement their lack of access to a consistent and  
4 healthy meal. SNAP provides in two months what  
5 emergency food providers provide in one year.  
6 Although emergency food providers alone do not have  
7 the capacity to make up for the loss of SNAP  
8 benefits, it is clear we must do everything we can to  
9 help those who overnight have become more vulnerable  
10 than they ever were before. Even for those who still  
11 qualify for SNAP, other anti-hunger safety-net  
12 programs and emergency food has been accessed, a 242  
13 million meal gap persists in New York City. The need  
14 to increase the baseline funding of EFAP to 22  
15 million in Fiscal Year 2018 is resoundingly clear.  
16 We are now not only fighting hunger. We are fighting  
17 fear. An increase in EFAP should be one of the ways  
18 in which we provide sanctuary as we promised. West  
19 Side Campaign Against Hunger and our anti-hunger  
20 allies strongly urge you to increase the baseline  
21 EFAP food funding to 22 million in Fiscal Year 2018.  
22 EFAP is strongly important to WSCAH, other emergency  
23 food providers throughout the City, and to provide  
24 sanctuary close the meal gap and to help the most  
25 vulnerable in our city access consistent and healthy

2 meals with dignity. Once again, I would like to  
3 thank the City Council's General Welfare Committee  
4 for the opportunity to testify about the urgency to  
5 increase baseline funding for EFAP. Thank you.

6 DANETTE RIVERA: Hello. My name is  
7 Danette Rivera, Executive Director of JITA Community  
8 Outreach Center located in Jamaica, Queens. I'm  
9 sorry. Thank you, Chairman Levin, for giving us your  
10 attention regarding our budget priorities for the  
11 City budget. I would like to share the importance of  
12 increasing food funding for the Emergency Food  
13 Assistance Program known as EFAP to my organization  
14 and the community that we serve. JITA is a member of  
15 the Food Bank for New York City and provides services  
16 to the community including a twice weekly food  
17 pantry. EFAP is important to our Queens community  
18 because it provides food and helps relieve financial  
19 burden such as housing and other necessities for  
20 families with low income. Furthermore, the food  
21 services, EFAP, provides so our community center  
22 allows us to be a trusted space to offer a variety of  
23 resources that reach people at the core of their  
24 need. When I testified at the Committee of General  
25 Welfare oversight hearing on reducing food insecurity

in January, I shared the story of Ms. Miriam Reels [sp?]. Miriam is one of our clients at the food pantry, and now she is a very good friend. She is a retired senior citizen, single mother and grandmother of her 42-year-old daughter, 22-year-old granddaughter and 12-year-old grandson. Her grandson eats lunch in school as part of the free middle school program and during summer meals, but Miriam also uses the wholesome and nutritious food EFAP provides from our food pantry for meals for her whole family. I'm happy to share that since January I was able to refer her to an organization that is assisting her household with a caretaker and additional income support. To meet the needs of our neighbors, we must expand anti-hunger programs. I would like to thank Speaker Mark-Viverito for including expansion for EFAP as well as support for SNAP in her State of the City Address, and urge the City Council to adopt those budget priorities, please. I support increasing baseline food for funding for EFAP to 22 million in order to help them meet the needs of hunger deficit that is going on in New York City today. Thank you again for your time,

2 and please continue to support programs that help New  
3 Yorkers like Miriam and her family. Thank you.

4 TRACIE ROBINSON: Good afternoon and  
5 thank you so much for this opportunity to testify on  
6 behalf of a sector that is so inextricably tied to  
7 the general welfare of New Yorkers. My name is  
8 Tracie Robinson, and I'm the Senior Policy Analyst at  
9 the Human Services Council of New York. You've  
10 probably seen us and heard from us many times and can  
11 probably sing my testimony by heart. So I'll modify  
12 it just a little bit and take us up to a 35,000 foot  
13 view of the sector as a whole. HSC is a membership  
14 association representing about 170 of New York City's  
15 leading nonprofit human services organizations. As  
16 you know, the City relies very heavily on these  
17 organizations to provide a wide range of services  
18 that help New Yorkers of all backgrounds and ability  
19 levels thrive, caring for children and seniors,  
20 feeding the hungry, providing shelter, helping people  
21 find jobs, and empowering people with disabilities to  
22 live independently are just some of the myriad of  
23 services that these organizations provide. There are  
24 currently about 60,000 homeless people living in  
25 shelters in New York City, about 55,000 older adults



2 in senior centers, NORCs which are Naturally  
3 Occurring Retirement Communities, and adult day  
4 programs, and about 10,000 children in foster care.  
5 Unfortunately, our sector faces some severe  
6 structural barriers and systemic under-reimbursement  
7 and these have created a real crisis for the  
8 nonprofit sector. We are also living in a time of  
9 great uncertainty as we face a federal administration  
10 that has made it pretty clear that the services that  
11 we provide are on the chopping block. Across the  
12 state, providers are reporting large deficits  
13 stemming from inadequate government reimbursement  
14 levels and an inability to fund-raise their way out  
15 of the gap. This is due in part to the fact that  
16 it's really difficult for organizations to raise  
17 funding for things that are considered indirect  
18 costs. It's really difficult to make a pitch for  
19 chairs, pencils, electricity, rent. It is very  
20 difficult for these organizations to raise funding  
21 for these types of expenses which are absolutely  
22 necessary for all of these organizations to carry out  
23 their missions. A group of 218 organizations  
24 recently sent a letter to the Mayor in December  
25 requesting a 12 percent increase across the board on

2 all nonprofit human services contracts. These  
3 organizations serve about 1.5 million New Yorkers  
4 each year, and provide over five billion dollars in  
5 human services in New York City. Many of the  
6 organizations that signed on to this letter are in  
7 the room today and some of them are not even members  
8 of my organization. We're calling for this immediate  
9 investment on our contracts to stop the reduction or  
10 termination of essential services that make New York  
11 a safe, diverse and inclusive home for all.

