

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

JOINT COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE and
PUBLIC HOUSING

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February 9, 2010

Start: 10:00 am

Recess: xx:xx am

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:

ANNABEL PALMA

Chairperson, General Welfare

ROSIE MENDEZ

Chairperson, Public Housing

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Maria del Carmen Arroyo

Gale A. Brewer

Margaret Chin

Helen D. Foster

Daniel J. Halloran III

Robert Jackson

Letitia James

Brad S. Lander

Steven T. Levin

Melissa Mark-Viverito

Ydanis A. Rodriguez

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Deborah A. Rose

James G. Van Bramer

Thomas White, Jr.

Jumaane Williams

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

Rosie Mendez
Opening Statement
Chairperson
Committee on Public Housing

Annabel Palma
Opening Statement
Chairperson
Committee on General Welfare

Annabel Palma thank you's:
Rosie Mendez
Chairperson
Committee on Public Housing

Molly Murphy
Counsel
General Welfare Committee

Migna Taveras
Policy Analyst
General Welfare Committee

Baaba Halm
Counsel
Public Housing Committee

Benjamin Goodman
Policy Analyst
Public Housing Committee

Anthony Britto
Financial Analyst

Crystal Coston
Financial Analyst

Brendan Chaney
Public Policy Division

Advocates

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

Speaking:

Steve Corsin
Representing
Scott M. Stringer
Manhattan Borough President

Jarrold Chowso
Representative
Tom Dwayne
New York State Senator

Mendez Thanks to
Scott M. Stringer

Steven Banks
Legal Aid

Aysha Farrakhan
Legal Aid

Afai Atametzza
Legal Aid

Piper Hoffman
Director of Advocacy
Partnership for the Homeless

Acknowledgement:
Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate
New York City

Acknowledgement:
PS 135
Queens Village

Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate
New York City

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

Fiera Stukoman
Speaking about her daughter
New York Association of Holocaust Survivors
Interaction Speaking Community

Lorna Thomas
Abuse victim
New York City Resident

Thomas Bonilla
Terminally ill, End state renal failure
New York City Resident

Catherine Trepani
Director
Housing Link Program
New Destiny Housing Corporation

Latoya Hill
Mother of twin 2-year olds
Intimidated Witness
New York City Resident

Nicky Martinez
Domestic Violence Social Worker
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

Michael Pollenberg
Vice President
Government Affairs
Safe Horizon

Alvin Johnson
Chairman of Housing
Community Board 11

Jennifer Levy
Deputy Director
South Brooklyn Legal Services

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

Patricia Aguilagos
Domestic violence victim
New York City Resident

Beryl Isaacs
Landlord harassment over Section 8
New York City Resident

Mercedes Cruz
Section 8 discrimination
New York City Resident

Claudia Wald
Interpreter for Mercedes Cruz

Shamtili Hakum
Director of Litigation
Manhattan Legal Services
Pavel Darevenchenko
Disabled senior citizen
New York City Resident

Tanya Vayeva
Interpreter for Pavel Darevenchenko

Patricia Queen
Disabled Section 8 Recipient
New York City Resident

Linda Ostreicher
Center for Independence of the Disabled of New York

Arafa Speaks
Homeless Advocate
New York City Resident

Camilla Shadeen
Supervising Attorney
Housing Project
New York Legal Assistance Group

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

Winnie Lao (Irene)
Mental Health issues
New York City Resident

Runa Rajakopal
Senior Staff Attorney
Mental Health Law Project
MFY Legal Services

Joyce Hill
Client
Mental Health Law Project
New York City Resident

Mishawn Baines
Advocate
Chairman
Task Force on Housing Committee
National Action Network

Lindie Ann Springer
Disability issues
New York City Resident

Yolanda Allison
Voices of Women

Rokuman Hakshaw
Communications Director
Council Member Darlene Mealy

Signed up to testify but did not appear:
Kumali Suryea
Michael Reese
Rosa Munoz

COMMITTEES ON GENERAL WELFARE
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CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Good morning.

[Gavel banging]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: This hearing is about to commence. Today's--I am Councilwoman Rosie Mendez. And I chair the Committee on Public Housing. I have the honor of saying that now because this was a Subcommittee and thanks to my Speaker and to the leadership of Chair Dilan of Housing and Buildings, Public Housing is now a full Committee.

Today's hearing is a Joint Hearing with the Committee on General Welfare, chaired by my colleague Councilwoman Annabel Palma to my left. And today we will discuss and explore the recent announcement by the New York City Housing Authority, NYCHA, that they will no longer accept new Section 8 applicants and will terminate some existing vouchers. We will be hearing today from members of the public about the impact of this decision. Ordinarily the City agencies come and give their testimony and then we hear from the public. The Administration has contacted us, someone that they feel is important to their panel could not be here at today's hearing so we will be

1
2 adjourning today's hearing after the public
3 testimony and joining on another day where the
4 City will come and give their testimony.

5 I think this is actually a very
6 unique but good opportunity to hear from the
7 public first. And on that adjourned date have the
8 Administration not just answer why we are in this
9 predicament but also take a look at some of the
10 real cases and individuals that hopefully we will
11 hear from today and have them address how those
12 particular issues would be addressed in the coming
13 months.

14 I now want to turn it over to my
15 colleague, Councilwoman Annabel Palma. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you Madam
17 Chair. Good morning. I'm Council Member Annabel
18 Palma. And I have the privilege of now being the
19 Chair of the New York City Committee on General
20 Welfare. I would like to thank Council Member
21 Rosie Mendez, Chair of the Committee on Public
22 Housing for joining me to examine this extremely
23 important and troubling issue.

24 I also want to thank all the staff
25 who worked to bring this hearing together today,

2 including Mattie Murphy and Migna Taveras of the
3 General Welfare Committee, Baba Hom and Benjamin
4 Goodman from the Public Housing Committee; Anthony
5 Britto and Crystal Coston, the two Finance
6 Analysts who helped prepare the hearing; and
7 Brendan Chaney from the Public Police Division.
8 And thanks to all the advocates and everyone who's
9 affected by this issue for being here today and
10 prepared to testify.

11 We're here today because in
12 December 2009, like Council Member Rosie Mendez
13 mentioned, NYCHA revoked the Section 8 vouchers
14 for several thousand vulnerable New Yorkers,
15 leaving them without immediate access to
16 affordable housing. Among others these people
17 include formerly homeless families who have
18 barriers to employment; youth ageing out of foster
19 care who need housing; families with children in
20 foster care who need housing in order to reunify;
21 victims of domestic violence; and intimidated
22 witnesses. NYCHA's action leaves these folks and
23 many others with deep concerns about what will
24 happen to them and specifically how the City plans
25 to allocate affordable housing when we are in

desperate need of it already.

The loss of Section 8 vouchers not only creates a crisis in the short term but also poses a long term problem for the City. Both the Department of Homeless Services and the Administration for Children Services regularly utilized Section 8 vouchers as a tool. Home-based, the HS Homeless Prevention Program, assists people at risk of homelessness with applying for Section 8. The HS also uses Section 8 vouchers in its Advantage New York Program, their rental subsidy program to help the homeless find permanent affordable housing. The very structure of this program is threatened by NYCHA's announcement that Section 8 vouchers applications will not be processed for the remainder of the year.

In addition the Administration for Children Services uses Section 8 vouchers to help the youth who are in their system get affordable and safe housing and to reunify families who have children in foster care but cannot be together because they lack housing.

Unfortunately the City is facing

2 record highs of homelessness due to the economic
3 crisis we have faced. We are also in the midst of
4 a recession. These conditions alone pose a great
5 challenge to the City's ability to provide safe
6 and affordable housing for those in need. We
7 understand that the City has made efforts to seek
8 assistance from the State but many questions still
9 remain about who in fact will receive help and for
10 how long.

11 Thank you for your attention and
12 your concern. And we look forward to hearing from
13 the testimony, your testimony. Before we call the
14 first panel, I want to recognize members of the
15 General Welfare Committee who are here with us
16 today, Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer from
17 Manhattan--I'm sorry, from Queens, I'm looking at
18 Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez from Manhattan;
19 Gale Brewer from Manhattan; and Brad Lander, my
20 friend, from Brooklyn. You want to call the first
21 panel?

22 [Pause]

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: First panel--
24 sorry my first panel fell.

25 [Pause]

COMMITTEES ON GENERAL WELFARE
AND PUBLIC HOUSING

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Our first
panel's going to be Steven Corsin from Manhattan
Borough President Scott Stringer's Office and
Jarrod Chowso from New York State Senator Tom
Dwayne's Office.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We've also been
joined by Council Member Debbie Rose from Staten
Island.

MR. STEVEN CORSIN: Good morning.
My name is Steven Corsin [phonetic] and I'm here
to read a brief statement on behalf of Manhattan
Borough President Scott M. Stringer.

Thank you Chairperson Mendez and
Chairperson Palma for the opportunity to testify
on the New York City Housing Authority's Section 8
crisis and the future of the Section 8 program in
New York City. As everyone in this chamber knows
the New York City Housing Authority exceeded the
maximum number of Section 8 vouchers that are
funded by the Federal government and announced in
mid-December that a considerable number of
vouchers that had already been committed to high-
need tenants and families would be terminated.

2 The most recently published figures
3 place the number of terminated NYCHA Section 8
4 vouchers at 2,330. Shortly after NYCHA's stunning
5 announcement our office recommended a series of
6 short and long-term policy proposals meant to
7 return value to bankrupt Section 8 vouchers that
8 were in the hands of potential tenants.

9 Together with a broad coalition of
10 advocates and elected officials we've called for
11 additional funding from the New York State Office
12 of Temporary and Disability Assistance,
13 interagency collaboration to transfer or
14 financially support Section 8 vouchers that have
15 been distributed by the Housing Authority, and
16 full disclosure of NYCHA vacancies and priority
17 placement of victims of NYCHA's Section 8 voucher
18 mismanagement in vacant public housing units.

19 Meeting with advocates and elected
20 officials have been convened, press conferences on
21 the steps of City Hall have been held, and letters
22 outlining our policy proposals have been sent to
23 the relevant Deputy Mayors and the Chairman of the
24 Housing Authority. Yet the coalition that has
25 been formed and more importantly the tenants and

2 families holding terminated vouchers have received
3 no response from the Housing Authority or the
4 City.

5 The collective inaction on this
6 issue is extremely disappointing. Therefore I am
7 renewing the Borough President's call today on the
8 Bloomberg Administration to stop sweeping this
9 issue under the rug and immediately begin a dialog
10 with practitioners, advocates and local elected
11 officials so that we can put fully funded Section
12 8 vouchers back into the hands of tenants that
13 were led to believe that they had genuine vouchers
14 in the first place.

15 Finally I'm re-voicing the Borough
16 President's call for a full investigation into
17 this situation by Acting NYCHA Inspector General
18 Kelvin Jeremiah. On January 11th our office
19 formally requested a review and investigation into
20 the termination of NYCHA's Section 8 vouchers
21 which was acknowledged in a letter from Mr.
22 Jeremiah on January 20th. However since that time
23 the Acting Inspector General has given no
24 indication as to whether an investigation will be
25 forthcoming and his office has declined the

2 Borough President's request to discuss a potential
3 investigation.

4 An opaque response from the Acting
5 Inspector General demeans the hardship that
6 thousands of families and individual Section 8
7 voucher holders have endured since mid-December
8 and is utterly unacceptable. The only way to
9 prevent a repeat scandal like this one is through
10 a top to bottom investigation where key policy
11 makers within the Housing Authority are held
12 accountable for the decisions that suddenly left
13 some 2,600 tenants and families with worthless
14 vouchers.

15 The City should be honest with
16 itself and its constituents. This was not a run
17 of the mill bureaucratic blunder. Many people
18 were rendered homeless at the height of the cold
19 season with a hastily called press conference as
20 their only notice and they should not be treated
21 as such by the New York City Department of
22 Investigation or the Acting Inspector General.

23 Thank you for the opportunity to
24 testify at this hearing.

25 MR. JARROD CHOWSO: Good morning.

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My name is Jarrod Chowso [phonetic] I'm here on behalf of State Senator Tom Dwayne who unfortunately cannot be here as he's in Albany. I want to thank Chairperson Mendez and Chairperson Palma and in the interest of time in hearing from the public I won't read over what Council Member Palma has already said.

As a New York State Senator representing a district in one of the most cost-prohibitive housing markets in the nation, I'm particularly concerned about the sudden and previously undisclosed decision of the New Housing Choice Voucher Program benefits, Section 8, administered by the New York City Housing Authority and the rescission of the signed vouchers. I applaud the Public Housing and General Welfare Committees of the New York City Council for holding this hearing and seeking viable housing options for those affected by this catastrophe.

Like me, many New Yorkers were shocked in mid-December when NYCHA announced that it had stopped issuing Section 8 vouchers and that the 3,018 vouchers that had already been issued to

families but not yet used were effectively terminated. According to a December 18th, 2009 report by New York One, NYCHA officials waited more than 6 months to cancel the vouchers with the hope that funds would be restored and more apartments would become available. While I sincerely appreciate NYCHA's ongoing efforts to provide safe and decent and affordable housing with dwindling public funding, it is hard to give credence to the claim that the Authority sought to maintain its Section 8 program without mobilizing its immense public and political base.

Had NYCHA promptly disclosed the program's impending suspension, it would have enabled voucher holders and prospective voucher holders, community based organizations and local elected officials to organize a massive campaign in support of our Congressional delegation's efforts to restore funding and to preemptively craft solutions to support those who would be affected. Tragically that did not happen.

Going forward we must work together to ensure stable housing for those families whose vouchers have been rendered worthless. I have

1
2 been working with Manhattan Borough President
3 Scott Stringer and other elected officials and
4 housing advocates across the five Boroughs to
5 ensure that NYCHA works with all levels and
6 branches of government to provide alternative
7 rental assistance for these extremely vulnerable
8 New Yorkers.

9
10 Earlier this year I joined Borough
11 President Stringer and 29 other elected officials
12 in sending NYCHA and the Bloomberg Administration
13 a letter outlining a 6-point plan of short and
14 long-term solutions to this crisis. Among other
15 recommendations we urged NYCHA to give priority
16 for any and all vacant inhabitable apartments
17 available to those whose vouchers were terminated.
18 We know that the City must also work with local
19 members of the New York State Legislature and the
20 New York State Office of Temporary and Disability
21 Assistance to secure funding for an extension of
22 Work Advantage, a program that provides rental
23 assistance to the working poor, many of whom are
24 Section 8 voucher holders or on the waiting list.

25 And we urged the New York City
Department of Housing Preservation and Development

to give priority for its available vouchers to those families who were affected by this debacle.

Regrettably more than seven weeks have passed since NYCHA officials announced the cancellation of these vouchers and we still have no clear sense of what NYCHA is going to do to rectify this situation. When I met with NYCHA officials last week I underscored the urgent need for the Authority to resolve this crisis and was assured that NYCHA's public silence does not reflect the Authority's significant investment of time and energy on this matter.

I look forward to and am anxious for NYCHA's swift disclosure of an action upon its plan. Certainly today's hearing can only help to focus NYCHA and all levels and branches of government on what must be done for those affected by the defunding of these vouchers, as well as how we can prevent such a catastrophe in the future.

I thank the Public Housing and General Welfare Committees of the New York City Council and I pledge to continue to work with you to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to stable housing.

Thank you.

COMMITTEES ON GENERAL WELFARE
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CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

We've been joined by Council Member Tish James from Brooklyn and Margaret Chin from Manhattan. And for Mr. Chowso, I'm hoping, I don't know if you would know but there's been a recommendation and an ask of the City to the State to change the definition of the Advantage Program which would keep the program open, would keep the vouchers out there, and would extend individuals who were eligible for that program. So you have any news at this point, what is happening with that program--

MR. CHOWSO: [Interposing) I don't have any news except to say that as I understand it, the State has denied the fact that they have stimulus funds available for extending the 2-year rental subsidies. But I know that Senator Dwayne is working hard to persuade OTDA otherwise.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very much. And is--any questions? Questions for this panel? Okay. and I want to extend my sincere thanks to Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer for being a leader on this issue so please let him know. Thank you very much.

2 The next panel will be Steve Banks
3 from the Legal Aid Society, Aysha Farrakhan, Legal
4 Aid and Piper Hoffman for Partnership for the
5 Homeless.

6 [Pause]

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Whoever would
8 like to start. I also want to say that we've been
9 joined by Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito
10 from Manhattan and part of the Bronx.

11 MR. STEVEN BANKS: Good morning.
12 My name is Steven Banks from the Legal Aid
13 Society--

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
15 And excuse me, and also we've been joined by
16 Council Member Halloran from Queens. I think
17 we've gotten to a full panel here. My apologies
18 and when you're ready.

19 MR. BANKS: Good morning. My name
20 is Steven Banks from the Legal Aid Society. We're
21 very grateful for the full panel that's here.
22 It's terrific to see old members and new members
23 together. I want to also introduce Afia Atametza
24 [phonetic] who's an attorney with the Legal Aid
25 Society, she's here working with us and I think it

would be best if perhaps Ms. Farrakhan begins.

MS. AYSHA FARRAKHAN: Good morning everyone. My name is Aysha Farrakhan. Thank you for the opportunity--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
Aysha can you just pull the microphone a little bit closer like right in front of you, just--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) All righty.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yeah. Turn the--exactly. Wonderful. Thank you. and don't be nervous, just take a deep breath, we all go through it--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing)
Unfortunately I am. [Laughing]. Well, okay. I'm still trying to catch my breath. All right well thank you for the opportunity to speak before the panel today, to talk about the Section 8 crisis. How it has seriously hurt my family. I know I'm just one of many families but I'm a mother of three children. My oldest is Justin, also Joshua--Justin is 11, Joshua who is 9 and Jason at age 4. That's Jason. My son Joshua has a mild case of Robert's Syndrome. He was born with no arms as

well as heart and kidney deformities. He's, he has a very rare syndrome. But in February 2009 I applied for a Section 8 voucher. I finally received the voucher September 8th, 2009. Excuse me. After receiving the Section 8 voucher, I came to NYCHA four different times to try to submit my housing packet. Each time I was turned away. Told the landlord filled out the paperwork wrong. The first time NYCHA told me that landlord had signed his name different from than it was on the deed, turning me back, because he had Junior on-- [chuckling] and on the deed it wasn't Junior. So I was turned away. From the landlord, he became frustrated and he longer wanted to deal with it.

Excuse me. The second time, NYCHA said that the block and lot number were incorrect although the Department of Finance said it was approved and it was an error on their part, they still refused to take it.

Each time, you know, I came back, it was something else wrong. I asked why didn't they tell me all of these, you know, issues each time. No one had any answers for me. But with them coming back and forth, they finally lost my

voucher. They lost my voucher, I would say--they kept saying it was in Miami for some reason [chuckling] the paperwork was in Miami and--yeah. I never sent my paperwork to Miami. Yeah. Miami, Florida. That's what the computer kept saying. So they--I couldn't rent an apartment. Yeah. [chuckling] Yeah. Eventually upon finding my voucher, my voucher came back a week before-- December 8th and the next thing I know I didn't have a voucher again. In the meantime given the fact that my son has so many different disabilities, his needs are so major, I've had ACS, you know, become involved with my family. I've offered to put my son--to separate my child until I can get myself together, financially because of my housing needs. You know, given the fact that he needs therapy at home. He needs a bed to accommodate him--different equipment and I mean these are just some of the things that we're going through. Even given the fact we're in shelters, you know, you move from one place to the next. The shelters are trying to throw people out that have Section 8. Well--that have the Section 8, and lost their vouchers, they're pushing you

1 out. So it--there's--it's a lot, it's a lot for
2 people... it's... it's hard. And it's--you'll be
3 surprised. You don't think it can be you but it
4 happens. [Pause] I'm trying to be. Thank you.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I just want
7 to--Ms. Farrakhan are you finished with your
8 testimony?

9 MS. FARRAKHAN: Yes I am, sorry--

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
11 Okay. We're going to go through the panel's
12 testimony and then we'll open it up for questions.
13 And if I can ask my colleagues, I know you want to
14 be supportive but we can get to everyone's
15 testimony if we just wait for them to finish.
16 Thank you. The next person on the panel please?

17 MR. BANKS: Thank you very much.
18 As I said we appreciate that you're looking into
19 this issue. Ms. Farrakhan's case is
20 representative of a number of cases that the Legal
21 Aid Society is working with. With detailed
22 representative cases in our testimony, let me just
23 highlight several of them for you and then we have
24 some recommendations for actions that could be
25 taken.

