

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

-----X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

-----X

January 14, 2009

Start: 1:03pm

Recess: 4:38pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:

BILL DE BLASIO
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Gale A. Brewer
Helen D. Foster
Jessica S. Lappin
Annabel Palma
James Vacca
Letitia James

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

Robert Hess
Commissioner
Department of Homeless Services

George Nashak
Deputy Commissioner for Adult Services
Department of Homeless Services

Hannah Cammins
Social Action Coordinator
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun Church of St. Paul and St.
Andrew Homeless Shelter

Jay Craynis
Congregation Rodeph Sholom

Joe Murphy
St. Andrew Avellino All Roman Catholic Church

John Benfatti
Riverdale/Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture.

Judy Lavann Fran
Park Slope United Methodist Church

Terry Grace
Housing Advocacy Coordinator
St. James Church, Social Concerns Commission of the
Episcopal Dioceses of New York

Wilona Stewart
Coordinator
Southeast Queens Cluster Homeless Program at Embury
United Methodist Church

Ann Melman
Co-Chairperson
B'nai Jeshurun Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew
Homeless Shelter

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

Jim Melkiori
Co-Chairperson
B'nai Jeshurun Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew
Homeless Shelter

Ann Tycher
CEO
Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter

Sylvia Friedman
Chair
Shelter Committee at the 15th Street Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends

Steven Corsen on behalf of Scott Stringer
President
Manhattan Borough

Sandy Taggart
Co-Founder
CHRM, Crown Heights Revitalization Movement

Patrick Marquis
Senior Policy Analyst
Coalition for the Homeless

Josh Goldfien
Staff Attorney
Homeless Rights Project in the Legal Aid Society,
counsel to Coalition for the Homeless

Reverend Jonathan Sales
Pastor
Greater Antioch Temple

Sister Denise Smith
Member, Co-Founder
Greater Antioch Temple, Agape Fellowship

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Good afternoon. This hearing of the General Welfare Committee is now called to order. Everyone please do your best to get situated. I know we have a tremendous amount of interest in the issues we're talking about today so please do your best. If there's any open chairs, please point them out to folks. And Sergeant, if there's any way to bring in some more chairs, I don't know if there is, please bring those over and thank you very much.

Happy new year to everyone. We're here to talk about a very difficult subject. But I do want to greet everyone and thank you for being here and wish you a happy new year. There's obviously tremendous concern about the issues we're discussing today. I'm glad so many people have turned out. I want to thank and welcome my colleagues, Council members Gale Brewer and Annabel Palma. And I want to thank the staff who helped to put together today's hearing; Molly Murphy, Migna Tavares and Crystal Costin.

Now we're here today to address Department of Homeless Services plans to restructure emergency shelters and overnight

1
2 services for one of the city's most vulnerable
3 populations; the street homeless. So many of you
4 in this room have done so much work for many years
5 on this issue and understand this very personally
6 and again thank you for that service to our city.

7 Our city's undoubtedly in a time of
8 economic crisis and all New Yorkers are feeling
9 it. But those at the lowest income levels are hit
10 the hardest, by far. The National Center for
11 Budget and Priorities estimates a startling 7 to
12 10 million additional people, nationally, will
13 reach the poverty level over the course of this
14 recession. So we know more and more people are
15 going to be hurting.

16 Now as more people lose their jobs,
17 the need for core services like food and shelter
18 will increase dramatically and cutting services at
19 this time would spell disaster for thousands of
20 New Yorkers and their families. Last year the
21 city embarked on an ill-considered plan to move
22 the central intake facility from Bellevue to the
23 Bedford Atlantic Shelter. I think many people in
24 this room understand immediately what a mistake
25 that proposal was, actually moving the intake

1
2 process away from where people are in need and
3 where people congregate and burdening a community
4 in the process in Brooklyn that can hardly afford
5 more stress on its neighborhood. That's a fight a
6 lot of us have been fighting, to try to change
7 that. But then right in the middle of that
8 something new occurred, which added to the problem
9 of how we help the street homeless and that was
10 the issuing last month of two RFPs by DHS for the
11 operation of drop in centers and faith based
12 respite beds.

13 The stated goal from DHS'
14 perspective was increasing efficiency and overall
15 capacity. Of course I appreciate the
16 administration's desire to do this in their mind
17 but I think they've gone off the mark here. This
18 is an administration that constantly likes to
19 quantify and I appreciate that too but the numbers
20 just don't work out this time. DHS' RFPs will
21 actually cause a decrease in the overall number of
22 beds we estimate by almost 17% equal to over 230
23 beds. So over 230 fewer homeless individuals will
24 have a place to sleep. We'll go through those
25 numbers in a moment and of course we'll hear from

the Commissioner and have an opportunity to question his version of those numbers.

This RFP coupled with the proposal to move the intake center will make it even harder for the street homeless to find a bed. And our city's now is about to enter a period of the year where we go through many, many days and nights where temperatures are in the 20s and 30s or even lower. We have to make sure our most vulnerable homeless folks have a warm place and a safe place to sleep at night.

Drop in centers provide shelter to the hard to reach street homeless population, many of whom have mental illness or substance abuse problems and who often resist formal and long term intervention. In light of all that, and for reasons I don't understand, DHS closed two drop in centers in this past year so our city has only eight left. While drop in centers currently operate on a 24/7 model, the new RFP calls for a "business hours" model, leaving centers open for only 7:30 am to 8:30 pm. The obvious question is what do we expect homeless individuals to do before and after these business hours and is that

the way to actually serve people in need.

No one wants to see homeless folks sleeping in chairs in drop in centers, that's been a criticism that the administration has levied and I think it's a fair one. The street is certainly, though, not a better alternative to people who end up sleeping in drop in centers. I understand the desire to not have people sleeping in chairs but the notion that therefore they could end up on the street seems to me, fundamentally illogical.

Outreach teams may be able to reach these folks in need but we also know that that is an imperfect effort and they will not be able to find everyone and successfully work with them. So why should we be turning away people from centers that could help them, in reducing those hours.

DHS also plans to acquire a more stringent eligibility screening process at these centers, adding a layer of bureaucracy and a strong disincentive for this hard to reach population. We know already many folks in this population refuse assistance and this will only make the situation worse.

The reality as I have described it

1
2 in terms of our faith based organizations is that
3 they have fundamentally served the homeless and
4 done it in a way, in many cases, the city could by
5 no means match, in a way that was more
6 compassionate and more helpful to the homeless
7 than anything the city has come up with over the
8 years. I keep saying if it ain't broke don't fix
9 it.

10 For over 20 years faith based
11 organizations have been providing services to
12 operate respite beds for the homeless. There are
13 currently 56 sites in operation, many of which are
14 run by volunteers. And that's another good point
15 that I'm sure the taxpayers are interested in,
16 that these centers are so much more cost effective
17 than anything the city runs professionally. As
18 we'll hear today, the folks who operate these beds
19 have established important and personal
20 relationships with the individuals they serve.
21 They provide a crucial service to those who refuse
22 to enter the formal shelter system.

23 DHS closed approximately 20 respite
24 sites in November. It is now changing the rules,
25 saying that respite providers must also offer

dinner and must be open at least five days a week. This will force the closure of many more centers across the city as organizations are already strapped thin in these tough economic times. For an administration that loves numbers, DHS' numbers on this one just don't add up.

According to DHS, an average of 644 adults slept in drop ins each night last fiscal year. Under the new RFP, no one will sleep in drop ins unless there's a weather emergency. DHS expects capacity for 495 respite beds under the new RFP but will lose some of the current beds I just mentioned. And with the reduction in drop in center hours, is it likely that all these other individuals will even make it to respite beds if they're available.

While DHS says that 200 more safe havens will be on line by the end of this fiscal year, these beds are only for the chronically homeless, those that have been on the street for 9 of the last 24 months at least. What is the rest of the homeless population supposed to do? While DHS' 150 stabilization beds remain, the system as a whole will lose 232 beds, approximately 17% of

current capacity. DHS is obviously not fulfilling its stated goal of increasing capacity.

So these serious and I think troubling changes, coupled with DHS' plan to move the front door shelter from Manhattan to Brooklyn spell disaster for New York's street homeless population. We must not let our city go back to the bad old days of rampant, visible street homelessness, especially when there are so many organizations that want to help.

Commissioner, I'm going to welcome your testimony but I hope and I believe you see today how many folks are here, so many of whom directly serve the homeless and think that the city is going in the wrong direction. These are folks who want to help, who have been helping, in some cases for decades. I hope you're going to take their attendance here today as a message to you that you should rethink your strategies and get these folks involved with you in figuring out the right solutions. With that, Commissioner, we welcome your testimony.

ROBERT HESS: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Before I begin, let me acknowledge that

1 the faith based leadership that has provided
2 volunteer beds and support across our city for so
3 many years is critically important. We are
4 respectful of that work, very much appreciated.
5 I've always wanted to continue and to enhance that
6 partnership and we fully intend to do just that.
7 With that said, I'd like the opportunity to go
8 through the testimony and then answer any
9 questions that you may have.
10

11 Chairman de Blasio, members of the
12 Committee, good afternoon. My name is Rob Hess,
13 I'm the Commissioner of the Department of Homeless
14 Services. I have to my right George Nashak, our
15 Deputy Commissioner for Adult Services. We
16 appreciate the opportunity to testify before you
17 today, when the city's effort to develop critical
18 solutions to street homelessness here in New York
19 and our continued commitment to develop resources
20 to best serve the most vulnerable New Yorkers on
21 our streets.

22 As I sit before you today, the city
23 has seen a 25% reduction in the number of homeless
24 individuals living on the streets of our city. A
25 quarter less individuals are forced to sleep on

1 parks or on sidewalks each night because our
2 solutions are in fact working. Today I'm here to
3 detail to you the city's strategy that has led to
4 this reduction, consisting of four key focuses.
5 First accurately identifying and measuring the
6 number of street homeless individuals in New York
7 City. Second; reorganizing a more effective
8 street outreach program. Third; redesigning our
9 intake process and fourth, increasing access to
10 beds citywide.
11

12 Together this plan is working to
13 take care of the most vulnerable New Yorkers and
14 actively make a difference in reducing the street
15 population with innovative thinking and a
16 comprehensive approach. DHS is less than two
17 weeks away from conducting its fifth annual
18 citywide Hope homeless street count. Last year
19 Council Members Brewer and Garodnick volunteered
20 their time to participate in the HOPE count and we
21 were grateful to have their assistance. I invite
22 and urge all council members to take part this
23 year as we walk the streets of New York on January
24 26th to count those living unsheltered throughout
25 the city's five boroughs.

It is important to understand just how vital HOPE is to this agency's understanding of the street population and the success we have seen in reducing it. Before Mayor Bloomberg, there was no formal measurement of the number of homeless individuals living on the streets of New York City. Conflicting estimates provided poor data and we were unable to properly quantify the number of individuals on the street, making it difficult to customize and provide those services they needed the most.

Street homelessness is the most visible kind of homelessness in urban life, intolerable to all those who encounter it for both humanitarian and quality of life reasons. Because of the critical nature of this problem, we reformed our approach and resolved to better understand the issue. On the HOPE count's implementation, remarkable data was mined and results achieved.

The fourth annual citywide HOPE count in January of last year indicated an estimated 3,306 homeless individuals on the streets of New York City, which is a 12% reduction

1
2 from the previous year and a 25% decrease of over
3 1,000 individuals since 2005. We were able to
4 achieve this significant reduction through the
5 streamline process, resulting from the street
6 outreach reorganization. The intake redesign and
7 increasing beds citywide will only lead to
8 continued reductions in the street populations as
9 we move forward.

10 Oftentimes progress means stopping,
11 listening and learning so that practices may be
12 updated and adopted to better serve those in need.
13 After ongoing conversations with New Yorkers
14 living on the streets, we better understood what
15 services they were most likely to accept. We
16 educated ourselves based on their feedback and
17 through innovative solutions we revised our
18 approaches to new levels of success.

19 DHS reorganized its street outreach
20 program to a single point of accountability in
21 each borough, under one provider. We put in place
22 performance based contracts where providers need
23 to make housing placements in order to earn their
24 full budgets. Budget funding was allocated in
25 correlation to the percentage of street population

1
2 by borough. And outreach teams reorganized to
3 each provider overseeing specific geographic areas
4 for which they are fully responsible. We
5 streamlined 16 different providers to just 4, with
6 one for each borough, combining Queens and
7 Brooklyn. Direct relationships between providers
8 and DHS along with key inter-agency partnerships
9 has allowed for collecting and sharing information
10 to manage programs more effectively than ever
11 before.

12 On a monthly basis, DHS holds
13 Street Stat, where providers and other agency
14 partners such as Sanitation, NYPD and Parks meet.
15 Each month we focus on one provider and the
16 progress they have made as well as the challenges
17 they have faced and what we can learn. It is a
18 highly effective tool and we continue to refine
19 our processes from it. All of these aspects
20 combined create a more effective system that
21 better serves our clients and works to more
22 quickly place them into housing.

23 Outreach teams work in a number of
24 ways to serve clients on the ground. Their two
25 main responsibilities, however, are to canvas and

1 case work. They canvas assigned areas and
2 identify areas where street homeless individuals
3 gather and work with them to move those
4 individuals from the streets to housing. Then
5 there are the directly operating DHS scout teams,
6 whose sole purpose is to look for areas of
7 congregation and identify them so that outreach
8 teams may focus on them and develop relationships
9 with the population to encourage them to accept
10 housing options and move towards life in a home of
11 their own rather than a life on the street.
12

13 Since the reorganization of DHS'
14 street outreach services in the fall of 2007, we
15 have placed approximately 3,000 individuals, 1,100
16 chronic and 1,900 non-chronic individuals from the
17 street into housing. The city found a frequent
18 road block in placing unsheltered individuals is
19 their rejection of the traditional shelter system
20 and their own willingness to come in off the
21 streets to that system.

22 We needed to develop an acceptable
23 alternative to help move folks to sleeping in beds
24 rather than on park benches. Through the creation
25 of safe havens, a form of low threshold housing,

1
2 offering a customized approach with fewer rules,
3 no curfews and no sobriety requirements for
4 entrants we were able to move clients who spend an
5 average of seven and a half years on the street
6 into housing. Simply put, for those with
7 difficulty navigating the rules, these safe havens
8 are a tailored solution.

9 There are multiple doorways meeting
10 the needs of non-chronic clients as well for each
11 and every street home in client receives our
12 utmost attention. For those who may not be a
13 candidate for safe havens, outreach teams explore
14 the possibility of traditional shelter, faith
15 based beds and drop in center services and more.
16 Once a client becomes known to our outreach teams,
17 they continue to revisit the client on a regular
18 basis to work to bring them in towards what
19 consistently has been and always will be our
20 ultimate goal of permanent housing.

21 Originally decentralization of the
22 shelter system was thought to be a possible new
23 approach to intake. However, interaction with the
24 street population demonstrated certain faults to
25 the plan's roots. The plan primarily was based on

1 the premise that street homeless clients were
2 likely to come into an intake center in the first
3 place or to utilize a traditional shelter.
4 Experience has taught us that that's not the case.
5 By reengineering street outreach DHS has
6 reexamined the intake process and how clients
7 enter the shelter system. We have taken services
8 curb side, bringing the door of intake to the
9 client rather than asking the client to find the
10 door.
11

12 It is important to understand that
13 many of the street homeless voted with their feet
14 and actually are more likely to accept services
15 through a customized approach like that offered
16 through outreach teams where they are processed
17 directly from the street to a bed rather than
18 going through an intake process. However, with
19 regard to homeless individuals who do utilize the
20 traditional shelter system, we will be moving
21 intake to the Bedford Atlantic Facility later this
22 spring, while in tandem opening a second intake
23 center in Manhattan. This move will allow us to
24 improve the intake process for those who undergo
25 the traditional intake process while continuing to

1
2 evolve our system.

3 We will improve Bedford Atlantic.
4 Bed Atlantic will be slimming down the number of
5 beds from 350 to 230 while at the same time
6 improving services. The ratio of staff to clients
7 will improve, we will see the security of the
8 client ratio go up and programs will be enriched
9 to better serve those at the center. Increased
10 prevention diversion, family reunion, landlord
11 mediation and financial assistance will be
12 provided. We're looking at a better, faster,
13 stronger facility.

14 Furthermore I assure you that our
15 team is working to ensure the permanent housing
16 options or alternative shelter options are offered
17 to those currently sheltered at 30th Street before
18 the transition to the new intake center takes
19 place. It is of the utmost important to DHS that
20 those in shelter continue to receive important
21 services that they need. New York City will
22 always work to implement programs that offer
23 vulnerable New Yorkers what they need most at
24 night: beds.

25 In fiscal year 2010 we will

1
2 increase the number of city beds dedicated to
3 clients on the street by 60% to over 1,100 through
4 safe havens, stabilization beds and faith based
5 facilities. At the same time, the city's formal
6 shelter system as beds available is the foundation
7 of the city's comprehensive approach to addressing
8 the needs of the homeless. I'm pleased to tell
9 you that next year we'll be expanding several of
10 our bed systems. Our faith beds will expand from
11 approximately 285 to 495.

12 Faith based beds are small
13 privately operated shelter beds typically run by
14 religious organizations and staffed by volunteers
15 who are members of the congregation. They provide
16 beds to homeless individuals that do not suffer
17 from significant mental illness or substance abuse
18 problems. Faith based beds are linked to clients
19 through drop in centers, which serve to connect
20 the clients to the beds. In an effort to increase
21 a larger, more efficient faith based bed and drop
22 in center network that is streamlined and
23 effective, two new RFPs have been issued for both
24 faith based bed programs and the DHS drop in
25 center program.

It does not make sense for a client to come to a drop in center in the Bronx to sleep in a faith based facility in Brooklyn. We want to make it work for the client. Therefore these 495 beds will be restructured to be more efficiently linked to drop in centers in the immediate vicinity for client convenience. At the same time, we're looking to increase safe haven beds from the current capacity of 298 to approximately 500 by fiscal year 2010.

Over the past year, more than 600 chronically homeless individuals have been served throughout the city at safe haven facilities. We are truly putting control back into the hands of the client for this individualized approach, giving them the keys to their private living space. From outreach worker to client is a move from the street to housing. Stabilization beds will increase from 150 to 180. Stabilization beds are modest housing options that accept clients directly from the street, where clients can live safely in individualized space while housing applications are being processed. While safe haven provide services on site the stabilization

beds outreach workers act as case workers as well.