12 Sanctuary is a buzz word that's being thrown around a  
13 lot lately, and if we're completely honest, this  
14 sector is our sanctuary. This is what the sanctuary  
15 looks like, and that's why we've titled our campaign  
16 Sustain Our Sanctuary. This ask is the sector's  
17 number one priority, and you'll probably hear it  
18 repeated by some of the other people testifying  
19 today. We cannot continue to do more with less, and  
20 we need the support of the Council to begin to make  
21 in-roads on the chronic underinvestment of the sector  
22 that has left us on the brink of collapse. The  
23 reason we're asking for an across-the-board increase  
24 is that there's no one-size-fits-all solution to  
25 nonprofit problems. Nonprofits have different

2 funding streams. They have different cost patterns,  
3 and they have different ways of dealing with  
4 problems. So, for example, some organizations have  
5 furloughed staff. Some organizations have forgone  
6 much needed infrastructure investments. Some  
7 organizations have reduced or terminated certain  
8 programs. So no two nonprofit organizations,  
9 especially in New York City, look alike. Nonprofits  
10 need flexibility and funding. So, you hear all the  
11 time from nonprofit organizations asking for funding.  
12 It's really important that that funding be flexible  
13 so they can make decisions that really are tailored  
14 to their particular needs and circumstances. We call  
15 on you to press the Mayor to include funding for this  
16 urgently needed 12 percent increase in the budget.  
17 Now is the time to strengthen the sector. As I  
18 mentioned before, we do face great uncertainty or,  
19 well, perhaps certainty with respect to the Federal  
20 Government, and this sector will become more  
21 important as the Federal Government implements its  
22 policies and budget cuts. The nonprofit human  
23 services sector is indispensable in helping the Mayor  
24 and the Council realize your vision of a safe, just

2 and healthy city, and we hope that you will join us  
3 in our call for this funding. Thank you so much.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to thank this  
5 panel for your testimony and also for the amazing  
6 work that you're doing every single day out in the  
7 communities and advocating for these very important  
8 services, and it's vital to this committee to have  
9 your input and to have your testimony and so we  
10 greatly appreciate you taking the time to stay and to  
11 deliver this testimony and make sure that we are on  
12 the right track and making sure that the City's  
13 resources are going into the right places. So, I  
14 just want to thank you again, and I think-- do any of  
15 my colleagues want to say anything. Barry, our  
16 resident food advocate on the General Welfare  
17 Committee, Barry Grodenchik.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I just want  
19 to-- thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to thank you  
20 all for sticking it out so long. We've seen some of  
21 you have been here all day and it's very important  
22 the agencies that we cover today cover the critical  
23 needs of millions of New Yorkers and I'd be remiss--  
24 I'd been very happy to work with Rachel Sabella along  
25 with the Chair. I am guardedly optimistic that we

2 will get back to where we are this year, and I do  
3 know that as you probably know, the Speaker has made  
4 this a priority. She had-- a big part of the State  
5 of the City speech. So as I told the Commissioner  
6 today I have reservations about some of the things  
7 that we try to do, not reservations, but it is a lot  
8 of hard work, but feeding everybody that lives in the  
9 city should not be hard work where we have literally  
10 over 500 food pantries ready in every neighborhood in  
11 the City of New York, churches, mosques, synagogues,  
12 temples, on and on and on that are willing to  
13 distribute food. So, no New Yorker should go hungry,  
14 and I really want to thank you all for being here  
15 today. We will roll up our sleeves, and I do believe  
16 that the Mayor will be with us at the end of the day.  
17 We know his history and his politics here, and I  
18 think it's just a matter of time, but we have to stay  
19 on top of them. That's what we do. So, thank you.  
20 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
22 Member Grodenchik. Again, thank you all very much  
23 for your testimony, really appreciate it. Next  
24 panel, Robert DeLeon, ATI Reentry Coalition CASES,  
25 Fiodna O'Grady, Samaritans of New York, Cheryl

2 Rozinski, Good Shepherd Services, Doctor Sophine  
3 Charles from COFCCA, Amy Ellenbogen from the Center  
4 for Court Innovation. Whoever wants to begin? You  
5 have to make sure that the microphone is on, the red  
6 light.

7 ROBERT DELEON: Okay. Now I will. So,  
8 good evening, actually, everyone. My name is Rob  
9 DeLeon. I'm the Associate Director of Youth Programs  
10 at CASES. Thank you, Chairs Levin, Cumbo, Cabrera,  
11 Committee Member Grodenchik for having us. I'm here  
12 from the New York ATI Reentry Coalition which is  
13 comprised of 10 New York City-based nonprofit  
14 organizations that are listed here. I'll cut short  
15 the remarks for you guys. We've worked really  
16 closely with all of the Committee Members. So, the  
17 Coalition is deeply appreciative of the Council's  
18 support of our work through the ATI initiative which  
19 in Fiscal Year 2017 allocated 5.357 million dollars  
20 to the 10 current members of the Coalition. The City  
21 Council has been the key partner throughout the  
22 Coalition's 20-plus year history providing critical  
23 funding that enables the Coalition to meet its  
24 mission to reduce crime, strengthen families and  
25 bring hope and opportunity to New York City's most

2 troubled communities by providing a full spectrum of  
3 services for New Yorkers involved in each stage of  
4 the criminal justice continuum from initial  
5 detention, court hearings to incarceration to re-  
6 entry into the community. Thanks to the Council's  
7 annual support, members of the Coalition have been  
8 working together for over two decades to provide  
9 direct services for populations in need, advocate for  
10 city and state policy and legislative reforms, and  
11 increasingly to be available as a resource for  
12 service providers that have not historically focused  
13 on serving criminal justice-involved populations.  
14 Continued City Council support in Fiscal Year 2018 is  
15 essential in order to ensure that the Coalition is  
16 able to maintain current services which reach all 51  
17 Council Districts. In addition, the Council's  
18 support allows the Coalition members to be responsive  
19 to the City's evolving criminal justice landscape,  
20 and for this reason the Coalition anticipates that  
21 the Council's funding will be all the more critical  
22 in the upcoming year. The Coalition applauds the  
23 Committee Chair, the Speaker and all of the Council  
24 Members for prioritizing reforms for the criminal  
25 justice system as well as for bringing to the

2 forefront discussion of the feasibility of closing  
3 Rikers Island. A number of the Coalition members  
4 have been engaged in the ongoing discussion  
5 surrounding these efforts, and we believe our  
6 organizations are well-positioned to support many of  
7 the recommendations anticipated to be included in  
8 forthcoming reports and analysis. Increased council  
9 funding in Fiscal Year 2018 would ensure that  
10 Coalition members are able to continue to work with  
11 the City to advance our shared objectives and are  
12 available to engage with communities and service  
13 providers that may be less familiar with the many  
14 successes achieved through the Coalition's community-  
15 based ATI and reentry programming. Furthermore, the  
16 need for the New York ATI Reentry Coalition's  
17 existing services and programs is anticipated to be  
18 even greater in FY 2018. As a result, the recent  
19 advances in long called for reforms to key aspects of  
20 the criminal justice system including efforts to  
21 raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York  
22 State, changes to sentencing processes for  
23 individuals with a history of mental illness and/or  
24 substance misuse, and the increased availability of  
25 discharge planning services thanks to new funding