First, for example, as detailed in our testimony, there's Mrs. Z, she's 104-year old woman. Her income is \$761 a month and her rent is \$535 a month. She waited 16 years to get Section 8. Part of the reason she had difficulty ultimately using her Section 8 is because her landlord refused to accept the Section 8 voucher in violation of Local Law 10, the anti-discrimination law this Council passed. And it was with the assistance of the Legal Aid Society that ultimately the landlord was going to have to take it. But she's been caught up in the middle of this problem and now cannot use her Section 8. 104-year old lady waiting 16 years for Section 8, the Housing Authority says she's not an emergency case.

Mrs. L with two children, she finally got Section 8. She was in an apartment in a housing court proceeding. In anticipation of using the Section 8, she had identified a place to move to. She agreed in the stipulation in housing court to move out of her current inadequate housing but at least it was a roof over her head. She too has been caught up in this and is

stipulated to leave her apartment but can't use her Section 8.

Mr. Y and his 6-year old, they were relocated from the shelter system into one of these apartments that you've heard so much about. The child--Mr. Y is disabled and has multiple medical problems. He too is caught up in this, can't use his Section 8 voucher and is in fear that the family is going to have to return to the shelter system.

Or Mrs. R, her income is \$652 in Social Security a month and her rent is \$747.67. She had a great deal of difficulty getting a landlord to accept her Section 8 and it was only when the Legal Aid society on her behalf enforced Local Law 10 that the landlord was going to agree to accept it. She too is caught up in this.

Or Mrs. C, a 19-year old. She's been in foster care since she was 13, ready to age-out of foster care. Could be using a Section 9 but can't as a result of this situation.

These are the human costs of mismanagement by several City agencies. It was well known by NYCHA and by the Department of

Homeless Services by the spring of 2009 that there would be a problem. Yet both agencies continued to take actions to put these vulnerable New Yorkers, literally in harm's way. The Housing Authority continued to give out Section 8's leading families like the ones we've described and individuals like the ones who have described to believe that they could rent apartments. They relied upon the actions of the Housing Authority. They gave up apartments. They turned down other options. They did whatever they could to do things that were the best for their families and then they've now been left holding the bag because NYCHA says, oops, there's no more money, when they knew full well by May and certainly by August when HUD, the Department of Housing and Urban Development had turned down the City's requests for additional funding.

On the part of the Department of Homeless Services, they continued to send families to Advantage apartments and the Advantage Program works on the concept that after the cash rent subsidy from the City and State runs out that then the family will be hooked up with Section 8.

Meanwhile the City's been sending more and more families into this program between May and the present, knowing full well that there would be no Section 8 available for many of these families. And in fact the families who are in these apartments literally now have this sort of Damocles hanging over their heads because they're going to be left without the wherewithal to pay the rent.

It's a shameful situation. The stories of these families highlight two issues that have been before the Council over the last several years. One is the need to ensure that source of income discrimination is eradicated in this City. The Council passed Local Law 10. What we see in these cases is that there's still noncompliance with the Local Law 10. the Legal Aid Society is providing representation as best we can, in large part with assistance from the Council. As you noticed in the preliminary budget our funding and the funding of other providers is cut. This is an important issue to focus on as well.

At the same time the City

determined in December 2004 to eliminate priority for homeless families for public housing. Mayors Koch, Dinkins and Giuliani all prioritized relocation of families to the Housing Authority as a way to deal with family homelessness. Those three administrations reasoned the homeless families were the housy-needy families in the City. The City has a vaunted eligibility process in which it determines that only people who really need shelter get into shelter. Yet the Bloomberg Administration reversed three Administration's worth of policy.

I don't know that Mayors Koch, Dinkins and Giuliani would have agreed on any public policy. But they agreed the prioritizing homeless families for public housing was an important City policy to combat family homelessness.

Embedded in the current crisis is the decision five years ago to take away that priority. And during that time the City had said that prioritization for public housing would be like a magnet and more families would come into the system to get public housing. In fact once

they took away the priority more and more families have been coming into the system and the size of the system has exploded since the priority has been taken away 'cause there are fewer and fewer options for relocating families to permanent housing.

And we see now that there are 3,000 families caught up in the middle of this current crisis as a result of the withdrawal of the Section 8 certificates and vouchers: 1,505 formerly homeless families; 168 children ageing out of foster care; 52 intimidated witnesses; 492 survivors of domestic violence; and other categories.

If not now, when is the time to restore the priority for relocation to public housing bestowed by the Department of Homeless Services? No action by the Housing Authority is needed to restore this. It's only a question of the Department of Homeless Services restoring the priority which could make such a great difference to families like Mrs. Farrakhan who's in the shelter system and others languishing in the shelter system or in apartments facing potential

eviction because of this problem.

In addition to restoring the priority for public housing, we have several other recommendations. Until all of the affected households receive Section 8 vouchers that they can use in the normal course--and of course this is a time limited issue because eventually the Housing Authority will be able to reissue Section 8 vouchers. So until we get to that point the State Office of Temporary Assistance and Disability Assistance and the New York City Department of Homeless Services should expand the Advantage Program to cover all of the affected families and to enable those that are in housing to remain in housing until such time as they can get Section 8's.

Now of course one might say but we're in the middle of a fiscal crisis. How can we do this? But for a couple of hundred dollars of subsidizing the rents of these families, the taxpayers are going to pay \$3,000 a month to shelter families in the shelter system. It is fiscally sound, not to mention avoiding the human trauma families like Mrs. Farrakhan and the

others that we mentioned by taking this action.

Of course the City also has stimulus funds. Homeless prevention stimulus funds that could be used to prevent these families from reentering the shelter system or have it enter the shelter system at a time when we have record homelessness in the City.

Thirdly the Department of Housing Preservation and Development also has its own Section 8 vouchers. And it could provide those 500 vouchers towards the 3,000 families that are affected by the current crisis. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development could also use its turnover vouchers, those that come back to it, in order to deal with this crisis. Again it's a time-limited crisis.

Of course as soon as the over-leased number of vouchers is attritted, approximately 2,000, the Housing Authority should start issuing vouchers to these very households. They have not made that clear commitment that these specific households will get the first vouchers that will be issued. Of course for some of them if there's further delay it will be too

late. They'll be in the shelter system at great human cost and a great cost to the City.

The Administration for Children Services has a number of affected families as well as a result of the ageing-out problem and other issues relating to preventive services for families that could end up being split apart because of lack of adequate housing and other matters even though State law prohibits families from being split up and kids placed in foster care because of lack of housing. But the ACS could use the funding stream for preventive and protective services to provide rental assistance to affected families. Again it's a finite number of families.

District Attorneys who've worked with these families who are now at risk because they must remain, in some cases, in the very building, if not the very apartment in which they've cooperated to address criminal conduct. District Attorneys do have funds that they take from forfeitures, that the City takes back from them, whenever possible. These funds could be used for the intimidated witnesses to keep them from being in danger or from entering the shelter

system.

And again, last but not least, we should be restoring the system of referring homeless families from the shelter system to the Housing Authority as a way of controlling the explosive growth of the size of the family shelter system while this crisis continues.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. I want to add that we've been joined by Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo from the Bronx; Council Member Steve Levin from Brooklyn; and Council Member Jumaane Williams from Brooklyn.

MS. PIPER HOFFMAN: Thank you. My name is Piper Hoffman. I'm the Director of Advocacy for the Partnership for the Homeless.

I'd like to thank the Chairpeople, Mendez and Palma, for holding this hearing and if I may, to welcome the new City Council Members including the representative of my own district, Council Member Lander.

This is a debacle. I think everybody recognizes that there is a human tragedy

here that's affecting thousands of people. And I believe that the other members of my panel have done an excellent job of illustrating exactly what the consequences are going to be.

I'd like to focus on something else. The subject of this hearing is the recent loss of the Section 8 vouchers and the future of Section 8 in New York City. And that's what I'd like to speak about.

The talk about the future of Section 8 in New York City requires talking about the Advantage Program which is the City-administered one to two year short term subsidy which often is intended to help bridge the time until a family can qualify for Section 8. The Advantage Program is not working for several reasons.

One is that short term subsidies are inherently an ineffective remedy for homelessness. And in particular the way that the Advantage Program is functioning is not a remedy for homelessness. DHS is permitting side deals that prevent Advantage recipients from saving money and leave them pretty much where they were

when they started once the Advantage voucher has expired.

In addition the short term subsidies provide one to two years of rental assistance but they do not provide job training. They do not provide child care. They do not provide medical care. They do not provide the basic tools that Advantage recipients need in order to become self-sufficient. Essentially they just hold them in an apartment until they can qualify for Section 8 where they will once again not receive the support services that they need in order to become self-sufficient.

The Advantage Program as I mentioned is premised on the idea that recipients will eventually qualify for Section 8 which is the long term subsidy. As we can see that's not always going to be the case. I think it's foolhardy for the City to rely on Federal funds that are not guaranteed, are not within our control. The entire Section 8 program is not within our control. If we were to lose Section 8 we would be in a crisis of massive proportions, well beyond what we're seeing even today.

So the time to rely on the Federal government to bail us out is over. I think absolutely there is reason to petition the Federal government for funding but it needs to be funding that we are responsible for that we can administer.

Finally I think that relying on Section 8 alone is ineffective for the same reasons that Advantage is ineffective. It does not provide the support services that people need to become self-sufficient. It keeps people in housing, on government assistance, for years, sometimes for lifetimes, sometimes for generations. It perpetuates a cycle of poverty. And I think that's based on an assumption that many of us hold that there's always going to be an underclass. There's going to be a permanent underclass in the urban culture of the United States of America. And there's nothing we can do about that.

I don't believe that that's true. I believe that it is possible to have a City that does not have a permanent underclass that does not have perpetual generations of poverty. But in

order to do that, again, we need to provide not just housing. We need to provide the supports and services that will allow people to afford their own housing. And not only their own housing, their own medical care, their own food, quality education for their children, integration into a community, all of these must be a part of our approach to ending homelessness. Housing subsidies alone are not enough.

So again what's happening right now is a crisis and must be addressed in the emergent way that is necessary to keep thousands of people from homelessness. But this is also an excellent opportunity to look at the long term and to reconsider our approach to housing the homeless and to refocus it on ending homelessness. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member... okay.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: thank you Madam Chair. I just have two quick questions and then I'll let the rest of the Council Members ask questions as well. Steve, when did Legal Aid--was Legal Aid made aware that the program was in... that

the Section 8 vouchers were going to be revoked?

MR. BANKS: We learned like our clients did and the rest of New York did when the City announced this by press conference, not an individualized notice to Mrs. Farrakhan or our other clients saying this is what's happened, this is what we're going to do to help you. It was simply a general announcement, oops, we ran out of money.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And...

MR. BANKS: A better announcement would have been oops we failed the plan but that one wasn't forthcoming.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Not--I don't think they would limit it to that--but did the Home-based, did Legal Aid reach out to the Home-based program?

MR. BANKS: Well we do through our neighborhood offices in all five Boroughs, the staff does work--

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: [Interposing]

But

MR. BANKS: --with home-based providers. But the home-based providers, I think,

have a limited ability to address this because
whereas they may be able to provide some short
term rental assistance, the real issues that Ms.
Farrakhan and other clients present is the gap
between income and rents. The theory of Advantage
was that people would get employment and pay the
rent. But in the midst of the great recession,
with unemployment over 10%, it's a flawed program
that's not going to work. And therefore reaching
out to home-based might provide, you know,
assistance for some days, maybe even weeks but
certainly not the months that are needed in terms
of help here.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And Ms.
Farrakhan, your Section 8 voucher has been lost
permanent or what--you're able to?

MS. FARRAKHAN: No actually they
found my Section 8 voucher before they took it
away.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And then they
took it away.

MS. FARRAKHAN: Then they took it
away--

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: [Interposing]

1 All right.

3 MS. FARRAKHAN: --a week later.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay. so
5 you're still in the shelter system--

6 MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) Well
7 I'm actually back in. I was doubled up in someone
8 else's apartment expecting to, you know, be put
9 into my own apartment. And now I'm back in the
10 shelter.

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And your family
12 has been split up because you're--

13 MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) Well
14 not as yet. They offered, for secure--for me--for
15 one of my children. Just because--although it's
16 against the law, they're not pushing it but they
17 offered it because he needs therapy in the home
18 and he needs other resources that I'm not able to
19 provide for him. And it's been over a year so.
20 It's just an option to me that they..

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I want to thank
22 you for your testimony. It takes a lot of
23 strength--

24 MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) Thank
25 you.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: --for one, go through what you're going through and then sit up here and give public testimony. So--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing] Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I want to call on Council Member Gale Brewer from Manhattan.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Steve I have some questions about numbers. I know you're not the City but you know everything. The question is what kind of numbers are we talking about. It looks to me, having talked to some of the City agencies, that it could be in 2 years up to almost 13,000 people in this situation. So there are people on Advantage and that's another whole discussion about that program who are on fixed income. Then there are people in Advantage who are not on fixed income. And then there are just people who are in the shelter system who need Section 8. So I'm just wondering do you have some sense of these numbers and how quickly they can escalate, obviously?

MR. BANKS: Well I think you put your finger right on it. There's the immediate

problem of the 3,000 families who are stuck as a result of this problem. And their immediate situations could be addressed in the way that we outlined in terms of the HPD vouchers, the--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing) Do we think there are 500 as you suggest, HPD vouchers?

MR. BANKS: Yes. And certainly they have turnover vouchers coming back to them. But the problem is two-fold as you identified. One is the immediate numbers of families affected and individuals that are affected, the 3,000. And it's important to solve their needs right now. But then there is the every month, families that are in various of the Advantage apartments with those cash subsidies expiring who are going to be at risk of reentering the shelter system. And every month there's a couple of hundred of those.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

MR. BANKS: So the outer limits that you're describing is--is not unreasonable to think of which is why it's so important to immediately begin to relocate families from the shelter system to public housing apartments

1 instead of continuing to put these numbers of
2 families into Advantage apartments which are only
3 going to contribute to the problem. And then
4 being to focus on the needs of the families that
5 are already in the apartments by extending
6 Advantage for the period of time until they can
7 get a Section 8. It's a solvable problem. And if
8 we don't solve it, it's going to cost a tremendous
9 amount of money for New York City.
10

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So
12 do you think then that this--these numbers that
13 you have, the 2,000 vouchers that NYCHA attrits,
14 is that something that is real? 'Cause these
15 numbers I haven't heard. Is there...?

16 MR. BANKS: They're numbers that we
17 believe are reflect the best analysis one can do
18 from an un-transparent process.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. DHS
20 states correctly or incorrectly that the \$76.4
21 million for stimulus that they've already spent,
22 whether they have or haven't, that's what they
23 state. So can the New York State Office of
24 Temporary and Disability Assistance, is that
25 something that also has stimulus money, to the

best of your knowledge or other funds that could
be a temporary gap closer?

MR. BANKS: Well with or without
stimulus funds, both the City and State are going
to pay for each one of these families--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
[Interposing) Right.

MR. BANKS: --\$3,000 a month of
which about half is State and local dollars. If
you simply took the half that State and local
dollars, you don't need even that much to extend
Advantage. So use of stimulus funds and
identification of stimulus funds would make sense
because they're Federal funds but in the absence
of that it is far more cost effective to extend
Advantage with State and City local dollars than
it's going to be to pay those dollars to shelters.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

MR. BANKS: Because you'll have to
site more shelters, you'll have to open more
shelters. And as we see from Ms. Farrakhan's
testimony, kids need to be in homes not in
shelters.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Absolutely.

Final question, obviously we all, I know the Borough President has brought it up and others regarding public housing apartments that are vacant. Do you have any sense of the numbers that we're talking about or is that something that is mostly in the public domain and not clear as to specifics?

MR. BANKS: Again it's not a transparent reporting process but the Borough President's analysis certainly seems like a reasonable one.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.
Thank you Madam Chairs.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you. I want to recognize Council Member Foster and Council Member Robert Jackson. Question, Council Member Rodriguez?

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Yes. I think that the whole thing's about the vouchers is about justice. It's about respect and it's about dignity. You don't play with people's hope. You don't tell people you have this voucher and then suddenly you say you don't have it any more. And I think that the Mayor's inauguration among his

priorities, he talked about economic development, helping the small business, education but then he say, you know, education he said he will work so that each student will graduate. But then on housing he say that affordable housing is going to be one of his priorities. For some people, a middle class couple making \$200,000 a year, the affordable housing is to buy a condo or to buy a co-op. For poor people making less than \$30,000 a year, affordable housing is to get a voucher. Is to get a voucher.

But my question is, is there any ground for a case for a class action on this particular case?

[Pause]

MR. BANKS: Well there's certainly issues involving the Advantage program of a City agency putting people into apartments and telling them that assistance would be there when they get to the end of their cash assistance, that there'll be further assistance available to them. There's certainly a legal issue there that we'll pursue.

But as always with the Legal Aid Society, if there can be an administrative or a

legislative solution and not a litigation solution we would urge that to happen. In terms of the Housing Authority's conduct, there are more limited legal issues there. We've been in court and we would urge you to not wait for the issues with respect to NYCHA to be resolved by a court as opposed to administrative or legislative action. I think that frankly the more these kinds of things happen the more that the legislative branch is able to address them, we think in the future the fewer times they will happen.

You made the point rather well that it's about respect and about taking into account the human aspects of some of these things. Here, too, it's a situation in which the dollars and cents make sense to subsidize rents rather than to pay for shelter costs.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: If we-- and I hope that we will be able to persuade from all elected officials to the City, the State and Washington, to get the money to get the resources to put back those vouchers to those close to 3,000 residents of New York City that deserved to have the vouchers because they were promised that they

2 would get the voucher. If that doesn't work would
3 the Legal Aid--can the Legal Aid explore if we get
4 the money, the possibility of putting a class
5 action on this issue?

6 MR. BANKS: Certainly. I think
7 that the focus is probably better legally on the
8 Department of Homeless Services and the State
9 Department--State Office of Temporary Assistance
10 and Disability Assistance, just in terms of a
11 legal claim. But I would be happy to discuss that
12 with you further.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you. Our
14 next question, Council Member James.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you.
16 I was remanded earlier by the Chair because I was
17 responding to the statement by Ms. Farrakhan. A
18 few minutes ago I heard the amen corner in the
19 audience. The amen corner and it's those passions
20 that you heard earlier, I find that I have a
21 difficult time containing at this point. So I
22 apologize. No actually I don't apologize. And
23 for those who were reprimanded in the audience, I
24 also hear you as well because this really is an
25 outrage. And there should be more anger. And

there should be more attention that is focused on this issue. Because 3,000 individuals, 3,000 families were promised Section 8 vouchers and then they were rescinded right before the holidays. This is almost six weeks later and there is no resolution. And if this would not happen to another group of people, homeless, I'm sure there would be an outrage in the City of New York. But because there is no constituency, there's no lobbyists, there's no money for the homeless. The homeless are the voiceless and the faceless in the City of New York. You are not seeing it on the front pages of the New York Times, the Daily New or The Post. So my amen corner out there, I hear you. And we're going to have to band together--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

[Interposing) Amen.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: --amen,
Council Member Lander is with me now, I just baptized him.

[Laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: We're going to have to organize and raise our voices. And so I want to join with Council Member Rodriguez and

urge the Legal Aid Society, a former Legal Aid attorney always a Legal Aid attorney, that we should join with you in filing a lawsuit. We recognize that we've got a legislative responsibility and a duty. We hope that our State elected officials will do the same thing but we will join with you to file any amicus and file any brief which is necessary. But my question--

MR. BANKS: [Interposing) Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: --but my question really is about Local 10. And Local 10 you indicated that a number of individuals, landlords, had refused to accept Section 8 vouchers in violation of Local Law 10. What are the remedies in Local Law 10 and what can we do to strengthen Local Law 10? What are the enforcement mechanisms in Local Law 10--?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
Council Member James.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: With all due respect that's not the subject of this hearing today--

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COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

[Interposing) Um-hum.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --we have more than 30 people who want to give testimony. That is probably an appropriate hearing for the future. So if I could just restrain you just because I want to get through all the public testimony, okay?

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So Local Law 10, obviously the enforcement mechanism we will get to at a later point and perhaps we can have a private conversation with regards to that. It's my understanding that NYCHA has not been referring the homeless--excuse me, Department of Homeless Services has not been serving--referring homeless families to NYCHA for apartments that are currently being warehoused by the Authority, is that a true statement?