In sum, these total bed increases in multiple categories mainly will go from approximately 700 beds today to 1,100 beds total in 2010, a 60% increase. Our most vulnerable New Yorkers will find a bed is the best solution for them and that beds are available to them.

In these difficult times, New York City has reengineered its street solution as prepared to successfully meet demand and serve the needs of those New Yorkers who come to us, no matter how many individuals that may be. We will continue to provide safe intake into shelter and we will continue our priority goal of permanent housing. And we will continue, above all, to ensure all efforts encompass decent and humane treatment of individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Our mission to reduce the street homeless population is a top priority and we will work to see a continued reduction of the street population across New York City.

I thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you

1
2 Commissioner. I certainly have a number of
3 questions, I'm sure my colleagues do, too. I'd
4 like to welcome Council Member Tish James. I'd
5 like to welcome Council member Helen Diane Foster.
6 I'm going to raise some issues here before turning
7 it over to my colleagues.

8 I have to say at the outset,
9 Commissioner you know we've worked together a
10 while now and I think I've expressed in word and
11 deed my appreciation for some of the things you've
12 done that I think were good reforms and important
13 improvements. I think you believe you're trying
14 to do something good but I'm astounded in this
15 case because it's pretty clear you didn't talk to
16 the folks who were doing this work. I believe you
17 when you say you think you have tried to gather a
18 sense from homeless folks of their needs. That,
19 obviously, is one of the first steps in the
20 process.

21 But I don't feel you've talked to
22 the folks, like so many in this room who have been
23 providing this service. Many of them, for a long
24 time and I don't mean this as a show of
25 disrespect. But many of them who were providing

1
2 this help for the homeless for 10 or 15 or 20
3 years before you came to New York City. I think
4 there has to be a certain humility in public
5 service to start the discussion with the people
6 actually doing the work and succeeding in helping
7 others. So could you tell me why they were not
8 brought into this process?

9 COMMISSIONER HESS: Mr. Chairman,
10 actually we had a couple of opportunities. We can
11 always benefit from more conversation, whether
12 that conversation be with people experiencing
13 homelessness or that conversation be with people
14 providing volunteer or other support to people
15 experiencing homelessness. That said, before we
16 issue an RFP, let me say we issued an RFP because
17 the existing contract for these services is up at
18 the end of June this year. We're legally required
19 to issue RFPs.

20 But before we issued those RFPs, we
21 did a couple of additional things. I actually met
22 with the current contract provider, Partnership
23 for the Homeless. Asked them to arrange a meeting
24 for me with the key representatives of the faith
25 based community who were providing these services.

I did meet with that group. In addition to meeting with that group, listening to their issues, concerns, suggestions, we then took the, I think, rather extraordinary step of issuing a concept paper prior to the issuance of each of these RFPs.

We received a variety of comments and suggestions, recommendations from a broad based group of volunteers and providers and interested individuals across the community. All of that information and recommendations and suggestions that were received were taken very seriously. We then modified the RFP before they were released to reflect much of the recommendations and comments that we've received. So that was the process that we went through.

Could there be more discussion? Could we always learn from additional opportunities to meet with folks? Absolutely. We continue to be willing to do that. Just this past week my office reached out to half a dozen or so leaders of various faith based groups that are providing services and we'll continue to meet, we'll continue to discuss, we'll continue to

1
2 remain flexible, we'll continue to try to learn,
3 we'll continue to figure out how to provide the
4 best possible services that meet the needs of the
5 people that are experiencing homelessness in our
6 city. And figure out how to do that the most
7 collaborative and partnership ways.

8 So I don't think it's fair to say
9 that we haven't listened. We try hard to listen
10 in all areas, to all groups of stakeholders.

11 Could we do more? Yes. Are-

12 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:

13 [interposing] But Commissioner--

14 COMMISSIONER HESS: --we willing to
15 do more? Yes. But to say we haven't done
16 anything it just doesn't fairly represent the
17 facts.

18 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Well fine,
19 you did some but I don't know what you think you
20 heard and I don't know how anything that you put
21 together here reflected these conversations. It
22 just--Commissioner you always have a positive and
23 uplifting message, almost bluntly to the point of
24 distraction sometimes. We had a hearing on the
25 mayor's homelessness plan, which as noble as it

1
2 was clearly has not come even close to yielding
3 the results intended. You spent the entire
4 hearing telling me how things were working
5 beautifully.

6 It would be refreshing to hear once
7 in a while that something wasn't done right,
8 meaning I'm not wishing for things not to be done
9 right. But when they obviously haven't been done
10 right it would be refreshing to hear you say, we
11 made a mistake and we want to fix it. So I don't
12 think it's accidental that all these people are
13 here who have been serving the homeless, in many
14 cases, for much of their lives, and think there's
15 a problem here.

16 I have to tell you, I often say
17 that sometimes there's a consent of the govern
18 problem. These are the folks who actually do the
19 work on the ground, in our neighborhoods and they
20 think this new policy doesn't work. They think
21 they're being cut out and their congregations are
22 being cut out. I would think you'd want to say to
23 them, I don't want you to feel that way. I want
24 to fix this problem; I need you to be part of the
25 solution. Instead you seem to be saying,

everything's just fine.

COMMISSIONER HESS: I don't think I said that. What I said was we could always learn, we're always available to listen, we're always available to continue in that dialogue. We will continue to be flexible to the extent that there are volunteers and providers in the community, faith based services that feel like they haven't been heard. We want to give them that opportunity. I certainly want the benefit of having the opportunity to hear from them and learn as a result. To the extent that we can find better ways to do it, we'll do it better.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: If people in this room are telling you their efforts to help the homeless are going to be compromised here. Some have had them already closed, others are facing closure. How do you respond to that? You've got real live people serving real live people and you are governing over a plan that will end that. So why is that okay? Why do you think that's acceptable?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I don't agree that we're working on a plan that will end that.

The reality is that in certain cases I think there were 20 facilities. There were facilities that were in relatively remote locations, not close to drop in centers, open in some cases a couple of days a week and in other cases a couple of months a year. What we tried to do is figure out how to provide services best to our clients. So those services have been discontinued in some of those facilities. We added four new facilities. The overall capacity has not gone down and overall bed nights will actually increase a little bit. In fact, we have engaged in conversation with some of those folks and we're open to engaging in conversation with others.

For example, Embury United Methodist Church was one of those facilities that did close. Now Embury after entering conversation with our staff, I'm pleased to say will be reopening on January 19th, seven nights a week for at least three months. And actually are taking referrals from outreach teams directly off the street. We think that's wonderful news. We're very excited about that. We think that's a great partnership. We think that's the kind of approach where we all

1
2 can work together in partnership to provide even
3 better services to people that need them so much.
4 I think that's the approach we'd like to take.

5 I'm available and will continue to
6 be available to meet with a variety of groups to
7 be able to figure out how best to serve people
8 experiencing homelessness in this city that we all
9 care so much about. I respect and appreciate how
10 much they do care and how they're willing to
11 volunteer their time and, in many cases, to help
12 these folks.

13 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Again,
14 you're not admitting any mistakes. You're not
15 admitting anything should be done differently so
16 it would be fair for anyone hearing that to say,
17 okay, then it's questionable how much you
18 appreciate what these congregations have been
19 doing because again, some have had to stop their
20 programs. Others are faced with a closure of
21 their programs.

22 You said at the end of your
23 testimony, you were focused on decent and humane
24 treatment of the homeless. With all due respect
25 to your larger shelter system, I know there are

1
2 good people trying to do good work in that system.
3 But I can not believe anything equates with the
4 work of these congregations in terms of humanely,
5 compassionately serving individual homeless folks
6 and we all agree, are some of the folks who are
7 hardest to serve. These congregations were doing
8 the work long before this city got its act
9 together and figured out how to do I properly.

10 And we're about to enter a period,
11 economically, where we could have more and more
12 street homeless. So something doesn't fit that
13 you would be retrenching and cutting back this
14 front line of help for the homeless, community
15 based, humane, compassionate. You would be
16 cutting that back at the beginning of an economic
17 crisis. It makes no sense.

18 COMMISSIONER HESS: But in fact
19 we're not cutting back. In fact we're not cutting
20 it back. In fact what we're trying to do is
21 create a system that will be well coordinated
22 between drop in centers and faith based beds, a
23 well located, in the best interest of serving the
24 client. So in the case of the 20 that closed, one
25 of which I mentioned will be opening back up

1
2 shortly, there were four new facilities that were
3 opened. The number of bed nights overall will
4 actually increase to be much closer to the drop in
5 centers, easier to coordinate, better for the
6 client. And we're not writing off anybody.

7 I truly appreciate and respect the
8 work done at every church and synagogue and mosque
9 that has taken on this work, that feel so
10 passionate about this work. And I think sitting
11 down and working together individually, we can
12 find ways to match the volunteer work and
13 availability with the needs of people that are
14 homeless in those communities. But I don't think
15 that transporting folks from a drop in, say, in
16 Brooklyn to a faith based bed in the Bronx makes a
17 lot of sense or is in the best interest of the
18 individual client.

19 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Look, I'm
20 not going to go in circles with you here.
21 Commissioner, I think if you've got people in our
22 neighborhood willing to serve the homeless and put
23 their heart and soul into it, to volunteer their
24 time. And by the way, if ever there was an
25 administration that would be about the dollars and

1
2 sense and the bottom line, and you got people who
3 are willing to give of themselves in a very
4 organized effective manner who I'm sure would be
5 willing to expand their efforts if the need got
6 greater. Which is an extraordinary precious
7 resource for this city and you're willing to see
8 some of that go by the wayside. It makes no sense
9 to me.

10 I bet you're going to be back here
11 in short ordering saying how you're overwhelmed
12 and you have more and more homeless to deal with
13 and you wish you had more capacity. Well you're
14 giving away capacity right now so why not find a
15 way to integrate the many, many efforts that are
16 working into your plan. That doesn't mean you
17 shouldn't seek efficiency. It means don't throw
18 the proverbial baby out with the bath water.
19 Don't let a good program get away; find a way to
20 work with it.

21 I would urge you and I want to echo
22 Council Member Foster made a very good point here.
23 We're going to have some questions for you. But
24 then I would strongly urge you to, as a show of
25 good faith, to stay for a while and listen to the

1
2 first few panels after you, which are actual folks
3 doing this work and hear from them what their
4 experience is. I don't want to suggest for a
5 moment you don't have a busy schedule; I know you
6 do. But I would urge you to spend a little time
7 after your testimony, after our questions to hear
8 folks out.

9 Two other points and I'll turn to
10 my colleagues. Commissioner, I think one of the
11 things that goes through people's minds here and
12 it's a perfectly fair concern is the kind of give
13 them an inch, they take a mile dynamic. That
14 these initial cuts, this retrenchment that are
15 seeing some centers close will only potentially
16 lead to others and that is both because of the
17 change in strategy. But more importantly because
18 you're going to be suffering budget cuts like
19 every other agency. So how you respond to people
20 who say, if you start to cut out some programs,
21 it's just a matter of time before others get cut
22 out?

23 COMMISSIONER HESS: I think, Mr.
24 Chairman, you can look at the RFPs, what we see is
25 even these difficult budgetary economic times,

1
2 we've increased funding in these areas. So our
3 commitment is to expand the number of available
4 resources, specifically beds available in this
5 area by 60%, starting in July. So we're making an
6 unprecedented commitment that follows other
7 unprecedented commitments to help people move off
8 the streets into housing in a coordinated and
9 effective way. That effort will continue. This
10 is a top priority of the mayor's. It's certainly
11 a top priority of mine.

12 We don't intend to give an inch on
13 this. We're going to work as hard as we can every
14 day with every partner that's willing to work with
15 us, to help people that are currently living on
16 the streets of this city be able to move into a
17 home and that's our commitment.

18 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: But are you
19 saying that in addition to saying you're willing
20 to meet with the congregations represented here,
21 you're willing to rethink some of what you're
22 doing? Are you saying you're ready to pledge that
23 no further congregations will be cut out of this
24 work?

25 COMMISSIONER HESS: No, I don't

1 want to see any congregations cut out. I think
2 what we have to do is figure out, in partnership,
3 what the right use is in any given area. That's
4 certainly, again to go back to the example, we
5 don't want to have to see clients go one place one
6 night, somewhere else another night to various
7 parts of the city. We got to be sensitive to
8 that. Ultimately our goal has to be the best
9 interest of the client.
10

11 With that said, we are looking
12 forward to working with every faith based group
13 that wants to work with us. There is plenty of
14 work to go around, I think, to assist people
15 experiencing homelessness in the city.

16 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: But I'm
17 saying, are you willing to say that going forward
18 you will not take any further action to reduce the
19 number of congregations involved in this work?

20 COMMISSIONER HESS: We have no
21 plans to do that at all. We're going through an
22 RFP process. We'll have responses in the next
23 week or so and then we'll see where that leads us.
24 But, no, there's no plans to ask any additional
25 congregations to discontinue this work.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: So you're not making a pledge, you're saying you have no plans.

COMMISSIONER HESS: I'm saying there's no plans.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Okay. Last question from me and then I'll turn to Council Member James and a number of my colleagues. I want to welcome Council Member Vacca.

Commissioner, this hits home to a lot of us in Brooklyn. So in today's testimony you say that you will be moving the intake operation to the Bed Atlantic shelter, which I don't even need to go over again with you my concerns and my criticisms of that action in and of itself. But you use this general, I think, euphemistic, phrase at the same time you'll be opening a Manhattan facility.

I don't understand from the very beginning why that wasn't the plan. I think the facility should have stayed in Manhattan to begin with but if you're going to propose an alternative, I don't know why there wasn't a Manhattan facility in the plan from day one. And I don't know why it wasn't presented to the world

specifically. I find it interesting that in your testimony now you're not giving us any specifics. So can you tell us exactly where this Manhattan facility will be, how big it will be, what services it will provide, when it will open exactly?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Here's what I can tell you today. Let me go to the first part of your question. The first part of your question is why wasn't there a vision two sites, one in Manhattan, one in Brooklyn from the beginning. I'll take a lesson from you earlier in this hearing and tell you that was a mistake.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: God bless you. [Laughter] I think the congregations here would affirm that point.

COUNCIL MEMBER: Amen.

COMMISSIONER HESS: We have a file a plan with the state to make the modifications that are outlined in the testimony at Bed Atlantic. We are awaiting the state approval to move forward with that; that will be step one. We're still sharing information back and forth and having discussion back and forth with the state.

1
2 Once we receive that approval, then we will
3 proceed with opening Bed Atlantic as an intake
4 center. At the same time, we're continuing to
5 operate an intake center at 30th Street. Under
6 the state rules, we'll need to file a plan with
7 the state 120 days prior to the anticipated
8 closing of 30th Street. We will do that. Either
9 before or at the same time we do that, we'll share
10 with the Committee where we are. It's very much
11 still in the planning stages.

12 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: All right.
13 Well I'm going to finish this round. I think I'll
14 have questions after my colleagues but I'll finish
15 this round by saying that I appreciate the point
16 about making a mistake and I honor that. But the
17 rest of your answer does not warm my heart. It's
18 a little suspicious to me that you don't have a
19 site yet decided upon and it makes me wonder
20 whether that site will ever materialize. I think
21 the better way to go about this is to say there
22 will not be any action on the Brooklyn site until
23 there is a Manhattan site that is acceptable. I
24 hear an editorial comment back here.

25 There's a Manhattan site that's

1
2 acceptable to that community and acceptable to the
3 Council. I think you should reevaluate your
4 entire plan. I would note and I really want to
5 give a lot of respect to the folks in the area
6 around the Bellevue site. I've seen something
7 extraordinary here and I hope you appreciate it
8 too, Commissioner, that people who are very
9 actively involved in that community have said that
10 they believe it is part of their commitment to the
11 city they live in to see the homeless served.

12 They actually think that that
13 shelter does belong there and they have defended
14 the right of the homeless to get those services
15 there. So it's a story that I don't think has
16 been acknowledged that a lot of people from the
17 community who you would think any of the community
18 would say oh, we're going to lose a government
19 facility, isn't that wonderful. But it's been the
20 exact opposite reaction; people saying, in fact,
21 their concern is that the homeless will not be
22 served as well if the facility leaves the Bellevue
23 area. So I just want to take a moment to
24 acknowledge that there is a lot of very decent and
25 high minded New Yorkers who are looking at the big

picture and care about their fellow citizens.

With that Commissioner--that was the easy questioning. Now I'm going to turn to over to Council Member Tish James.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

Commissioner, I'm reminded of this past week there was an exit interview of President George Bush. He, too, refused to admit any mistakes and it was in fact all over the media and in a number of pundits. It just really talked about his failure and his disconnect to reality. Not suggesting that your testimony is comparable but I'm just reminded of it.

Let me also go on to say whenever there is redesigning, reorganization, restructuring by this administration, it ultimately leads to reduction in services time and time again. I would hope that the mayor of the City of New York and you would do something similar to what the Commissioner and the Mayor did with respect to senior services and change course and decided that it was not proper to restructure senior centers in the City of New York. I would hope that you too would reconsider this RFP,

particularly for the faith based community.

They have been offering these services for at least a minimum of 25 years. And to provide these services to, again, individuals who are not doing it for the love of money but are doing it because they want to be closer to God. They believe as I believe, as someone who surrounds herself with a God squad, my six ministers in my neighborhood who have my back at all times. They believe that this will result in more homeless individuals being on the streets of the City of New York and I tend to agree with them.

So, Commissioner, I am asking you, I am pleading with you, I am urging that you reconsider this RFP for respite services. And that you continue to consult with the faith based community, provide them the degree of respect that they so deserve and recognize that they are doing the work of the angels. I'm asking that you do this on behalf of the faith based community, not only those that are represented in this room, but on behalf of all of those who care about the needs of the less fortunate in this great city.

With that, let me turn to parochial issues, Bedford Atlantic. You said that the approval process was filed, had been filed with the state?

COMMISSIONER HESS: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And you're waiting on approval?

COMMISSIONER HESS: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: The last conversation that I had with the State Commissioner was a letter from you dated December 12th. Has there been further communication since that point? It was a letter dated December 12th and that response indicated that your plan thus far was deficient.

COMMISSIONER HESS: My recollection is that the state has a long way as a series of follow up questions to our plan that our staff has routinely been responded to those questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So it's my understanding that based on conversations with the state that you have yet to completely provide them with the information that they require in order to do a thorough analysis of this.