2 included in New York City Department of Corrections  
3 Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 18. Increased  
4 Council funding in Fiscal Year 18 will be central to  
5 ensuring the Coalition members have the capacity to  
6 meet the anticipated need for ATI reentry services in  
7 the city and are able to continue to be innovative in  
8 developing tools to reach populations not currently  
9 served through existing programs. Therefore, in FY  
10 18, the NY ATI Reentry Coalition is seeking a million  
11 dollar increase in funding from the City Council's  
12 ATI initiative which would be divided equally among  
13 the 10 members of the Coalition, a thousand dollars--  
14 excuse me, 100,000 dollars would be the increase per  
15 organizations. The Coalition's total FY 18  
16 initiative request of 6.357 million will assist the  
17 Coalition in its work to partner with the City in  
18 advancing shared criminal justice reform objectives,  
19 allow Coalition members to respond quickly to the  
20 anticipated increased demand for their programs in  
21 the upcoming year and provide critical ongoing  
22 support for ATI and reentry services citywide. Thank  
23 you for this opportunity to submit the testimony.  
24 We're grateful for the Council's longstanding  
25

2 support, and we look forward to continuing to work  
3 closely in the upcoming year. Thank you.

4 SOPHINE CHARLES: Questions? No? Okay.

5 Great. Good afternoon. I am Doctor Sophine Charles.

6 I'm from the Council of Family and Child Caring

7 Agencies also known as COFCCA, and I see Councilwoman

8 Cumbo is looking at me like you know me from the law

9 enforcement group, but today I'm here testifying on

10 behalf of COFCCA. COFCCA is the membership

11 organization. We represent more than 50 of the

12 nonprofit providers that provide foster care,

13 preventive services, juvenile justice, and

14 residential care services. Thank you for the

15 opportunity to testify, and I have to say that

16 Councilman Levin, you've already done my job for me

17 because you know preventive services so well, and

18 you, the Council has been an incredible friend to all

19 of our providers and we thank you. Over the years

20 you've been very friendly in terms of getting us our

21 preventive slots, increasing the slots, and also

22 lowering the caseload. So thank you very much, and

23 we really like when you say go for it. We're going

24 for it. Our agencies are united with the Human

25 Services Council and the other nonprofit providers in

2 asking for a 12 percent across-the-board increase for  
3 our contracts. Our agencies have been working on a  
4 2008 budget with our contracts, and because those  
5 contracts have been underfunded our agencies have had  
6 to raise money, private dollars, in order to  
7 subsidize ACS contracts. We are specifically  
8 interested in seeing that that 12 percent increase in  
9 our contracts are applied for the families that we're  
10 working with. Our families are the black and brown  
11 families that are-- have few resources. Many of them  
12 are very poor, and many of them are in the ACS Child  
13 Welfare Network Preventive Services for a number of  
14 reasons. One is because many of them had been  
15 indicated for child abuse or maltreatment, and then  
16 we have a population that had voluntarily come  
17 forward to request services to deal with a number, a  
18 wide range of issues, everything from parental  
19 incarceration, substance abuse, mental health issues.  
20 Most of our-- we have, I think probably about 60  
21 percent of them in some areas of the City are  
22 actually homeless and in the shelter population. So,  
23 our preventive providers are dealing with some very  
24 high-risk families with a tremendous need and so  
25 we're asking for that 12 percent because that will

2 allow our agencies to deliver timely, quality  
3 preventive services, and also the workforce that  
4 we're dealing with. ACS testified earlier that they  
5 have a 15 percent workforce turnover. Our preventive  
6 providers, we have a 35 percent workforce turnover,  
7 and what that means is that we have, I think, there  
8 are-- probably a couple of weeks ago, 500 families,  
9 more than 500 families were on a wait list for  
10 preventive services, and part of the reason that  
11 there is a wait list for preventive services is  
12 because some of our providers have actually had to  
13 close their intake because they didn't have the staff  
14 to provide services to families where they could take  
15 new families into their programs. Our families are  
16 waiting for these services, and keeping in mind also  
17 that we have a very young casework staff and many of  
18 them are leaving because the demand is just so  
19 incredible along with the low salaries. It's just  
20 really hard for us to maintain a qualified workforce,  
21 and so that 12 percent would certainly help us  
22 fortify, fiscally fortify our agencies. We'll bring  
23 them up to at least a 2017/2018 contract cost. We  
24 also, our agencies are using the 2008 budget to pay  
25 for escalating cost of rent, escalating cost of

2 insurance premiums, and we really can't afford to pay  
3 our workforce. So we're asking for that 12 percent,  
4 but we're not asking for it retrospectfully [sic],  
5 right? We're not-- retroactively. So, we're just  
6 asking 12 percent across the board, no retro. So  
7 make sure that I make that point, and just to say  
8 thank you for the support that you've given us. You  
9 have our testimony there, and we absolutely are  
10 looking forward to the details and we're very pleased  
11 to hear that Commissioner Hansell has preventive  
12 services as number two on his list of priorities. So  
13 we're very happy for that, and I also want to thank  
14 Deputy Commissioner Andrew White for sticking around  
15 to hear our testimony on preventive services, and  
16 Deputy Commissioner Doctor McKnight. We're so used  
17 to our ACS colleagues-- and Assistant Commissioner  
18 Kelly Berger [sp?], hi. You're still here too. We're  
19 so used to you guys taking off that it's wonderful to  
20 see that you're still here. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
22 and so that'll be the mantra for the next couple  
23 months, 12 percent, 12 percent. Just don't forget  
24 it.

25 SOPHINE CHARLES: And go for it.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And go for it, yes.

3 SOPHINE CHARLES: Go for it. Go for it.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

5 CHERYL ROZINSKI: Good evening. My name  
6 is Cheryl Rozinski and I work for Good Shepherd  
7 Services as their Public Policy Fellow, focusing on  
8 youth services including foster care, youth  
9 employment, and youth justice programs. I am here  
10 today to share about the needs of youth and families  
11 in foster care and prevention and how the Committee  
12 can support their needs, but before I do so I would  
13 just like to reiterate some of my colleague's points,  
14 that the Sustain Our Sanctuary 12 percent ask is a  
15 huge priority for Good Shepherd Services as well. I  
16 want to thank the Committee for holding this hearing  
17 and for the opportunity to share testimony. I am  
18 currently completing a year of service with Good  
19 Shepherd Services and two of my community members  
20 serve at Family Foster Care and one serves in our  
21 Close to Home Initiative program. I have been  
22 advocating with the Fostering Youth Success Alliance  
23 since I started in August, and through these  
24 experiences I have heard the stories and needs of  
25 foster youth and families in New York City. Good