MR. BANKS: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. Even though the regs basically require that NYCHA refer individuals to these empty apartments they are-- currently the Department of Homeless Services is not doing that.

2 MR. BANKS: Well the Department of
3 Homeless Services doesn't, doesn't refer the
4 families to the Housing Authority so therefore the
5 Housing Authority doesn't put them in--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
7 [Interposing) And is that--

8 MR. BANKS: --and that could be
9 remedied by requiring the Department of Homeless
10 Services to make such referrals.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And would
12 that be a State requirement or is that something
13 that the City can do?

14 MR. BANKS: The City can do it.
15 It's--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
17 [Interposing) We can do that.

18 MR. BANKS: --it's a City agency.
19 It's a City priority choice. It doesn't involve
20 Social Services. It's not an issue with respect
21 to preemption. It's--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
23 [Interposing) I--

24 MR. BANKS: --that the Council has
25 the authority to--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

[Interposing) I will be drafting some legislation to require DHS to do just that. And my last question is I also know that the District Attorney's Office, we discovered that they were holding some funds, some forfeiture funds, and I believe some other agencies it was discovered had some hidden funds. Is it possible that we can tap into those agencies, specifically HPD, to remedy this problem?

MR. BANKS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you. Because of time I will defer to my colleagues.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you Council Member. Next Council Member for questioning is Lander followed by Rose, Williams and Mark-Viverito.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thanks very much. I want to say thank you to Chair Palma and Chair Mendez. This is my first hearing in the General Welfare Committee and it is an honor to serve with you.

Like my colleague Council Member James, I'm angry. And I'm angry today because I

1 don't see the Bloomberg Administration here to
2 testify, to accept responsibility, to present a
3 plan or even to listen to the families that are in
4 front of us. It's been six weeks since the
5 holiday announcement, this press conference, not
6 even the dignity of an individual conversation.
7 And we've heard no acceptance of responsibility
8 for the pain they've caused 3,000 families. We've
9 heard no plan. And now they haven't even come
10 today to present a plan, to tell us how it
11 happened, or just to sit and listen to the cases
12 that you've presented like Ms. Farrakhan's and the
13 others. I'm a new Council Member and maybe this
14 is how things work but it's outrageous and it's
15 totally unacceptable.

17 A couple of questions. First Ms.
18 Farrakhan, I want to thank you for coming. It
19 takes courage to do what you're doing every day
20 and I really appreciate your coming here. I
21 wonder, you must have, I assume after the press
22 conference you reached out to someone at, you
23 know, at NYCHA to ask what the story was. And I
24 wonder if you could just tell me what they told
25 you you were supposed to do.

2 MS. FARRAKHAN: No actually I went
3 in to take my packet in after finding out my
4 voucher was finally back in New York. And I was
5 turned away--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
7 [Interposing) They wouldn't even meet with you?

8 MS. FARRAKHAN: No. They wouldn't
9 even take the package. They wouldn't explain
10 anything--anything to me. They basically told me
11 to get out [chuckling]. They were like there's
12 nothing we can tell you. We don't know anything
13 so... see you later--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
15 [Interposing) Now some people have mentioned going
16 to these things called the Home Base.

17 MS. FARRAKHAN: Home Base.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Did you,
19 did you go to Home Base?

20 MS. FARRAKHAN: Home Base is where
21 I applied for my Section 8. That's where I
22 applied for my Section 8 voucher. But Home Base
23 has no knowledge of what's going on. Everyone is
24 really limited, you know, if Section 8 can't give
25 you an answer, no one can.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So you've
been back to Home Base--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing]
[Interposing) I've been--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --since
then.

MS. FARRAKHAN: --yes. I've been
to Home Base--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
[Interposing) Because that's what I understand the
Administration is encouraging people to do is go
to Home Base and they'll--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing)
They're--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --take care
of you.

MS. FARRAKHAN: --overwhelming Home
Base for no reason. They're sending people there
for no reason. There's nothing they can do.
They're very limited with their resources. I've
been to a number of different organizations. I
even--the Mayor's Office for people with
disabilities, a number of places, housing, even
housing is like...

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So let me ask a question about housing. I mean you had an apartment identified which I assume was where you wanted to live. But at this point if you could get an apartment, appropriate size for your family, in New York City Housing Authority, would you?

MS. FARRAKHAN: Definitely.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: You would take it.

MS. FARRAKHAN: Yeah. I asked them, well if I was already qualified for Section 8 and I am on the Housing waiting list why can't you just push my application in, send me straight to it. They said it doesn't work like that--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay so this--

MS. FARRAKHAN: --you know, so.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --then takes me to my question for Steve Banks--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) Um-hum.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --and I want to thank you for--especially for that work on

Local Law 10 and source of income discrimination which sounds like is already making a big difference. But I just want to be--make sure that I understand that the Department of Homeless Services could simply choose to refer the exact families we're talking about, I mean agree that, you know, more broadly we should be referring homeless families for Section 8 vouchers as you discussed was the policy of the past three Mayoral Administrations, but could they make the decision simply to take the families that we're talking about here, the 2,600 families, change no rules, refer families like Ms. Farrakhan to NYCHA and they would become top priority for public housing apartments but they have refused to do so.

MR. BANKS: That's absolutely correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And then you also said to Council Member James that we would have--you believe that we would have the power by local law to compel them to do so.

MR. BANKS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

MR. BANKS: Yes. I should also

2 add, by the way, I don't want to--although I'm the
3 head of the organization and I get credit for a
4 lot of things that I don't actually do myself, I
5 want to give credit to Judith Goldener--

6 MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) Oh
7 yes.

8 MR. BANKS: --and Afia Atametza and
9 to--

10 [Applause]

11 MR. BANKS: --Helen Davidson for
12 the work on Local Law 10.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you
14 very much.

15 MS. HOFFMAN: May I interject on
16 the topic of Home Base because the Partnership for
17 the Homeless does have a contract as a Home Base
18 provider. So I may be able to clarify a little
19 bit. First of all DHS has not give Home Base
20 providers any magic wand, not to mention any extra
21 money or guidance or anything for dealing with
22 this crisis. Sending people to Home Base
23 providers is just a way of fobbing them off on
24 somebody else. And in fact the Department of
25 Homeless Services has recently announced that the

Home Base contract is going to be changed so that whereas the focus of the program used to be on prevention, on diverting people who were about to enter shelter into apartments, the Home Base purpose has now changed to helping people who are already in hotels, that DHS has placed in hotels because there's no room in shelters, helping those people find housing. Drastically cutting the amount of aftercare that Home Base providers are able to provide to those people. Removing any sense of prevention from those programs. But the primary point for purposes of today's hearing is that the Home Base providers have nothing special that they can do for the people affected by this cut.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: First before Council Member Rose goes to ask her question, I just want to know, I see someone here from HPD. Is anyone here from NYCHA or from DHS out in the audience? Or any one from the Administration sitting in the chambers? Thank you. Okay. and you're representing?

[Off mic]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

[Off mic]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Thank you for being here. We've been joined by Council Member Tom White from Queens. Council Member Rose followed by Council Member Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: I want to thank Chairs Mendez and Palma for providing an opportunity to give voice to the voiceless. And it is so important because I could not believe as a new Council Member that this issue hadn't been all over the front page of the newspaper since this announcement was made.

As a new member I am not really sure about this procedure but I think that the City agencies, the Mayor and HPD and NYCHA should have been compelled to be here. They owe the citizens and the people who are in these programs that have been denied, some sort of response and an explanation. And in fact, not only an explanation, but how they plan to resolve this. And my whole--my question really was about the fact that I know in my district, NYCHA is

warehousing apartments. And this has been, you know, a huge concern to me for a long time. And not understanding the purpose of this warehousing, and to find out today that they are not warehousing these apartments to make them available to the very people who need them.

So Council Member James actually stole my thunder--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

[Interposing) I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: --and I'm going to sign on her with to make sure that maybe we can litigate and make the City responsive and NYCHA especially when in fact there is housing that's available. And they need to give us an explanation of how and why they think that they can keep these apartments vacant and let the people who need them flounder just to their own devices. And so Council Member James, I hope to sign on to your litigation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Sorry.
Thank you Chair Mendez and Palma for putting this

1
2 together. I appreciate it. It's an honor to be
3 here on this side of the table. I feel it's a
4 little different.

5 I'm not a member actually of any
6 Committee--just this Committee, actually it's just
7 very important that I come here. And when I was
8 young we had a game, you'd give somebody you'd say
9 psych. And you'd take it back. And I really
10 don't understand how our government is allowed to
11 say psych to people that were promised housing.

12 And I know if there were two
13 developers who were promised incentives as they
14 started to build and were taken away the whole
15 government would implode or something. Something
16 crazy would go on. If there were ten millionaires
17 who were promised co-ops in the Trump Towers for
18 half price and they raised the price on them,
19 there'd be an outrage.

20 [Applause]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And I
22 don't understand why 3,000 Ms. Farrakhans don't
23 make a difference. And it's terrible. And I
24 commend you for just the fortitude and your
25 stature here as you're giving your testimony.

It's an amazing thing. I don't know if I would have that strength. And in my part, you know, my part of government I wish I could do more right now than apologize but I want to at least do that, as whatever part of government I am responsible for that this happened and I apologize for that.

And I think most of us up here are going to try to do whatever we can to make sure that's rectified.

I have three questions. Two for Mr. Banks and one is for Ms. Piper. The first question was about the stimulus money. I just wanted to know what it is that they said that they have spent it on or will spend it on. And the second one, have they acknowledged that they are warehousing apartments and just won't give it up?

MR. BANKS: I think that the answer to your first question is it's not at all clear. And I guess the Budget Oversight Hearing will give an opportunity to determine with both the Department of Homeless Services and the Human Resources Administration what, if any, accounting they can give the Council as to their expenditures. So we, as lawyers for affected

1 individuals, don't have any more specific
2 information that there was a substantial amount of
3 stimulus money provided to the City and you
4 certainly are entitled to get an accounting of it.
5 But again even if those funds are not available,
6 there are other funds that could be made available
7 to solve this problem particular because
8 ultimately the City's going to pay for the
9 increased shelter costs.
10

11 As to the warehousing of
12 apartments, that too is something where there is a
13 lot of information that, for example, the
14 Manhattan Borough President has been able to put
15 together, but there's not a lot of information
16 coming from the Housing Authority itself.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you
18 and Ms. Piper, I just wanted to hear kind of you
19 comment--I noticed you were mentioning a lot that
20 there were a lot of social services weren't being
21 offered. Is that a lot of social service
22 agencies? Are they not working together properly?
23 Are they not talking? Or is there a structure in
24 place that's just not working?

25 MS. HOFFMAN: I think what's needed

for those social services to be provided is an overall comprehensive plan with sufficient funding that would provide those services in conjunction with Housing. So what we have now is a patchwork of nonprofit organizations and we are doing the best that we can to provide those services. But there is no comprehensive approach to ensure that every person who receives Housing subsidies or have every person that was homeless receives the assistance that they need to become self-sufficient.

Instead they're given vouchers and then the City wipes its hands clean of these people. And they're left without social services unless they happen to have the luck to hook up with one of the nonprofits and the nonprofit has the money to provide ongoing services.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So there's no clear directive and structure for this to happen right now.

MS. HOFFMAN: That's right.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay.
And Ms. Farrakhan, again, I apologize and I hope we can do something. I'm going to sign onto, you

1 know, Ms. James' bill, Council Member James' bill
2 and I hope there's something else we can do to
3 help you.
4

5 MS. FARRAKHAN: Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Good
7 morning to the panelists and to all of those that
8 are here to provide testimony. I think--and Ms.
9 Farrakhan I think you're setting the tone. As has
10 been indicated by my colleague, I really wanted to
11 extend my thank you for being here because it does
12 take strength. And you have to understand the
13 importance of what it is that you're doing here
14 today 'cause you're giving strength to others in
15 terms of being able to really share what is very
16 intimate and very private and a very difficult
17 reality. And that's something that means a lot to
18 me and I'm sure it means a lot to us here on this
19 panel. And you're putting the human face on an
20 issue that this Administration continues to turn
21 its back to. It is unbelievably disrespectful and
22 it is just appalling to me that there is no
23 representation of the City of New York in terms of
24 this Administration, the Bloomberg Administration,
25 in this room here today to speak and be

accountable to each and every one of us. That's not acceptable in this City. That's not acceptable of this Mayor. So--

[Applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: We are--and understand that we are in challenging times. We all know that. We're all living it. Many in this room are living it. But that does not mean that we have to continue to perpetuate, and this Administration does that in these times, you know, a dehumanizing aspect to this Administration. This is not about numbers alone. This is about lives that are at stake. And we have to really rethink and I think your testimony Ms. Piper really touched on it. We have to rethink in these challenging times, we have to really think outside the box. And what is that we're doing and how we can retool, right, and rethink our public policy. It's a very drastic situation but these times call for it. These stopgap measures are not the solution. And we understand that. And it's putting more people and more families at risk. But we do have the immediate reality before us which is these

families that now have no vouchers and many more that down the line are going to be impacted. And we have a very immediate reality that we have to really address. So the fact that we don't have, unfortunately at this moment a true partnership with this Administration, and trying to think outside of the box and finding a very tangible and real solution and many solutions--and many recommendations have been provided. And yet there's been no response as to whether they're going to be addressed or whether they're going to be adopted. And again that is not acceptable when lives are at stake. So I think that, you know, speaking numbers is what we have to be real about. And you've touched on it Mr. Banks about the fact that this is--if we address it the way we're supposed to address it down the line it's more economical for us as a City, it's more humanizing to the individuals that are impacted because it does give them the ability to provide for themselves and that's a reality as well that everybody wants to do that in this City. So I guess, you know, my question--and just the last thing, I know that when we do these large--and

we've been critical, many of us in this room, many of us on this panel, of these large deals, you know, that this Administration has been promoting for the past eight years, the benefit of the corporate sector and the private interests. And I'm sure that when those deals are done, they're getting a lot of handholding. A lot of handholding to close those deals, to get those subsidies, to fill out those applications, and we'd turn over backwards as a City to make sure that they get the money that's been promised to them. And yet for these families, we're not doing that. And that is not acceptable. That is not acceptable in this City.

So I have two quick questions.

With regards to what response are we getting from our colleagues in government at the Federal and State level? I know that there is a lot of help that we need at the Federal level as well but, you know, we've been supportive--I know the recommendations have been thrown, and I know some of us have reached out to our colleagues at the Federal and State levels, but just as advocates, what responses have you been getting from the

electeds and the Congress members on this matter?

MR. BANKS: Well I mean as we often find the elected representatives have been very supportive. Unfortunately on the administrative level we're not seeing any extra dollars given to New York. In part because that's cut up it seems in the national situation. At the State level I think that is particularly disturbing that the State approved this Advantage Program and put certain limitations of the City's implementation of the program. And then for the same six weeks has taken no action to try to deal with the suffering and the real harm posed by the events that have occurred.

So again I think there are elected officials on the State level who have been responsive on the legislative branch but on the executive branch we don't see any response whatsoever at this point from the agency that's responsible and ultimately is going to have to pay half the cost, state and locally, of putting these families into the shelter system which just makes no sense at all.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: And

speaking of the NYCHA, the warehousing issue
'cause I know that that's been very controversial
and I know that the response that NYCHA has given
to the issue of warehousing is at a lot of times
there are apartments that they cannot put online
because of capital work that needs to get done.
Well I think that the times and some of the
stimulus money that has been received by NYCHA,
the priority, and they should rethink this, I
don't know if it's too late, but that the priority
should be to use that for capital repairs that is
going to expedite getting all these apartments
online if that continues to be their argument. I
know many of us may think differently. But, you
know, that's the kind of thinking, a creative way
I guess in really holding them accountable that
needs to happen. So I guess that's one challenge.
I guess I'm putting it out there in the ether
world because we don't like, right, we don't have
representatives here. So hopefully we can get a
response at some point about NYCHA about that
thinking as well about how they can implement that
money to get these apartments online and then
prioritize those individuals that have been left

out. Unfortunately--

MR. BANKS: [Interposing) That's--

COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: --in
the cold. Thank you very much Madam Chairs.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
Van Bramer followed by Foster, Levin, Halloran and
then Mendez, and then we'll be moving onto the
next panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank
you Chairs Mendez and Palma. This is my very
first Committee meeting as a New York City Council
Member and thank you very much, thank you.
Council Member Ulrich in the back. And Ms.
Farrakhan I just wanted to say a few things, you
know, at the very beginning of your testimony I
think you were a little nervous. Probably not as
nervous as I am right now but I just wanted to say
that you were so poised and so thoughtful in your
testimony. And in addition you have the best
behaved 4-year old son in the history of the
world.

[Applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Sitting
in the front row there. And, you know, and I mean

this in all seriousness, I find it hard to be
dispassionate about these issues. I find it hard
not to feel, right, this is all about people.
It's about human beings. And it's a disgrace that
the Administration is not here today because it's
one thing to make decisions in government. We all
make decisions. But it's another thing not to
face the music and not to face the very people
that you have disenfranchised by those poor
decisions.

And let me also say that if the
people who made the decisions in the way that they
made them and then announced them in the way that
they did had half of the decency and the empathy
and the intelligence that you and your son
possess, we'd be in a far different position
today. And--

[Applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --so I
wanted to--I thank, you know, Council Member
Williams is such a good and decent human being.
And certainly I join him, you know, in
apologizing. But I think we as a body can do so
much more and that is to work every single day to

make sure that people who make horrific decisions
that affect peoples' lives are held accountable.
And that's what we're here to do.

[Applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And I
just want to say thank you so much for being here
and for raising your voice and reminding me about
why I ran for the City Council in the first place
and that's to help people get back on their feet
and live the life that they're entitled to. This
City is not just for the rich, for the powerful
and the privileged, it's for you too, and that's
why I'm here. Thank you.

[Applause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
Foster.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Thank you.
Sorry, I apologize for being late. First of all
let me say that I'm not surprised that the
Administration is not here. I think this is modus
operandi--

[Applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: --when you
look around the room it affects people of color

and when you look in his administration there is a lack of people of color. It disproportionately affects women and children, especially women and children of color. So I'm not surprised. And when I was leaving 250 Broadway a couple of days ago, I saw a police officer trailing someone. And I fell out laughing because it's the NYCHA head and he has security. And I find that, you know, that's very interesting that he has security. I don't know, you know, maybe that's something in the Charter that you need security when you cut off vouchers for people and you get to go home in chauffeured, you know, police-drive car.

But all of my questions actually in terms of the Federal government were asked by Council Member Mendez and Council Member Williams about what we can do. What I would just like to say is that we as women and women of color who are especially affected by this need to be very aware and not have political amnesia the next time it's time to vote because we are a group they're targeting because they think they can. And a great suggestion would be all these condos that can't sell, give them vouchers and let them move

in there.

[Applause]

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Then they won't be empty. And to Ms. Farrakhan though I missed your testimony. I want to apologize that you're even here and have to do this, but applaud you, not for--'cause it is difficult but for the example you're sending to your son. And as you know a mother of a son who--sons, oh, sons, I only saw this little handsome fellow here, who is just, you know, if you weren't looking I'd snatch him and take him with me. But understanding that you're doing this for him. And we need to send a message loud and clear in terms of a class action suit as well as a discrimination suit based on race and gender that this is unacceptable. If it were White men from Wall Street this wouldn't happen. Because it is people of color and the poor, it's fine to do this. And we really have to make sure that we wake up and use our political voice so this doesn't happen again. And I want to thank you Chairs Mendez and Palma for holding this. Thank you.

[Applause]

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you
Council Member. Council Member Levin.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you
Madam Chairs. I'm just going to have one very
brief comment. And I want to thank Ms. Farrakhan.
I want to thank all the panelists for coming out
and shedding light on what's going on here.

As somebody--I'm also new to the
Council. One of the last things that I did in my
old job was I was working with a constituent in
Bushwick who is a woman in her 60s who, all she
had--she had the voucher all lined up. The only
thing she needed was a couple of repairs on the
prospective apartment. And then that was around
the middle of December and then by the end of
December her voucher was taken offline. And it
was a feeling of helplessness that she had, a
feeling of helplessness that I had as someone who
was trying to help her and trying to advocate with
her.

So I sympathize. It's not a
failure on anyone's part who is on the receiving
end of this. As folks might feel that they might
have done something, the lady that I was working

with kept on asking me if she, you know, what did I do wrong. How did I screw up this process? And the reality is that this was in no way a fault of people that had been doing--acting in good faith with our City agencies and our government. And they've been holding up their end and I think that it's appropriate that our government holds up its end.