COMMISSIONER HESS: I think that's fair to state. Every time they ask a question, we give answers and they ask more questions. Then there's a little bit of delay before they get more answers.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: But as they say in the legal community, the issues have not been joined as of yet. Correct? Would that be fair?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I think it's fair.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. It's also my understanding that this is according to the United Way, 75% of homeless individuals, particularly single men suffer to some extent mental illness. Would you agree with that?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I would not.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: To what extent do the homeless suffer from mental illness, particularly single men?

GEORGE NASHAK: I'm George Nashak, Deputy Commissioner for Adult Services at DHS. The national statistics show that it's probably closer to a third. That's the data that we've

seen, that pretty much is confirmed by the surveys that we've done on the street.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Based on your survey on the street, can you make it more locally. How many locally? Do you think the numbers are comparable?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: About a third.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So the Bellevue shelter has up to 130 beds for the mentally ill. It's based on conversations that you have had with my office and with other elected officials in the district as well as communication that we received, it's your plan to reduce the number of beds that Bedford Atlantic to 230, correct?

COMMISSIONER HESS: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: so if you plan to reduce the number of beds to 230, you plan on closing Bellevue and there's currently 130 beds set aside for the mentally ill. Is it your position that there will only be 100 beds for the remaining homeless individuals who show up on average?

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMISSIONER HESS: At Bed
Atlantic?

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes.

COMMISSIONER HESS: No, Bed
Atlantic beds at 230 will be assessment beds.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So what will
happen to the 130 beds set aside for the mentally
ill at Bellevue?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: We've
got mental health shelters for men in other
locations. For example, the 200 bed mental health
shelter at the Fort Washington Armory. So we're
constantly looking at the demographics of our
population and trying to make certain we've got
the right match of program beds to match the
people that are coming in the front door.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: At Fort
Washington is it not true that you're at capacity
in terms of the mental ill?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: We may
be at capacity on a particular night. We are
constantly moving people into permanent housing
and then we're able to free up space so that
people can take their places.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And how much permanent have we created in the City of New York for the mental ill who were formerly homeless?

COMMISSIONER HESS: You have to give me a date from which we could start, probably with the New York, New York One and Two agreements, which were predominantly if not exclusively for people with mental illness, we're at 5,300 beds. We've just begun implementation of the New York, New York Three agreement, which is a total of 9,000 not all dedicated to the mentally ill but preponderantly dedicated to the mentally ill. So we've created thousands of beds within New York City, permanent housing beds with rental subsidies and support services and operating dollars for people with mental illness.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And the mentally ill who come to the Bellevue intake center, do they receive services at Bellevue?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Do you mean at Bellevue Hospital?

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: No, at the site.

COMMISSIONER HESS: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: They do.

And will those services now come to Bedford Atlantic?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And according, again, statistics put out by DHS there were 1,492 mental health beds that are available in New York City. There are on average 1,515 adults in mental health programs in your shelter system. So the homeless shelter system's ability to cater to the mentally ill, it appears, it as full capacity. It's my understanding that you plan on closing Bellevue Peter Young and eliminate 150 beds at Bedford Atlantic. Just in sheer numbers how could you accommodate the mentally ill in the shelter system?

COMMISSIONER HESS: The beds that you just listed were not mental health beds. We're trying to preserve, within the extent possible, the mental health capacity in our system. Peter Young for example is not specifically a mental health shelter so by taking down the 150 beds then we're not taking down mental health beds.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Let's go back to Bedford Atlantic. Bedford Atlantic I believe the plan is it would continue as an assessment center and an intake center, yes?

COMMISSIONER HESS: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I have a difficult time understanding the difference between assessment and intake. Could you explain the difference between the two? And does intake requirement a different use of the building?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Different use of the building, no. Intake is an administrative function. When people come in we gather basic information, search through databases to see if they've been with us before. Then they go to assessment beds where they go through a brief period of time of assessment so we can ensure we match them to the most appropriate shelter that's available within our system across the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: On average, assessment allegedly is supposed to take around 21 days.

COMMISSIONER HESS: Historically it's taken about 21 days. We think that we can

1
2 reduce that time period significantly by enhancing
3 services at Bed Atlantic.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And by
5 enhancing services and reducing the amount of time
6 at the intake center, you will be referring these
7 individuals out to permanent residences?

8 COMMISSIONER HESS: We'll be
9 referring out. Some will be diverted to permanent
10 housing opportunities, some will be reunited with
11 family, some will be assigned to the most
12 appropriate shelters in our system.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Again, going
14 back to the mentally ill. If the mentally ill
15 constitute about 30% of the homeless in the City
16 of New York and right now they're in Manhattan,
17 how are we going to get them to actually come to
18 Bedford Atlantic if they suffer from this illness?

19 COMMISSIONER HESS: As we've said
20 numerous times Councilwoman, we intend to have
21 access to intake center in Manhattan as well as at
22 Bed Atlantic in Brooklyn. So anyone will have the
23 opportunity to access either in Manhattan or in
24 Brooklyn.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do we have a

location yet in Manhattan?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes, we have 30th Street. Prior to 30th Street closing we will have another site.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you have the address of that other site?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I do not.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you have any idea whether or not it will be uptown, downtown, east side, west side?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I do not at this time.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. Are you considering any of your existing facilities as an intake center in Manhattan?

COMMISSIONER HESS: We're considering all options.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: When will you have a final decision?

COMMISSIONER HESS: We'll have a final decision prior to notification to the state, which we have to do 120 days prior to the closure of 30th Street.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. The

1 Bedford Atlantic shelter has a reputation for
2 being the most dangerous shelter in the entire
3 system. In fact, the 77th precinct indicated that
4 it accounts for a significant increase in violent
5 crimes in my district, in that community, in the
6 Crown Heights and Bedford Stuyvesant and Prospect
7 Heights communities. Why would we want to put
8 again a fragile constituency, i.e., the mentally
9 ill in a shelter which is the most dangerous
10 facility in the system.
11

12 COMMISSIONER HESS: I don't agree
13 at all that the current operation of Bed Atlantic
14 is dangerous. We have spent a lot of resources in
15 placing peace officers inside and outside of Bed
16 Atlantic facility, as you know. The Bed Atlantic
17 facility today is one of the safer facilities that
18 we have in many ways. We spent a lot of time, a
19 lot of resources and it has had a history of going
20 way back to times when it was apparently a
21 dangerous place to be. I don't believe that's the
22 case today.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I have
24 testimony or a number of residents at Bed Atlantic
25 have contacted my office and have indicated that

1
2 in fact it is still a dangerous place and have
3 witnessed individuals engaging in sales of drugs
4 and have engaged in other type of illegal conduct.
5 So I believe the accounts of these individuals who
6 have contacted my office because they are living
7 it on a daily basis--

8 COMMISSIONER HESS: [interposing] I
9 hope Councilwoman you'll pass along to us so we
10 can do the proper and thorough investigation.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I believe
12 that the community and the precinct themselves
13 have consistently cried out to DHS about the
14 conditions that continue to exist at Bedford
15 Atlantic.

16 COMMISSIONER HESS: With any
17 situations like this your personally aware of, I
18 hope you'll provide that to us so we can conduct a
19 proper investigation.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you plan
21 on holding any public hearings in the community
22 with regards to this proposal?

23 COMMISSIONER HESS: We've attended
24 a number of public hearings and forums in the
25 community already, as you know. We will remain

open to attending future community forums.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Have you done an environmental impact or do you anticipate doing an environmental impact study of the closure of Bellevue center and its impact that it will have in the borough of Manhattan.

COMMISSIONER HESS: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you anticipate doing a study of the impact of closing Bellevue center will have on the homeless population on the streets of Manhattan?

COMMISSIONER HESS: We have looked at that internally. We do not expect that there will be an impact on the street population in Manhattan. We have over the last couple of years added resources in terms of safe havens and stabilization beds and faith bed coordination throughout the borough of Manhattan. We will continue to do that. We'll continue to grow the bed resources.

As I stated earlier in my testimony, the number of beds will increase by 60% during the next fiscal year. So we don't expect that there would be an impact. The last thing we

1
2 want, we have made a lot of progress on the
3 streets. There are over 1,000 fewer people living
4 on the streets today than just a couple of years
5 ago. We have no interest in seeing any
6 backsliding on the street or more people ending up
7 on the streets. That is the last thing we want to
8 see. We will do everything within our power to
9 continue to help people move from the streets into
10 their own housing.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And if in
12 fact this proposal goes forward and you realize
13 that you were wrong, you would reverse course and
14 close Bedford and Atlantic and reopen Bellevue?

15 COMMISSIONER HESS: Anytime we see
16 that anything is occurring, whether we cause it or
17 not, that is adding people to the streets we will
18 deal with that quickly and decisively. It is our
19 intent to ensure that the progress we've made on
20 the streets continues.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Last
22 question, have you done any study about the impact
23 of having an intake center in my district of
24 Bedford and Atlantic would have on my
25 constituents, a district which is already over-

1
2 saturated with social service agencies, which has
3 a very high crime rate, which is partly due from
4 Bedford and Atlantic and believes that moving--

5 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:

6 [interposing] Council Member, come on, let's get a
7 question in that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Last
9 question, by moving this would be in violation of
10 the Fair Share Doctrine.

11 COMMISSIONER HESS: We actually
12 think we're improving Fair Share in the area.
13 Currently you have 500 beds between Bed Atlantic
14 and Peter Young across the street. We are
15 reducing the number of beds from those 500 to 230.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Well, the
17 reason why your testimony reminds me of President
18 Bush is because he thought that they did a good
19 job in Katrina, Iraq and Afghanistan. And again,
20 unfortunately I just believe in terms of the way
21 that we've handled the faith based organization,
22 the issuance of this RFP and the moving of the
23 intake center to my district again is reflective
24 of the mayor's insensitivity to the plight of the
25 homeless in the City of New York. And it fails to

take into consideration the needs of our particular district. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you Council Member. Council Member Gale Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you and thank you Commissioner. I don't know where in hell's name you're going to find a site in Manhattan but I wish you luck.

COMMISSIONER HESS: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Please don't put it in my district; I have enough problems with you know what.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: What's you know what?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: St. Louis on 94th Street. Safe havens, they exist now. How many of them exist and where are they, just generally?

COMMISSIONER HESS: About 280 some exist today. We're planning to ramp up to 500. I think almost all of the safe haven beds are in Manhattan.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: And Queens.

COMMISSIONER HESS: And there's some in Queens. We'll hopefully have an opportunity to grow some safe haven beds in some other boroughs. But all the initial safe haven beds were in the borough of Manhattan.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is that something that we can get a list of?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. If we could provide that to the Committee.

COMMISSIONER HESS: Be happy to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think one of the issues and I'm going to be kind of specific. Obviously I've met often with the faith based community. Chairman de Blasio talked about some of his concerns. How, just on the details because the devil is in the details? I know we're trying to cut down cost of transportation, linen. I know you think that there are people who work, I don't know if you call it game the system but I don't because I know sometimes even if you work you don't have enough money for rent. So people are trying to do whatever they got to do to

1
2 survive.

3 But the question is how do you look
4 at this travel. Either the travel of the
5 transportation--what was brought up was if under a
6 new RFP the respite program has to provide the
7 transportation and the linen. The individual who
8 is part of that system perhaps he or she would get
9 a ride in a van but perhaps he or she would have
10 to take a Metrocard. The trouble with that,
11 leaving it up to somebody else and not the city,
12 in my opinion is that if you take a Metrocard. I
13 guess in worst case scenario you end up going no
14 where. I've had three transit checks in the last
15 three months and they all break down because
16 there's something wrong with the system in terms
17 of it working. So maybe the Metrocard doesn't
18 work, etc.

19 You have to kind of think ahead
20 about how the travel arrangements would work. I
21 understand we want shorter distances but is this
22 something that you discussed with the faith based
23 or anybody else to see how travel might actually
24 work? Just on the ground with the details.

25 COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes, thank you

1
2 for that question Councilwoman. Under the current
3 contract, DHS was providing for transportation
4 services and linen services. When we got to the
5 point of being at the end of the contract and
6 legally needed to issue a new RFP, I made the
7 decision that the government procuring those
8 particular services may not be the most efficient
9 way to do it. So I made the decision to take that
10 money and to put it into the pool that would be
11 available to the providers in order to procure
12 their services.

13 And we did not specify in the RFP
14 intentionally how they would provide those
15 services because I don't frankly know if someone
16 who is going to respond to the RFP may have a drop
17 in center with faith based beds next door and
18 people can walk to those beds. They could use the
19 money for something else. So we kept it
20 intentionally broad enough so that whoever
21 responds can respond in a way that makes the most
22 sense for them. You wouldn't want to require
23 under the example I gave for someone to have to
24 have a bus contract to move somebody from a drop
25 in center across the street to beds so there's

1
2 better uses for that money. So the first decision
3 that I made is probably DHS procuring
4 transportation, linen services might not be the
5 best use of those dollars. So we put that into
6 the pool of the RFP.

7 The second decision was to let the
8 respondents to the RFP decide how best to provide
9 that transportation. Now when we get the
10 responses and we'll get them in the next couple of
11 weeks and we review them and decide who the
12 winners are and enter in to negotiations with the
13 winners. If a proposal is a winning proposal but
14 we think is a little bit short on the
15 transportation side for reasons maybe like you
16 have mentioned, then we will enter into
17 discussions with that award winner to shore that
18 piece up.

19 We'll have an opportunity to do
20 that as we move forward before we issue award
21 letters and new contracts. But that's the answer
22 to your question. I firmly believe that better to
23 take that money that's historically been procured
24 services through DHS, put it into a pool where the
25 provider can make better use of those funds.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think
3 that sounds good. I just don't know how it's
4 actually going to work because I don't think
5 Metrocards should even be unless it is right next
6 door. But I doubt that there will be any such
7 place, something to be discussed. I hope what you
8 say, that you will actually do in terms of working
9 with the contractors.

10 COMMISSIONER HESS: Councilwoman,
11 we try very hard to--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
13 [interposing] I know you do. You have to talk a
14 little bit more to the community, sir. Next is
15 the faith based community. I want you to walk me
16 through because I know you say this is not true
17 but I don't understand it. They are concerned,
18 understandably, that the people who will be coming
19 to them will have challenges that they can't meet.
20 Individuals now, I'm not as faithful as so many
21 people here in the audience, I've only done this a
22 couple of nights. But I will tell you these
23 people are the salt of the earth in our city.
24 They develop relationships with people who then go
25 on and get jobs based on the congregation's

1
2 support, that's a fact. So now the question is,
3 however, if a person is too challenging you can't
4 do that, you just can't. I know these people, you
5 can't do them.

6 So the question is why do you
7 counter what the faith based community states,
8 which is the people will not be assessed enough
9 and they will in fact have slightly different
10 challenges that are not able to be met by those
11 mainly women, not exclusively. But a lot of
12 women, a lot of children some times; people come
13 with their kids, serve dinner, take the kids home
14 and come back. It's really, really something to
15 be looked at with great admiration. So how do you
16 answer this question? The people who are being
17 housed in the faith based are not going to be more
18 challenging.

19 COMMISSIONER HESS: One of the
20 things that came out when we issued the concept
21 paper, we did not initially have as a role of the
22 drop in centers to screen people before they went
23 to faith based beds. But we had a number of
24 comments during the comment period for the concept
25 paper that we should consider a screening process

1
2 to be done at the drop in center for just the
3 reasons that you're describing. We listened to
4 that and we added that to the RFP.

5 So today, if you look at the RFP,
6 anyone who applies under the drop in RFP will have
7 to provide those screening services prior to
8 connecting clients at the drop in center to the
9 faith based beds.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So
11 where will the more challenging individuals go
12 since they can't stay on the chairs all night
13 long? Because you know what? There's a reason
14 they're on the chairs, without being specific,
15 they're challenging people.

16 COMMISSIONER HESS: Challenging
17 people, depending on their circumstances now are
18 sleeping well in safe haven beds and stabilization
19 beds and there are some churches or synagogues or
20 mosques that are better equipped and prepared and
21 have a more service rich environment than others.
22 I mean--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
24 [interposing] Give me an example.

25 COMMISSIONER HESS: I will. Embry

1
2 United Methodist for example, after again talking
3 with us, working with us, is going to open their
4 doors on, again, January the 19th and they will be
5 accepting referrals from the Queens outreach team,
6 directly from folks that are on the street. So
7 the people have different service levels available
8 and they have different desires in terms of who
9 they would like to provide services to. We'll be
10 respectful of that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think,
12 again, that's one of those issues that as the
13 responses come in you need to think about that
14 issue. It sounds good that there's one place
15 where folks who are more challenging can go but my
16 guess is because there are more financial
17 opportunities in Manhattan, there are a lot of
18 challenging individuals in Manhattan, too. I
19 don't quite know how that's going to work out.

20 The other question I have is can
21 you just sort of walk me through if there is going
22 to be a different assessment process and if there
23 is, how it is different from what currently
24 exists.

25 COMMISSIONER HESS: From the drop

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

in centers?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

COMMISSIONER HESS: We won't know that specifically until we see the responses to the RFP. One of the requirements that we have, again, taken from the concept paper recommendations is that there be a screening process that ensures the people with severe mental illness or substance abuse are not referred to the faith based beds.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Will some of these faith based beds have to have paid staff, which I don't know where they would get the funding, if they are to take more chronically challenging individuals?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I think we've--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
[interposing] That's the fear of some of the faith based.

COMMISSIONER HESS: I think we'll see what the responses are. One of the things that we may see or some of the hybrid kind of models that you're describing, where maybe we'll get a response that would include some paid staff

1
2 and some unpaid volunteers to support that. I
3 don't know. We'll have to wait. I think we're
4 ten days or so away from all the RFP responses
5 being and we'll have an opportunity then to read
6 the responses, evaluate them and see where we are.
7 But we're open and flexible to meeting the needs.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The issue
9 of special needs populations, I know we talked
10 mostly about men but you also have women and you
11 also have older adults, men and women. How are
12 those individuals going to be re-housed, if at
13 all, in your scenario?

14 COMMISSIONER HESS: Apparently
15 we're having additional budget challenges.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Somebody
17 just hit the lights. Peter's Place, Olivieri, et
18 cetera.

19 COMMISSIONER HESS: Two separate
20 questions, first on the drop in side. What we've
21 found on the drop in side is that we have a couple
22 of, now I think of all female drop in facilities,
23 one--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
25 [interposing] Olivieri.