2 Shepherd Services recognizes that academic and  
3 social/emotional skills developed through a sound  
4 education are vital for success. In our foster care  
5 agency, the educational and vocational specialist  
6 works with young people to develop and realize their  
7 educational goals, whether that is a two or four-year  
8 college degree, vocational training or our own  
9 training and apprenticeship program. Our staff  
10 regularly hosts Preparing Youth for Adulthood  
11 meetings and Career Club for 16 to 20-year-old youth,  
12 as well as offers one-on-one help with applications,  
13 resumes and tutoring. We know that creating caring  
14 relationships with adults can go a long way for  
15 foster youth. We know that older youth make up the  
16 largest percentage of children in the child welfare  
17 and juvenile justice system today with approximately  
18 1,000 aging out of care in New York City each year.  
19 The traumatic histories and complex needs of older  
20 youth explain why agencies need appropriate resources  
21 at their disposal to help produce better outcomes  
22 around permanency and well-being for these youth.  
23 Our staff need to be trained in evidence-based  
24 practices that both help them to engage older youth  
25 and that supports their healing and recovery. We

2 also need funding from ACS and other government  
3 agencies to create innovative and cutting-edge  
4 programs that lead to development of soft and hard  
5 skills for our older youth as they transition out of  
6 both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

7 In addition, we believe that we need to continue to  
8 work to improve collaboration and communication  
9 between systems and agencies to ensure youth receive  
10 the supports they need in the most coordinated way.

11 At Good Shepherd Services, as in many other social  
12 service organizations, staff in prevention programs  
13 are faced with the most formidable tasks of providing  
14 all case management as well as counseling needs to  
15 participants. This demands that our staff be highly  
16 clinically trained and possess specialized graduate  
17 education. However, our budgets simply do not allow  
18 us to hire at this level, which presents tremendous  
19 challenges. ACS must invest in additional resources  
20 so nonprofits can offer salaries that match the  
21 experience and education required to meet the complex  
22 needs of the families we serve. Thank you for the  
23 opportunity to testify about the importance of  
24 supporting our foster care and prevention programs.  
25 I look forward to answering any question you might



2 have about my testimony. Again, thank you for your  
3 time and dedication to these very important issues.

4 FIODNA O'GRADY: Good evening everybody  
5 and thank you, Chair Levin, Chair Cumbo, and also my  
6 member from the Mental Health Committee, Council  
7 Member Grodenchik. I haven't come before the Welfare  
8 Committee before, but as the Government Relations  
9 person for Samaritans the Suicide Prevention Hotline,  
10 I was encouraged to do so. Ours is a smaller  
11 program, a smaller ask as you know. We answer 80,000  
12 calls per year and provide emotional support to many  
13 New Yorkers who are vulnerable and marginalized  
14 citizens, and so we see ourselves akin to some of the  
15 agencies here. We feed them. we also feed the  
16 emotional support of the City, and since our last  
17 election, this was an interesting thing I heard which  
18 is there's a 100 percent increase in calls across the  
19 country to hotlines like ours in the way that  
20 vulnerable populations feel in this era as we face  
21 not only hard times fiscally, but also I think in  
22 Sanctuary Cities with immigrants, with those who feel  
23 marginalized in our cities, and yet ours is a good  
24 one and has a great history of helping, and we're  
25 part of that community and that's why we're here

2 today. Samaritans operates the Suicide Prevention  
3 Hotline. We are in 400 centers in 42 countries. As  
4 we've learned anything in the past 60 years in  
5 diverse cultures around the world it is that the  
6 public health problem of suicide impacts people of  
7 every age, sexual identity, race, culture, and  
8 socioeconomic standing. Suicide proves the  
9 universality of man and woman. For almost every  
10 living soul is touched by emotional, psychological,  
11 physical, and economic challenges at some point in  
12 their life that can lead to depression, trauma, self-  
13 harming, and suicidal behavior. The World Health  
14 Organization reports that more people in the world  
15 die from suicide than from warfare. Think of it,  
16 more people take their own lives than are killed by  
17 somebody else. In New York City which has increased  
18 for the third year in a row, suicide now leads to  
19 almost as many fatalities as homicides and automobile  
20 accidents combined in the City with the greatest  
21 increases in communities with higher rates of  
22 poverty. At Samaritans, we believe suicide is a  
23 barometer of how well we respond to our most fragile,  
24 vulnerable and marginalized citizens, that the  
25 numbers of people dying from suicide as well as those

2 who are experiencing psychological disorders keeps  
3 increasing tells us there's much more that needs to  
4 be done, especially when you consider that suicide is  
5 the third leading cause of death in New York City for  
6 15 to 24-year-olds and over 25,000 of our high school  
7 students attempt suicide annually and that the rates  
8 of suicide are increasing for women three time  
9 greater than they are for men. Add that suicide is a  
10 significant problem in our corrections system, in our  
11 school system. We do the training also for a lot of  
12 our-- ACS has sent us people for our professional  
13 development that the members provide funding for. We  
14 also work with students in temporary housing  
15 citywide, because the problem of suicide is not point  
16 source, and so it travels across any person with a  
17 problem. Ultimately, if that problem becomes so  
18 severe it can have a suicide component, and that's  
19 why we're thinking of crossing committees and  
20 speaking to General Welfare and more. So the message  
21 is clear. With Samsur [sic] reporting that as many  
22 as 60 percent of the people who experience  
23 psychological disorders never receive care, and so  
24 many people in these highly charged political times  
25 resistant to seeking help especially from official

2 government run services tied to concerns about their  
3 safety and their right to make their own decisions  
4 about their health and welfare. Supporting and  
5 enhancing community services must be a priority.  
6 There are many respected and defective community  
7 services that have seen funding cuts over the past  
8 years, services with long histories of effectiveness  
9 reaching and serving the disenfranchised,  
10 marginalized and underserved such as at-risk  
11 children, immigrants, family in poverty, those  
12 struggling with mental health issues and others. On  
13 our behalf, the Samaritans that's answered the 80,000  
14 calls, we ask for your support for our 297,000 dollar  
15 ask, which is the same as last year, and we're hoping  
16 for 50,000 increase because we too are coming-- I'm  
17 hearing the 12 percent for agencies. We've been  
18 working on the same budget, and because our budget is  
19 so small that in fact-- and it's a city contract, we  
20 did not get the COLA for raising the minimum wage,  
21 and so we also face-- we have some people who are on  
22 minimum wage who we are raising each year, and then  
23 also parallel to that are people a little bit above  
24 that level that we smaller agencies are finding it  
25 very hard to meet our basic needs. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you to this  
3 entire panel, and thank you for the great work that  
4 your organizations are doing and for the partnership  
5 that you have with this Council. Each of your  
6 organizations have, you know, a long history with the  
7 Council and we look forward to continuing to  
8 strengthen those bonds, you know, making sure that  
9 you guys are on good sound footing across the entire  
10 sector. So, we look forward to continuing to work  
11 with you guys throughout the budget season this year.  
12 The next panel: Clayton Brooks from Covenant House  
13 New York, Craig Hughes, Coalition for Homeless Youth,  
14 Catherine Trapani, from Homeless Services United, and  
15 Reed Vreeland from Housing Works. Before we get to  
16 the panel, I have been informed that there is another  
17 six-week-old watching live right now, and that is  
18 Elijah Max [sp?], who is the son of Deputy  
19 Commissioner at ACS, Jill Krauss. I've been informed  
20 that Elijah may in fact be watching right now, so  
21 shout out to you Elijah if you are watching. These  
22 kids are getting to know the issues early. You guys  
23 are kind of broken up. You know what? Actually, how  
24 about Zoma Cruz [sp?] from Project Hospitality, Annie  
25 Garneva from New York City Employment and Training