So I just want to reiterate the call that we have a second hearing, that we make sure that the Administration is here, and that they are able and willing to testify. I think that it's imperative so I want to encourage both Madam Chairs to do a round two on this. And I think that it's imperative upon the Administration to enter into a meaningful dialog. I noticed that the Public Advocate has entered the room, is he still here? Mr. Public Advocate. And I want to make sure that the Administration knows that they need to enter into a meaningful dialog both with the advocacy community, with the Chairs and the members of these committees and with the Public Advocate's Office. So thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. As

has been stated, we've been joined by Public Advocate Bill de Blasio. Thank you for being here. And we've also been joined in the audience by PS 134 from Queens Village. I hope you find--

[Applause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --this interesting and informative. Council Member Halloran, you're next up for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Thank you Madam Chair. First of all I'm glad to be here and thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask some questions.

First question is to Mr. Banks. Mr. Banks you indicated that it's about \$3,000 per family to provide shelter assistance versus the vouchers which average about \$393 or \$400 a month. In addition to providing actual housing in the shelters, are other resources provided in that \$3,000 per month per family allocation? By that I mean food, toiletries, other items which would otherwise be expenses that they would incur outside of the system.

MR. BANKS: Social services.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Yes.

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MR. BANKS: Social services.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Yeah.

Okay.

MR. BANKS: That's the other

expense--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:

[Interposing) Okay.

MR. BANKS: --and, you know, I

understand--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:

[Interposing) So it's not purely--I mean, just so

I--I'm not saying that you don't have a point. I

just want everyone to be clear that when you say

something like that, that it's \$3,000 per family

in the shelter versus \$400 for a voucher, you're

not being completely genuine with us in saying

that the \$400 voucher is equivalent to the

services provided in the shelter. That's correct,

is it not Sir?

MR. BANKS: No that's actually not

correct. If the family was not in the shelter

system they would not be receiving those social

services anywhere, so there'd be no public

expenditure--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:

[Interposing) Right.

MR. BANKS: --for them anywhere.

The triggering of the \$3,000 is 100% caused by the family not having a roof over their heads.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: No, no, I understand that. I understand that--

MR. BANKS: [Interposing) So there would be no--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: --but my question is--

MR. BANKS: --no public expenditure of \$3,000 if these families don't end up in the shelter system.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: And that's the goal--

MR. BANKS: [Interposing) Period.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: --to keep them out of the shelter system. But that's not simply for the roof over their head.

MR. BANKS: You're incorrect to make that point.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Is it true or isn't it true that in addition to the roof

2 over their head, other services are provided which
3 are part of that \$3,000 component?

4 MR. BANKS: The government provides
5 other services--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:
7 [Interposing) Okay.

8 MR. BANKS: --but those services
9 would not be provided to the family but for them
10 being homeless. Therefore if one more family is
11 kept out of the shelter system, with or without
12 rent, with or without social services, the
13 taxpayers would not incur an additional \$3,000.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Would you
15 agree that those families who are receiving those
16 additional services should probably get those
17 additional services even if they were outside of
18 the shelter system?

19 MR. BANKS: Every study that's been
20 done shows that the most important factor in
21 preventing homelessness is a rental subsidy not
22 the other services.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Okay.

24 MR. BANKS: The studies have been
25 done by the New York University School of Research

and a whole range of other entities. All of them find that the most important way to prevent homelessness is with a rental subsidy.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Hum.

MR. BANKS: And that the other services may be nice to provide, families may need them but you can't prevent homelessness without a rental subsidy.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Do you know if the additional services--

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: [Interposing)
Councilman--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:
[Interposing) Sure.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: --I'm sorry
Council Member Halloran--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
This is your Committee, so--

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: [Interposing)
Yeah. I'm--the issue at hand is how the Administration failed to announce what was going to happen with the Section 8 vouchers--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:
[Interposing) I'll limit my question to it.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: --the General Welfare Committee is going to be having budget hearings and those questions--

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN:
[Interposing) Okay.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: --will be appropriate for the Administration.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: When the funding was cut by the Obama Administration in the Democratically controlled Congress which took \$58 million out of your budget, out of your budget, did they inform you ahead of time that that was one of the things on the table to be removed?

MR. BANKS: The Legal Aid Society doesn't have that kind of a budget that has \$58 million for rental subsidies. If we did we would be giving them to Ms. Farrakhan and others.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: And the budget cuts that were passed through and unfortunately affected both the Housing Authority and I believe also HPD, did anybody at HPD take the time to come and speak to the people administering both the Section 8 program or the other housing programs to find alternatives to

cutting the vouchers as opposed to maybe cutting the bureaucracy at Housing or cutting maybe civil servants at Housing and providing these pass-throughs--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Council Member Halloran, I think that is an appropriate question at budget for the Administration not for the Legal Aid Society.
Okay? Council Member Chin.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah thank you Chair Mendez and Palma for holding this hearing. Steve, thank you for the recommendations. I think for myself who's been an advocate on the outside, sitting in the audience, and I'm really proud to have a position here 'cause I could do something. I think with the recommendation that you have put forward, I also ask my colleagues here that we could start asking those questions to the agencies, especially for new members, we're getting these special meets and greets with all the Commissioners, so when we meet with them, I think we should raise this issue about what are they doing about the vouchers and how are they helping the families. And Ms.

2 Farrakhan, thank you for being here to put a human
3 face to this issue. And all the examples that you
4 have given in your testimony, Steve, those are
5 human beings, families are being affected. And I
6 think I will raise these recommendations when I
7 meet with the Commissioners and we will follow up
8 with the agencies to see what they have to say
9 when we ask them why don't you use some of the
10 vouchers that you have. Why don't you, the
11 Department of Homeless Services refer people to
12 public housing? So these are the questions that we
13 can raise to them. And thank you for your
14 suggestions.

15 MR. BANKS: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

17 Now it's my time. Mr. Banks, you've mentioned the
18 number 3,000. At some point I've been informed by
19 the Administration that the number is closer to
20 2,000. Has your organization been given an
21 accounting of how many vouchers really have been
22 rescinded?

23 MR. BANKS: Ultimately it may
24 appear to be in the neighborhood of 2,600 but what
25 I think you're asking is actually what the Council

needs and we need which is an actual counting person by person of how many are affected. But the more specific numbers that we gave you, 492 so far as domestic violence, 52 intimidated witnesses, 168 children ageing out of foster care, 1,505 formerly homeless families, those are concrete numbers that we had. The number 3,018 was the number that was provided initially. There's been another number of 2,600 provided. These are certainly questions that we would appreciate getting answers to. But there's no question that it's a substantial number of people. There's also no question that it's a solvable problem.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And--

MR. BANKS: [Interposing) Unlike some of the other things that we sometimes discuss that are in the tens of thousands, this is a solvable problem.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And those are vouchers. And just from your experience when someone comes to Legal Aid like in Ms. Farrakhan's case it's actually a family of four. How much is the average family that's coming in with this

problem?

MR. BANKS: The average family size tends to be an adult and two children, but as you can see from the examples that we gave, there are senior citizens affected. There are couples without kids where one or both of the individuals are disabled. It's a very vulnerable population--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
So we're talking about 10,000 New Yorkers, of all ages, more or less, is what we're looking at whose vouchers have been rescinded.

Ms. Farrakhan, when did you get your voucher?

MS. FARRAKHAN: I received my voucher September 8th I believe.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: September 8th.

MS. FARRAKHAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So that is after we've heard testimony, after HUD turned down the request for additional funds. So you were given a voucher after that time. And every time since you got the voucher in September, you kept going back and there was a so-called problem with your?

2 MS. FARRAKHAN: Each and every time
3 and--

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
5 Until they lost it.

6 MS. FARRAKHAN: --you know, yeah.
7 And then not to mention they have this line that
8 you have to call and make an appointment. And
9 your appointment is like three weeks, four weeks.
10 So it limits the time that, you know, you can run
11 in there and take your paperwork in and say hey
12 look I have this packet completed. So it--when
13 you have to wait another three weeks to bring that
14 packet in or four weeks, it--each week, it just
15 gets longer. You know.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

17 MS. FARRAKHAN: I would like to say
18 one thing. I've been listening to what Mr. Banks
19 is saying. And as, you know, a person in and out
20 of the shelter, I've watched many other families
21 return with the Advantage Program. I've spoken to
22 over ten families in PATH and the shelter that I'm
23 currently in. And there have been many families
24 returning to the shelter because Advantage didn't
25 work for them. You know. And I think Advantage

is really not an option for families. It's miscalculated. You know, they think it'll turn over into Section 8 sometimes it doesn't. And that's only for the Child Advantage and Fixed Advantage. For the working people, that program doesn't roll over. They expect them to learn how to pay their rent within a year. But if they're low income families, they're never really honestly going to be able to pay their rent unless they have a better education or a better job. And that's just the truth about it. I think that program is no good. I think it needs to be eliminated.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you--

MS. FARRAKHAN: [Interposing) Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --for coming here today and for bringing your son and we will be asking the Administration why that little boy doesn't have a home. Okay?

MS. FARRAKHAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Public Advocate Bill de Blasio.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE DE BLASIO: Thank

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examples you brought up here, we need to continue to make clear to people of the City that this is what this means. This is the human reality. And these are folks who are suffering because these vouchers were not followed through on. This council fought for years to guarantee that people would not be discriminated against to have Section 8 vouchers. And Legal Aid played a crucial role in that fight.

To hear that that fight was won and you were actually able to get people help who wouldn't have been able to before we passed that law and then our work is nullified by these vouchers being pulled back is tremendously frustrating 'cause the intent of the folks here has always been to make sure that vouchers get to people who deserve them.

So I hope after today's hearing the Administration will actually come forward with a serious and specific plan to make sure all 3,000 people are made whole quickly, not a year from now, now maybe, but a guarantee that they will be made whole. And I think there's still plenty of methodologies that the Administration has to get

that done and that's what we should fight for.

Thank you very much Chairs.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you Mr.
Public Advocate. I want to thank this panel for
their testimony and for enduring our, you know,
questions. I want to call up the next panel.
Jennifer Levy, Patricia Aguilagos [phonetic].
Pavel Darevenchenco, I'm sorry if I messed up your
name, and Latoya Hill.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can the--
whoever's ready to give testimony, can you please
start?

[Off mic]

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: For the
people, who are sitting down, if you are ready to
give testimony, just grab the microphone, identify
yourself for the record?

[Pause]

[Witnesses getting settled]

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: For those
individuals that were supposed to be a press

conference at noon but being that this hearing is really going to run a bit for any of the press or any individuals who are going to partake on that, you can go out to the rotunda with Council Member Tish James. And if the people who are sitting down on the panel whoever's ready, just grab the microphone and start giving your testimony, please.

: Council Member Mendez, our organization was part of the press release so... so perhaps we can defer to the--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
I can--

: --to the next panel?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Is this panel going on all together? I mean can anyone give--

: [Interposing) This is all Legal Services, yes.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: you--fi--I will then call you when--whenever we get back to you if you want to step out for the press conference--

: [Interposing) Thank you very

much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --next list
of...

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Fiera
Stukoman, Stukoman, please take a seat.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thomas Bonilla
and Lorna Thomas please make your way up. Take
your time. Ms. Stukoman you can start to give
your testimony. Grab the microphone, put it next
to you and press the button, make sure that the
light is red, no press the button.

MS. FIERA STUKOMAN: It's okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: thank you.

MS. STUKOMAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And Catherine
Trepini, you can join this panel as well. You can
get started Ms. Stukoman.

MS. STUKOMAN: My name is Fiera
Stukoman. I represent New York Association of
Holocaust Survivors and Interaction Speaking
Community. I am the activist from Community. And
I came today about, not only my community; I came

today about my daughter. I am very upset and I cannot talk. My daughter is an invalid. And she's very sick. And 2007 she was invited to Section 8. And they closed her case and they put her unqualified income. And this is not true. She receive her SSI. What can be unqualified income if she receive \$760? She cannot walk. She stay at home. She stay in bed. And I cannot found the true. Not Councilman, not Assemblyman, nobody, wherever you go, nobody can help us. I came today for truth. Please. I cannot say today it's my pleasure to be here. It's not my pleasure. I am very, very upset. You know when you came to Section 8, you came like a criminal. Nobody talk to you. You cannot talk to the manager. You cannot talk to nobody. Only through the window. You have oppression. You have to stay three, four hours for a question. You cannot call to them, always busy. Please dear friends, I see today Councilman and representative from City, help, help my daughter because my--I cannot explain to you. I'm holocaust survivor. I was in concentration camp. I came to America with my dream. I brought my children. And I live in the

2 best country, in America. I'm very satisfied.

3 And I can't--I help a lot of people. People
4 advertised me like to activist. And I do a lot.

5 And I cannot help my daughter. Please, who can
6 help me? This is why I came today. You see this
7 paper? The landlord gave this, invite her to the
8 court. She cannot pay her rent; \$1,200 and she
9 have to go to the court. And what will be--she
10 will be homeless. I share with her my food. I
11 cannot help her because I am SSI. I receive \$760.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

13 Thank you for your testimony. Please remain
14 seated so we may have questions for this panel.
15 Next. Whoever's ready to give testimony.

16 MS. LORNA THOMAS: I would like to
17 say good afternoon or good morning to each and
18 every one of you. I would like to start from, you
19 know, honoring my sister who's in the shelter
20 system, who my--the woman who has the children in
21 foster care and who's trying to get to an
22 apartment to get their children. The babies are
23 waiting for them and the mothers are waiting for
24 their children. And it's very, very traumatizing
25 for the children and the mother. Now I'd like to

say a little about my story. My name is Lorna Thomas. And I went through abuse for 33 years.

And it sad to see that what is going on, you know, it is like torture. I went through this abuse. I went to two different shelters. I tried to get Section 8. I was abused I always say from A to Z. It didn't have a topic that I didn't go through. And after going through those shelter systems, they never did give me Section 8. The housing specialist went with me many times to try to get Section 8 for me. They held it back from me because I couldn't report my husband. My husband was threatening me for every day of his life. For any little thing that he feel like to get on my case, he would threaten to kill me. There was no way I could report my husband at that time. I had to leave--wait until I get out. I had a stumbling block in my way because my son, I have four boys, and shelters was not taking boys. They advised me to take my children and put them into one shelter and stay in the next. I said no. I stayed at home until my last boy was 13 years and then I left. During that time I went through a lot of abuse. But what I'm saying is that the

Section 8--they wanted me, you know, to report my husband. I did after I leave. I still didn't get that--any Section 8. I was fortunate at that time that the housing specialist get me into a house, a housing--Help USA [phonetic]. It was okay but I had two jobs. I feel on one job and then my life just went downhill again. Because with the real world, I thought out here, you know, I was going to be able to make it. I couldn't. I went to welfare office. I'm a senior citizen now. And they were helping me to pay my rent. They just pulled that rug out under my feet. They told me they cannot help me pay that rent. I had to go--they applied for Section 8 for me. I get my Section 8 and unfortunately--I would like to step back before they took my Section 8 away. I went through my divorce because my husband was so angry he divorced me because--for leaving him for abusing me for 33 years. And the judge give my address to him. So now I'm like a sitting duck waiting, again, I have to manage my abuse all over again. It's very traumatizing. I fell on my job, one of my jobs, hurt my spine. I have three--five herniated disks in my back. I may look like if

I'm okay. I get blackout spells. I'm here today because I wanted to be here. And go to the--I went to the Section 8 office. And these workers there, I don't know what to say with them. They are doing a good job. And pulling back those Section 8 vouchers, because they give me a hard time to look at me and tell me that bringing a proof of disability. I have five doctors working with right now. And all the proof that I give to them, they still took my Section 8 away from me and tell me that I'm not disabled. And it is unfair to me and to woman who is like me. I was listening to Ms. Farrakhan. There are many, many woman out there who is struggling like Ms. Farrakhan and worse than her to have their, you know, the Section 8 so that they could be with their kids and to be in a safe place like me. I don't know. Right now as I said, I'm trying to manage my abuse all over again because my husband know where I am. And it's the court that sent my address to him. And I think it is unfair. I need my Section 8. And this is why I'm here today and I'm thankful for the panel who is on our side. You know. And it's sad to know that the people

who are supposed to hear this is not here today.
And thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Next person.

MR. THOMAS BONILLA: Yes. Good morning. My name is Thomas Bonilla. I'm a resident of the City of New York. I came about to apply for Section 8 subsidy because I'm terminally ill. I have end stage renal disease for which I receive dialysis treatment three times a week. I'm on the transplant list but I am not deemed, you know, ready to get a transplant because I have to obtain suitable housing. I've been living in a Moravian Open Door which is affiliated with the Department of Homeless Services. I've been there for the past 18 months. And I've been trying to work my way out of the transitional housing system. During the past two years I've applied repeatedly for affordable housing. And each time I have received letters of rejection because the income that I have is insufficient. It does not meet their minimum guidelines.

On November 10th, I was issued a housing Section 8 voucher. One week after receiving that voucher I was able to secure an

apartment. I completed all the paperwork with the realtor. I scheduled an appointment with NYCHA. And I submitted all my documentation on November 24th. The housing assistant that was assigned to me, a Ms. Jesus, she reviewed all the documentation, indicated to me that everything was in order. She had me sign the lease and advised me that an inspection would be scheduled within three to four weeks.

On November 25th, the realtor received a notice from NYCHA advising them that the request for tenancy had been approved and that an inspection would be forthcoming within three to four weeks. Three weeks pass and no inspection had occurred. I began to become a little skeptical and I started calling NYCHA. No answering machines, the housing assistant could not be found anywhere. I had a paralegal from the Legal Action Center call, the same thing, to no avail.

Subsequently some time towards the middle of December I was finally able to get in contact with Ms. Jesus, the housing assistant at NYCHA. When I inquired about the status of the

3 inspection that four weeks had elapsed and no one
4 had appeared, initially she asked me did I give
5 my documents. I told her yes Ma'am, that's how I
6 got your name and your phone number. And I also
7 have the confirmation number which was necessary
8 for me to obtain, in order for me to make an
9 appointment to come and submit these documents.

10 She turned around and told me oh
11 well the documents had not been returned. I says
12 been returned from where? You know, do you have a
13 department that you have to forward them to, for
14 example, an inspector's department? She was unable
15 to give me any clarification on the status, only
16 to tell me that the inspection, you know, was
17 pending.

18 Subsequently the paralegal at the
19 Legal Action Center came into contact with one of
20 the attorneys over at NYCHA whose name I do not
21 know at this time. He was provided with my
22 voucher number, the address of the location that
23 had to be inspected, and my name. The attorney
24 said that he would look into the matter and get
25 back in contact with them.

No response was forthcoming. On

January 11th I subsequently received a notice from NYCHA in effect telling me that the voucher that I had would not be honored because there was no funds. Now back in December, before this crisis was announced to the public, there has been a meeting in NYCHA, okay, and in essence, one of the representatives from the Legal Action Center writes, in essence, I have learned from sources at NYCHA that NYCHA is not accepting Section 8 packages for rental from new Section 8 voucher holders. 3,018 voucher holders are impacted by this decision. The majority are foreignly [phonetic], homeless families and Advantage apartments. If your client submitted a landlord packet on or before 12/10 it will likely be accepted for rental and be scheduled for inspection. Okay.

Now in as much as NYCHA had established a policy setting, in essence, a deadline of when it would stop receiving new rental packets, it's clear that the packet that I submitted back in November 24th was 3 weeks before they even had this meeting and issued this policy.

So it's obvious that even the

1 policies that they established in relation to this
2 crisis, they're not even adhering to these
3 policies at all. And when you try to get some
4 type of clarification as Ms Farrakhan testified
5 earlier, they don't even want to talk to you about
6 it. You know, they're not responsive. You try to
7 obtain clarification, to obtain their assistance;
8 they're very rude, very disrespectful. Basically
9 their demeanor is indicative of this
10 Administration, the Bloomberg Administration. You
11 know, it is emphasized by their absence here
12 today.

14 Okay. They have not taken the time
15 to address, you know, this problem. And never
16 mind going to the Mayor's Office for the Homeless.
17 I went to their office, you know, in regards to
18 this purported Mayor's efforts and all I received
19 was a listing of available apartments that is
20 basically being generated by many of the City
21 agencies in the City of New York. The only
22 different thing is their cover letter. Okay.