COMMISSIONER HESS: --yes, one senior facility. And then we look at the other facilities that we have and there is a mix of male and female, younger and old, in our other facilities. We think with the business hour model and trying to connect people with beds at night rather than having them sit up in a chair, that we won't need these specific population facilities, that all of our drop ins will be able to accept both male and female, both younger and older.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think speaking particularly about Olivieri because that's the one I know the best. I can't imagine some of those ladies mixing so that's a challenge. Those are ladies that have their own individual ways of doing about business and they may have been there for a long time but that's the way it works for them. I think you need to look at that very carefully. And also Tony Olivieri, may he rest in peace, he meant a lot to many of us.

My final question and maybe we can come back is how do you see the timing on all of this in terms of making the suggestions? In other words, are you going to be meeting again with some

1
2 of the providers once you get the information
3 back? In order to fine tune, as you say, some of
4 these ways in which making this a system that
5 works. I'm, needless to say, asking nice
6 questions because that's my temperament. I have
7 tremendous concerns about this project.

8 But how do you see the ability to
9 fine tune because when the RFP goes out, it's my
10 impression that you have to stick with some of the
11 ways of which it's constituted even though it may
12 not make sense. So how do you work on that fine
13 tuning? This is a really challenging population.
14 I understand you're under the gun to get people in
15 to beds. I don't quite know where all these beds
16 are but you say they exist. Also just keeping
17 people in those beds, that's another challenge.
18 How are you going to fine tune it?

19 COMMISSIONER HESS: We're going to
20 do a number of things. We'll get the responses to
21 the RFP in the next ten days or so. We'll review
22 them carefully, we'll evaluate them. We'll begin
23 negotiations with the top rated proposals. In the
24 meantime, just this past week we have continued to
25 reach out to a number of the key churches and

1
2 synagogues in the faith based network. And I hope
3 to continue to have an opportunity to meet and
4 continue that dialogue. So we'll be as flexible
5 as we can, we will refine as we go along. We have
6 to start with taking a close look at the responses
7 that we do receive from the RFP and we'll be able
8 to do that in about another ten days.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right.
10 Thank you Mr. Chair, maybe we can go back later.

11 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you
12 very much Council Member, now Council Member
13 Annabel Palma.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you.
15 Thank you Commissioner for your testimony.

16 COMMISSIONER HESS: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: I'm
18 interested in knowing how are the safe havens
19 identified.

20 COMMISSIONER HESS: Identified
21 typically by providers; we have an open ended RFP
22 out for safe havens. So a provider in the
23 community that finds a site that they think would
24 be appropriate for a safe haven, they can apply
25 under that open ended RFP. Then, of course, we go

1
2 through the evaluation and negotiation of the
3 contracting process.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So these
5 safe havens are being advertised through DHS web
6 sites?

7 COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: What are the
9 other means of advertisement? How can someone--

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK:
11 [interposing] When you say advertisement, do you
12 mean to the clients who are potentially users or
13 the people who want to create one.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: To the
15 people who may have a location.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: Well
17 we have an open ended RFP, which is a ongoing
18 process of procurement that allows people who are
19 interested in providing this service to come
20 forward with a proposal.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: But someone
22 has to go into DHS web site so--

23 COMMISSIONER HESS: [interposing]
24 That's right.

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: When

1
2 we first put the open ended RFP on the table, we
3 also sent notification to our bidders list of all
4 the people who have bid or provided services to us
5 in the past. So we did, at the beginning of this,
6 some marketing if that's the right word.

7 COMMISSIONER HESS: We also have an
8 opportunity to talk publicly about this routinely.
9 We always let people know, we try to let people
10 know what open ended RFPs we have so that if they
11 have an interest in a specific area they can
12 follow up on that.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NASHAK: But to
14 address the outcome of this, I would say it seems
15 that we've been fairly effective because we have
16 had a sufficient number of providers interested in
17 proposing viable projects to meet the goal we have
18 set for ourselves.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: In your
20 testimony, Commissioner, you state that
21 chronically homeless mean more than nine months in
22 the street for someone to qualify for a safe haven
23 bed?

24 COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes, over a two
25 year period of time. If someone's been on the

1
2 streets for nine months or more over a two year
3 period of time then we prioritize that individual
4 as chronically homeless and work with them in a
5 priority manner to help them move to housing.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So does this
7 individual need to prove he's been on the street
8 more than nine months?

9 COMMISSIONER HESS: We try not to
10 be particularly bureaucratic on the street. What
11 we try to do is have the outreach workers engage
12 with them. In many cases we will have a record of
13 having encountered the individual in the street
14 before our outreach teams will recognize that
15 individual as someone that they've encountered
16 multiple times on the street. So that's typically
17 how the determination is made.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So the
19 outreach team doesn't have a time where they need
20 to confirm that this person has been out in the
21 street?

22 COMMISSIONER HESS: They need to
23 determine it to their satisfaction but we don't
24 ask for paperwork to document you've been on the
25 street for nine months.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So this
3 person can be in a bed immediately or...? Okay.
4 And if they do not meet that criteria then what's
5 the process in terms of the outreach team to get
6 this person--

7 COMMISSIONER HESS: [interposing]
8 If they're not chronically homeless individuals
9 they certainly have the right to come into shelter
10 on any given night. They have the right to go to
11 a drop in center. And they have the ability,
12 after being screened, to access a faith based bed.
13 It's one of the reasons why we think it's so
14 important that we increase significantly the
15 number of available faith based beds across the
16 city, to be able to provide those faith based bed
17 opportunities to people that are not chronically
18 homeless but are living on the streets. And to
19 give others the opportunity to move from that kind
20 of metal folding chair to a bed at night.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: The outreach
22 team then refers them to the intake center and
23 then see that process through?

24 COMMISSIONER HESS: That's correct.
25 Well, they don't have to go to an intake center

1
2 necessarily. They could go to an intake center if
3 they're willing to come into shelter and some do.
4 They could go directly to a drop in to be screened
5 and then access a faith based bed from there.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Then my last
7 question is are the outreach teams the only people
8 that can refer individuals to safe haven beds?

9 COMMISSIONER HESS: Yes. The
10 reasoning there is we want the outreach workers to
11 really take their services curbside and really do
12 the intake work that historically has been done by
13 the bureaucracy. So people that have lived on the
14 streets a significant amount of time have told us
15 that they're not coming into an intake center and
16 we don't want them to have to come into an intake
17 center in order to move off the street into their
18 own home or into a bed. So we've given the
19 outreach team the complete authority to be able to
20 make that happen.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you.

22 COMMISSIONER HESS: You're welcome.

23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you,
25 Council Member. Commissioner, a few more

questions that I have but let me make a statement based on one of the things Council Member Brewer said, the point about--I know it may not be typical but I think it illustrates what we're talking about here, that in some instances congregations that have actually helped some of the people they serve to get a job and to get situated. I think that it crystallizes the quality, the level of compassion, the level of humanity, the sort of personal intervention that goes on here and how much it is a neighborhood taking responsibility for people in need in their own midst and a congregation taking responsibility. So again, I think that is precious. I think it's a higher level of effectiveness than any - when I say bureaucracy I don't mean this derogatorily but - than any bureaucracy could ever reach. I think the idea of actual neighborhood people embracing someone as one of their own and saying we are taking responsibility. We're using all the resources and relationships at our disposal to find you a job or to find you housing. We can only dream of that happening...

COMMISSIONER HESS: It's a beautiful thing.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: ...in our society more often. It's an extraordinary thing.

COMMISSIONER HESS: It's a beautiful thing.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: So we can't replicate that with any traditional government approach. Again, that's another reason why I think this needs to be preserved. I want to get these numbers right because I think there's a real difference here between our two understandings of what capacity we're going to have if your plan were to come to its fruition. So I'm going to run through this and you tell me what you agree with and what you disagree with.

According to your numbers, an average of 644 adults slept in drop in centers each night last fiscal year. And under the new RFP, no one will be sleeping in a drop in center so now to go through where people will sleep. Respite beds, you expect a capacity of 495 under the RFP but you will lose capacity simultaneously at some of the sites that can not comply with the

1
2 RFP provisions, that stands to reason. A site
3 that can't provide a hot meal, a site that can't
4 stay open at least five days for example.

5 I assume you have a number, a
6 working number, for how many you're going to lose
7 to offset whatever else you're doing it so I want
8 to ask that. I want to ask you or get clear in
9 terms of the safe haven beds. You have 298 now
10 and you expect 500 by the end of the fiscal year.
11 Again, only for chronically homeless people
12 meaning that they must have been homeless nine
13 months out of the last 24. So that seems to
14 suggest, I want to make sure I'm getting this
15 right, that the folks who do not fit in that
16 category but are on the streets don't end up in
17 the safe haven. And it is perfectly fair
18 assumption that we're going to have more and more
19 folks who are not in that category because of
20 what's happening in the economy. We're going to
21 have more new homeless on the streets, sadly.

22 Then stabilization beds, you have
23 150 now and you're talking about going to 180, if
24 I understand correctly. But it's not a major
25 increase so when you add all that up what we see

1
2 is a decrease overall, I think roughly a 12%
3 decrease because especially we are assuming you'll
4 be losing a meaningful number of the respite beds
5 because of sites that can't meet the standards of
6 the new RFP even though they've served effectively
7 in the past. We see a decrease, what do you see?

8 COMMISSIONER HESS: That must be
9 new math.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I had the
11 numbers--

12 COMMISSIONER HESS: [interposing]
13 Let me try to go through the numbers that I
14 believe accurately reflect where we are today and
15 where we expect to be.

16 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: By the way,
17 I just want to emphasize every number I gave you
18 is from your own publicly available sources, none
19 of that was from anything but DHS.

20 COMMISSIONER HESS: Let me just add
21 two additional numbers then. Currently if you add
22 the 285, the 298 and the 150 together, I believe
23 that brings you to 733. If you then add the 495,
24 I actually think we'll get to 510 safe haven beds,
25 and the 180 stabilization beds that brings you to

over 1,100 - 1,185, which I believe is a 60% increase.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Let me counter you, I'm going to give you the original numbers again based on the experience of the last fiscal year. So 150 stabilization beds, 298 safe haven beds, 285 faith based beds and space for 644 in drop in centers; a grand total of 1,377. So we--

COMMISSIONER HESS: [interposing] I think--

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:
[interposing] Hold on, let me finish. I'm sorry. We count your 180 and your other numbers and we end up with your new total as 1,175, your previous total was 1,377, so we get you as down 200 or so spaces. Now again, and we're going to come back to this in a moment, no one wants to see anyone sleeping in a chair inside a warm building attended to by actual compassionate human beings. But even worse do we want to see someone on the street? So I see you as having 200 less spaces available, what do you see?

COMMISSIONER HESS: Here's a

1
2 couple--I don't see 200 fewer beds available. I
3 see counting in the 644 chairs as beds. But let
4 me explain why I think that's significant and
5 there's a couple of reasons. First, the 495 is an
6 average number across the year. It could higher
7 at some points in the year, lower at other points
8 in the year and flexible enough to meet demand.
9 The 644 that you referred to as the chairs and
10 drop ins today, first of all not all of the
11 individuals utilizing those chairs do not have a
12 home to go to or a bed to go to. Let me explain
13 that.

14 I had the opportunity just the
15 other day to spend some time at Grand Central drop
16 in center. There is a procedural problem in some
17 cases that causes some people with beds in the
18 shelter system to spend a night in a chair at a
19 drop in center, for example, and we have to fix
20 that. I encountered a group of individuals who
21 had beds at Charles Gay, who were actually
22 spending the night in chairs at Grand Central
23 because for whatever reason they didn't feel like
24 they were going to be able to get back in time.
25 We have to fix that.

1
2 So there are other pieces to this
3 here that we're going to have to work through. At
4 the end of the day, our intent is to see that
5 anyone at a drop in center who wants a bed, gets a
6 bed. And that no one goes from the drop in center
7 to the street. And I think, Mr. Chairman, you
8 know me well enough to know that there is no way
9 that we have any interest in creating a policy or
10 creating a procedure that leads to additional
11 people sleeping on the streets of this city.
12 That's not what we're about in this
13 administration. That's not what any of our
14 policies have been about up until now and that's
15 not what we're going to allow to happen moving
16 forward--

17 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:

18 [interposing] Commissioner, I appreciate your
19 passion but I'm telling you, you are giving up
20 this precious resource. The whole hearing you are
21 not denying that there are congregations that are
22 no longer going to be able to do this work because
23 the changes you've made. Again, I emphasize,
24 these are real human beings committed to helping.
25 That is different than anything a bureaucracy

1
2 could ever produce. And we're going into a period
3 where we expect more and more people to be
4 homeless. I'm sorry I certainly understand that
5 there may be procedural problems and we all
6 welcome you fixing those. I certainly think
7 anytime a person can be in a bed that is better
8 than a chair.

9 But I think you're being a little
10 utopian here. I think you're putting a lot of
11 faith in your outreach teams and your other
12 methodologies to catch everyone out there. In
13 fact, a lot of times it is the human dynamic that
14 draws people in and makes them comfortable coming
15 in to a situation where they'll be safer. You
16 just don't have that in your plan so God bless
17 you; go ahead and fix the procedural problems.
18 Get more people to beds where you can, that's
19 good.

20 But that does not replace the
21 capacity that is available in our neighborhoods.
22 It's just what these congregations is doing is
23 different from what you're doing. And it is not
24 in any way something you can replicate. I just
25 don't see why you wouldn't be doing both. I don't

1
2 see why you wouldn't be protecting what you have,
3 every single space you have that a congregation is
4 providing. And then making your other reforms
5 around that rather than throwing out something
6 that's actually working?

7 COMMISSIONER HESS: I don't know
8 how else to say it, with respect to the faith
9 based beds, the respite beds, anybody reads the
10 RFP will see that we're increasing the number of
11 available beds through our faith based community
12 from 285 to 495 on average with flexibility
13 throughout the year. Now if we find at some point
14 in the year that's not enough then we'll figure
15 out how to add to it, as we have in the past.

16 So that's where we start from. We
17 will meet the need. If we got this wrong and we
18 need to increase the capacity, we will do that.
19 Given our best estimates and taking a hard look at
20 what's occurred in the past, this is what we put
21 in the RFP because we believe it's what is
22 appropriate. If we're right, great. If we're
23 wrong, we'll add to it.

24 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: But you
25 can't be wrong for very long without actual people

1
2 suffering. These congregations have built up a
3 lot of experience and a infrastructure. If you
4 shut it down you don't know if you're going to get
5 it back for when you actually need it. Again,
6 there's a little bit of an Orwellian dynamic going
7 on here. You're acting like something hasn't
8 already happened that has taken away our capacity
9 to help the homeless. Some of these congregations
10 have had to close down that work they're doing
11 already. Others, from everything they understand
12 are going to have to close down soon, simply
13 because of the publicly expressed new standards in
14 your RFP.

15 Here you have I'm going to say
16 about 100 New Yorkers deeply involved in helping
17 the homeless. Do you think they all suddenly had
18 some kind of amnesia and misunderstood the rules?
19 And they're all here because they have nothing
20 else to do with their time today? There's a
21 reason all these people are here, they are fearful
22 that the work they're doing is going to be ended.
23 It's great if you say, we're going to add more of
24 the faith based beds, that's fantastic, but yet at
25 the same time taking away the work that a lot of

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

these folks are doing.

I don't understand why you wouldn't want to be doing both. I don't understand. I've seen your budgets for years now and you always leave plenty of room for the need to handle more and more homeless. And you've always said one way or another that this city understands it has to be there for the homeless so that OMB, even, will give you the resources when you need it.

But you have the capacity right here so unless you're going to tell me every single person in this room misunderstood what you put in your RFP. I think what I need to hear from you is you're going to go back to the drawing board now, not after it fails and fix the problem now.

COMMISSIONER HESS: Look, I told you where it's been. I told you we're going to be flexible. As we go back and look at what's already happened, we're talking about 20 churches that were not meeting the standards that currently exist in the existing contract. We opened four additional ones that were closer to existing drop in so that we can better meet the needs of the

1 clients. We didn't just do that, though. We then
2 began a process of reaching out tot churches, as
3 we did with Embry United, to try to find ways that
4 we can remain engaged with those churches and
5 we'll continue to do that. You're quite right;
6 we're not looking to turn people away that want to
7 help. But we want to do that in a way that makes
8 sense for the clients and for the individual
9 congregations and we'll continue to do that.

11 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Then you
12 should pull back from your current strategy, get
13 with all these people and figure out a plan that's
14 actually going to work on the ground. You're
15 using the Embry example over and over. It appears
16 to be your only example of something, a case where
17 you fixed the situation. You're exactly right,
18 you're not hearing the point people are raising.

19 If I were in your shoes, I would
20 admit that something has gone wrong here. Freeze
21 this plan in place, get with the folks in this
22 room and figure out how to make it work for folks
23 who are right now trying to help the homeless.
24 I've got two more quick questions for you and then
25 I really want us to close down this portion and

1
2 let some of these panels come up so you can hear
3 them and your staff can hear them. But I know
4 Gale has a quick follow up.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Just very
6 quickly, in terms of the specifics. The issue
7 with the hot meals I know is something that maybe
8 you can be flexible on and maybe you can't. But
9 that's something that the faith based have some
10 ideas about how to handle. That's an example of
11 maybe it went out correctly, maybe it didn't but
12 it's not making sense to people in the community.
13 Five nights, three nights, two nights. I know
14 when we spoke you said we could merge, we could
15 have a collaboration, et cetera. That's not clear
16 from the RFP. Again, you can't ask volunteers to
17 necessarily do it five nights a week but guess
18 what? You might have the best possible overnight
19 opportunity at three nights a week and everybody
20 does get services, contacts are made, people are
21 off to doing something on their own.

22 The whole timing issue, I'm not the
23 expert. People have different opinions and you
24 do. These are people who have been doing it for
25 30 years. Maybe they've been doing it wrong for

1
2 30 years. My opinion of this community is I think
3 the same as yours and the same as de Blasio's,
4 this is an awesome community. These are not
5 normal folks; they are like off the charts. So
6 the fact of the matter is what they say, I think I
7 would say this honestly, I listen to them more
8 than I would listen to myself or most New Yorkers.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Amen. I
11 agree with that. Now, Commissioner, let me take
12 you back one more step on Bellevue. The economic
13 crisis, there's no credit to be had, is the
14 administration willing to rethink the Bellevue
15 plan because it was all predicated upon selling
16 this valuable property and not there may be no one
17 to buy it?