2 Coalition, Unthu Nygoyen [sp?] from Democracy at Work  
3 Institute. Okay.

4 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

6 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Alright. Thank you  
7 for sticking it out with us, and congratulations to  
8 you.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

10 CATHERINE TRAPANI: My name is Catherine  
11 Trapani, and I'm the Executive Director of Homeless  
12 Services United. HSU is a coalition of over 50  
13 nonprofit agencies surveying homeless and at-risk  
14 adults and families in New York City. We provide  
15 advocacy, information and training to member agencies  
16 and expand their capacity to deliver high-quality  
17 services. Faced with record-high homelessness, the  
18 de Blasio Administration has made important  
19 investments in homeless services as we heard about  
20 this morning. They have expanded street outreach  
21 programs and the Homebase prevention network,  
22 invested in housing subsidies for people exiting or  
23 trying to avoid shelter, introduced mental health  
24 services into the family shelter system, and have  
25 promised to replace poor quality hotel and cluster

2 site shelters with purpose-built service rich  
3 shelters. I commend these important steps forward and  
4 the effort to turn the tide on homelessness.

5 However, absence significant investments in the  
6 nonprofit sector that is tasked with carrying out  
7 these initiatives, success may prove elusive. I'm  
8 going to focus my testimony today on the financial  
9 starvation, frankly, of the nonprofit agencies and

10 programs that they operate which poses a serious  
11 threat to the City's most vulnerable citizens. We  
12 echo Tracie and the Human Services Council's

13 testimony and ask that the Council include in the  
14 budget response to the Mayor the 12 percent across-  
15 the-board increase. We're going to be talking a lot  
16 about the specific needs for the subsector of

17 homeless services. We consider the 12 percent to be a  
18 start, and certainly not an end to address the long-  
19 term funding. COFCCA testified earlier that they're  
20 operating on budgets from I think they said 2008.

21 We're operating on budgets from 1988. So, we feel  
22 your pain, and as everybody knows costs related to

23 rent, health insurance, I mean I could go on and on,  
24 have really significantly increased since then. So

25 I'm just going to do a little bit of a deep dive. You

2 have a longer version that I submitted in writing.

3 But HSU has repeatedly warned that chronic

4 underfunding is going to threaten the health of

5 nonprofits and the wellbeing of the clients that we

6 serve. The chronic starvation of nonprofit homeless

7 services providers has significantly impacted our

8 ability to serve tens of thousands of homeless men,

9 women and children while providing critical services

10 to transform their lives. Absent immediate and

11 decisive action, many shelter providers will face

12 undue burdens that will likely impact the quality of

13 services delivered and the ability to open the new

14 shelters to replace the poor stock that we have.

15 Many nonprofits have already declined to expand their

16 operations citing uncertainty of payments with the

17 City of New York despite the ongoing urgent need for

18 additional high-quality capacity and Mayor's plan to

19 close down the clusters and hotels. We also need to

20 talk about the rates paid for shelter services. We

21 were very pleased when DSS recognized that we're

22 working off of budgets from the 80's and committed to

23 rationalizing the rates for shelter services in the

24 City of New York. But in the budget we only say 125

25 million dollars for the standard homeless re-estimate



2 and didn't see any new commitment to actually fund  
3 the presumed increased rates associated with doing  
4 this. A recent analysis that HSU conducted with our  
5 partners at the Human Services Council showed us that  
6 the contracts are underfunded by approximately 25  
7 percent. So that's a huge discrepancy that needs to  
8 be addressed in the budget shortfall. The other big  
9 issue that we have is that the way they're  
10 rationalizing their rates is a piecemeal approach.  
11 So they're only looking at direct costs within DSS  
12 and have told us that the nonprofit resiliency  
13 committee convened by the Deputy Mayors will deal  
14 with things like fringe and overhead and admin. So  
15 that sort of divorce process tells me that they  
16 won't be getting to some of the biggest ticket items  
17 this fiscal year, which means relief is going to  
18 prove to be elusive. So we would like them to do a  
19 more holistic approach and really get that funding in  
20 for FY 18 to really shore up the sector. The other  
21 issue is the delayed contracts, which thank you for  
22 asking about that earlier. The Commissioner did  
23 testify that the contracts for 2018 will be "in  
24 process" by the start of the fiscal year, but that  
25 actually means for the third fiscal year in a row

2 they will not be registered on time, and his response  
3 to your questions he noted that things like advances  
4 in bridge loans would be available, and I would just  
5 urge the Administration then to capitalize the loan  
6 funds so that that's actually possible, because the  
7 experience our members have working with those  
8 remedies is that they have not proved to be adequate  
9 this fiscal year. So we would certainly look forward  
10 to more information on how exactly that's supposed to  
11 work so that we can continue to function. I do want  
12 to touch briefly on conditions. I have like 15  
13 seconds left. That we really need to look at the  
14 capital funding for the shelter stock, and we have  
15 some recommendations in our testimony on some  
16 processes that can make that easier to ensure that  
17 the people living in the shelter system have high-  
18 quality facilities and the ability, for example, to  
19 have capital reserves would go a long way with that,  
20 and to really reform the new needs process and to see  
21 it reflected in the budget so that we know that  
22 there's funding to do it. And very quickly, lastly,  
23 others have talked about this, but the workforce  
24 challenges, the low-paid staff, the need to really  
25 invest in our people so that the folks that are

2 surveying people in the shelter system have the  
3 qualifications and the skills necessary to really  
4 work with folks and how have the ability to retain  
5 that high-quality staff. So we really are looking at  
6 a quality agenda at HSU to make sure that the service  
7 providers have the tools that they need so that the  
8 services that we are providing to homeless New  
9 Yorkers are as robust as possible to really end the  
10 cycle of homelessness. So thank you very much for  
11 your time today.