23 Everything, every agency that you
24 go to is basically sending you in a circle. Okay.
25 You're getting no help from nobody. Everybody

perpetuates they're doing a lot and they're not doing nothing, okay. Back in August 2006 I went to Ms. Gale Brewer's office, Councilwoman Brewer's office for some assistance. And at that time she wrote a letter on my behalf to the Commissioner of the Homeless Services asking them for their assistance, okay, and intervention in helping me to obtain housing. I have not waited, you know, for housing, you know, to do anything for me. I have pursued this matter diligently. I have submitted somewhere in the neighborhood of about 50 applications to new housing developments. But affordable housing is not something that exists in the City of New York, okay. A person making \$30,000 a year may--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Sir, if you could summarize your testimony?

MR. BONILLA: Yes Ma'am. You know, a person making \$30,000 a year can't get affordable housing. I'm on a fixed income of \$761 a month. The issue that I, you know, take here today and support is that something needs to be done about this crisis. And I think that NYCHA should be held accountable for their inaction, for

misleading people, okay, issuing, you know, vouchers which in essence are not worth the paper that they're written on. Okay. And I hope that this panel would take this, the City Council would take this up with the Mayor and, you know, the other entities of the New York State government, okay, because we need to address this. Okay, there's no mechanism in place in New York City for people who are disabled, for people who are homeless, to turn to, to try to find housing, in which they can live in. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: No, we're going to have the next person on the panel and then we will open it up for questions.

MS. STUKOMAN: I am sorry--[Mic turned off]

MS. CATHERINE TREPANI: Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. My name is Catherine Trepani and I am the Director of the Housing Link Program at New Destiny Housing Corporation. We're a nonprofit organization that seeks to increase the permanent housing and services available to low income survivors of domestic violence and others at risk of

homelessness.

The loss of these nearly 3,000 vouchers has been absolutely devastating. My help line has received dozens of calls from voucher holders, much like the folks sitting at this table, one of whom is Ms. Thomas that we're actually working with on her case. And folks are confused. They're frustrated. They're at a total loss as to what to do now that their vouchers have been rescinded. And I'm at a loss as to what to tell them.

Most of our callers are victims of domestic violence who desperately need affordable housing to escape their abusers and save the lives of themselves and their children. These people were able to meet NYCHA's stringent documentation requirements which requires them to prove that their lives were in danger due to the abuse that they were suffering and needed to relocate. They complied with every request for additional documentation, produced police reports, orders of protection, letters from social workers, district attorneys, etcetera. They've endured long waiting periods, actually received the voucher and they

2 finally thought that they'd secured the means to
3 get out of their abusive situation into a
4 violence-free permanent home.

5 All of this, only to be told that
6 there is no assistance for them after all and
7 those vouchers are just not valid. Apart from
8 remaining in or entering to the shelter system
9 until this crisis is resolved there is absolutely
10 no other resource that is immediately available to
11 them. If they're lucky, the documents that they
12 to originally get the domestic violence priority
13 could be still fresh enough to apply for public
14 housing. And that's if they're lucky because
15 they're probably going to be over a year old at
16 this point. But even then they would have to
17 endure that whole application process all over
18 again with all of the onerous documentation
19 requirements and so forth.

20 So in essence there's really no
21 real alternatives, particularly for those folks
22 that aren't in shelter but are just hanging on by
23 their fingertips in the community. These victims
24 of domestic violence and by last count we heard
25 that there's nearly 500 of them, along with over

2 2,000 other equally needy households affected by
3 these cuts deserve not just an explanation but the
4 rental assistance that was promised to them.

5 Since the Housing Authority doesn't
6 have the funding to support these vouchers that
7 were given out right now, it's imperative that the
8 City partner with all of the relevant agencies
9 throughout the City and State to find a workable
10 solution now. I've heard several proposals here
11 today including, you know, City-State funded
12 rental subsidies, from OTDA to bridge the gap
13 between now and the availability of Section 8,
14 extending Advantage, using stimulus money, using
15 HPD Section 8 vouchers, or to have every City
16 agency who referred the tenant to the Section 8
17 program cover the cost of those tenants out of
18 their own budgets like ACS or the DA's Offices.

19 I think the best solution is
20 probably going to be some combination of all of
21 these things. But I do want to make a couple of
22 points that I hope can help inform the process of
23 identifying the best course to take.

24 First I want to say that a lot of
25 the affected voucher holders were not referred by

particular City agencies. So if we simply say let's put it on ACS to fund the foster kids and the DA's to fund the witnesses, you're actually missing a large chunk of the affected voucher holders. And that does include the 500 domestic violence survivors in these so-called emergency cases that we were hearing about from my colleagues at Legal Aid.

So we have to be sure that whatever solution we choose covers every single affected voucher holder and not just those that fall into certain categories that may be sort of easier to identify funding sources for. We can't abandon the remaining voucher holders.

Second, when we are looking at other funding resources or homeless housing resources throughout this City like the public housing units of the HPD Section 8 vouchers, we really need to do that quite thoughtfully. We don't want to solve this crisis by creating another for different equally needy people. So we need to look at the waiting lists and where those--who those resources would have been helping were it not for this crisis and just be careful not to,

you know, solve this and then create another mess
someplace else. So thoughtful consideration of
all of those factors.

And lastly any solution that we
come up with here locally in the City or hopefully
in partnership with the State is probably going to
be a temporary one pending the availability of
Federal funds for Section 8. So as we ask our
partners in government to find a solution for
these 3,000 people who are experiencing this
unfair, acute crisis, we also have to ensure that
going forward when this Section 8 list does reopen
that there is sufficient oversight to ensure that
this absolutely never happens again.

So on behalf of the thousands of
needy families with emergency priorities on the
now frozen Section 8 waiting list and the
countless others that can't even apply right now
because of this crisis, we do ask that steps be
taken to accurately account for all the vouchers
issues in the future, such that no other group has
to suffer this level of trauma and uncertainty
ever again. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you for

your testimony. I have a couple of questions for this panel. Ms. Stukoman, your daughter had a Section 8 voucher? Okay can you grab the microphone please?

MS. STUKOMAN: Sorry. She, in 1994 she applied--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Okay.

MS. STUKOMAN: --in 2007, they invite her, this time I forgot to say she got cancer surgery.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Um-hum. Okay.

MS. STUKOMAN: And the case worker, what make me upset never, ever invite her, never talked to her--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Um-hum.

MS. STUKOMAN: --how can be this?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

MS. STUKOMAN: How can be this, never talk to her? Never propose her, your income is not good, it's not okay. You have to do something. You have try something.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very

3 much. Mr. Bonilla? So you got your voucher when?

4 MR. BONILLA: November, I got my
5 voucher on November 10th.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Of this--of
7 2009--

8 MR. BONILLA: [Interposing) Of
9 2009.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And so then
11 the same thing, there were issues with your
12 application and--

13 MR. BONILLA: [Interposing) No.
14 No. I got the apartment a week later.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

16 MR. BONILLA: I called the number
17 in Queens which is where I had to call to make an
18 appointment to submit my rental packet.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Um-hum.

20 MR. BONILLA: They gave me a
21 confirmation number. And the following--that was
22 on November 23rd. And they gave me an appointment
23 for November 24th. On November 24th I went to NYCHA
24 with my completed packet and everything was in
25 order. Everything was in order; the housing
assistant reviewed all the paperwork.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Um-hum.

3 MR. BONILLA: She came back out.

4 She had me sign the lease. Okay. She wrote down
5 her name and her phone number and told me the
6 apartment will be inspected within three or four
7 weeks--

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)

9 So they processed your application but prior to
10 actually getting an inspection this is when the
11 vouchers were rescinded and that's when you were
12 told that your voucher was rescinded?

13 MR. BONILLA: No--my--the voucher,
14 the notice that operates as rescission, I received
15 in January.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Um-hum.

17 Right. Okay.

18 MR. BONILLA: But all along from
19 November--

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)

21 Right.

22 MR. BONILLA: --until the first
23 week of January, I was being told that the
24 apartment was scheduled to be inspected. But
25 nobody ever went to inspect the apartment. Then

after two months, the landlord holding the apartment, the development on the same day that I got the notice, she also received a notice from NYCHA telling them that there was no money for no new rentals. But again according to NYCHA's policies, I was not supposed to be affected by the crisis because my packet was submitted three weeks before they even made a policy. Okay. I had already submitted it November 24th. They didn't issue this December 10th cutoff date until December 7th.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you Mr. Bonilla. I think what's, you know, as we listen so similar testimony is that they were just holding off and holding off until they made their announcement. So that is, you know, they can disabuse of that appearance when they come in to testify. Anyone else has questions of this panel? Okay the next panel, oh, I want to thank everyone on this panel for their testimony--

MS. STUKOMAN: [Interposing) Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
The next panel we have Latoya Hill, Afara

[phonetic] Speaks from Homeless in America,
Michael Pollenberg from Safe Horizon and Nicky
Martinez from Metropolitan Council on Jewish
Poverty. And as soon as you're ready just grab
the microphone and start, identify yourself for
the record and start giving testimony.

[Pause]

MS. LATOYA HILL: Good morning or
good afternoon. My name is Latoya Hill. Thank
you for the opportunity to speak this morning,
this afternoon. I'm the mother of twin boys,
Kingston and Kenyon Lewis. They're two and a half
years old. I first applied for Section 8, for a
Section 8 voucher in August of 2009. And I
received a voucher on November 24th of 2009. Safe
Horizon helped me apply for my voucher after I was
forced to flee from my apartment I shared with my
fiancé after he was brutally murdered. The
suspects in my fiancé's murder would often harass
me and hang around the area where I lived.

I got a restraining order against
one of the suspects. Thereafter I took my sons
and went to my mother's house; excuse me, hoping
that the people who killed my fiancé would not

find me.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Ms. Hill could
you just grab the microphone a little closer--

MS. HILL: [Interposing) I'm sorry,
I'm just a little--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --that's okay.

MS. HILL: --nervous.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I know. Your
voice is getting a little lower so it was getting--
-

MS. HILL: [Interposing) Okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --difficult
and--

MS. HILL: [Interposing) I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --I want to
make sure we capture everything. Take a deep
breath. If you need to take a second, that's okay
as well. You might want to bend the little
cushion part a little bit--

MS. HILL: [Interposing) Okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --so we can
capture you better.

MS. HILL: Okay. When I received
my voucher, I immediately began a search for

apartments. No one from NYCHA told me that I had to hurry up and find an apartment because the vouchers may not be valid soon. In fact I was told by NYCHA's staff that I had six months to find an apartment, 180 days. Yet less than one month after I received the voucher, NYCHA decided not to accept any more vouchers. I found an apartment in Harlem that I like and I still want to move into that specific apartment.

Now that NYCHA has refused to accept any Section 8 vouchers I cannot move. And one of the suspects in my fiancé's murder was recently released. And I often see that person in my community where I live. I don't know when my voucher can be used. NYCHA hasn't given me any information on what I should do. the letter that they sent out, it just--it's not specific. It doesn't tell--it just tells you that you'll be put in the order that you, you know, applied. Thank you.

MS. NICKY MARTINEZ: Hi. I'm Nicky Martinez. I am a domestic violence social worker with Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty. I actually have a prepared statement but I really

3 believe, I'm very passionate about this subject
4 and I think that speaking extemporaneously would
5 probably be more appropriate.

6 I'm here to represent over 490
7 domestic violence victims who lost their vouchers
8 as a result of the NYCHA's change in policy. And
9 I understand that there are quite a few more
10 people but just as everyone here has
11 constituencies, I do as well.

12 We have worked, Metropolitan
13 Council, has worked with the New York City Family
14 and Justice Centers very closely. We're a partner
15 agency in both the Queens office and in Brooklyn.
16 We serve over 900 domestic violence victims a year
17 and we're a very small unit. So that's quite a
18 big number.

19 After the policy was passed by
20 NYCHA, I went to work and in the New York City
21 Family and Justice Center which is a Mayoral
22 office. It is run by the Office to Combat
23 Domestic Violence. No one had answers. No one.
24 The Commissioner who works under the Mayor had no
25 answers for our clients.

Our clients who have been

victimized already are being re-traumatized by the fact that there are no answers for them. And entering shelter is a really difficult decision for these women. If they're not deemed in immediate danger, they are not accepted into domestic violence shelters and therefore are put through the shelter system, the regular City shelter system which is not always safe for them, even using the Nova system which is set up for domestic violence victims who cannot get into domestic violence shelters. They're not safe. They're often placed in shelters that are just blocks away from where the abuse took place or the abuser lives.

Our clients came to us for answers and because we didn't have answers we didn't really know where to send them. We called Section 8. We called NYCHA. We contacted as many people as we could. There was no one to contact. And I have to say that as a professional, the level of respect that--or the lack of respect I should say that I received when contacting NYCHA and Section 8 is an absolute atrocity. And I challenge each and every person in this room who serves the

public to go to a public assistance office and try to apply and see what that's like. Go to Section 8 and to NYCHA and to see what that's like. These people are being constantly re-traumatized and constantly disenfranchised by these offices. And it's awful. And I can't even express to you how difficult it is. I've sat in those meetings and until I present my business card, no matter what I look like or what I'm dressed like, I am a woman of color. And until I present my business card or my ID identifying myself as someone who works for the City of New York in the Family Justice Center, I'm disrespected. And that is just absolutely not acceptable.

As I said, many of my clients are reentering the shelter system at this point. And they can't actually be here to talk. Some of them are in hiding. Others are just not really feeling that this is the most--I absolutely, I give the most credit to the women who've come here today and the men and women who talked about their situation because I know how difficult it is.

And I just want to share a couple of examples of just some of the clients that I'm

working with. Mrs. R is from Far Rockaway, Queens. She has four children and she'd been living in an abusive marriage for over 15 years. In March 2009 she separated from her husband and she received an order of protection from Queens Family Court. Her husband has repeatedly violated this order by harassing her and on several occasions has become physically violent. And although the abuser does have this order in place and has been arrested several times, he continues to violate. He doesn't care. And my client has started to refer to her order of protection as nothing more than a piece of paper. My client not only resides in a home that she shared with her husband for many years and where the abuse took place but this apartment has been deemed illegal by the City of New York. This apartment I should also tell you is owned by a friend of her husband's. And because she turned them in for having an illegal apartment, he is now harassing her, the landlord. He is allowing her husband to come on the property. He's reporting to her husband her whereabouts, her activities. She's not in a safe place. But she doesn't want to go

to shelter with her four children because she's just--she's scared. She's been through so much. I should also tell you that this particular client, I submitted her Section 8 application 3 times. I don't know why it was returned. I actually had to have it hand delivered by a member of the Office to Combat Domestic Violence. And at that point it was finally accepted. She received her voucher in November only to see it revoked just several weeks later. At this point her husband refuses to pay child support. She has no work experience because she was in a relationship where her husband wouldn't allow her to work. And she has no options. She has no options. And the Section 8 voucher was the beginning of what she thought was the end of her trauma. And it actually has only started to be another beginning of it.

Another client that we're working with, Mrs. J, she lives in Manhattan with her 6-year old son. She has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and she's really attempting right now to get disability benefits but currently is living on only her food stamps. After living in an abusive

relationship for several years she finally separated from her perpetrator in July of 2009 following a very violent incident. She has an order of protection from both Family Court and Criminal Court but again her abuser continues to violate this order of protection, not only personally but through third party individuals. She's been called by his family and friends to be harassed and threatened. And at one point feces was left on her doorstep.

The abuser is following her son to school. He's not safe. And as a result she's had to make special arrangements with the school just so it's safe for her son to attend. She actually received the Section 8 voucher. She secured an apartment in Pennsylvania. She was actually ready to port, what Section 8 refers to as porting, the voucher to another state where she could live away from her abuser and with her family. And she signed the lease. Everything was ready and just weeks before it was set to go the voucher was revoked again. And she is in Manhattan now. She really has no options. And these are just two of the examples of the clients that we're working

with.

MR. MICHAEL POLLENBERG: Thank you
Chairwoman Palma, Chairwoman Mendez and members of
the Committee for the opportunity to testify
today. My name is Michael Pollenberg. I'm the
Vice President of Government Affairs for Safe
Horizon, the nation's leading victim assistance
organization.

Since this announcement was made in
late December nullifying existing Section 8
vouchers, our offices throughout the five Boroughs
have heard from dozens of domestic violence
victims whose window to safety for themselves and
their children has been shuttered. From the women
and children who live in our emergency domestic
violence shelters and transitional housing to the
victims of domestic violence who come to us
through our network of community offices, court
based programs, hotlines, and free legal services,
the end result is heartbreakingly similar;
crushing disappointment, continued homelessness,
and increased risk of further violence and abuse.

For our clients as you've heard
today, safe and affordable housing can be the very

3 backbone to starting a life without violence. It
4 offers children the chance to lay their heads down
5 at night without apprehension. It allows spouses
6 to prepare for work or school without the risk of
7 sudden violent confrontation. It replaces fear
8 with normalcy, trepidation with comfort, and
9 allows victims to become survivors.

10 While all of the households
11 affected by the crisis equally deserve our
12 collective sympathy and resolve, we are
13 particularly focused on those households, nearly
14 500 or so in total, headed by a victim of domestic
15 violence. For New Yorkers who are desperately
16 trying to escape their abusers and find affordable
17 housing where they can safely raise their
18 families, Section 8 vouchers can be a critical and
19 life saving tool. And we hope that by sharing a
20 few of our clients' stories with you today,
21 although you've heard from so many already, we can
22 help elucidate how this crisis is affecting so
23 many of our needy families.

24 In the interest of time I have
25 three vignettes here and you've heard vignettes
from others. You've heard direct testimony from

my colleague sitting next to me and from others.
I'll just read one.

This is Ms. B. After years of
enduring physical, emotional and verbal abuse, Ms.
B made the decision to leave her boyfriend.
Despite their breakup the violence and threats
continued and in July of 2009 the ex-boyfriend
approached Ms. B in the street, slapped her and
threatened to send his friends to attack her and
her family. She reported the incident to the
police and her ex-boyfriend was arrested.

She also petitioned for an order of
protection which the perpetrator violated a few
weeks later, coming to her family's home and then
punching, kicking their apartment door and
threatening to kill them. In addition his
siblings came to her home and threatened to kill
her as well.

No longer safe in her family home
and afraid that her mother might get hurt Ms. B
began the process of finding her own apartment.
She came to Safe Horizon's Manhattan Community
Program to learn about her options and to discuss
ways to manage her risk. In the meantime she was

1 staying with a friend and paying part of the rent.
2 She applied for Section 8 housing and was excited
3 and relieved when she received the voucher in the
4 fall. But just as she was finalizing her search
5 for the apartment she was notified that her
6 voucher was no longer valid.
7

8 She's reached the limit on how long
9 she can stay with her friend and for safety's sake
10 she can't return to her mother's apartment. She
11 had hoped to have stable and safe housing to focus
12 on her future but her plans to be self-sufficient
13 are being--are now jeopardized as she faces
14 imminent homelessness.

15 The need for safe affordable
16 housing is why NYCHA prioritizes victims of
17 domestic violence for Section 8. And the loss of
18 these vouchers will mean homelessness and greatly
19 increased risk of further violence for our clients
20 and their families. We agree with many of the
21 recommendations that have been stated already.
22 And we urge you to follow up with the City in a
23 week or two when they come back and we look
24 forward to the results of that hearing. Thank
25 you.

3 [Pause]

4 MR. ALVIN JOHNSON: Good afternoon.

5 My name is Alvin Johnson. I am the Community
6 Board 11 Housing Chair. Community Board 11's
7 footprint is East Harlem, El Barrio, where 84% of
8 the housing stock is either subsidized housing or
9 rent-regulated housing, with many of these
10 households receiving or on Section 8 or on the
11 Section 8 waiting list.

12 The second page of my testimony is
13 a letter dated December 30th, 2009 from the New
14 York City Housing Authority notifying 3,000
15 families, many of them from East Harlem, that
16 applied for and received their Section 8 vouchers,
17 that those vouchers were worthless and would not
18 be honored. In the letter why NYCHA is taking no
19 responsibility for issuing the 3,000 Section 8
20 vouchers that they knew never existed, because HUD
21 funds were never allocated for these vouchers.

22 I ask the Council to demand that
23 NYCHA come before you immediately and explain to
24 you who was responsible for crushing the hopes and
25 dreams of over 3,000 families. When did NYCHA
know that they had made this unconscionable error?

What will be done so that this can never happen again? And NYCHA should immediately place all 3,000 voucher holders in warehoused NYCHA apartments. I think NYCHA certainly owes this to those devastated families.