18 COMMISSIONER HESS: I think that's
19 a question I think we'd to EDC. I don't know what
20 the plans are there. We've said right along that
21 remaining in a facility like Bellevue that has its
22 own physical plant challenges, is in need of
23 serious renovations, would be extraordinarily
24 expensive to stay is, is not something we've been
25 interested in doing.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: I respect that. I do think there is a live possibility here that that site will not be sellable anytime soon and that it is a better solution to try to fix that site than to create your--I don't mean to be derogatory but it still sounds to me like a little bit of a mythical new Manhattan site and to overburden an existing Brooklyn site that needs plenty of work itself. So I'm not sure the cost benefit analysis would not favor staying in place. But I asked you to help us get a formal answer to the question, does the administration absolutely continue to move forward with that sale given that it's an environment where it may not be salable or it only may be saleable at a very discounted and inappropriate price.

COMMISSIONER HESS: We'll get you an answer to that question.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you. Lastly, on drop in centers, I think we have a fundamental philosophical disagreement. You have one version of common sense and I have another. I bet a lot of folks here would agree with what I'm concerned about, that if I knew your outreach

1
2 teams could find and appropriately handle everyone
3 out there, I might feel differently. But I know
4 you have real limits. I believe that on any given
5 night, you're talking about something like 50
6 people in your outreach teams. I'm sure they do
7 very good work; I've seen some of the good work in
8 our district and I thank you for that.

9 But it's a big city; 50 can only
10 get so far. So this fundamental question of
11 whether it's better that someone be at a
12 congregation they know even if, God forbid, they
13 end up sleeping on a chair that night. At least
14 they're inside and they're protected and they're
15 with people who will help them, versus being out
16 in the street waiting for an outreach team maybe
17 to find them. This whole point about what should
18 be the hours these centers are open and what's the
19 role of drop in centers. Again, I feel like we're
20 going into a more difficult environment.

21 You're suggesting a sort of more
22 idealistic solution. I think I would look at it
23 the other way around. Folks know where these
24 existing drop in centers are, they work for them.
25 Why not keep that in place? If you can prove to

1
2 us that the outreach teams over time are getting
3 every single person out there, that's one thing
4 but it's just not physically possible in this
5 current environment.

6 COMMISSIONER HESS: I think our
7 outreach teams are doing spectacular work. The
8 results have been spectacular, the whole shifting
9 and reorganization. When we began to reorganize
10 street outreach there was a lot of doubters, a lot
11 of nay sayers, a lot of criticism around that.
12 The outcome has been spectacular. I'm
13 extraordinarily proud of the work that's done on
14 the streets across the city by outreach teams in
15 coordination with police and parks and others each
16 and every day.

17 It's going to be never more
18 important than this coming weekend, as
19 temperatures get to the point where people on the
20 street will be at eminent risk. So I'm proud of
21 the work they do. I don't pretend for a minute
22 that they're going to be able to find every
23 individual out there every second but they are
24 doing great work. I think this reorganization
25 will lead us to the same point. I think we can

all agree that we are not comfortable with individuals sleeping in folding chairs. We can do better than that.

I think we can all agree that we want to see every individual have an opportunity to sleep in a bed at night and be treated with all the dignity and respect they deserve. We can disagree on how to get there and that's a reasonable discussion. We ought to try to learn from each other on that discussion and do what's in the best interest of people that need our help at the end of the day and that's what we're committed to doing.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:

Commissioner, again, I respect you but this is a classic kind of answer from you. You give us this positive ra ra about something that doesn't respond to the question. Do you have more than 50 people out in your outreach teams on a given night?

COMMISSIONER HESS: I think it's closer to 60.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Fine, 60 people for a city of 8.1 million people. Let me

1
2 suggest to you that the best 60 people on earth
3 couldn't possibly find everyone who's out there on
4 the street and needs help, in the same way that
5 these folks who are in communities and know the
6 actual homeless individuals and have relationship
7 with them can. So again, why not keep what you
8 have, continue to perfect and add to your outreach
9 teams. They are great.

10 I'm a big supporter of them but
11 they don't do the same thing as the existing
12 efforts do. So why not keep both as opposed to
13 creating this opposition. We'll close these drop
14 in centers, people will somehow end up in a good
15 situation. If they don't, our drop in teams will
16 find them. It's just no physical way we can find
17 all these folks.

18 COMMISSIONER HESS: No, I think
19 what we said is when we go to a business model for
20 drop in centers, we will do whatever is necessary
21 to ensure that there are adequate beds for anyone
22 who would have been in those chairs. And we're
23 committed to that, we will do that. I can't let
24 the 60 pass, however, in a city of 8.5 million
25 people.

10

11
12
13
14
15
16
17

18

19
20
21
22
23
24
25

1
2 are getting assembled here, I want to ask everyone
3 who is going to be speaking today. I know people
4 feel passionately and forgive us that it's taken
5 this long to go through all the questions but
6 everyone please be brief and to the point. Please
7 be brief and to the point because there is so much
8 ground to cover. Sergeant. I'm sorry, could we
9 move it along? Thank you.

10 I want to say to the panel, please
11 be brief and to the point because so many people
12 want to speak today so try and get to--please
13 don't read testimony today. If there is ever a
14 day not to read testimony, this is that day. Just
15 summarize, let us know what you feel. You can
16 take turns rotating in and out. Sorry for the
17 lack of physical space here.

18 I'm going to say it one more time
19 to this panel but I'm saying it to every one else
20 who is going to come up in a panel or in public
21 testimony, try and keep it to a couple of minutes.
22 Try not to read testimony. Try to summarize, get
23 to your core point. If someone else has already
24 said your point, you can amen their point rather
25 than repeating all of it. What we're looking for

1
2 is what's unique and individual about each
3 person's experience. I appreciate the
4 Commissioner staying with us. That's what he
5 needs to hear, I know that. So who would like to
6 begin?

7 HANNAH CAMMINS: I'm here. I'm
8 going to do my best to summarize--

9 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:
10 [interposing] Push the button and introduce
11 yourself. Everyone introduce yourself before you
12 begin for the public record.

13 MS. CAMMINS: My name is Hannah
14 Cammins. I'm the social action coordinator of
15 congregation B'nai Jeshurun on the upper west
16 side. I'm going to do my best to summarize. I
17 have notes; it's a full testimony. I'd like to
18 thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm
19 here representing congregation B'nai Jeshurun,
20 Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew Homeless
21 Shelter. Together through a true inter-faith
22 effort we operate a women's shelter all year round
23 and everything that comes with that, five nights a
24 week, ten women a night.

25 We've served the City of New York

1
2 for over 22 years. And I'll address a few of our
3 primary concerns with these RFPs that are being
4 discussed today that I think put our continued
5 participation in jeopardy. Our concerns include
6 the potential exclusion of current shelter
7 providers with new requirements for nights open,
8 number of beds and weeks in operation, which will
9 result in less people served and shelters closing
10 at a time, as you said, when more will probably be
11 in need.

12 In addition, we have concerns about
13 the exclusive focus on street homeless people,
14 which we do not believe are the only people
15 currently being served by drop in centers and/or
16 respite beds. We have a concern about the need
17 for direct transportation of guests to our
18 shelters and we need to see that there is adequate
19 screening of guests before they come to our beds.
20 I think these concerns will echo with other
21 people's concerns.

22 Our shelter, I just want to give
23 you a sense of what it takes to run at least one
24 of these operations, that is five nights a week,,
25 ten women a night and all year round, so you get a

sense of what DHS is asking of every single congregation regardless of their resources. Our shelter takes a cadre of about 150 volunteers to keep running smoothly. We have two volunteers who set up the shelter nightly, two volunteers who sleep over nightly, five off site nightly coordinators who manage the monthly schedule for each night of the week. We have a supply coordinator, we have two program co-chairs and we have scores of food donors who provide meals each night, plus a person to manage that schedule. So this is a big operation, whether or not its done by professionals or volunteers. We have become professional at being volunteers.

I'm saying, again, that small congregations or congregations period, depending on their situations may not all have the resources that congregation B'nai Jeshurun and the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew have in partnership with each other. The flexibility that this shelter network has had up until now is what has allowed the faith based organizations here today to open their doors. Many congregations simply won't be able to meet these new guidelines and ultimately

1
2 the city will lose out. You'll have less beds,
3 not more with the way we interpret this RFP.

4 By the way, we've read it. We're
5 not acting out of ignorance. I don't think that
6 we're misunderstanding. We've read it very
7 carefully and we deem ourselves quite intelligent.
8 My understanding is that our shelter network, in
9 fact, serves a certain number of people at a cost
10 that's almost less than half of what it would cost
11 to serve the same number of people in the larger
12 shelter system. And we give added support that I
13 think contributes to people's ability to get back
14 on their feet.

15 Guests come to our shelter, they
16 form a community with one another. We encourage
17 an atmosphere of personal and collective
18 responsibility. Each guest feels a sense of
19 dignity that might be absent in a less intimate
20 setting and contributes to the self worth
21 necessary for them to turn the corner to a
22 brighter future.

23 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Okay. Hold
24 there one second. I'm going to ask you just to
25 wrap it up just because there are so many other

1
2 people waiting. So just do your best to wrap up.
3 Commissioner, I want to give you a key word
4 already - volunteers. Much cheaper than paid
5 staff are volunteers. Continue, please.

6 MS. CAMMINS: Okay. I believe some
7 other people will address more carefully the issue
8 of transportation and the need for the direct
9 transportation and the need for a full screening,
10 which includes TB tests and psycho and social
11 examination. So I'll just say this: the benefits
12 of volunteer participation on a citywide level in
13 addressing this acute social problem should not be
14 underestimated.

15 The volunteer participation in the
16 faith community maintains individual and community
17 awareness of homelessness, helps our constituents
18 better understand the public policy that you set
19 first hand and creates a bridge between our
20 neediest citizens and those of us who are more
21 fortunate. That shouldn't be underestimated and
22 I'll let somebody else here talk about the other
23 needs that we think are not addressed in the RFP.
24 Thank you very much.

25 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you.

Thank you very much. Who would like to go next?

JAY CRAYNIS: My name is Jay Craynis and I directly shelter at congregation Rodeph Sholom on West 83rd Street. On March 1st we will mark our 26th anniversary. We opened our doors on March 1, 1983. I believe we were among the first. We are opened five nights a week from the first Monday in October until June. Each night we have at least two volunteers who spend the night with our eight guests and that is a major concern, which I'll touch on in one moment.

We have a shelter facility which was specifically designed for our guests. We have a lounge with T.V. and comfortable furniture. We have a small kitchen and we have a sleeping area, which has eight cots spaced out nicely so that no one is sleeping on top of one another. Each has a night table and an overhead lamp.

One of the benefits of our shelter from the feedback that we've got from the men is that we do not hound them. We do not profess to be professionals. We don't guide them, we don't counsel them; we give them freedom. And in 26 years I have heard repeatedly how much they have

1 appreciated that.

2 Our men come to us and are guests
3 from the Open Door. And at the Open Door they
4 have a full range of professionals who are working
5 with them. The last thing they need when they
6 come to us is to be picked away at again. We
7 stock the kitchen each night with foods, mostly
8 light stuff, sandwich meats, bread, fruit, cheese,
9 soft drinks. In the morning we have cereals, hot
10 and cold, coffee, hot chocolate, tea. The men
11 serve themselves; we don't serve them.

12 There are very few restrictions and
13 they mostly go to the issues of safety. Our
14 guests, as I said, come from the Open Door where
15 they have access to multiple hot meals every day.
16 I absolutely know the Open Door intimately.
17 Before they come to us, they are screened and I
18 can't emphasize the importance of that.
19 Immediately after they're screened, they get on
20 the buses, which are now provided by the
21 Department of Homeless Services and they're
22 dropped off at our doorstep. I can't emphasize
23 the importance of that.

24 They come in, they spend the night
25

1
2 with at least two volunteers. By 10:00 or 11:00
3 the building is shut tight and the only people in
4 the building are eight guests and the volunteers,
5 oftentimes including whole families with smaller
6 children. As I understand the proposal, if the
7 proposal is implemented what we risk losing is the
8 screening. Not that the screening won't take
9 place but that one of the alternates is to give
10 the men - and in our case we only have men - give
11 them Metrocards. Once they hit the street, the
12 screening is negated.

13 I can tell you over the years that
14 I have sent men home, sent men out; men that I've
15 known because they've been with us for an extended
16 period of time because they didn't come off the
17 bus. They missed the bus for whatever reason. I
18 will give them money to take public
19 transportation, give them as much food as they
20 want but they can not spend the night at our
21 shelter.

22 One of the levels of comfort that I
23 give our volunteers is the screening process.
24 It's not scientific but it's enough to make us
25 comfortable that we're not going to get anybody

1
2 with an obvious drug problem, an obvious alcohol
3 problem, an obvious medical problem, which behind
4 closed doors may create a serious problem for--

5 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:

6 [interposing] Mr. Craynis I just want to say we
7 want to keep moving along to other folks. I just
8 want to give you a chance to summarize.

9 MR. CRAYNIS: I emphasize that.

10 The end result is if we wind up closing our doors
11 because we're not comfortable with the sanctity of
12 the screening process, the losers are going to be
13 our eight guests who have had the benefit of a
14 relatively warm, safe and welcoming facility for
15 26 years.

16 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you
17 very much. Who'd like to go next?

18 JOE MURPHY: My name is Joe Murphy.
19 I'm from St. Andrew Avellino All Roman Catholic
20 Church in Flushing, Queens. This year would have
21 been our 26th year of providing a homeless shelter
22 for ten men, a warm, safe homeless shelter for ten
23 men with hot meals, five nights a week for four
24 months a year, from the beginning of December to
25 the end of March.

I've been involved in this program for over 22 years, the last 8 years as a moderator. In Queens in 2008, 14 of the 15 shelters were closed, including St. Andrew Avellino. Obviously this was a big mistake by the city to ignore the benefits of the faith based program for our homeless. To discontinue this program so abruptly without any input from the religious groups who have supported this effort for so many years.

Our program is supported by volunteers from our church who believe in our religious responsibility to reach out to those less fortunate than ourselves. They believe it's important to offer these individuals compassionate alternative to the warehousing of human beings in potentially unsafe environments.

This leads to my first concern, the well being of these men. Many of the men who stayed in our shelter became regulars. Of the ten men we have, I would say six to seven of those men became regulars at St. Andrew Avellino. They felt comfortable where they were to the point where they would leave their personal belongings night

1
2 after night. Will they be able to do this in this
3 new environment? Where will they go?

4 Speaking to many of the men over
5 the years, they said they wouldn't go to the
6 armories. They didn't feel safe there,
7 themselves, for their possessions. My question is
8 where will these people go if not the armories, to
9 the streets, riding subways? Back to the past
10 like it was 30 years ago, that's what I think is
11 going to happen.

12 Earlier I had mentioned our program
13 is supported by volunteers from our church. That
14 is exactly what they are, volunteers. No one is
15 paid to be a volunteer in our program. We have
16 four major activities that I'm responsible for
17 making sure are covered every year. Every October
18 I speak before our four services on a Saturday and
19 Sunday. We look for volunteers for preparing hot
20 meals for every night for these ten men. We have
21 a welcoming committee to greet our guests from
22 7:30 to 10:00pm, an overnight team to provide
23 support 10:00pm to 6:00am and food shoppers.

24 On the day that I speak before the
25 congregation we hold registration. The meal

1
2 providers and the food shoppers are completely
3 booked, 100% that night or that day. The 7:30 to
4 10:00pm shift usually 80% to 85% of that is
5 scheduled on that day. The 10:00pm to 6:00am
6 shift is the most difficult to fill, usually only
7 about 40% of these nights are filled by the end of
8 registration. I spend the next several weeks
9 calling people to fill any open spots.

10 Every year we experience a loss of
11 volunteers to death, relocation and age. The
12 average age of our volunteer population is in the
13 early to mid 60s. I'm 68. I have found that
14 consistency is important in maintaining our
15 volunteer base. This interruption in our homeless
16 program gives me concerns to recruiting volunteers
17 when this program is reinstated in St. Andrew
18 Avellino. Many volunteers would have moved on to
19 other activities and some will have lost interest.
20 We might find it difficult to maintain the five
21 nights a week that we have been doing for the last
22 25 years. This leads to my next concern.

23 Since we are all volunteers and an
24 aging population, the safety of our people is of
25 utmost importance. By working with the

Partnership for the Homeless we have always felt secure knowing that the men we were welcoming as guests have been adequately screened. To reinforce what you said here, to ensure that they were not high on drugs or alcohol.

Furthermore, these men were transported directly to our shelter from the screening center. This gave us the confidence to know that our guests would behave properly in the comfort of our shelter. I do not believe that the program as outlined by the Department of Homeless Services will meet our security needs. Without this guarantee of safety for our volunteers, we would no longer participate in this program and we aren't currently.

I also wonder under the new proposal who will provide us with the other things necessary for our shelter, beds, cleaning linens, toiletries. These are items that the Partnership provided us. Finally, I would like to make it clear that we at St. Andrew Avellino wish to continue our participation in the homeless shelter program. However we can only do it so long as the new program provides the same level of comfort and

security as the existing program did. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you very much. Who'd like to go next.

JOHN BENFATTI: I will go next. My name is John Benfatti. I represent the Riverdale/Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture. About 15 years ago we formed a coalition called the Northwest Bronx Support Committee for the Homeless and we united many congregations, synagogues, churches and the Ethical Society in Riverdale. We attempted to address homelessness. There's not a lot of homelessness in our community but we still wanted to do something about homelessness.

We overcame NIMBY and started an emergency overnight shelter at the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, which is not in Riverdale. It's outside of Riverdale. I think many members of the audience know what NIMBY means, Not In My Backyard. We all want to help the homeless but do it somewhere else. So we overcame NIMBY in a community organization in Kingsbridge, at the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. And continued to keep the idea alive in

Riverdale and it wasn't until five years ago that we were able to open a second location at the Riverdale/Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture.

Here we border a community called Fieldsten, which is a very wealthy community. We told Fieldsten that we were going to do this in our space at the Ethical Society regardless of what they wanted because we knew that this program was not going to negatively impact their community as they accused us of. We've been operating there for five years ever since and I don't want to stop our operation.

We have volunteers from the community, from our society, from other churches. We provide a hot meal every Monday night and every night that we operate we provide a hot meal. We have volunteers from Manhattan College that provide the meals, we have sleep over volunteers. I don't want to lose this immense cadre of volunteers that I have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you very much. Is there one more? Did everyone--yes, I'm sorry. Thank you.