12 REED VREELAND: Hello. Thank you, Chair  
13 Levin, Chair Cumbo, and Committee Member Grodenchik.  
14 My name is Reed Vreeland. I'm Director of Policy at  
15 Housing Works. I'm here today representing Housing  
16 Works, a healing community of people living with and  
17 affected by HIV/AIDS. Our mission is to end the dual  
18 crisis of homelessness and AIDS through the  
19 relentless advocacy, the provision of life-saving  
20 services and entrepreneurial businesses that sustain  
21 our efforts. Housing Works applauds Mayor de Blasio,  
22 City Council and Human Resources Administration for  
23 your leadership over the past year and expanding  
24 eligibility for housing, transportation and  
25 nutritional supports for all income eligible

2 individuals with an HIV diagnosis that live in New  
3 York City, and Council Member Johnson spoke about  
4 this earlier at today's hearing, and for your ongoing  
5 commitment to end New York City and State HIV/AIDS  
6 epidemic by the year 2020. Indeed we believe that  
7 the services provided through HRA's HASA, HIV/AIDS  
8 Services Administration, are the primary reason that  
9 we are poised to become the first city in the world  
10 to end AIDS as an epidemic by stopping ongoing  
11 transmission and ending AIDS test [sic]. From the  
12 beginning of the AIDS epidemic in New York City, New  
13 York City understood that stable housing was a  
14 central baseline for managing HIV illness and that  
15 the City has always led the way in meeting basic  
16 subsistence needs of low-income individuals and  
17 families dealing with HIV infection. HASA was  
18 established over 30 years ago to address HIV health  
19 inequities by providing the means for extremely low-  
20 income New Yorker to access and benefit from HIV  
21 care. New York's unique response to the social  
22 drivers of HIV made it possible for the City to  
23 reduce new HIV infections by over 40 percent in the  
24 last decade. Compared with no reduction or even  
25 increases in the rate of new infections in other

2 parts of the United States. Meanwhile, research  
3 studies have proven conclusively what we already  
4 knew, that housing, food and transportation are  
5 healthcare for people with HIV, and that people-- and  
6 that persons with HIV who are unable to meet  
7 subsistence needs are far less likely to receive  
8 effective anti-retroviral treatment that suppress the  
9 virus. We know that early and consistent anti-  
10 retroviral that suppress the virus not only enables a  
11 person with HIV to maintain optimal health but also  
12 makes it impossible to transmit HIV to others. The  
13 City once again has led the way this year by acting  
14 on evidence by expanding medical eligibility for HASA  
15 support for all income eligible people diagnosed with  
16 HIV infection. In doing so, the City became the  
17 first jurisdiction in the world to provide life-  
18 saving housing support to all homeless and unstably  
19 housed persons managing HIV infection. The change  
20 was implemented at the end of August on World AIDS  
21 Day-- at the end of August, and by World AIDS Day  
22 over a thousand people already between August and  
23 December had already applied and received HASA  
24 services as a result of the expanding medical  
25 eligibility. We understand now that between now and

2 2020 HRA expects to add another 4,000 to 5,000 income  
3 eligible households to current HASA caseloads. Prior  
4 to the HASA expansion, an estimated 750 to 1,000  
5 people living with HIV resided in DHS shelter system  
6 on any given night. This change in moving people out  
7 of the shelters into more appropriate less-expensive  
8 housing is critical and we praise the Council and the  
9 Mayor for this move. We are also excited about  
10 ongoing discussion of the potential to develop and  
11 implement data-drive demonstration projects to  
12 leverage the wealth of new resources available to  
13 improve outcomes for homeless and other low-income  
14 persons with HIV and other chronic conditions. These  
15 resources are within Medicaid re-design Delivery  
16 System Reform Incentive Payment, DSRIP, health home  
17 and ending the epidemic blueprint. What we're  
18 talking about with these potential project is persons  
19 enrolled in HASA and DHS represent some of the  
20 highest utilizers of health services with some of the  
21 poorest health outcomes. Yet, there's currently  
22 little ability for integration of care between HASA  
23 and the DHS system and the involving the evolving  
24 integrated healthcare system. New York State's  
25 investments in regional health information

2 organizations, or RHIO's, have created a platform for  
3 consented data-sharing to support increased  
4 integration of social health services. Where these  
5 systems effectively integrated persons in HASA and  
6 DHS would receive care that is more effectively  
7 coordinated and would achieve better health outcomes.  
8 This would accrue cost-savings both to the healthcare  
9 system and these social service systems and also New  
10 York State's public health and corrections systems.  
11 We encourage the Council to continue participation in  
12 supporting this type of innovation. I'm only-- I'm  
13 going to cut it short because I'm over time, but I  
14 wanted to emphasize some of the successes of ending  
15 the epidemic so far in the second to last paragraph.  
16 Most notably between-- in one year between 2014 and  
17 15, the latest data, the City had an 8.3 percent  
18 decrease in new HIV diagnoses. So that's nearly a 10  
19 percent in new diagnoses in one year which really  
20 shows that the program is working, the initiative is  
21 working, and I thank you for your continued support.

22 ZOMA CRUZ: Good evening Council Members.  
23 Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to be here  
24 today to testify. My name is Zoma Cruz [sp?] and I'm  
25 the Director of Food Advocacy in Project Hospitality

2 in Staten Island. This is an inter-faith nonprofit  
3 organization that serves more than 25,000  
4 impoverished Staten Islanders annually. We provide  
5 emergency food from our two storefront base food  
6 pantries, two soup kitchens and an additional store  
7 front that does breakfast program. We also have been  
8 providing a mobile food pantry services at more than  
9 two dozen locations throughout the borough. All  
10 told, we're serving a little more than two million  
11 meals every year. Staten Island families are  
12 struggling with rising rents, and we have very little  
13 rent stabilized housing. Families are forced to make  
14 tough decisions. Do they feed their families and  
15 their children or do they pay the rent? A majority  
16 of the people that we serve are seniors, disabled  
17 Staten Islanders and low-wage working families.  
18 Project Hospitality sponsors a Food for All campaign  
19 in conjunction with the Staten Island Hunger  
20 Taskforce, a 33-year-old food pantry coalition  
21 coordinating advocacy efforts throughout more than 30  
22 local faith-based and food pantries and soup kitchens  
23 throughout the island. Our Hunger Taskforce is the  
24 only borough-based in the entire city. All our food  
25 pantries and kitchens together generate over 20