In closing, the future of Section 8 in New York City can only happen with the help of the City Council. I urge the City Council to call your Senate and Assembly counterparts and tell them that they must pass Senate Bill S3326 and Assembly Bill A9230. These bills would place all Mitchell Lama and Section 8 buildings built after 1974 into rent stabilization and making it impossible for the landlord of my building to increase the rent roll from \$1.8 million to \$2.9 million which they have done. If Section 3326 were passed, the most my landlord would be able to allow the rent to be increased would be 3.5% a year or \$63,000 a year, not the \$2.1 million he's currently going to get.

In my building alone where 90% of the apartments will receive Section 8 vouchers, we would have saved Section 8 over \$2 million a year if S3326 is passed. Now times that by the 100's

2 of Mitchell Lamas and Section 8's that would be
3 placed into rent stabilization retroactively in
4 New York City, saving Section 8 hundreds of
5 millions of dollars per year. That savings would
6 be more than enough to fund those 3,000 NYCHA
7 vouchers. As 3326 is an important bill that will
8 assure the future of Section 8 in New York City,
9 we must pass this bill. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

11 [Applause]

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
13 Melissa Mark-Viverito.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:

15 Thank you Madam Chair. You know, I do want to
16 take an opportunity because Alvin Johnson, you
17 chair the Housing Committee of Community Board 11
18 which is a Community Board that I represent. And
19 I really want to thank you for taking the time,
20 all the panelists as well, but in particular it
21 gives me great pride to see my community
22 represented here, to speak out 'cause we do our
23 jobs but we also want to do that--we know that
24 we're only going to be successful in partnership
25 with our constituents and being truly being able

to stand shoulder to shoulder in the front lines because this is going to be a difficult time as we all know. And we all know that we're going to see a lot of rallies and a lot of protests and we need to be out there in front of City Hall every day. So, you know, congratulations on being named Chair of the Housing Committee and I look forward to working very closely with Community Board 11 during these difficult times in making sure that we do the best thing on behalf of all of our constituents. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member James?

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yeah. Mr. Johnson, do you have a census or a survey of how many available public housing units you have in your Community Board?

MR. JOHNSON: Actually I just received a census from the Community Service Society who had actually done a census for public housing--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
[Interposing) Yes.

MR. JOHNSON: --NYCHA housing in

East Harlem--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

[Interposing) Yes.

MR. JOHNSON: --and I just received
that. There is actually about 17,000--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

[Interposing) Wow.

MR. JOHNSON: --NYCHA apartments in
Community Board 11 which is the highest
concentration of NYCHA in the City. Of those, I,
I'm thinking that 15,000 of those are apartments
that are filled. So that would be a warehousing
of about 2,000 units.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And of those
2,000 are they all renovated or are they habitable
or?

MR. JOHNSON: The survey that I
have, there are a couple of them that are under
rehabilitation. One development at is under--I
think it's Metro North that is under
rehabilitation which is about 300 units. So the
apartments are there and they are being
warehoused.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And last Mr.

Johnson, do you know if there's a waiting list for these units?

MR. JOHNSON: I don't know if you-- if there's a waiting list for warehoused apartments because NYCHA is not bringing them online.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And do you know the status of these two bills that are pending in Albany? Do you know if they've passed committee yet?

MR. JOHNSON: They are in committee. The Senate bill is on the third reading.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay.

MR. JOHNSON: And the companion bill in the Assembly has been redone and it's resubmitted.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you Mr. Johnson, to your service, not only to your Community Board but to the City of New York.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Thank you. Council Member Brewer followed by Council Member Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

3 My question is either for Safe Horizon or for Met
4 Council. And thank you for all the work that you
5 do. When you--do you work--I know you're working
6 with domestic violence folks but in addition are
7 you working with people who are either in the
8 Advantage system or who are maybe going from DHS
9 to the Advantage system? And what do you know, if
10 anything, they're being told? Because if there
11 isn't any light at the end of the tunnel in terms
12 of Section 8, I'm wondering if people are being
13 told that or are they just being told you can get
14 this Advantage funding for a year and then they're
15 not given the appropriate full information.

16 MS. MARTINEZ: I don't have any
17 concrete numbers on how many of my clients are
18 either in Advantage apartments right now or
19 applying for the Advantage program but there are
20 quite a few. My experience is that my clients
21 actually don't like Advantage because they really
22 truly believe that they will just be back in the
23 shelter in a year.

24 And I have seen that quite a bit.
25 I've seen, and again, this is when domestic
violence victims, at that point, a year later, you

2 can't get into a domestic violence shelter 'cause
3 you're not deemed with--you're not deemed in
4 immediate threat. So you go into the regular
5 shelter system. And I've had quite a few clients
6 that have had come out on Advantage, been in an
7 apartment for a year, not been offered anything in
8 long term, and then gone back into shelters.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
10 very much. And anything at Safe Horizon? No.
11 Okay. All right. Thank you very much. That
12 makes it really clear.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: This just
14 follows up on that I think. I'd like to hear a
15 little bit more. For survivors of domestic
16 violence what you think we ought to do, which of
17 the solutions that have been talked about in the
18 short term until Section 8's turnover, we should
19 really focus on. Unfortunately one of the things
20 I' think we're stuck in the position of doing is
21 trying to match, especially without the
22 Administration here, you know, coordinating it,
23 matching ideas for particular solutions to
24 particular populations which is not an idea
25 situation. But, you know, we heard earlier from

Legal Aid that one thing the council probably has the power to do is by legislation to compel DHS to refer some of these individuals to NYCHA for priority, you know, but I understand obviously this particular issue is related to survivors of domestic violence. Would that be, you know, an appropriate--would it be better to come up with some sort of short term--anyway I guess if you could speak specifically to assuming what we're trying to do is something, you know, to hold people over until the Section 8 vouchers they were promised become available, particularly for survivors of domestic violence, you know, what do you think we should be looking to do?

MR. POLLENBERG: I think one thing, not all, but a lot of the folks, the victims of domestic violence who applied for Section 8 as DV priority also applied for the New York City Housing Authority's DV priority. And while they're a priority, it still is a much longer wait than any of our clients or us for that matter would want. And so one thing we would ask the City to do is for those applicants who jointly applied for Section 8 and for New York City

Housing Authority, that their applications be expedited, very, very quickly, so that they really are at the very front of the line for these kinds of--for any of the openings that come up.

MS. MARTINEZ: I'd like to note that most of my clients also, again, applied for Section 8 and NYCHA at the same time for New York City Housing Authority apartments. And in our experience, Section 8 always came through faster. And clients would then let their NYCHA applications lapse believing that their Section 8 applications would come through. And again, yes, I think that that would be the most appropriate, the most appropriate solution for these clients is to allow them to be made priority in NYCHA apartments.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you know whether or not once your clients, a DV victim gets a Section 8 voucher and ultimately apartment, whether or not NYCHA ever takes them off the waiting list?

MS. MARTINEZ: I'm not sure but I know, again, most--usually the Section 8--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

3 [Interposing) Is there any cross-reference or
4 coordination, I guess, between--

5 MS. MARTINEZ: [Interposing) I
6 don't know--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

8 [Interposing) Okay.

9 MS. MARTINEZ: --usually the
10 Section 8, the interview would come first. And in
11 our experience and then they wouldn't answer
12 anything from NYCHA.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Ms. Martinez,
14 you mentioned a couple of cases, but I only read
15 two case scenarios in here. Could you get us
16 summaries of the other cases that you talked
17 about?

18 MS. MARTINEZ: Absolutely, we
19 definitely have--

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
21 Okay.

22 MS. MARTINEZ: --have other cases.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So that we
24 could follow up with the Administration on some of
25 these cases--

2 MS. MARTINEZ: [Interposing) Okay.

3 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --and it'd be
4 helpful to have that. Ms. Hill, since several
5 cases have been mentioned since your testimony, I
6 now couldn't remember and I wanted you to refresh
7 my recollection, when were you given a voucher?

8 MS. HILL: November 24th of 2009.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: November 24th.
10 And I'm sorry again, just refresh my recollection.
11 You did find an apartment shortly thereafter or?

12 MS. HILL: No I didn't specifically
13 find--I found one to my liking but once I got
14 ready to submit my paperwork, that's when I
15 received the letter that everyone received on
16 December 30th. I only had my voucher for maybe 30
17 days.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Um-hum.

19 MS. HILL: So.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

21 MS. HILL: By the time I got ready
22 to submit my packet, my voucher was no good.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And you
24 received your letter when was that that you
25 received--

MS. HILL: [Interposing) December
30th--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
You received--

MS. HILL: --that's when it was
dated but I got it like maybe January... 2nd or 3rd.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Um-hum. Okay.
I'm very sorry for what's happened to you and to
everyone else--

MS. HILL: [Interposing) Thank you
very much. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I want
to thank this panel for their testimony. If we
can bring up the panel that was up before,
Jennifer Levy. And it is Patricia Arguilagos with
you? [Skip in audio] Isaacs and how about Pavel
Darevenchenko? And Mercedes Cruz. Is there a
Mercedes Cruz still with you?

[Off mic]: Yes she's here but you
can sit--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
Okay.

[Pause]

[Witnesses getting settled]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

Jennifer Levy, Patricia Aguilagos, Beryl Isaacs,
Mercedes Cruz and Pavel Darevenchenko, right?
Who's--and someone is translating here?

MS. JENNIFER LEVY: Yes somebody
will be translating.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: You have to
press the button and please identify yourself for
the record.

MS. JENNIFER LEVY: Thank you. My
name is Jennifer Levy. I am the Deputy Director
of South Brooklyn Legal Services. At the outset
I'd like to thank the Committees, the Council
Members for holding this Oversight Hearing. I
know that a number of you have been dedicated to
this issue and are deeply involved. And I already
appreciate the great amount of work that you have
all done. So thank you.

And I'm going to follow Steve
Banks' example and at the outset turn it over to
the clients because I know you want to hear from
them more than you want to hear from me anyway.

3 [Pause]

4 MS. PATRICIA AGUILAGOS: Good
5 afternoon. My name is Patricia Aguilagos
6 [phonetic]. I live in Brooklyn with my three kids
7 and my newborn 2-week old granddaughter. After
8 experiencing a serious, ongoing domestic violence
9 situation involving hitting, stalking and threat
10 with guns, I work with Safe Horizon to obtain a
11 domestic violence priority Section 8 voucher. My
12 voucher was dated February 3rd, 2009. The
13 expiration date was August 3rd, 2009. On February
14 15, my abuser came to my apartment and pushed me
15 out of a second story window. I was very
16 seriously injured. I broke every bone in my back.
17 My legs, my arm. I was in a coma for 3 days. And
18 the surgery to repair my back took 14 hours. My
19 spine is now being held together by 2 plates and 6
20 pins.

21 My abuser still has not been
22 arrested because the police can't find him. I
23 spent 2 months in the hospital. When I was
24 released I went back to the apartment. I needed
25 24 hours nursing care and for several months.
During the day I had a nurse come to the apartment

3 and at night my daughter took care of me.

4 Slowly after being completely
5 bedridden for months, I started to recover some of
6 my mobility. At first I could only use a
7 wheelchair, then I began to use a walker or
8 crutches. Moving around is still very painful for
9 me.

10 Because I didn't want to lose my
11 Section 8 voucher, I asked friends to be on the
12 lookout for available apartments. In July I heard
13 about an apartment in a 3-family house in
14 Canarsie. I spoke with the landlord over the
15 phone and he told me that he would accept Section
16 8 after me, after offer me a lease. The landlord
17 brought all for the rental document to me. And
18 because a worker at the Section 8 office told me I
19 needed to come in person to meet with them and
20 delivery my apartment paperwork. I took Access-A-
21 Ride to downtown Brooklyn on July 27, 2009.

22 During that meeting the Section 8
23 work make a mistake on the--tell me that the
24 apartment that I had found in Canarsie was
25 accepted. And that the paperwork needed to be
like the landlord had to fix the paperwork. It

was missing some, you know, information on it.
Went back to the landlord, fixed the paperwork,
come back and the Section 8 mentioned to me that
this apartment, I cannot live in it because of the
zip code--their mistake that they made trying to
say that I am the one that made the mistake but
lucky me they had wrote the address on my file.
So when they opened the file the address was right
there in front of them. I said no it's not my
mistake, here is the address. So they--when they
look at it they said oh, they went and talked
among them and come back to me and they said not
because your voucher will be expired, we're going
to--we're going to give you a two month extension
for our mistake that was made. But two months was
not enough for me, you know, on a wheelchair to
find an apartment.

And, you know, I went back to
Section 8, with all--I'm in and out of the
hospital. I went back to Section 8 with all my
hospital documents and there was nothing, you
know, they said they can't help me out. Thank you
so much.

I'm still living in an apartment.

I'm back and forth at friends. My abuser was in front of my door two days ago, huh, so I'm like I'm running from one place to the other. My kids is all over the place. And, you know... needs to be fixed, you know?

MS. LEVY: Thank you very much.

The next person who's going to speak is Beryl Isaacs who's a client of Legal Services Bronx.

MS. BERYL ISAACS: Good afternoon.

My name is Beryl Isaacs. [Pause] I'm emotional for these women who've had to go through these things. At the time that I was going through it years ago there was no domestic violence shelter. There was no advocates for my son who was disabled. But I got away. But there's more, I guess, evil present now than there was. So my emotion is for them.

Because my case is--I had a Section 8 voucher. My landlord wouldn't accept it. We had to go to Supreme Court 'cause his lawyer, Mr. Cohen was very nasty, very confrontational and didn't want him to accept it. And he wanted me out of the building because my rent was low. And he didn't care that I would have had to go into a

shelter because of the fact of going back and forth to court, no one was going to rent me an apartment, I was told, by one of the realty's that I went to.

Because of going back and forth to court I wound up in the hospital with running to go to court to take the rent money one day, and I hurt my ankle. I was told I can't sue them for harassment. But I'm on disability. I have a few illnesses, fibromyalgia is one of them which is very painful, you know. Osteoarthritis. I'm not going to name all the things that's wrong [chuckling]. But my landlord, in not caring about me or my illness or the fact that he had to accept by Section 8, he had, what is it a J-51, is that what you call it? But he and his lawyer did not care about that or me or that despite my disabilities that I would be in the street.

Fortunately I went to Section 8 and they said they would give me more time. I still couldn't find an apartment. And they said when you're finished with this case, then we're not going to close your Section 8 case, we're going to leave it open. But they closed it. So Legal

2 Services had to fight for me to get Section 8
3 again. But at that point, my landlord knew that
4 he couldn't put me out. I prepared to move, gave
5 away a lot of my stuff. The apartment now is a
6 mess that I've never experienced. I raised two
7 boys, helped to raise other kids, raised my
8 granddaughter, and my apartment has never looked a
9 mess. But because I thought I had to move into a
10 one-room apartment, I gave away stuff. Then
11 afterwards to find that I didn't have to move but
12 still my landlord did not finish the paperwork.

13 He says well after I found out I
14 went to Section 8, I found out that he didn't
15 finish the paperwork. I went back to him to let
16 him know, huh, he put this puzzled look on his
17 face like he didn't know what I was talking about.
18 But all he was doing is buying for time. It's
19 like he knew something that I didn't know. And
20 because of that fact I feel that this is why he
21 kept on delaying because he knew that I was going
22 to lose my Section 8 voucher.

23 I went to the Housing, earlier, so
24 that I could put in harassment papers on him. And
25 because he said that I wasn't paying my rent,

where in actuality he wasn't cashing the money orders and he would take me back to court and say that I wasn't and then I would always prove that I did give him the rent, that I did get the money orders.

The last time that I went, I made an appointment for Section 8, the landlord said that he was going to meet me there. Never showed up. But this was in December. She knew that I wasn't going to be able to get my Section 8. She didn't say anything to me. All she said was oh well, tell your landlord to finish the papers, have them finish--you do this. I did all of that. And my landlord still didn't do anything. That same month, now he's got me back into court, suing me for the money, for my rent and saying that I didn't pay rent. When Supreme Court had said to him that he either has to accept 30% or what the Section 8 was going to give me. But he knew that I was going to lose my Section 8. And him and the lawyer are now trying to make me pay that back money which I don't have because my rent was 3/4% of my rent--of my disability. And sometimes I couldn't even get my medications. They didn't

care about that.

MS. LEVY: Thank you so much Ms. Isaacs. Because we are running out of space up here, would Ms. Aguilagos and Ms. Isaacs just sit right there.

[Pause]

MS. LEVY: Next I'd like to introduce Mercedes Cruz and Claudia Wald [phonetic] will translate for her.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Speaking in Spanish to Ms. Cruz]

MS. MERCEDES CRUZ [Through an interpreter]: Good day. My name is Mercedes Cruz. Thank you for allowing me to speak today and share with people that are in the same situation. Single mother of three children, they are 19, 15 and 11. Income are Social Security and public assistance, I receive \$588 in Social Security. I also receive \$95 monthly in public assistance. Without Section 8 an apartment for our family would [mic turned off]. For this reason I've been living in a rented room. I rent a room from another person for \$370 a month. The room only has enough space for 3 beds and a table

with 3 chairs for my sons to use to do their homework. My oldest son is a student at Brooklyn University. Our clothes is in boxes or in suitcases. Because there's no room I don't have a bed. I sleep on the floor. We've lived this way for 13 years. I was given a Section 8 voucher in 2009. This finally gave me the hope I would have a better life. I applied for Section 8 in 2000 and finally I was approved for a voucher in May 2009. I had to wait a long time to obtain the Section 8 voucher. When I received it, I began to look for an apartment going from agent to agent with the hope of finding a better life that was suitable for my kids. Now I'm at risk of losing my Section 8 voucher. I'm disabled and I've had problems, health problems for having to fight so long for my benefits. Because I've not completed the process, to use my voucher for a specific apartment, NYCHA's decision means that they're going take away this benefit for which I've fought so long and so hard.

MS. LEVY: The next person who will testify is Pavel Darevenchenko.

[Pause]

[Witness getting settled]

MS. SHAMTILI HAKUM: Good afternoon
Council Members. I want to thank--my name is
Shamtili Hakum [phonetic], the Director of
Litigation at Manhattan Legal Services.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Hold on who
are--are you giving testimony or are you
translating--

MS. HAKUM: [Interposing) I'm
introducing my client and Mr. Darevenchenko who's
going to be giving testimony.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can I ask you
this? Can we then call you on the next panel so
that we can get through questions? And--

MS. HAKUM: [Interposing) I think
that I--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --We're going
to need another translator for someone else. We
can--

MS. HAKUM: [Interposing) Sure I
think the idea was that all of these are Legal
Services clients representing--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
Um-hum.

2 MS. HAKUM: --from each of our
3 Boroughs. And Jennifer Levy who's our Director is
4 then going to give the organization, so actually
5 it was intended to preserve and be efficient in
6 terms of--I'm not going to be giving testimony but
7 this is my client and he's also--the case is a
8 Local Law 10 case which is currently under
9 litigation. Tanya Vayeva [phonetic] is an
10 associate at Millbank, she's going to be
11 translating in Russian for our client. And so
12 this is another scenario where while in litigation
13 the Section 8 voucher was denied and the funding
14 is not available. And this Council passed what I
15 think is a beautiful, as an antidiscrimination
16 lawyer a beautiful legislation regarding source of
17 income discrimination. And essentially what NYCHA
18 did is given the landlord an additional tool to
19 say, you know, forget you. So what you got this
20 voucher, we're not going to give you any money.
21 And we're basically been in the midst of
22 litigation, as a litigator, to have this thrown
23 away as a tool that this Council set forth is
24 another example in addition to the other examples
25 that you've heard. So I want to give most of the

time to Mr. Darevenchenko. There's a translated testimony that we prepared and that's all I'm going to say. Thank you Council Member.

MR. PAVEL DAREVENCHENKO [Speaking through an interpreter]: My name is Pavel Darevenchenko [phonetic]. I live together with my wife Ludmilla Strunitska [phonetic].

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I'm sorry. Can you just hold on. Can you go onto the other mic so you're also recorded into the record. Thank you.