JUDY LAVANN FRAN: Hi, my name is

1
2 Judy Lavann Fran and I'm from the Park Slope
3 United Methodist Church in Brooklyn. About three
4 years ago we were very excited to partner with
5 Partnership for the Homeless and Hansen Place
6 Methodist Church to serve some of the homeless in
7 the Fort Greene and Downtown Brooklyn area. I
8 appreciate the Commissioner's criticism that we
9 don't want people having to travel undue from one
10 borough to another. But the gentlemen that we
11 served always came from fairly local. We also
12 understand that there were shelters that were not
13 open all year round, ours was open all year round.
14 Even in the summer, ironically, it's often harder
15 to find shelter space in the summer because
16 there's a feeling that the men can be okay on the
17 street. We disagreed and we stayed open all year
18 round.

19 We were only able to do one night a
20 week and Hansen Place did one also. But we felt
21 that that was still a big contribution. We
22 estimate that we've served about 1,500 hot home
23 cooked meals and that's asking a lot from me. I'm
24 not a good cook but they all like it. [Laughter]
25 My husband would give up one of his Tuesdays every

1 month to be someone who would be present and chat
2 with the men and develop relationships and sleep
3 over. So between the two of us, we were there two
4 weeks out of every month. We were a small
5 operation, we had only four people, two cooks and
6 two sleepers, on a shift. We had five teams,
7 which rotated.
8

9 I feel like we were very committed
10 to this. We were really shocked to be told that
11 we were basically just shut down and that we
12 weren't going back. We also got together and felt
13 like we could challenge other synagogues, churches
14 and community organizations in the community to
15 potentially join us to be able to provide more
16 nights that would enable us to be fully functional
17 and keep doing what we feel is important to do.

18 I look forward to hopefully
19 speaking with the Commissioner or someone to be
20 able to figure out what is it that we can do to be
21 able to continue this work that we've been very
22 pleased to be involved in.

23 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you
24 very much. I want to thank the whole panel.
25 Judy, your testimony hits home, literally, for me.

1
2 Commissioner, this church is two blocks from house
3 and my two children went to preschool program on
4 the grounds of this church. It's extraordinarily
5 active congregation. I think one of the most
6 socially conscious congregations anywhere in
7 Brooklyn. You're hearing here directly that it's
8 not only a matter of the good work that's being
9 done now but it could be expanded with some
10 support. I can speak for the people of my
11 community very, very clearly here and as can you,
12 that so many more people if they knew this need
13 was growing and that here was a place that they
14 could serve would be more than happy to volunteer
15 their time.

16 I think another point for you and
17 your team. If anything, thank God, the spirit of
18 volunteerism is growing in our country by no means
19 by coincidence. The events of November 4th and
20 what we're about to hear this coming Tuesday I
21 think is only going to add to people's impulse to
22 want to help their fellow citizens. I think this
23 is a real crucial point, that we could actually be
24 doing more not less with these efforts. Gale,
25 quickly. You answer then Gale quickly and then

1
2 Tish quickly. I'm sorry. I'd like to welcome
3 Council Member Jessica Lappin.

4 MS. FRAN: I just wanted to point
5 out that the Hansen Place is a beautiful old
6 church. It's probably one of the most struggling
7 churches out there. It's extremely small
8 congregation with very few volunteers and they
9 manage to pull this shelter off week after week
10 every Monday. I really hand it to them.

11 The other thing is that people walk
12 through the doors of synagogues and churches, not
13 looking to find something necessarily to believe
14 in but how to make their faith live, how to really
15 live in to their faith. This is another thing
16 that the churches and synagogues. It's one of the
17 reasons they're so committed. We hope that we can
18 continue that.

19 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Quickly for
21 Jay and also for the gentlemen from Queens, this
22 transportation issue. I thought you made a good
23 point that it's not just how you get there but
24 it's if you don't have the transportation, what
25 you do between where you're coming from and when

1
2 you are there. I just wanted Jay to perhaps
3 elaborate on that so that we're really clear as to
4 the role of the transportation as it currently
5 exists.

6 Second, when the shelters or the
7 faith based closed in Queens does anybody know
8 what happened to all those folks? So I guess
9 first the transportation and second what happened
10 to the people in Queens.

11 MR. CRAYNIS: Based upon experience
12 I believe that every man that comes into our
13 building has a history of substance abuse. I've
14 seen and heard first hand when we've invited the
15 men to meals where we serve ceremonial wine. I've
16 seen the reaction when they violently stepped away
17 from the table. The benefit of the system as it
18 now exists is that the men who come to us do not
19 have an opportunity to be on the street between
20 the Open Door and our facility, which means that
21 they don't have an opportunity to be exposed to
22 drugs and alcohol or some other substance.

23 That means that when they come to
24 us, they are relatively clean. I'm sure everybody
25 is in the process of recovering but nobody is

1
2 high. Nobody is drunk. And it is extremely
3 important in a close quarter that this doesn't
4 happen because the potential for a serious
5 incident in a closed building is just something
6 that I don't want to contemplate.

7 MR. MURPHY: In terms of the men
8 that we shelter, they were transported to our
9 location from Manhattan from the center. I don't
10 know exactly where those men would be now. I
11 would think perhaps at the center if there are no
12 beds. I also represent several of the other
13 parishes. We have a small committee crown
14 [phonetic] and two of our other churches had five
15 night shelters. A church in Lutheran had two
16 nights of shelters. So right there we had over 30
17 some odd men we took care of every night. We
18 don't know where they are.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.
20 Thank you Mr. Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you.
22 Council Member James.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I'm just to
24 United Methodist. I grew up with United Methodist
25 under the leadership of then Reverend Finley

1 Shaff. I was born there, attended there and in
2 fact my brother still worships at your church. I
3 know all of the work that you have done and the
4 history of that wonderful church. Unfortunately
5 Hansen Place homeless center is closed. They're
6 under new leadership and they would like to reopen
7 but unfortunately at this time they just don't
8 have the resources in this RFP. As all of you
9 have raised similar concerns, are concerned about
10 the cost of transportation and the obligation that
11 will be imposed upon them and the fact that there
12 is no screening involved. There is an
13 overwhelming need in Fort Greene in Downtown
14 Brooklyn despite this notion that it's upwardly
15 mobile.

17 I guess, Commissioner, I did not
18 ask you but in the letter that I referred to
19 December 12th. Our own state commissioner has
20 indicated that he, too, has stressed his concern
21 about the continued reduction of shelter beds in
22 New York City. So not only does the faith based
23 community and this panel but the Commissioner of
24 Oteda shares similar concern.

25 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you

1
2 very much. I want to thank this entire panel,
3 both for your good work and for helping us to
4 understand this issue so clearly. Now we have one
5 more panel. We have several more panels but one
6 more panel of folks who are specifically doing
7 this work every single day and I think have
8 tremendous expertise to share. Terri Grace of
9 East Side Congregations, Jim Melkiori of B'nai
10 Jeshurun, also Ann Melman of B'nai Jeshurun, Ann
11 Tycher, Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter and
12 Wilona Churchhill of the Embury United Methodist.
13 Come on up. If we could get that microphone down
14 to face level; it's a little too high there, that
15 would be great. That one is working. I don't
16 know if the other one is working but that one is
17 working at least. Who would like to begin?

18 Everyone is doing a pretty good job
19 with their summarizing. As we get deeper into the
20 hearing, more summarizing is even better so please
21 think about the things that haven't been said and
22 add those personal and those specific reflections
23 to what has not been said. Please everyone
24 introduce yourself as you begin.

25 TERRI GRACE: My name is Terri

1 Grace. I live at 530 East 76th Street on the
2 Upper East Side. I am a member of St. James
3 Episcopal Church. We share a shelter with Madison
4 Avenue Presbyterian Church right next door. I am
5 on the mission committee of St. James Church as
6 the housing advocacy coordinator and I'm also the
7 housing advocacy coordinator for the Social
8 Concerns Commission of the Episcopal Dioceses of
9 New York.
10

11 I also had the privilege of
12 serving, I am on a steering committee of the East
13 Side Congregations for Housing Justice and have
14 had the privilege in the last several months of
15 serving on the emergency shelter network task
16 force, which has gathered over 7,000 signatures
17 from members of congregations and community people
18 to support the faith based shelters and the
19 neighborhood drop in centers. Drop in centers in
20 our neighborhoods not one per borough because we
21 have experience on that.

22 People in trouble come to our doors
23 every day, that's what happens at churches and
24 synagogues. People come, they talk to our
25 receptionist. We talk to them, see what their

1
2 needs are and then we hopefully refer them to
3 services. We can call 3-1-1 but you never know
4 when the outreach workers might arrive. We have
5 referred people to drop in centers. When we had
6 our local drop in center, Neighborhood Coalitions
7 of Shelter on 77th Street, it was very convenient
8 for all the upper East Side churches because we
9 could actually walk people over there.

10 Now the drop in center is 40 blocks
11 away and we can only hope that people make their
12 way down there. What happened this last summer--
13 first of all I'll say that you know that we have a
14 25 year history on the Upper East Side. The east
15 side churches got together and formed the
16 Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter 25 years ago.
17 We were doing meal programs, women's shelter with
18 Atlantics Neighborhood House and that has evolved
19 into the armory shelter at 68th Street. We also
20 developed our own para-shelters.

21 In 1989 we founded the Neighborhood
22 Center for Homeless People to be our drop in
23 center. That worked great but this last June the
24 drop in center was closed on very short notice.
25 All of our congregations were sort of left

1
2 scrambling as to what we're going to do. Our
3 shelter, we actually had two shelters at the same
4 time at Madison Avenue Presbyterian. We had 12
5 bed shelter, overnight shelter, the kind that
6 we're talking about. There was one that was a
7 more advanced shelter that was also 12 beds and
8 they were both closed down.

9 We closed the overnight shelter for
10 about four weeks and had to go and interview the
11 people at Grand Central and Main Chance to see if
12 they could work with us, if they would do
13 screening that would be safe enough for our
14 volunteers if we could work out the transportation
15 arrangements. It was really quite horrendous.
16 Plus during that time we lost volunteers and we
17 had to institute emergency procedures to teach our
18 volunteers because we no longer had a local drop
19 in center that we could call in the last minute.
20 We had one 40 blocks away. So if something
21 happened it was more tentative, more difficult for
22 the volunteers. I'm trying to summarize.

23 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: You're
24 doing good.

25 MS. GRACE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: We appreciate it.

MS. GRACE: I don't want to duplicate what other people had said. When the Neighborhood Center for Homeless People was closed down and you'll hear from Ann Tycher later. The congregations but in particular St. James and Madison Avenue Presbyterian did meet with Department of Homeless Services. We met Commissioner Nashak several times and we tried to talk about what our needs were and what the needs of our homeless people were and tried to understand why the drop in center was closed. We heard for the first time what the new plans were for this program that is supposed to start on June 30, 2009.

Mind you, we started talking to them in April. Then we talked with a larger group of local congregations. We all got together, we talked to the Partnership for the Homeless. We had some congregations on the West Side who were beginning to hear about what the problem was. But we have been in this dialogue for quite a while. Yes, we feel that DHS has listened but we feel

1 ignored.

2
3 Our drop in center was closed. We
4 could not reopen it. We had to hustle to get to
5 know a different one. We think that it was the
6 beginning of closing of all drop in centers. Now
7 the RFP says we're committed to faith based
8 shelters and we're committed to drop in centers
9 but we knew that the focus was going to be on the
10 chronic homeless people. Yes, all of us agree
11 that chronic homeless people have to come in from
12 the cold, have to start new lives and that they
13 have a different need and so the safe havens serve
14 that need.

15 But we see hundreds and hundreds of
16 homeless people who are not that chronic, not
17 homeless enough some might say. That need
18 services so that they will not be on the street
19 for nine months and become safe haven candidates.
20 So we really think that the city can do better.
21 We were offered a chance to be a 24/7 safe haven
22 actually, if professional staff could be put into
23 our facility. But that makes us nothing but
24 landlords, right? So that means we have a
25 contract directly with the city and we become

nothing but landlords. That's no longer on the table.

Also, we don't think that we can receive people directly from outreach workers because the screening. If an outreach worker is talking to someone standing in eight degree weather, what kind of screening is going to happen there? How much intake can you do standing in eight degree weather? So we need the one hour that's recommended for the drop in centers to spend screening people is not long enough. You have to intake the person, you have to take their history. You have to do a mental and physical screening. You have to give them a TB test and then they're supposed to have a shower and they're supposed to have a snack. How are they going to do all that in an hour? I just don't see how it's going to work?

I hope that this discussion will mean that we can go back to the drawing boards. I know that the bids are due in two days. No, they're due next week. I hope that there can be some flexibility after the bids are in but of course if I were bidding on a contract I want to

1
2 say I can do this and this and this and this and
3 this. So where's the flexibility? What will the
4 contract look like and how would we be involved in
5 the contract? That's kind of interesting.

6 I think in a city where we have
7 multi million dollar penthouses. We're talking
8 about a billion dollar stadium up in the Bronx and
9 we have millions of dollars that they are asking
10 to go into that stadium more. And we have billion
11 dollar financial scandals. There has got to be a
12 way that we can serve these poorest of the poor.
13 We're not Calcutta but homelessness is the same
14 everywhere in the world and we have to serve these
15 people. We can do better in our society.

16 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: I'm going
17 to ask you, is that a good point to end on. I
18 appreciate everything you're saying but we just
19 want to make everyone is heard.

20 MS. GRACE: I think that these
21 people--we've all said. They deserve dignity and
22 a home. They're children of God like the rest of
23 us.

24 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you.

25 WILONA STEWART: Good afternoon.

1
2 My name is Wilona Stewart. I'm the coordinator of
3 the Southeast Queens Cluster Homeless Program
4 which is housed at Embry United Methodist Church
5 in Queens. I just felt compelled to speak. I
6 feel like Commissioner Hess and I are good friends
7 because I remember he kept saying Embry United
8 Methodist Church. So I said I had to introduce
9 myself. [Laughter]

10 Our program has been operating for
11 24 years. On October 3rd we were called by
12 Partnership for the Homeless saying that we were
13 closed. When I questioned why we were closed,
14 it's because they stated we didn't have five days
15 bed. We are a five day bed, five days a week.
16 They said we don't have 10 beds. I said we have
17 15 beds. I said we've operated for 24 years and
18 our shelter is very unique because we work with
19 six Methodist churches at Embry. So all the
20 churches come to Embry and feed so that means
21 every day of the week we have various churches,
22 St. Johns, St. Pauls, Springfield Retirement
23 Congress, First Church of Jamaica and Brooks
24 Methodist Church.

25 Each church which I am operating

1
2 with six churches we have six coordinators that
3 come and work, take one night a week. With their
4 congregants and they take care of the 12 weeks
5 because we're only from January to March. So we
6 have a very unique type of program and we've been
7 doing it for 24 years. The only uniqueness is
8 that St. Johns of Elmont because there an Elmont
9 DHS. But the buses would not go three blocks over
10 the city line so the St. Johns of Elmont got a
11 mini bus for this program that goes and picks up
12 the men at Embry, brings them to their church,
13 feeds them and takes them back to Embry.

14 They have more congregants so if
15 you go on a Monday night at Embry you might see 40
16 people there, with the Girl Scouts and their
17 parents. It's more of a family orientated on
18 Monday night. Every other church goes to Embry.
19 But like we said, if it ain't broke don't fix it.
20 So this is something that we've been doing and
21 we're talking hundreds of volunteers. Because we
22 have six churches it's a very heavy responsibility
23 and I've been the coordinator for 13 years. I've
24 had my daughter work with me, my grand daughter
25 work with me so it's a family orientated thing.

We do it from our heart because this is what our faith tells us to do. I can say I've just met Hansen Methodist Church, which my pastor is their pastor also. That's my pastor, you know Reverend Stone. He's an awesome man of faith and my heart goes out that their program is closed also because of the smallness. We're just inquiring if DHS can think out the box. If we can do all these churches to one facility maybe that's an opportunity to open up more churches that only had one day bed and just coordinate them together.

I have to say sitting here that I'm excited that we're opening up January 19th. Hallelujah. That is because of the angel that you have with DHS, Ms. Ruden. I met her at a meeting on December 18th. She extended her card and the worst thing she ever gave me was a phone number. I have been haunting her but we have, by God's grace, was able to put together a program that Common Grounds and our program could work. When I tell you a week and a half of trying to get everything on point, we're at the last point of getting everything together.

I just want to clarify, we are not

1
2 accepting people straight off the street. Common
3 Grounds knows they have to the screening and they
4 have to do it because they met with us at our
5 church, with our six coordinators from the
6 churches. We told them what we have to have. We
7 must have appropriate screening and transportation
8 and both parties, all seven of us agreed. One day
9 there are two churches such as Springfield and St.
10 Paul's we join on every other Tuesday because St.
11 Paul's is a smaller congregation. That's why I
12 say six or seven churches together because I know
13 there's only five days in a week for us. But
14 that's what we do, we work with each other.

15 But I have to say I thank God for
16 Ms. Ruden for just hearing, opening her ears and
17 her imagination and putting Common Grounds and us
18 together. So, yes, I am the sacrificial lamb. I
19 am going to see how this works out but I'm very
20 grateful. Thank you for your time.

21 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you.
22 I have to tell you, I love your testimony. I love
23 it because--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Hallelujah.

25 MS. STEWART: Hallelujah.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Hallelujah, thank you Tish. Because it emphasizes the value of listening and being flexible and changing plans when they're not working, which I appreciate. That's what we should all strive to do in life. But I also think the fact that three generations of your family have been involved. First of all I commend you and I commend your family. But I think that crystallizes what a humanly important element there is to this work, that it bonds people together to help others so thank you.

MS. STEWART: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you. Who would like to go next?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I have a question. Can I ask you one question before she leaves?

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: First of all I think--I don't know when we met, it wasn't solidified. My question is Common Ground is located where and from where do the individuals comes to southeast Queens.

MS. STEWART: I believe they're in

Williamsburg Brooklyn. Ms. Amy I can't say her name correctly, Popasell.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Whatever.

MS. STEWART: What she's doing is there's going to be 15 men. They are trying to find hubs where the gentlemen can go where they can pick them up. I think DHS is going to provide the transportation, pick them up and bring them to our church, to Embry. Now because of the differences of where they might be coming from, because our window was 6:30 to receive the men in. But we've made the flexibility to open it up to 7:30, so from 6:00 to 7:30 we will allow the men to come in because people have to go to work the next day--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[interposing] How is this different from what it was before, just simplify.

MS. STEWART: For us, it's...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: About the same

MS. STEWART: It's about the same as long as the transportation and the screening is done.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:

Commissioner, I appreciate that you did stay for a part of this. We do appreciate that. I'm sure you're going to be hearing a lot more. I hope some of your staff will be staying and I hope you'll be having further discussions with folks in this room. We appreciate that. Who'd like to testify next?