2 million meals for impoverished Staten Islanders. We  
3 need the 21 million dollar proposed EFAP allocation  
4 recommended by our City Council Speaker to help us  
5 fill the meal gap of Staten Island. We urge you to  
6 please allocate this dedicated funding for the  
7 express purposes of reducing hunger not only in  
8 Staten Island but throughout the City. I would like  
9 to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you, and  
10 I want to leave you with just a little number to just  
11 think about as our friends and partners in hunger for  
12 New York, 242 million food meal gaps are at stake  
13 right now. Our children are hungry. They're going  
14 to school hungry. They're going to bed hungry every  
15 day. So just think about that the next time you help  
16 support us, and again, thank you so much.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

18 ANNIE GARNEVA: Good afternoon. My name  
19 is Annie Garneva. I'm the Director of Communications  
20 at the New York City Employment and Training  
21 Coalition. We are a member association of about 180  
22 workforce providers throughout the City. So that's  
23 CBO's, unions, educational institutions and the rest.  
24 Together we provide about-- services to about 800,000  
25 New Yorkers. So, not only do we support the 12

2 percent ask that HSC is pushing for, we also have a  
3 set of priorities that we would like to talk about.  
4 First of all, we have been encouraged by HRA's  
5 transitional concepts around employment services, and  
6 we have been helping with the April 1<sup>st</sup> roll-out on  
7 the provider end, but are still concerned that low-  
8 cost per participant may undermine the success of  
9 these programs. We intend to remain attentive to the  
10 quality of training provided to public assistance  
11 recipients in the coming year and will surely testify  
12 on the matter again in the future once we have some  
13 data in the coming year. With regard to this year's  
14 budget, however, there are still other areas where we  
15 find the Preliminary Budget is lacking in some  
16 straightforward ways. In particular, we believe that  
17 there needs to be an increased funding for bridge  
18 programs which are designed to provide workers with  
19 very limited English proficiency and math proficiency  
20 skills to be able to actually enter the programs that  
21 a lot of our training providers offer. The scale of  
22 need for bridge programs is vast. There are about  
23 1.7 million New Yorkers with limited English  
24 proficiency and thousands more with basic skills  
25 needs. Without bridge programs to help these New

2 Yorkers take the next step in their education or  
3 career, our city's workforce system will be stuck  
4 perpetuating the existing inequalities in our  
5 society. So far the City's career pathways blueprint  
6 which are to govern the use of workforce dollars in  
7 the City budget called for 60 million in funding for  
8 bridge programs by FY 20, yet the Preliminary FY 18  
9 budget has only 6.4 million included, none of it  
10 under the HRA budget. In particular, we're  
11 disappointed that HRA's career bridge concept has  
12 been left unrealized and not sufficiently replaced.  
13 When HRA embarked on reimagining its employment  
14 services contracts in 2015, it included this career  
15 bridge concept with an estimated funding level of 9.7  
16 million. However, when the RFP's were eventually  
17 released, career bridge was not included alongside  
18 career compass, career advance, or youth pathways,  
19 and the dedicated funding to support bridge programs  
20 was not added to these contracts. We ask that the  
21 City Council take this opportunity to add either  
22 Career Bridge or an equivalent amount of funding to  
23 the budget to support bridge programs for populations  
24 eligible for public assistance. More broadly, we ask  
25 that this budget's shortfalls in basic education,

2 bridge, and adult literacy across agency be  
3 considered in the context of the City's blueprint for  
4 workforce development career pathways. We're now  
5 entering the third year of a five-year plan to  
6 transform the city's workforce development system and  
7 are falling behind track on the budgetary commitments  
8 contained in that plan. Included in these key  
9 commitments are a promise to increase the share of  
10 workforce dollars that support training programs from  
11 roughly six percent to 20 percent which would amount  
12 to 100 million spent on training by 2020 and the  
13 previously mentioned annual investment of 60 million  
14 in bridge programs by 2020. If substantial new city  
15 resources are not made available to fulfill these  
16 promises in the next two years, hundreds of thousands  
17 of low-income and unemployed New Yorkers will be left  
18 out of our growing economy. And lastly, I'd just  
19 like to reiterate the 12 percent ask that goes--  
20 we've heard that problem across all of our providers  
21 multiple times. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
23 to this panel, and thank you all for bringing up new  
24 issues that we need to be addressing that we weren't  
25 necessarily able to hit during the Preliminary Budget

hearing. We have another opportunity during the Executive Budget hearing, so we're going to take all of your suggestions under advisement, and we'll be looking forward to talking with the Administration throughout this budget process, which really that's what it is is a process where Preliminary Budget, Executive Budget and then Adopted Budget. So we really wanted to continue to engage with you as the process moves forward. So, thank you all very much for taking the time to testify and for staying here as well so late. So, have a great evening. Thank you. Yes, gold star. Okay, and gold star also goes to the next panel which is our final panel, Katherine Gerald, Voices of Women Organizing Project. CWOP? I have you down twice. One for CWOP and one for Voices of Woman Organizing Project. Rachel Pratt, New York Road Runners? Estelita Baez [sp?], CWOP? Did I pronounce it right? Baez, oh, I'm sorry. Baez, I'm sorry. Chelsea Wilson, CWOP. Katherine Gerald, CWOP, and Kimberly Ann-Tire [sp?] CWOP. So, CWOP panel.

EMILY CALPHEN: Hi, good evening. My name is Emily Calphen [sp?]. I'm not on your list, but I'm going to be reading the testimony of--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] That's  
3 okay.

4 EMILY CALPHEN: Chelsea Wilson, who had to  
5 leave early to go to class. I am a representative  
6 from CWOP, Child Welfare Organizing Project, and I'm  
7 honored and privileged to get to introduce two of our  
8 parents that are also part of the organization and  
9 have you hear a little bit about them. I'm also  
10 formerly Preventive Service Supervisor where I served  
11 for five years in the Child Welfare System. I did  
12 leave the system in order to come work on the  
13 organizing side to help make reforms to a very well-  
14 intentioned system that has a lot of work to continue  
15 to improve. So, on behalf of Chelsea, "Good evening.  
16 My name is Chelsea Wilson. I'm a graduate student at  
17 the Milano School for International Affairs,  
18 Nonprofit Management, Urban Policy Analysis and  
19 Management at the New School, and an intern at CWOP.  
20 I began interning at the Child Welfare Organizing  
21 Project January of this year and knew nothing about  
22 child welfare when I entered their doors. What I  
23 have learned through my research has given me deep  
24 concerns about the work of the Child Welfare System.  
25 Research shows that communities of color and people