MR. DAREVENCHENKO [Speaking through an interpreter]: I live together with my wife Ludmilla Strunitska [phonetic] we both are 71 years old. We both are diabetics. My wife suffers most from diabetes. Because of this disease she lost her vision, almost lost her vision in one of her eyes. The diabetes also affects her vessel system. First she had a heart attack in 2002. And she had a bad circulation in her legs from the result of that surgery. That she can't walk freely for more than 15, 10 steps without having to stop to take a break. That's why he could only make it here on his own without

his wife. In addition he also suffered a heart attack in 2006. That's when he learned that the funding of Section 8 program is being stopped. It make him feel at a loss because he has difficult buying food to support himself and his wife. Their joint household income is \$1,115 a month. Currently he pays 44% out of this joint income towards his rent. The leftover bills is hardly enough to cover bills. To buy food that is recommended by their doctors since they're diabetics. And forget about trying to make life a little bit more decent and have some sort of, you know, entertainment or something like that. That's the--the freeze of the Section 8 program will negatively affect my life and my health. In January, this past January we celebrated our 50 year anniversary with my wife and I couldn't even afford to take her out, not to buy her anything. But I still am forced to pay an extra \$160 a month because my landlord is refusing to accept my voucher. When I received my voucher in May of 2009 I was having--the landlord refused to accept the voucher. With the help of my lawyers and the workers of Section 8, we wrote a letter to the

landlord which confirmed the validity of my voucher. Despite all this the landlord refused to accept the voucher. Pavel resented and he was shocked at this. My lawyers sued the landlord in October of 2009. And the case is currently being in court. But the landlord already violates the law and still refuses to accept the voucher irrespective of the case being in court against him. And then at the end of December 2009 I received a letter from NYCHA which stated that program Section 8 closes because there is no funding. Thus I am betrayed, I'm betrayed by the City government. And I don't know what shall I do. It looks as if landlord won yet again and I still cannot get over the hurdle. We applied to receive a voucher in 2008, received the voucher in May of 2009 so now two years had passed. We became two years older. We didn't become healthier. And I currently still am waiting for help. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I have a quick question. Jennifer, in Mr. Pavel's case he received the voucher before the policy was

changed. His issue is that the landlord did not accept his voucher. Had his landlord accepted his voucher do you think he would have been in the 3,000 so many people that got the vouchers revoked or he would have been okay?

MS. HAKUM: If I understand the Council Member's question, this is a scenario where prior to the cancellation he had received his voucher. They refused to accept the voucher. What's also incredible--

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: [Interposing]
They, the?

MS. HAKUM: The landlord refused to accept his voucher. The NYCHA Director of Leased Housing in Manhattan sent a letter to the landlord saying the voucher is valid. So essentially I mean it's a litigator's, you know, those of you who are former lawyers, it's a great case of violation clearly of Local Law 10 which this Council passed, yet still, the landlord refused to settle the matter. And then what happened is this cancellation of the program and I think that there are a number of, you know, scenarios where you have clients who--where the landlord refused to

1
2 accept the voucher in violation of the law and now
3 simply because NYCHA has cancelled the program,
4 effectively, they're giving them the tool to
5 violate the law. And that's how--this is one
6 scenario of many scenarios that you've been
7 presented today.

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you. And
9 I'm sorry, I didn't--I forgot you hadn't given
10 your testimony.

11 MS. LEVY: I did want to point out
12 that many of these cases are Local Law 10 cases.
13 It's true of Mr. Darevenchenko, it's also true of
14 Ms. Isaacs. Her case had to do with the landlord
15 needing to accept Section 8 because her landlord
16 received a J-51 benefit which before we had this
17 wonderful Local Law 10 was the argument that we
18 had 'cause the J-51 law requires that landlords
19 accept Section 8. And the same with Ms. Cruz, we
20 filed a Local Law 10 case because once she finally
21 got her voucher after waiting for nine years, then
22 she went to brokers to try to place her voucher
23 and broker after broker said to her we don't do
24 Section 8. So we brought a lawsuit against those
25 brokers saying that they were violating Local Law

10. In the meantime her voucher becomes no good.

The other thing I want to point out is with the bulk of these clients who gave testimony here today, they're in the category that's been described as Other in the breakdown by NYCHA. So I want to urge you not to forget about this category that they have called Other or non-emergency because they very much are emergencies.

The other thing that this reveals is that giving--well it's a wonderful solution for a great many of the people who are in peril here, giving people public housing apartments is not going to work for absolutely everybody. It's not going to work for Mr. Darevenchenko and it's because he's in a low rent--or Ms. Isaacs because they're in low rent, rent stabilized apartments that they should not be giving up whose landlords have been trying to force them out for a long time. We would lose an affordable unit which the City cannot afford to lose.

And so for that reason we can't forget about using HPRP funds. And there's been a lot of talk about the HPRP funds this morning and some confusion about it and its relationship to

Home Base. According to the City's own stimulus tracker website, DHS received \$74 million in HPRP funding. And they are authorized to use those Federal stimulus dollars for short and mid-term rental subsidies. According to the City's own website, once again, they have allocated \$38 billion (sic) of those dollars to the Home Base Program. And once again the Home Base program is authorized to provide these short or mid-term rental subsidies. If the City as was testified to by Ms. Hoffman is saying that those funds should be diverted for non--homelessness prevention purposes, then I would hope that the Council asks DHS about that very carefully when they're testifying before you at the adjourned date for this hearing.

One other thing I should mention is that \$38 million that I just mentioned is more than what it would take to solve the entirety of this problem as the cost has been estimated. \$38 million has been allocated to Home Base. And also, Congresswoman--err, Council Member Brewer asked the question about going to Home Base and whether you can obtain help. And actually Council

Member Lander asked the same question. And one of our clients who is not here to testify today did just that and was told that because her voucher had been cut she had no future ability to pay her rent and the Home Base benefits that she was receiving would be cut. So that is a solution that, that NYCHA is telling our clients to seek and it is not working.

The other thing I want to point out is that there's been some confusion about the number of vacancies in public housing. There's been some suggestion that if we give these apartments to the people that are on this list that we're taking apartments out of the hands of other people who've been waiting. But I want to point your attention, and it's cited in our written testimony, I want to point your attention to a 2006 report that was prepared by Comptroller Thompson which said that there were 3,073 vacant apartments in NYCHA, not just regular vacant apartments, but apartments that were vacant for capital improvements and that 69% of those 3,000 apartments had been vacant for 3 years or more. So asking NYCHA to speed up its repairs is not the

3 same thing as taking apartments out of the hands
4 of people who've been waiting for a very long
5 time.

6 I think the rest of our testimony
7 is contained in the written testimony that we
8 handed up. So I'll stop there. Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Ms. Levy I
10 just have a very quick question. Regarding the
11 Advantage Program, I don't know--I'm sorry, I had
12 to run downstairs for a moment, I don't know if
13 this was addressed in your testimony. It's my
14 understanding and I'm curious with your
15 experience, the Advantage Program which provides
16 this middle term or short term assistance, NYCHA
17 is--it's put into the program that NYCHA should be
18 assisting your clients or folks that are in the
19 Advantage Program with a Section 8 voucher. Now
20 when there is no--so oftentimes the Section 8
21 vouchers, you know, with the application program,
22 there's some complication or there's a document
23 missing, does NYCHA give indication to the client
24 that's in the Advantage Program that there's some
25 problem with their Section 8 voucher because from
what I understand what's happening is that clients

as they are phased out of Advantage, they don't have the Section 8 there to take up the subsidy once that--

MS. LEVY: [Interposing) Right, right.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --the Advantage Program ends.

MS. LEVY: Right. I think that what you're suggesting is something else that bears pointing out which is the fluctuating numbers of people who are impacted by this. And I think that that reveals why that might be. At the outset it was 3,000 people and now it's 2,000 people. I think that you can chip off people who they say are directly affected. And the reason is, I think what you were saying, is that people who are in Advantage apartments should be expecting to receive a Section 8 voucher and they won't be getting them. So the problem is compounded with each month that new Advantage come off service.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But also I'm wondering whether or not NYCHA is fulfilling its duty of notifying. They should be required to

1
2 notify--at least it's my opinion that they should
3 be required to notify if there's a problem or a
4 snag along the way, those clients, because this is
5 in a broader context of how the Advantage Program
6 could be best utilized.

7 MS. LEVY: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: That--what
9 I'm wondering is whether or not in your experience
10 your clients have been fully informed if there's
11 been a problem with their Section 8 application
12 while they're going through the Advantage Program?
13 And if they are not notified whether or not that
14 would be a, you know, there should be some way
15 that NYCHA be required to notify these clients?

16 MS. LEVY: Well I mean the level of
17 notification or consistency is widely variable
18 from person to person and caseworker to
19 caseworker. But I would imagine that the people
20 who are affected by this particular cut are not
21 receiving sufficient notification.

22 I also want to mention that there's
23 been a lot of talk about lawsuits and that our
24 office does intend to file a lawsuit on behalf of
25 Ms. Aguilagos and others who've been discriminated

against because of their disability. And Ms. Aguilagos' case being refused an extension when she was unable to physically go and look for an apartment. And I think I have found a number of new clients here this morning too.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: First I just wanted to thank each of you for taking the time to come down and testify after the struggle that you've already gone through and are continuing to go through, you know, there's some beginning of the City saying we screwed up. And we're sorry and we're going to work hard to do something about it. Now we've got to get the Administration to say that too but we're going to start by saying that here today. And I thank you for coming to testify. I just want to clarify on the HPRP funds because I need to make sure I understand it. So there's \$38 million that's been given to Home Base and could be and that DHS could direct Home Base providers to use for this purpose. But am I right that there are also stimulus funds that are still with DHS that haven't even been sent out to Home Base that could also be used for this purpose as well?

MS. LEVY: Yes. I mean the total that they received was \$74 million. And I think another very good question for the Administration when they're here is--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
[Interposing) We have a long list.

MS. LEVY: --what do they mean by spent. Right? What do they mean by spent? They say that the money has been spent. But do they mean promised? I mean I know that we're a recipient of some of those funds and I think what it means is that they have issued an RFP. So has the money been spent for Home Base--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:
[Interposing) It looks like they--

MS. LEVY: --has it been promised--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --promised, they gave the vouchers--

MS. LEVY: --right--

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --to the families we're talking about--

MS. LEVY: [Interposing) Exactly.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --so it seems like--

2 MS. LEVY: [Interposing) Right,
3 right. And according to the stimulus tracker,
4 only 12% of the Home Base funds have been spent
5 which leave \$34 million that could be used for
6 this purpose. So.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you.

8 MS. LEVY: - - how they spent it.

9 [Pause]

10 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

11 MS. LEVY: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Our next panel
13 is Arafa Speaks [phonetic], Linda Ostreicher
14 [phonetic], Patricia Queen and Camilla Sudonen
15 [phonetic].

16 [Pause]

17 MS. PATRICIA QUEEN: I think that's
18 it. Okay. Thank you all for hanging out because
19 I know you're hungry just like we are. So please
20 be patient. My situation is the same and a little
21 different. And first I read my testimony in
22 whatever time, whatever. I cannot paint a bad
23 picture of myself so how do I state that I am
24 disabled and that it is invisible to your eyes. I
25 woke up and today is a day that I had zero

3 confidence to state my case to be understood. Yet
4 I still wanted to go to testify that I am disabled
5 and that my Section 8 was taken away with the
6 excuse that my disability does not put me in a
7 wheelchair. My body and mind just wants to vomit
8 at the thought that I need to state I am disabled
9 and there's a possibility that since I do not
10 appear to be under a rubble in a disaster, what
11 could possibly be my problem.

12 I'm disabled and because I'm not in
13 a wheelchair it is easy for NYCHA to take my
14 Section 8 or demand that the explanation of my
15 disability be so precise that a missing comma or
16 full stop could deem me as not having enough
17 evidence of disability.

18 I'll make a short list of things I
19 battle to get through a day. Most times I'm safe
20 in my apartment if all the lights stay on 'cause
21 darkness can pull me back to those yesterdays. To
22 get out of my house I must burst through
23 agoraphobia to get out my door, go down the stairs
24 and get out of my gate. Two steps from my house
25 those actions may feel like a week's work with no
sleep and I have not left the block. Small

spaces, crowds, multiple changes can cause me to feel like a train wreck. Yet if I can make it through the day, tomorrow will be better.

Tomorrow I can come up with a plan for world peace and enact it the next day and the third day have no relationship to the ability of the two previous days. Thinking days, action days and feeling days are really demonstrated with me at the same time.

Today for me it is murky, for lack of housing for me means lack of stability to get out of a fog that severe childhood sexual abuse, adolescent rape and massacre along with attempted trafficking forced me in a devious situation lasting 17 years to which 4 years ago I hit a wall and have difficulty connecting to the genius within for without consistency of routine days my abilities are not consistent, sometimes from moment to moment to day to day or hour to hour.

So what if I become homeless? The big deal is my capacity to recover is almost zero as my confidence of today. It would be impossible for me to protect myself when I can sink into any abyss never to return. The skills I used in the past to protect myself mimic amnesia and can last

anywhere from minutes to hours to years.

They tell me I'm not crazy and the issue is some type of lack of nurturing in critical years. And the trauma of multiple, sequential abuse which most of us could not fathom, has created these symptoms. I can help others develop a life, business or career plan, yet for myself I have great difficulty filling out a simple form that I know all the answers.

My Section 8 application and most all applications within the last few years was filled out by someone else. Since the age of 7 and this year I am 50, I have existed on less than 2 hours sleep a night most of the time and only sleep more than 6 hours in a night less than a handful of times a year.

I'd like to move beyond my disability to a fulfilled life which I am capable of when I get through this impasse. This... I cannot get past this moment without a safe place to live and the support that Section 8 and disability funds offers at the moment. The house I live in was stolen through predatory lending and I await the knock on the door telling me to get

out since I'm stuck in motionless cycles of how do I respond to this.

Section 8 was my only hope to prevent a shelter situation which I have no capacity to maneuver. For people with disabilities and no wheelchair this act is our disaster. In the past two weeks I received two letters. One is stating that the acquisition of the house may not have provided certain information specified by the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and other debt collection laws. My uncle who had a disability himself, I forgot what it's called now, what was his problem... anyway he was made to sign something of the house and he was unable to legally do it but they did it. And because he has died I have no papers on the house now 'cause I wasn't in the will. I think also we have to consider that the houses that have been taken by predatory lending should be considered as those houses that can be acquired for housing for persons not only of disability but who are in this quandary of having Section 8 vouchers that are useless.

My Section 8 voucher was given to

1 be, I believe, in May. And I was in the process
2 of talking to NYCHA at 250 Broadway and they just
3 haven't sent me that letter because, you know,
4 they don't know what to do but I'm sure I'm in
5 that number. As within my household I had two
6 sets of people living with me 'cause I know they
7 couldn't go to shelter. And one of them was
8 disabled too.
9

10 But you can't put that on the books
11 anywhere. And I'm sure that there are many people
12 that's doing that. And thank you for listening.

13 MS. LINDA OSTREICHER: Hi. I'm
14 Linda Ostreicher from the Center for Independence
15 of the Disabled of New York. And I want to thank
16 you for recognizing that this is an emergency in
17 holding this hearing so quickly. I'm not going to
18 read my testimony. You have it. I'm just going
19 to bring up a few points, the few things that I
20 haven't heard people bringing up already.

21 One is that that group of people
22 who are considered Other who are not domestic
23 violence survivors or intimidated witnesses does
24 include many people with disabilities. And many
25 people with disabilities have invisible

3 disabilities which are paralyzing in their lives,
4 even though they may not look physically
5 paralyzed.

6 And for people with disabilities to
7 go to the shelter system, it's horrible for
8 anybody to go to the shelter system, it's
9 traumatic, it damages them emotionally, it can
10 damage them physically. But for people with
11 disabilities of any kind, physical, mental,
12 learning disabilities, it's even worse. So for
13 the people that my agency serves almost everybody
14 we serve is poor. Poverty and disability go
15 together. Something like half of the long term
16 poor people in the United States have
17 disabilities.

18 And the other thing that fits
19 together is--I've just forgotten. I'm sorry, I'm
20 trying to go too quickly. I'm also very upset by
21 what I've heard today. It's just horrifying.

22 One of the things that we relied on
23 Section 8 for or what I was going to say that the
24 majority of people who come to us are coming for
25 housing. I never knew until I worked at my agency
that there were so many homeless people with

disabilities. I always thought somebody took care of them. And it's--I find myself waking up and crying at night just about all the people that we can't help.

One of the ways we were able to help people was Section 8. For people with disabilities especially people who need accessible apartments, Section 8 was the magic wand that would make them able to move into an affordable apartment. We've heard before today about how affordable apartments, you know, the Mayor's building and renovating 165,000 affordable apartments and almost none of them are for people who are actually poor or at risk of homelessness.

They're not for people on SSI which is \$761 a month. They're not for people on welfare They're not for people earning minimum wage. But if you have a Section 8 voucher, you're not subject to those income minimum limits. You, if your Section 8 voucher will pay enough to pay the rent that they expect for that apartment, they can't--they have to take your application even though your income is really low. So that's been the magic thing for our consumers. And for people

3 who need accessible apartments, some of the only
4 accessible apartments in the City for people in
5 wheelchairs or people who are blind or deaf are in
6 this new subsidized housing which has to have 5%
7 of its apartments accessible to wheelchairs and 2%
8 to people who are blind and deaf. Those people,
9 there's a lot of referral lists for affordable
10 housing because so many people need it. If you
11 fit those two accessibility needs you go to the
12 top of the lottery. And they're required to
13 market to people with disabilities. But they
14 market to us. And our consumers, if they don't
15 have Section 8 vouchers, they can't apply. So
16 we're building affordable, supposedly affordable,
17 accessible apartments and then people who are
18 moving in who don't need them because nobody who
19 does need them can afford them.

20 So that's a way that the Section 8
21 loss directly impacts the disability community.
22 And we're a large part of this disaster. And I've
23 heard today from lots of disabled people.

24 The other thing I want to bring up
25 is a tiny contribution to the solution is that I
was looking at NYCHA's amended plan for 2010. And

they've asked the Federal government for--they're using some of their stimulus money to renovate-- we've all been hearing about these 21 NYCHA developments that have no Federal subsidy because they were built with City or State money and then the City and State stopped giving their subsidy. And then NYCHA got desperate and got permission from the feds to take Section 8 vouchers, to take thousands of Section 8 vouchers and use them in its own apartments in these 21 developments. And they have used a little over 2,000 of them as of November 2009. That's what their draft plan says.

Meanwhile they've used some of the stimulus funding they're going to use to renovate these--or to do some kind of major capital something or other to these 21 developments that will make them federally subsidized developments and they will start to get a Federal operating subsidy. So I think it's very important that we get those 2,000 vouchers back. They're already being funded. The funds should stay with them and they should be used for apartments outside of the Housing Authority.

I'm going to turn it over to the

next person now. Thanks.

MS. ARAFA SPEAKS: Greetings and
God bless. My name is Afara Speaks [phonetic].
And I've had about three hours sleep in two days
because in two months time--within two month's
time I've been transferred twice from two
different shelters, one out of the Lower East Side
against my will, had a so-called STAFA [phonetic]
hearing and lost it. And I was transferred to a
shelter which they put me out, transferred to
another shelter. And there was five other people
with me. And then they brought four people from
that shelter to this shelter in Brooklyn so I'm
still in Brooklyn I didn't go to the second
shelter. I've been staying--sitting up in these
24-hour joints writing and researching and
everything. I'm not going back to the shelter.
Enough is enough. I never wanted to go there. I
lost my mother in '07 and I came down here, my
brother's invitation, to get a job. I didn't get
a job 'cause I had locks.

Anyway so I went back to the
shelter system. And I've caught nothing but hell.
This is what we're hearing today is not just for

what they call poor people, disabled people, families, homelessness is homelessness. Okay. And we need to stop calling homeless people clients. We are not clients. We do not choose any of these services nor did we design the homeless service network. We're not that crazy, okay. And nobody wants anybody else to get paid to do for us what we can do for ourselves. What we're already doing for ourselves.

I want to mention that this is African History Month. I didn't hear anybody mention that. I want to say Happy African History Month. I have some ribbons if anybody wants them later. We're not going to forget that. And we need to get Carter G. Woods' [phonetic] statue up in this joint. As I'm looking around I don't see any of us represented in here. We have to make everything contemporary.