ANN MELMAN: Is this working?

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: The other one and just lower it down a little bit. There you go.

MS. MELMAN: Okay. Hi, I'm Ann Melman. I'm from the B'nai Jeshurun and St. Paul and St. Andrew Homeless Shelter. You just heard a member of our staff, Hannah Cammins, testify. And Jim Melkiori and I are the co-chairs. We've been running this homeless shelter since the beginning of the program 22 years ago. We have many, many commitments to those in need in our community. We run all sorts of other programs so I don't want this to come across as if it's about us. It's not

1
2 really about us.

3 It's about the guests that we
4 serve. I want to just emphasize a few points
5 because so many good things have been said and I
6 don't want to repeat them. First of all I want to
7 just emphasize that the proposals that DHS has put
8 forth really make a distinction between the
9 chronically street homeless and the kinds of
10 guests that we get in our shelter. Now I have
11 absolutely no problem with improving the services
12 to the chronically street homeless. I'm certainly
13 supportive of the kinds of change that the
14 Commissioner and his team have proposed on their
15 behalf.

16 The basic question is what will
17 this do, how will this change the services to
18 those people who are now being served through the
19 shelter network? What I see is that there is a
20 set of strange trade offs being suggested here. I
21 think that that's a very unfortunate change. I
22 think it will actually increase or potentially
23 increase the homeless population, the street
24 homeless population. Because as we're hearing
25 already from the women who come to our shelter,

1
2 they are worried, they are desperately worried,
3 what will happen if this shelter program
4 disintegrates.

5 Some of you asked what happened to
6 the people who used to go to the shelters that
7 have already been closed and we don't really know.
8 So if you think ahead just a little bit, what
9 could possibly happen to them? As far as I can
10 see, there were three options. One option is they
11 will somehow find family or friends who can put
12 them up in whatever way they can, if they're lucky
13 and they have that option. Another option, which
14 many of them absolutely reject, is to go into the
15 city shelter system. They don't want that.

16 And the third option is that
17 they'll go on the street. Once they go on the
18 street and they're out there long enough then they
19 will qualify for this new program that DHS has.
20 But to me that seems like a terribly backward way
21 of planning for these people who are now getting
22 really good services from shelters like ours. So
23 the only good option for them if the shelter
24 network disbands is if they have family and
25 friends who can put them up. There's no guarantee

1
2 that they have that. The other two options are
3 worse. We are actually potentially disadvantaging
4 all these homeless people who are now getting good
5 services.

6 As the previous speaker said, if it
7 ain't broke don't fix it. We have a good system
8 now. If we want to provide a better system for
9 the chronically street homeless; wonderful. If we
10 want to improve on what we are now giving to these
11 transitional homeless people, I think we should do
12 that. But we need to think very carefully about
13 what will happen next. I just outlined very
14 briefly what might happen to our guests.

15 I will also say what will happen to
16 our volunteers? I have co-chaired this particular
17 shelter for about 12 years. It took quite a long
18 time to bring it up to speed, to get all the
19 volunteers in place. And we are in a constant
20 struggle to get new volunteers because of the
21 natural attrition that occurs. It's going to be
22 very difficult, even to keep the volunteers we
23 currently have, if the program doesn't address the
24 issues that previous speakers have spoken about,
25 specifically the issue of screening and the issue

1
2 of transportation. I think those two are key to
3 making it comfortable and safe, not only for our
4 guests but for our volunteers. I think those are
5 just two basic criteria that we have to include.

6 Then I want to just say briefly
7 about what will happen next as far as costs. So I
8 think you've heard enough testimony today to
9 realize that this huge cadre of volunteers who
10 gladly and willingly provide their energy and
11 their commitment and their labor to this effort.
12 This is a very hard resource to replace and it
13 certainly won't be replaced at the same cost; it
14 will be a greater cost. What I see is the danger
15 and we should really struggle very hard to make
16 sure this doesn't happen. To provide fewer or
17 worse services to these transitional homeless
18 people whom we now serve at a greater cost to the
19 city.

20 If we realize we've made a mistake,
21 then to have to rebuild the volunteer pool that we
22 now have will be very, very difficult. So I think
23 we should work with what we have. If we want to
24 add components, all well and good but we should
25 not endanger the program we currently have.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you very much.

JIM MELKIORI: As Ann said, I'm Jim Melkiori, the co-chair of the congregation B'nai Jeshurun St. Paul and St. Andrew shelter on the Upper West Side. So many great things have been said so far that I'm just going to take few minutes and give us a snapshot of an evening at our shelter.

Our guests over the past year or two have included a woman who had spent her college years as a philosophy major at American University in Washington, a woman who came to New York to write a book and found that the cost of housing was overwhelming, a woman who spent time in our shelter each evening preparing resumes and arranging her clothing for job interviews the next day. Some of our guests have jobs. Several of them have found permanent housing after a period of time with us and have returned to visit with us so that we can rejoice with them.

Our rabbis and pastors consider our shelter guests to be part of our congregations, our community. They join us for holiday parties

1
2 at the home of the clergy. They helped us on
3 Election Day when we had a hospitality effort that
4 provided coffee and snacks to 4,000 voters,
5 including Council Representative Brewer. Some of
6 our guests join us for our weekly exercise classes
7 in Pilates and yoga.

8 I don't think anyone would
9 characterize our guests as chronic street
10 homeless. And in fact our volunteers who range in
11 age from 7 to at least 81 and who include a
12 family--93, okay, and include a family where we
13 have three generations who have been sleep over
14 volunteers, grandmother, son and teenage daughter.
15 This is a cadre of volunteers that could not
16 safely and effectively provide services to chronic
17 homeless just off the street without screening,
18 without case workers assisting them in their
19 return to traditional life and without door to
20 door transportation.

21 Our synagogue and church bed
22 network is not the only solution to the scourge of
23 homelessness. But we are clearly part of the
24 solution, already up and running, with volunteer
25 staffing for folks in a specific situation. Our

1
2 guests are our neighbors, our friends and indeed
3 our brothers and sisters. And in a time of
4 recession, as the city rightly tries to expand its
5 reach to include all who are without homes, I urge
6 you not to abandon or overlook our guests who are
7 already receiving some measure of comfort.

8 Thanks.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
10 very much. Who's next?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Let me just
12 thank them for referring to the individuals as
13 guests, that recognizes their humanity. Thank
14 you.

15 ANN TYCHER: Good afternoon. My
16 name is Ann Tycher, I'm the CEO of the
17 Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter. We have been
18 providing housing and services to homeless people
19 for 27 years. We were created at Terri Grace
20 said, by a coalition of churches and synagogues on
21 the Upper East Side that took on the issue of
22 homelessness in the late 70s and early 80s. And
23 have been responding to it every since with a
24 really very rich network of food programs, lunch,
25 dinner, breakfast, shelters and other services.

1
2 Since our drop in center was the
3 one that was closed in June, I'm going to talk
4 about the impact of the closing of a drop in
5 center and what happens in a community. But I
6 also wanted to just raise something that hadn't
7 been addressed. The number of drop in centers
8 that will be closed by June 30th of this year
9 under the new RFP, with our drop in center, as of
10 last June there were seven drop in centers in
11 Manhattan.

12 On July 1 of next year there will
13 be three drop in centers in Manhattan and there
14 will be one drop in center in every other borough.
15 The capacity of the drop in centers will be 75 to
16 90 according to the RFP so there will be a
17 capacity of only 300 drop in center spots in
18 Manhattan, which is substantially less and 75 to
19 90 in the other boroughs. So you're looking at a
20 way reduced number of people that will be feeding
21 into the faith based system. I just wanted to
22 make note of that.

23 I will just cut to the chase and
24 tell you some of the impacts on the community and
25 on the people that we serve. When we were told we

1
2 were closing we had about 70 active clients and we
3 had several months to house them. With the help
4 of Jodie and her staff we were successful in
5 housing quite a few that were still with us.
6 Although we had a lot of clients that were just
7 very difficult to house and we'd had them for a
8 period of years and they were difficult to house.

9 Many went to the other drop in
10 centers to Grand Central Partnership. Then there
11 were about 30 that went to the street and all
12 summer and a lot of the fall they lived behind the
13 boat house in Central Park. They continued to
14 come back to our vocational program, to our
15 substance abuse treatment program but they were
16 still living in the street and they refused to go
17 to shelters or other drop in centers. Some that
18 did go to other drop in centers then joined them
19 in the park. So there was really a whole
20 community of people who had lived at our drop in
21 center who wound up in the park. I hope at this
22 point most of them are in shelters, housed or in
23 safe havens.

24 As a result of the closing within
25 weeks a number of people who were seeking services

1
2 at a homeless outreach program at Yagnis
3 [phonetic] Church which is three blocks away went
4 from 15 people a day to 60 people a day. This is
5 a little church program that really just did basic
6 kind of triage and could not handle this number of
7 people. They had 77 new individuals within three
8 days. Within eight weeks the Lennox Hill outreach
9 team which services our neighborhood and had
10 successfully housed 20 chronically homeless people
11 in its first year, found an increase of 14 new
12 chronically homeless people on the streets.

13 During a one week survey that we
14 did in September of the neighborhood lunch and
15 dinner programs that sponsored by the religious
16 community, we found that 57% of 700 people
17 attending were homeless. Of those 67% had
18 previously relied on NCS for services, and of
19 those 63% had been homeless for more than six
20 months and of those 50% for more than a year. So
21 there was a substantial impact on the number of
22 homeless people in the community who were being
23 served but only with food, those kind of basic
24 services but not much else.

25 We then held several focus groups

1
2 with the religious community to see how we can
3 work together to begin to fill the gaps and
4 identify what the needs were and we're still doing
5 that. But what we found was that the number of
6 homeless people that the food programs themselves
7 were seeing just astronomical increases in the
8 numbers of people they were serving, double and
9 sometimes triple. Only one church in the
10 community could provide showers and that was only
11 one day a week. They were then having trouble
12 meeting the demand for people then who wanted
13 showers because they just weren't set up for doing
14 more than a few showers a week.

15 The religious community expressed a
16 desire for help in coordinating the services that
17 do exist in the community and we're looking at
18 ways to help them with that. Our entire community
19 has been affected by the closing of this
20 neighborhood based center. Neighbors have noted
21 and it's been in some of the local papers, the
22 increase of the numbers of people that are now
23 seen sleeping on the streets, doorways and in the
24 parks. Without a neighborhood center that's
25 easily accessible, homeless people do not get the

1
2 help they need. Other centers start to scale
3 down, which they will soon have to do to be ready
4 to close by June, the situation will only worsen.

5 The outreach teams do a fabulous
6 job. Really I can't say enough good things about
7 them either but it just doesn't meet the entire
8 need. So to reduce these services at a time of
9 growing homelessness, growing unemployment, I
10 think is poor public policy and the city should
11 retract this RFP and reconsider their plan to
12 reinvent drop in centers and faith based services.
13 Thank you. [Applause]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Any
15 questions? Ann Tycher is quite a hero. Thank you
16 ma'am. Our next panel is Sylvia Friedman, Joshua
17 Goldfien, Patrick Marquis, Steven Corsen and Sandy
18 Taggart. So I guess try to take seats and then we
19 will begin.

20 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: While
21 everyone is taking seats, thank you Council Member
22 Brewer for filling in. Let me also note we have
23 testimony that will be a part of the formal
24 record, written testimony from Partnership for the
25 Homeless, from Barbara Deinhardt of the Brooklyn

1
2 Heights Synagogue, from Christie Park of Homeless
3 Services United and from Reverend Michael Harry of
4 our Lady of Refuge in Brooklyn. So all those
5 written testimonies will go into the record and we
6 welcome the next panel. Who would like to go
7 first?

8 SYLVIA FRIEDMAN: My name is Sylvia
9 Friedman and I'm clerk, which is Quaker for chair
10 of the Shelter Committee at the 15th Street
11 Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. I
12 listened with envy to the coordinators who told us
13 about how they had all these shifts of volunteers
14 each evening. We are open seven nights a week,
15 365 days a year. We have two volunteers each
16 night and they do all of the jobs, they do the
17 shopping, they set it up, they prepare the food,
18 they welcome our guests, they treat them with
19 respect and dignity and in the mornings, they put
20 everything away.

21 My testimony is very brief and it
22 would be easier for me if I just read it. We have
23 sheltered 12 homeless men and women for the last
24 25 years. I've been chair of the committee for
25 the last 22. We do it because we believe that

1
2 it's our responsibility to serve people who are
3 less fortunate than we are. We were told by the
4 Deputy Commissioner of Adult Services at DHS that
5 it's not about the volunteers but about the
6 homeless people we serve and he's right.

7 12 homeless people who have refused
8 city services come to us. I was told two weeks
9 ago by one of our guests that only because he
10 knows he'll be on the bus to our shelter each
11 night is that he's off the streets and alive
12 today. Our guests have gotten together and given
13 us five stars. We rank with any five star hotel
14 in the city, even though our guests sleep on cots,
15 in one room, in a school gymnasium and each
16 sandwiches and salad and fruit. We have no oven;
17 we can't cook.

18 We're there not about ourselves,
19 although it does give us pleasure to leave our
20 homes and sleep in a school gym with 12 others,
21 but about our guests. We treat our guests as
22 people, not numbers, with friendship, warmth and
23 caring because we believe it is incumbent on us to
24 do that but we do it gladly. Our guests know that
25 we're doing it for them.

We have heard how the new plans may make it impossible for us to continue to serve. Yes, we will be hurt but the hurt to our 12 homeless men and women will be uncalculatable [phonetic]. Do not confuse efficiency with effectiveness. We are effective, just ask the people we serve. Thank you. [Applause]

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Sylvia, a classic example of short and sweet. [Laughter] I appreciate it and you hit the nail on the head. I just want to highlight this point, especially for our friends from Homeless Citizens who are still here. The folks who refuse city services but will come to you, I think that's one of the crucial points of the whole hearing today. Thank you.

MS. FRIEDMAN: Thank you Councilman.

STEVEN CORSEN: My name is Steven Corsen and I'm here to read a statement on behalf of Manhattan Borough President, Scott Stringer. I'll try to truncate and summarize where possible and we'll leave a full copy of our statement on the table by the door.

Times are tough as we know. Last

1
2 week IBO projected a loss of 243,000 jobs and they
3 projected that tax revenues are going to fall by
4 \$2.8 billion in fiscal year 2009. Two days ago
5 the New York Times ran a story telling the public
6 that the State Labor Department is going to stop
7 payments to 50,000 unemployed New Yorkers this
8 week so times are tough. Everyone knows that, I
9 think, though.

10 It's become a common refrain among
11 people that discuss our city's economic downturn
12 that New York must be vigilant in maintain crucial
13 city services that ensure the safety of our
14 citizens and the general quality of life. Police,
15 fire and sanitation services are frequently
16 connected to these types of statements, however
17 homelessness services are often left out. While
18 it's true that efficiencies can and should be
19 found within the Department of Homeless Services
20 to reflect economic realities, it's crucial that
21 we strike a balance to maintain essential homeless
22 services that directly impact the safety and
23 quality of life of all New Yorkers.

24 New York City's municipal shelter
25 system has recently experienced its highest

recorded levels of patronage since records were first kept in 1982. The emergence of newly homeless populations will be a serious possibility in the near term. With all the aforementioned factors in mind, I'd like to briefly outline some of the concerns that the borough president has with the restructuring of services to the street homeless population in New York City.

First, the December 12, 2008 Request for Proposals to operate drop in centers outlines a shift in policy that would decrease drop in center hours from what has been a 24/7 system to one that operates from 7:30am to 8:30pm, eliminating drop in hours. On the eve of the city's annual Homeless Outreach Population Estimate, known as HOPE, it's impossible not to acknowledge the counter intuitive nature of a policy change that limits night time access to drop in centers.

Previous HOPE methodologies have eluded that street homelessness is best enumerated during evening hours. Thus the estimate takes place in the late evening. Therefore it's very difficult to understand why on the one hand the

Department of Homeless Services accepts night time hours as the best time to measure street homelessness while on the other hand it proposes to cut over 4,000 drop in center hours annually, all during this critical time of day.

The Department of Homeless Services should urgently explore all reasonable avenues to keep drop in centers open during evening hours before formally adopting a policy change that may compromise the safety of our citizens and put a strain on the general quality of life in New York City.

Second, it's been suggested by some faith based service providers of respite beds that the changes outlined in December 12, 2008 RFP to operate the respite bed program will be prohibitively difficult to implement solely with a volunteer staff. In addition, similar volunteer staffing concerns have been raised by some who believe the replacement of general health, mental health and substance abuse screening with a more general, rapid assessment process prior to placement at respite bed sites may discourage volunteerism.

At a time when resources are tight, the borough president is concerned that individuals or organizations that wish to serve their community for altruistic reasons may not have the limited opportunities to contribute as a result of the policy changes proposed in the two aforementioned RFPs. This represents potential loss of services to our homeless population and a decrease in the city's capacity to provide shelter for those in need.

Our third point relates to Bellevue. I'll truncate that just by saying New York City's largest street homeless populations are in midtown Manhattan and men comprise roughly 80% of this group. New York City's on the brink of what may be likely a record breaking strain on the capacity of our homeless services. In an effort to implement the ten year plan to end homelessness is crucial to work towards contentious measures that reduce street homeless, not those that are likely to increase it.

The borough president and myself share the desire articulated by the Department of Homeless Services and the drop in center and

1
2 respite bed RFPs to enhance services and better
3 serve clients. However, decisions made now will
4 have long term impacts on the safety and general
5 quality of life of all New Yorkers, especially if
6 we witness a surge in newly homeless populations.
7 Let's use this opportunity to find solutions where
8 DHS service providers, advocates and elected
9 officials can work together to truly enhance
10 services offered to homeless individuals without
11 over burdening cash strapped volunteer
12 organizations or disrupting neighborhoods.

13 Thank you for the opportunity to
14 testify on this important matter.

15 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you
16 and thank the borough president please for being
17 involved in this and particularly for the comments
18 on Bellevue, which are very appropriate I think.
19 We give special respect to elected officials and
20 their representatives reading testimony as it was
21 written. I'd like to say to the other panel
22 members, please summarize. But thank you for your
23 testimony. Who would like to go next?