2 who live below or at the poverty line are  
3 disproportionately affected by the Child Welfare  
4 System. I don't have the expertise to express an  
5 opinion on the exact size of the ACS budget, but I am  
6 certain that the current budget is not being used  
7 effectively to keep families in tact at a rate that  
8 will reduce the disproportionality in the system.  
9 While it's clear that the numbers of children placed  
10 in care today are far fewer than a few decades ago,  
11 and the Commissioner spoke to that. A continued  
12 9,000 children being separated from their parents is  
13 still far too great. Protecting children through  
14 separation should only happen as a last resort. I've  
15 interviewed and interacted with many parents who have  
16 had their children removed, unclear there were many  
17 option to have prevented the removals and many  
18 opportunities to return children who had been removed  
19 much sooner if they have been returned at all. When I  
20 talk to children-- when I talk to parents and  
21 workers, I hear a lot about the checklist of services  
22 so many families are directed to do, parenting  
23 classes, anger management classes, individual  
24 therapy, family therapy, group therapy, and so on.  
25 Parents tell me this checklist of services does not

2 correspond to their individual and families' need,  
3 rather is more of a cookie-cutter checklist for the  
4 family to satisfy. It occurs to me that the voice of  
5 the family is not integrated in service planning in a  
6 meaningful way. I ask that however large the ACS  
7 budget, that the money be used strategically with the  
8 input of the community to ensure that family voices  
9 are heard and services are identified by the families  
10 who are using them. I'm happy to hear the  
11 Commissioner say earlier that in this current review  
12 process he's planning to spend time with ACS workers  
13 to hear from the very people doing the work what  
14 changes they would recommend. I urge the  
15 Commissioner and ACS also to make the time and take  
16 the time to speak directly to community members and  
17 parents affected by the Child welfare System as well,  
18 as theirs is the critical voice that continues to be  
19 missing in this conversation." So, thank you for  
20 your time, and I'll turn it over to Estelita and  
21 Katherine.

22 ESTELITA BAEZ: Good evening. My name is  
23 Estelita, and I was affected by an act of domestic  
24 violence committed by my ex-boyfriend. My children  
25 and I had a very dramatic DV experience. Without



time to heal from a time when both my children and I were vulnerable and needed the support and stability of us being a family. ACS entered our lives and removed my children from my care for three months. Immediately after the incident of domestic violence against me, I sought and I was granted an order of protection and emergency transfer from NYCHA. The apartment building-- excuse me-- the apartment I was living in to a location where I would be safe from the person who had committed the act of domestic violence against me. I had to move from my apartment in a hurry and was not able to take all my belongings with me. I was worried about my children, relocating and completing the services ACS had mandated me to. ACS created more stress than my abusive boyfriend who committed the act of domestic violence against me, because nothing is more abusive than taking children from a mother who loves and cares for her family. ACS did not provide anything other than stress, accusations, twisted words, and their own opinion. Their workers in my case was not supportive, compassionate or empathetic. ACS has such a huge budget, over three billion dollars. I wonder how that money could be better spent on training workers

2 to provide support. My children needed me and  
3 unfortunately during my encounter with ACS, all my  
4 children and I received was increased worry, stress  
5 and concern. This same experience is common for  
6 families of color and families that live below the  
7 poverty line. Whatever their budget, I hope ACS can  
8 begin to actually provide support to families and not  
9 create added stress. Thank you.

10 KATHERINE GERALD: Hi--

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Thank  
12 you, Estelita, thank you.

13 KATHERINE GERALD: My name is Katherine,  
14 and I am a parent affected by Child Welfare. My  
15 children were removed from school without ACS making  
16 any contact with me. I was devastated. I went to  
17 school to pick up my children and returned home with  
18 a piece of paper from ACS, not my children. Housing  
19 was a barrier for me. No money from the ACS budget  
20 was used to help assist me with housing-- my housing  
21 situation. Money is power. My experience is ACS  
22 used their power to destroy my family. Not only did  
23 they separate us, but they used all of their  
24 resources to keep us separated. Never giving up hope  
25 that my family will be reunified. If I had been

2 given one dollar for every time ACS spoke about a  
3 "risk factor" I would have a three billion dollar  
4 bank account. On the other hand, if we're given a  
5 dollar every time they spoke about a "protective  
6 factor" I would be homeless on the street, because  
7 their focus was using their resources to find and  
8 point out risks to separate, not to point out what I  
9 already had in place, and they never asked me to  
10 identify the type of support I needed. My request is  
11 ACS begin to use their money to actually support  
12 families by building on their protective factors,  
13 providing support and keeping families intact. Thank  
14 you for your time.

15 EMILY CAPHLAN: So, I just wanted to add,  
16 I wanted to thank Katherine and Estelita for sharing  
17 of themselves and on behalf of CWOP I know CWOP has  
18 started building a really meaningful relationship  
19 with you, Councilman Levin, and I look forward to us  
20 continuing to work together to meet the needed  
21 reforms. ACS is an essential part of this city, and  
22 we have a group of parents that are really courageous  
23 and incredible, and we want to work together to keep  
24 making it work the way it needs to.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And thank you very  
3 much Katherine and Estelita for your testimony and  
4 for being here today and for staying the whole time  
5 and for sharing your personal story because you're  
6 right, that in-- we're talking about three billion  
7 dollars, ten billion dollars, but really what we were  
8 really talking about is families and children, and  
9 your stories, you know, really bring it home. So, I  
10 really, I want to thank you for doing that service to  
11 this committee and to this hearing and giving us some  
12 much-needed perspective as we bring the hearing to a  
13 close. I want to thank you very much, and thank you  
14 to CWOP for doing all the great organizing work that  
15 you do. So, thank you and thank you very much for  
16 your testimony.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Mr. Chair, I  
18 just want to thank these women also. They get the  
19 marathon award for being here all day with us, and  
20 it's very important for us to hear testimony from  
21 people who had been through the system. I was very  
22 encouraged that we do have a new Commissioner today,  
23 was very encouraged by what I heard from him and his  
24 top staff, and I know that the Chair and this  
25 Committee and myself will continue to follow these

2 very, very important issues. Nothing more important  
3 than our children and our families in this city,  
4 because after all is said and done, that's what  
5 really matters, and we have a new father here, so  
6 he's learning that. Six weeks? Six weeks, and I  
7 warned you she'd be early, right? Thank you, Mr.  
8 Chairman.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
10 Council Member Grodenchik. Thank you very much for  
11 being here for the entirety of this eight and a half  
12 hour hearing today. I want to thank all the staff  
13 that was here as well, Andrea Vasquez, Samir Nushat  
14 [sp?], Tanya Cyrus, Julie Barrow [sp?], Steven Bayar  
15 [sp?], thank you very much all for being here as well  
16 as our wonderful Sergeant at Arms for conducting this  
17 hearing today. And with that at 6:33 p.m., this  
18 hearing is adjourned.

19 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 15, 2017