24 SANDY TAGGART: I'm Sandy Taggart.
25 I'm a co-founder of CHRM, Crown Heights

1
2 Revitalization Movement. I'm here to sort of
3 differently from most everyone else. I've really
4 appreciated hearing all of this and we will
5 support you. I'm here to speak about the
6 communities that are going to be effected by the
7 intake center being placed at the Bedford Atlantic

8 The Bedford Atlantic Armory
9 Assessment Center Shelter will now have in
10 addition to that, an intake center. There are
11 three points that were a little confusing because
12 my information seemed to be different from
13 everyone else's. I have been informed that there
14 will be, of the 230 beds at the shelter, 30 that
15 will be designated for a detox unit. So there
16 will not only an assessment center and intake
17 center, there will also be a detox unit.

18 The other thing DHS referred to is
19 decreasing the beds in my community, which is the
20 most over saturated 6.3 times the median for
21 Brooklyn in social service beds. We're not being
22 NIMBY, we're really being destroyed. According to
23 DHS statement a while back, they said that they
24 were maintaining a 200 person or 200 bed census
25 since May. So the 350 beds that are now being

1 reduced to 230 beds were not being used anyway.

2 I don't know if Peter Young has
3 closed yet or is going to close. It's a shelter
4 for 150 people. I do know that Peter Young people
5 have proposed, since they no longer are
6 maintaining a shelter to replace it with a 28 or
7 30 day drug rehab program, residential drug rehab
8 program. So they will have people living there
9 for 30 days doing drug rehab. This is part of
10 what our community faces and we do not have the
11 services, we do not have the resources to support
12 what we already have, which is more than any other
13 community in Brooklyn. The thing is this will
14 break the back of the community.

15 But how can they consider sending
16 what ultimately is approximately 14,000 men into
17 the community over the period of a year? Into a
18 community which doesn't have enough resources at
19 this point to take care of itself? So this is, I
20 guess, in a sense a slap in the face to the
21 homeless because they're saying, okay, this
22 community is so messed up, you can come here for
23 intake. Because they do that the community is of
24 course degraded more. So that's essentially what
25

I had to say. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you very much, Sandy. Who would like to go next?

PATRICK MARQUIS: Good afternoon. My name is Patrick Marquis. I'm senior policy analyst to Coalition for the Homeless and I will not read my testimony. I will briefly summarize.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you deeply Patrick.

MR. MARQUIS: Because so much has been said today there's not that much to add to it. I do want to take this opportunity, though, to just take a step back and consider the proposals that have been outlined by the administration in their totality in what they represent in terms of this city's approach to street homelessness.

The city's proposal right now, simply put, represents the most dramatic shift in the city's approach to street homelessness since modern homelessness began more than 25 years ago. It will reduce the amount of shelter and services for street homeless New Yorkers at a time with rising homelessness during the economic recession.

1
2 It will make emergency shelter much less
3 accessible and harder to get and it will lead to
4 more street homelessness and in all likelihood
5 more death and injury in the streets for
6 vulnerable New Yorkers.

7 Let's consider why we have the
8 current arrangement that we have now. It
9 recognizes two fundamental facts. The first is
10 that the majority of street homelessness is
11 concentrated in Manhattan, largely in the Midtown
12 area. That is why since the problem emerged more
13 than 25 years ago, we have had the central intake
14 center for the municipal shelter system, the
15 intake center for homeless men in Manhattan, first
16 on the Bowery in the early 80s, then since 1984 at
17 the Bellevue Shelter. It's centrally located.
18 It's near the hospital and other vital services.
19 Most important, it's near to where the street
20 homeless can reach it on a cold night.

21 The other reality, the other
22 fundamental reality is that some street homeless
23 individuals do not use the city's municipal
24 shelter system or do not use it frequently. That
25 is because the city's municipal shelter system is

largely comprised of large warehouse style facilities that often do not meet the needs of many street homeless people, the majority of whom are individuals living with mental illness and other disabilities.

In recognition of that, the city created some different ways of approaching that problem. First of all outreach teams to go out and find the street homeless on the streets. Drop in centers which serve those street homeless individuals who will not go into the city shelter system or will not go in all the time. And finally the faith community heroically stood up and provided emergency shelter and services in houses of worship at a time when there was a need for those vital services.

The city's proposal right, now simply put, undoes all of that arrangement and flies in the face of those fundamental realities. To sue the healthcare model, what we used to have was emergency medical teams, ambulances in the form of outreach teams, emergency rooms in the forms of the intake and drop in centers and hospital beds meaning shelter. The city wants to

1
2 eliminate the emergency room or move the emergency
3 room from Manhattan now to Brooklyn. It wants to
4 close down some of the other emergency rooms, the
5 drop in centers and close them down at night. And
6 it wants to create fewer hospital beds for the
7 folks that are going to need it. How is that
8 supposed to work?

9 The numbers simply don't add up.
10 At the intake center in Manhattan now more than 90
11 men a night walk in to that center seeking
12 emergency shelter and services. Last night, a
13 bitterly cold night, 247 homeless men walked into
14 the Bellevue intake center. So this issue of the
15 number of beds at the Bedford Atlantic Armory, at
16 the Bellevue Shelter is immaterial to the fact
17 that so many men seek help and shelter at that
18 facility. It must remain in Manhattan. It can
19 not be moved out to Brooklyn without a replacement
20 facility in Manhattan.

21 Let me talk about what we need to
22 do instead. This is going to sound like a radical
23 idea. We should decentralize men's intake. We
24 should maintain an intake center for homeless men
25 in Manhattan but have intake centers in the other

1
2 boroughs starting with the Bronx and Brooklyn. We
3 should expand and enhance drop in centers to make
4 sure they can provide more help and not less. And
5 we should expand the Housing First permanent
6 support of housing model for the street homeless.
7 This is such a radical idea that it was actually
8 included in Mayor Bloomberg's 2004 Homeless Plan.
9 And yet the administration has done a complete 180
10 on this and is prepared to abandon some of the
11 central features of those recommendations.

12 That's why we're enormously
13 concerned with these proposals going forward as
14 they are proposed now. Right now in New York City
15 if you're a homeless man on the streets after the
16 hours of 8:30 at night you can get help at the
17 Bellevue intake center, you can get help at one of
18 the drop in centers. There are nine of them
19 located around the city. There are places where
20 you can get help. If the city's plan moves
21 forward, the only place you'll be able to walk in
22 and get help if you're a homeless man on the
23 streets after 8:30 at night will be the Bedford
24 Atlantic Armory and it will be hard for a lot of
25 folks to get there. We do not want to move in

1
2 that direction. It will lead to more street
3 homelessness. And it will lead to more harm to
4 street homeless New Yorkers. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you
6 very much. I like the emergency room, ambulance,
7 et cetera comparison. It's very, very helpful,
8 very vivid.

9 JOSH GOLDFIEN: I'm sure Patrick
10 won't mind if you use it.

11 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: I agree
12 with you.

13 MR. GOLDFIEN: My name is Josh
14 Goldfien. I'm a staff attorney in the Homeless
15 Rights Project in the Legal Aid Society. We are
16 counsel to Coalition for the Homeless and the
17 Callahan and Eldridge litigation in which we
18 represent homeless single adults, men and women.
19 We're also counsel in the Boston and McCain
20 litigation in which we represented homeless
21 families with children. I think the committee
22 heard testimony from Steve Banks about the
23 historic settlement we reached establishing a
24 right to shelter for homeless families to match
25 the one that was established in Callahan.

I'm just going to read one paragraph from our testimony to highlight on the last point Patrick made. We are looking at this from the perspective of what's going to happen to our clients when these services are reduced and when access becomes more limited. Among other things, the research of Dr. James J. O'Connell underscores the point that safety net shelter can be a matter of life or death for our clients. Dr. O'Connell is one of the country's leading experts on risk factors for death among street homeless adults. His research highlights the danger of exposure to the elements at almost any time of the year because homeless persons can be harmed by both heat related and cold related injuries.

Cold related injuries can be especially dangerous. Contrary to popular belief, are not solely attributable to absolute temperatures. As Dr. O'Connell's clinical experience demonstrates, most cold related injuries and deaths occur when day time temperatures range from 40 to 50 degrees. In part because I think people are not anticipating how cold it's going to be.

Given the combination of factors that can result in the injury or death of a street homeless person exposed to the elements, there is simply no time of the year that it is safe for a homeless person to be out on the streets.

Emergency shelter can not provide homeless persons with protection from the elements if it is not easily accessible.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Very impressive. Did you have a question? Tish has a question. Go ahead Tish.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Mr. Marquis and counsel, you were here when I asked the questions with regards to the mentally ill. The Commissioner indicated that only about 30% of the homeless population consists of individuals who suffer from a mental illness. Do you agree with that?

MR. MARQUIS: It's not a question of whether I agree or not, the research shows otherwise. I'm not sure what the Deputy Commissioner, which population he was referring to when he said 30%. Lots of research studies show that around two-thirds of street homeless

1
2 individuals are individuals with serious and
3 persistent mental illnesses like schizophrenia or
4 bipolar disorder. Around two-thirds of those
5 folks have co-occurring addiction disorders, often
6 folks with serious and persistent illnesses self
7 medicate with alcohol or drugs because they're not
8 getting treatment for their mental illnesses.

9 So it's clear that there are high
10 rates of mental illness and other health problems
11 among the street homeless population. I think the
12 rate of one-third might be more true for the
13 population of homeless single adults in shelters
14 on a given night. That rate sounds closer to true
15 for that population. But certainly for the street
16 homeless we're looking at folks who have more
17 serious health problems.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you
19 believe their needs will be met in the shift to
20 Bedford Atlantic?

21 MR. MARQUIS: No and I think most
22 fundamentally they will not be met because they
23 will have a very hard time getting to that place.
24 It just will not meet their needs. I think it's
25 also important to recognize, too, what happens at

1
2 the Bellevue Shelter. Lots of times folks who
3 seek shelter at the Bellevue Shelter or some of
4 the residents of that shelter have emergent either
5 mental health or physical health problems, crises.
6 What can they do now? They can go right next door
7 to Bellevue Hospital and get the emergency help
8 that they need. They won't be able to do that at
9 the Bedford Atlantic Armory.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Is Bedford
11 Atlantic still a dangerous place?

12 MR. MARQUIS: That's what we are
13 told my homeless individuals who go to that place.
14 We've received, I would say more complaints about
15 that facility in the more than 10 years that I've
16 been at Coalition for the Homeless than about any
17 other facility in the single adult system. My
18 colleague is nodding. We still receive complaints
19 about unsafe conditions. It's a reality as well
20 that lots of street homeless individuals know that
21 reputation, know its notorious reputation and tell
22 us if I have to go to Bedford Atlantic Armory, I'm
23 not going to do it because I'll be afraid for my
24 safety. I'll just stay on the streets.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Last point

1
2 is that as you know in this letter from the State
3 Commissioner dated December 12th he indicated the
4 city, DHS has a limited shelter capacity for
5 single men. They have stressed their concern
6 about the continued reduction of men's shelter
7 beds in New York City, which is consistent with
8 our argument. So counselor, I guess have we
9 shared our concerns with the state commissioner in
10 our effort to stop this transition?

11 MR. MARQUIS: Yes, we've certainly
12 shared our concerns about the potential move of
13 the central intake center to Brooklyn to the
14 Bedford Atlantic Armory. If you look at the
15 census reports and that's what my colleague was
16 just handing me, the nightly census reports from
17 the single adult shelter system. I don't see any
18 way currently where you can close down the
19 Bellevue Shelter which as 850 beds, close down the
20 Peter Young Shelter which has 150 beds and reduce
21 capacity at the Bedford Atlantic Armory by an
22 additional 120 beds and actually provide emergency
23 shelter to the existing population of folks that
24 are there, to say nothing of any potential
25 increase in that population that we will see

1
2 because of economic downturn.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Before
5 Council Member Brewer, I just want to put an
6 exclamation point. I've known you a long time.
7 When you say a shelter is the one you've had the
8 most complaints about in your whole time at the
9 Coalition for the Homeless, boy, that's a red flag
10 for me. That's saying a lot. Council Member
11 Brewer.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Just back
13 to the women at Olivieri and some of the older
14 folks at Peter's place. Is it your understanding
15 that if this RFP goes forward those two places
16 would be closed? To me, I can't quite see
17 Olivieri being closed, that's just my past
18 history.

19 MR. MARQUIS: I think it's a strong
20 possibility it will be closed. I would really
21 highlight what Ann Tycher said. At the beginning
22 of this past year, a year ago, let's say, there
23 were seven drop in centers for the street homeless
24 in Manhattan. If this proposal goes through there
25 will be only three. And again remember that is

the borough with the majority of street homelessness.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We're going to fight that tooth and nail. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you. Thank you very much to this panel. We appreciate it very much. We're now going to public testimony. I'll just call out, we have a few names here. We have Reverend Sales and Denise Smith and earlier we had the name Mark Roshkund, am I getting that right? I don't know if you're still here. Again, Reverend Sales, Denise Smith, Mark Roshkund. Those are the only names we have for public testimony. Wait, we have another name? No, okay. So those are the names we have. Typically we do a two minute limit but since we're at the end of the day, if you keep us in that ball park we won't do it formally; we won't run the clock. We'll just keep it informal. Hold on one second. Please, if you're leaving the room please do so quickly and quietly because we still have a little more testimony here. We welcome your testimony.

REVEREND JONATHAN SALES: I'm Reverend Jonathan Sales. I'm the pastor of the Greater Antioch Temple, a new pastor in Brooklyn, only a year. And I'm also the overseer of the Agape Fellowship, which is a transitional supportive program that we've started. I'm going to pass the mic, I just wanted to introduce myself.

COUNCIL MEMBER: Location?

REVEREND SALES: 339 Nostrand Avenue, Quintine Gates in Brooklyn.

COUNCIL MEMBER: That's one block out of my district.

REVEREND SALES: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: That's your loss, I assure you.

REVEREND SALES: I'm quite sure it is

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: You'll still be seeing plenty of her. On behalf of both of us Brooklynites we welcome you to Brooklyn.

REVEREND SALES: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: And we thank you for the work you're doing and we welcome

1
2 your testimony.

3 DENISE SMITH: About 20--

4 CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO:
5 [interposing] Please, just formally introduce
6 yourself for the record.

7 MS. SMITH: My name is Sister
8 Denise Smith from the Greater Antioch Temple. I'm
9 the co-founder of the Agape Fellowship, which is a
10 transitional service. About 25 years ago a young
11 lady went to a homeless shelter. She went there
12 and she had been abused, she had been beat up and
13 she had been on drugs and raped. She found her
14 way into a shelter. When she got there with the
15 few things that she had, they had beat her up and
16 took her things. She found herself wandering the
17 streets. She was at the very end of her rope and
18 was contemplating suicide. She managed to find
19 herself at a faith based program. When she got to
20 that faith based program they gave her a shower.
21 They gave her something to eat. They got her to a
22 hospital where she found out that she was
23 pregnant.

24 After that, she was able to go.
25 They sent her to another shelter where she was

1
2 able to get some services. She delivered an 8 lb.
3 baby, a healthy baby. 24 years later she got with
4 Pastor Sales and opened up the Agape Fellowship.
5 I'm talking about myself. Somehow after we opened
6 up our program we stumbled into the path of Frank
7 Chapman from the Partnership of Homeless. And we
8 were so grateful because we began doing the very
9 thing that saved her life, which is giving beds to
10 people who are homeless, overnight beds to people
11 who had no place to go, people who did not want to
12 stay in a drop in center, who could not sit up all
13 night.

14 The service that we provide is
15 invaluable. We have two men overnight shelters
16 and we have two female overnights; we house them
17 seven days a week. I have the opportunity to go
18 to all of them and talk to every one of them
19 because I want to know who it is that we're
20 dealing with. I believe that if we lose this that
21 it would be a tremendous loss, it would be a
22 tremendous loss to Brooklyn because there is some
23 really good stuff that comes out of it, some
24 really good people that come out of those places.
25 I know that to be a fact because it's a testimony

of my life. Thank you.

REVEREND SALES: I would just like to say.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Yes, please.

REVEREND SALES: The Commissioner has stated that there was four different programs that he opened up. I believe - - two, the Fellowship.

MS. SMITH: Yes, the Fellowship.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: First of all thank you both for the work you're doing. I want to say your story is extraordinary and I admire you for the path you've traveled. I especially admire that you are taking what you have experienced and turning it into an impulse to help others. That's exactly how we all should live our lives so thank you for that. I'll turn to Council Member James.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Obviously, the faith based community, particularly in the borough of Brooklyn and Central Brooklyn provides for a number of needs. They've filled a gap, filled a void of government and unfortunately

1
2 federal government, which has turned its back. As
3 of Tuesday we're all going to be celebrating in
4 the streets. It's going to be a national holiday,
5 I know in central Brooklyn. So I look forward to
6 working with you.

7 I just want to ask you the question
8 with regards to if in fact this proposal goes
9 forward, is your issue the transportation, the
10 lack of resources? Is it because the failure to
11 screen or what would jeopardize your program?

12 MS. SMITH: I think every aspect of
13 that RFP would jeopardize our program. We're a
14 small congregation. The people, the volunteers
15 who work in the overnight centers actually are
16 homeless people who live in our houses. So we all
17 just pitch in to work together to help somebody
18 else. We don't have the capacity to do screening
19 or transportation or anything. We give of
20 ourselves willingly and we give what we can give
21 with the knowledge that we have.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So primarily
23 you rely upon charitable...

24 MS. SMITH: Yes.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: ...gifts and

2 DHS brings the individuals to your door?

3 MS. SMITH: Yes.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And they do
5 not provide you any resources?

6 MS. SMITH: They give us the sheets
7 and the blankets.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Right but
9 just the basic necessities.

10 MS. SMITH: Just the basic
11 necessities, yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you get
13 reimbursed for the food, any food?

14 MS. SMITH: We get reimbursed for
15 some food but I think it's \$1.25 a person; it's
16 not much.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Interesting.

18 MS. SMITH: We serve them hot meals
19 in the morning and the evening.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I know how
21 you cook up in central Brooklyn, I know.

22 MS. SMITH: We do. I'm the cook.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I'm going to
24 come by and worship with you.

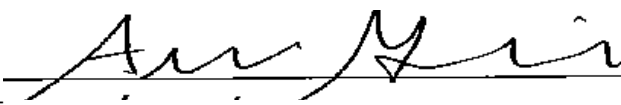
25 MS. SMITH: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DE BLASIO: Thank you.

I want to thank everyone who has been a part of today's hearing. I want to say we're going to keep working with everyone in the faith based community and with everyone trying to help the homeless. And this hearing of the General Welfare Committee is now adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

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

Signature _____  _____

Date _____ January 26, 2009 _____