I am organizing to take the issue and for the horrors of homelessness and the abuse of homeless people, in particular women and African Americans as Sister Helen had mentioned, to Washington DC to the White House this month. And in March because enough is enough. We want to

blame it on the Mayor. It's not just the Mayor's fault. It's everybody's fault. When you're spending the money on these football games, basketball games and you know the condition of the people, the politicians, everybody is at fault for what is going on. And especially homeless people, I blame homeless people for not standing up for their rights. Their God-given rights, their civil rights, their human rights. I've been ministering since 1989. Now they'll fight each other but they won't open their mouth and say a word to the people that's--you ever heard of drag-a-bed? You know what drag-a-bed is? If you violate even the smallest thing, you lose your locker and you've got to wait until after bed check, 10:00 o'clock, okay, to be assigned another bed. You've got to drag, literally drag your belongings. You've got disabled people, elderly people. This is here at the Renaissance, right here in Brooklyn on Ralph and East End Parkway. And a whole bunch of other stuff. We've got to--while we're talking about all these other issues, you've got to talk about the hell and the horrors that homeless people are going through while they are living under these

2 conditions. I've heard it mentioned, people are
3 becoming disabled. People are becoming diabetics,
4 coming in here eating ambassador foods and all
5 this other foolishness, okay. I'm not going to
6 mention names today but we will be mentioning
7 names because I've dealt with politicians who have
8 refused to even look at my situation and many
9 other horrible situations. And now this is
10 nothing new what's happening here today. You
11 know, I'm sitting here listening to people like it
12 just started today, it didn't just start today.
13 This has been going on for a long time. I've been
14 ministering since 1989 up and down the east coast
15 and I see the same thing everywhere. I'm not
16 going back to the shelter. My property's been
17 thrown away, you know, it's like--it's just my
18 God. We need to get real and we need to start
19 dealing with the reality of the fact that
20 everybody is talk and talk is cheap. Aysha
21 Farrakhan, we are going to be helping her to get a
22 house. We're taking this public through Reverend
23 Sharpton and the Homeless Outreach Team.
24 Dominique Sharpton helped us to establish a
25 Homeless Committee. We fought for two years to

get that even within the organization they tried to hijack that committee. But we're going forward and we're going to get that woman a house. It's not oh you're so strong, stop telling people they're strong. They're catching hell. We need to heal from all the stuff that we're going through. And we need to start tearing down these petitions and get up front and personal, you know, and start touching and handling and getting involved. And I think we need to ask the Mayor and all the commissioners and everybody else to trade places with us, to come and spend time, live up in these joints so that they can see first hand 'cause the issue of the Section 8 is not the only issue. And it's discriminatory to put people in a position once you come into the shelter system or the threat or danger of becoming homeless to have to look at subsidies. We're directing people to poverty, poverty, poverty. I'm totally against that. I have yet to meet a stupid person within this homeless system. Everybody has marketable stuff and nobody wants to look at creating an alternative to the safe haven, the Micah's and the employment shelters. There's something that is

far greater and nobody is listening and I mean
nobody is listening and working with what they
call homeless people--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Ma'am can you please summarize your testimony?

MS. SPEAKS: --to put in place--
yeah, so put in place the alternative that's going
to work for us. And first of all we need to stop
calling everybody clients. We need to put that
down for the record. We are no clients. We did
not choose any of this. We are resident
advocates. I encourage everyone to become an
advocate for themselves and I'll let everybody
know, you are homeless. You're not dead.
Everybody can stand up and speak for themselves.
And they need to be encouraged and we need to
create these emergency forums. I don't have nay
copies of this but I'm going to email this to
everyone. And as I said I did not just begin this
and I'm really--I'm trying not to be furious. I'm
trying to keep continue--maintain my trust in God
which I do because that's how I got in this
trouble in the first place. I said oh use me I'm
available to use. You know? And he don't always

use you at a picnic, okay. And truly I'm not having a picnic. And it's terrible the things-- people have died. I've seen it. I'm not going to say I've seen it all. And the question is when are we going to kick off our heels and get real with this. And everybody here that hear Aysha's testimony, beginning there, that's not the end, we're going to get her a house. And everybody, let me find out that you didn't put \$.10 in to help that woman get that house and to work with those children. There is no village. We have to restate--didn't Hillary Clinton write the book? It takes a village? What are we going to do?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you very much.

MS. SPEAKS: Oh and also Deborah Rose, I want to say congratulations. Deborah Rose [applauding]. Do you know--do you know about Deborah Rose? Everybody know--[Microphone goes off].

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you. Thank you. Can we please get back to the testimony? We still have several more panels here.

MS. CAMILLE SHADEEN: Chair Mendez,

Chair Palma, Councilwoman James, staff, thank you so much for the opportunity to testify. I'm going to try to do this as quickly as possible so I'll probably be speed reading and I apologize in advance. I'm Camilla Shadeen [phonetic] I'm the Supervising Attorney of the Housing Project at the New York Legal Assistance Group a non-for-profit law office dedicated to providing free legal services in civil law matters to low income New Yorkers.

As many of you know and for full disclosure I'm a former employee of the Council where I at one time served as the Counsel to the Subcommittee on Public Housing as well as the Counsel to the committee on Housing and Buildings. So I'm super happy to hear about the fact that it's now a full committee. It's wonderful, congratulations. And really quickly I'd also like to thank Tiara Litz [phonetic] who assisted me with preparing this testimony.

By all accounts NYCHA was aware of a potential shortfall in its Section 8 program as early as May of 2009 but continued to issue vouchers through November 2009 without warning to

recipients of any potential problems of applying or continuing to count on these vouchers. This caused grave problems for many voucher holders, is forcing other government agencies and entities to respond to the crisis without warning or without having planned to do so, and is putting an additional strain on many non-for-profit organizations both in terms of grants issued to tenants for rent and resources and resources in assisting clients who are thought to have viable housing. Since late December through day my office has seen a spike in housing intakes related to NYCHA's decision to revoke vouchers already issued to people in desperate need of finding both affordable and safe housing.

And to mention but one client, and I say client because we represent people, she is currently in a shelter so I guess in the shelter setting she would be an advocate. Ms. T had a Section 8 voucher for many, many years. In July of 2008 she had to leave her home because of severe domestic violence as we've heard from so many people testifying today. When she fled her home she immediately notified Section 8 and was

given a transfer voucher. Due to restrictions as to where she could look for an apartment it took Ms. T until September of 2009 to find a viable place to live.

The apartment passed the required NYCHA inspection and all Ms. T needed was to receive an official move in letter from NYCHA. However her case worker who had been helping Ms. T all along left on medical leave and did not provide the requisite letter before leaving. Ms. T and her social worker kept attempting to reach NYCHA and spoke to various people. By the time they were able to speak to a supervisor Ms. T was informed that due to funding she was one of the people chosen for termination. At this time Ms. T does not know what to do. Even if her voucher were to be reinstated which would be an immense help she has lost the safe, affordable apartment it took her so long to find.

It is egregious that NYCHA was aware of its shortfall as early as May but failed to prevent this crisis, failed to give people adequate notice of the crisis, and failed to work out a plan for all those affected by the crisis

2 prior to its sudden announcement. At this point
3 NYLAG is attempting to assist clients on a case by
4 case basis. However we, like so many legal
5 services organizations, do not have the resources
6 necessary to file the kinds of labor-intensive
7 cases that would be necessary to rectify the
8 situation for each of our clients. Additionally
9 even if we were to file cases on behalf of every
10 single client that we have, we have no guarantee
11 of what the outcome would be or that a suit would
12 necessarily restore the Section 8 vouchers if
13 there's no funding for the vouchers.

14 Accordingly, keeping in mind that
15 the Section 8 program is cost effective and that
16 it costs approximately \$26,000 a year to provide
17 someone with assistance in a homeless shelter and
18 only \$11,000 a year to give that same household
19 affordable rental housing through Section 8, we
20 join tenants, colleagues and advocates in urging
21 the Council to work together with City, State and
22 Federal agencies and elected officials to find a
23 solution to this problem that particularly affects
24 indigents and vulnerable New Yorkers.

25 Specifically, we urge NYCHA to give

affected voucher holders a priority for public housing. We urge OTDA to cover all households using Advantage subsidies or alternatively to cover most of the households with Advantage. And we urge DHS to use its homelessness prevention stimulus money to cover the rest of the households until they receive Section 8 vouchers in the normal course.

We also encourage HPD to give the 500 Section 8 vouchers it is currently holding to the affected NYCHA voucher holders and give its turnover vouchers to these households as well. We also urge NYCHA to start issuing vouchers to the affected households as soon as NYCHA has regained them through attrition. We encourage ACS to cover families who were referred to the Section 8 program by ACS. We also encourage the District Attorneys to cover the intimidated witnesses who are referred to the Section 8 program by them. And finally we encourage City officials including Council Members and the public to be part and to be allowed to be part of the discussions and the solutions to this problem. And we also generally and specifically to this case urge NYCHA to

increase its transparency so that this does not happen again so that we have more notice to deal with problems like this. Thank you. Thank you for letting me testify.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.
For the first person on the panel, I see you have a lot of papers but we didn't get any written testimony. Is it possible for you--

MS. QUEEN: [Interposing] Yes you go this, yes--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
We did get--oh. Okay. We did get. Okay.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Did you receive any correspondence from NYCHA or written correspondence from NYCHA Section--in regards to the Section 8? You mentioned that you had received letters.

MS. QUEEN: Oh I was told that--
oops, sorry. I forgot. I was told that because my disability didn't include a wheelchair that they couldn't extend my time. Most of the refusal to give me apartment was 'cause my credit score was below 690 and 720...

[Off mic]

MS. QUEEN: No I understand that but they didn't even let you talk or fill out the paper because they say your credit score is too low. That includes Habitat for Humanity. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay thank you.

MS. QUEEN: And I'm sorry. One more thing I wanted to say. What I remembered was my uncle had Alzheimer's and they tricked him into a reverse mortgage that he didn't understand and, you know, he has subsequently died. I have been in the house without an ability to move forward. I can't get some help because I'm in a house but I can't pay for the water because my name's not in it. And I can't change the name 'cause I'm not on the deed. And so some of my bills is not being paid and I'm so traumatized that even when I have the money to go pay the bill it takes me a couple of weeks to decide oh I think I could do it today and then I forget.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay.

MS. QUEEN: And so the money is still in the bank.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you

Patricia.

MS. QUEEN: Uh-huh.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: The next panel we have Kumali Suryea [phonetic], Winnie Laserene [phonetic], Michael Reese, Runa Rujokopal [phonetic] and my apologies, and with your client, Joyce Hill. And my apologies if I mispronounced someone's name. Thank you.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Would you please tell me your names so I can see who's not on--who didn't show up for this panel?

MS. WINNIE LAO: My name is Winnie Lao (Irene).

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And you are?

MS. RUNA RAJAKOPAL: And I'm Runa Rajakopal.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So we'll add other people to the panel. Mishawn Baines, join this panel. Okay thank you. And whoever's ready to start giving testimony, you can start.

MS. LAO: Hi. Hi good afternoon

and everyone my name is Winnie Lao. I'm very happy to have the opportunity to speak for myself and for people who need Section 8 housing in New York City. I was a graduate of Howie the Happier Casey Center [phonetic]. I'm a PS specialist graduate and after three year of graduation I get a job as an administrative assistant. I work for about five months and then I resigned from my job for some--for many reasons. After three years of searching for a job in our school, I did not, I did not get a job. So before Christmas last year, I remitted to college, LaGuardia Community College, I was start, I would start paralegal study in March, next month. I think that the reason I did not get a job because I am in a mental health program, that's why I didn't get a job for the past three years when I'm looking for a job. It seems when you're for a donkey and a donkey is not there. So if you're looking for a donkey and the donkey's not there, so you never get a donkey. So--and also I think that I do not have enough education and also the market is not good. A lot of people out of work. And not only like that, you know, I think that if I'm looking

for a job I don't want to be like getting a job like the past five or six or seven years, getting like \$7.00, \$8.00 per hour. I really don't want to get that kind of job. I want to make big money. I want to become a woman in the government. I want to make a lot of money. I want to write proposals for our country. I want to become a community activist. I want to become a political activist. I want to become a speaker, a lawyer, an attorney. And possible a business woman. I want to make a lot, a lot of money, become a millionaire, maybe a billionaire. Okay? So but how can I access my dream? The first thing I need to do is to get out of the mental health program. How can I get out of the mental health program? Is a transition, now is a transition. You will get out of the mental health program this year and move to a Section 8, so that once I move out of the system, which is the mental health program, I moved in Section 8 I can get a part-time job on weekend and maybe put in a political office, maybe in some other places. But I hope I can get a job in a political office on weekend. I don't know who would hire me [chuckling]. Okay

but I have a strong work anyway. So. If I get out of the system, the program, I can get a job. Once I get a job I, you know, I can, I can support myself. I want to get rid of my SSI and SSD money. I do not want to use the government's money to support myself. I want to use every single dollar that I earn for myself to support myself. I don't want to work for nothing and get all those money from the government because I think that, I think that, you know, I think it's better for myself to work for what I deserve. I work for the money. I support myself. I don't want to get money--I don't want to get free money from the government so I think that--so I also I want to have a family. So in the program I cannot have a family. I cannot get married in the program. Is a limitation. So this is about my story.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. thank you. Next person please.

MS. RAJAKOPAL: Good afternoon Council, thank you for this opportunity to testify. And I'm going to keep my comments brief. My name is Runa Rajakopal. I'm a Senior Staff

Attorney at MFY Legal Services and we work towards creating equal access to justice for the neediest and most marginalized communities in New York City.

I work in the Mental Health Law Project which is funded by the City to protect or provide civil legal services to mental health consumers in New York City. And I'm joined with Joyce Hill who is a client of mine and I'll be honest, I almost gave up 'cause I have to be at a hearing right now. But she told me to persevere. So that's why we're still here and she wants to tell her story.

So I just wanted to say that like many organizations, our project is contacted regularly by mental health consumers who are homeless or on the brink of losing their housing. And, you know, the reasons for their predicaments are obviously varied but it's a combination of chronic health, mental health impairments, being poor with access to limited and conditional benefits, impossible rents, high cost city, just very difficult situations that they're in. And where we can we intervene. Where they're housing

1
2 court cases, we try to zealously advocate, connect
3 them with City resources, supportive services and
4 preserve housing.

5 But all too often right now more
6 than ever we're getting calls from people who
7 simply cannot afford to live in apartments, not
8 just people who are homeless but people who have
9 apartments, who have housing, and can't afford to
10 live there. And it's very frustrating as an
11 attorney and an advocate to say I cannot help you,
12 we cannot help you, because the issue has to do
13 with income and affordability and not a defensible
14 legal claim. And with respect, particularly with
15 respect to mental health consumers who we know the
16 connection between chronic mental health, chronic
17 mental illness and homelessness, who may have
18 experienced the revolving door of being homeless,
19 finally getting housing and then now are in a
20 predicament where they're going to lose the
21 housing that they fought so hard to get.

22 So I guess I'm here reiterating
23 what has already been said and what we already
24 know, that we have to fight to preserve this
25 program because so many communities, families,

individuals are relying on it to survive. We have no other options but to fight for this program.

So I just want to turn it over to Ms. Joyce Hill who is an application for a Section 8 and is one of those people in the Other category who, you know, she's from the Bronx. She has an affordable rent regulated apartment. She's applied for Section 8 and was deemed eligible but did not get a voucher. And now she's at the brink of losing this affordable rent regulated apartment because she hasn't had access to a voucher and to the supports. So Ms. Hill, I'm going to... let me pull my mic over to you so you can... just explain to the Council what your situation is.

MS. JOYCE HILL: Good afternoon. My name is Joyce Hill. I'm not used to speaking in a forum like this but bear with me. I'm a mother of three. I started when I was 15 and I live at my place I have now since I was 17, I'm 50 years old now. I raised my 3 children there, educated them and pushed them through school, pushed myself through nursing school. And the father was abusive and I had him indicted, convicted and sent to prison in '81. I think I

1 was about 21 years old. I was left with 3
2 children by myself. And it was hard. It was
3 difficult for me. I applied for Section 8 and
4 back then when you applied for Section 8 you have
5 to find a place right away. And so I let that go.
6 Then I applied again later on.
7

8 But this latest one I applied, they
9 answered me, they asked me, Ms. Hill, send--we're
10 sending you a letter and we want to know how much
11 expenses you have. So I sent it back in the
12 letter and I told them to write me right back.
13 And they did. And then the letter came and said
14 that I was eligible and that wait for the voucher.
15 And this was in April. I go there in December,
16 it's been approved since May 4th, '09. And I got
17 to the desk and he said Ms. Hill take this, go
18 down to the third floor. So I went to the third
19 floor. And so I had a letter from the hospital
20 'cause I got to the clinic, the mental health
21 clinic there since 1985. And she told me she said
22 Ms. Hill we don't need another letter, you've
23 already been approved. Go home and call this
24 number. I go home and I call the number on there
25 and the lady said to me Ms. hill we can't give no

more vouchers. The program has been suspended. I was so crushed and so disappointed because I had taken money that I had saved for my daughter, my daughter is living with HIV positive. She's one step from full blown AIDS. And she had left home and moved out. I took the money there and I covered it with prepayments to my landlord so I would have enough--thought I would have enough money to cover until the voucher, until I retrieved the voucher.

That wasn't so. Now the money is gone. My daughter done moved out. I might have to move her back in. This is what the City's telling me that they might have to--you might have to bring her back home in order for me to help you. And so this is where I am. I feel so--a disservice and a dishonesty, the way I look through, the lens through my eyes in the world that I see the good in people, kindness, I grew up in the church. And I always believed the good in people. Even my landlord, all of them. I know them by name. They've known me since I was a young adult. And I lived there, I went through two fires with the children in the house. And

remained, you know, I still study fast because I always wanted my own. And I had my son when I was 15. He is now 34 years old. And my daughter's 31 and my youngest son is 30. And I've been here since 1977. And this is home for me. And I wrote them and I said I really need your support for my housing. They didn't even send me a common courtesy letter or say Ms. Hill we did a freeze or anything like that. They didn't do that. They didn't do nothing.

And so I have a pending case now that's getting ready to start with my landlord taking me to court for the balance of the money for housing. I called in different places. I went to Home Base, I think, and they said they couldn't take my case 'cause you have to have two incomes or something like that. So I tried different places and doors was closed until I called this place. And this place the door was open for me here. The Mental Health Law Project opened the door for me. I'm just asking if--just to be heard. Thank you for listening to me and the opportunity to speak today.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you for

your testimony Ms. Hill.

MS. MISHAWN BAINES: Hello, good afternoon. My name is Mishawn Baines. I am advocate and I'm also the Chair of the National Action Network Task Force Committee. And in 2008 starting with my personal story, in 2008 I was illegally evicted due to the negligence of a preventive service worker and a discrimination based on income.

When I was in my apartment I did have a program and due to no fault of my own there was a portion of the money that was paid towards the rent which was about \$4,000 due to the landlord. But what happened was, which FEPS [phonetic] is, and I was eligible at the time for the rent arrears. Now when it came time for the rent arrears to be paid, the landlord said he did not want the money and he did not want me in the apartment. And this is going back to Local 10. Now Local 10 was passed then. So the worker which is from a CAB organization which is also Home Base, did not assist me in keeping me in my apartment. She did go to court before the judge to say that I am eligible. So when it came time

to pay the rent the checks was not there. And I also followed up with the State.

Anyhow, after that happened I had to vacate the apartment, the judge said I had to vacate. And I've been in a shelter for two years. And prior to that my apartment was empty for a year which is 1042. Now and also six months after being in the shelter, I did receive a voucher income of \$1,316 which I had to advocate for, I didn't receive any help from DHS or any housing specialist.

I have been to 300, 300 management and realtors looking for an apartment. And they all say no programs or either my credit score is not good enough which my credit is 621 which I did my own credit search history and they always ask you for \$100 [chuckling].

So I've been fighting to get an apartment. I have been to City, State and the Federal legislation. Borough President's Office, Bronx Borough President's Office, Assemblywoman Green's Office where she's now the Vice President Borough President; City Councilwoman Foster knows my case very well because she was the first one I

went to, working with Isabel. And I've been in the City Council, is it, Baez, BIAS, Office regarding my situation. And I've been to the Inspector General and Officer Shawn Donovan's Office regarding this same issue.

Just want to get back to in 2003 I had Section 8, I had just received the Section 8 voucher for a four bedroom because I have a family of five. My Section 8 was terminated in 2004 without my knowledge because the worker told me that President Bush had closed down Section 8 and for me to file for Article 78 in the Supreme Court. So I'm just giving you a history of Section 8.

Recently in 2007 because I had an open ACS case, my children was unjustly removed which is another issue that us as Black women, we are targeted by the system and to make money off of us. So every day I am fighting ACS, Housing and all these institutions who are racist, to keep us in the system, to keep alive. But I say this to say that ACS, I was eligible for Section 8 and the Section 8 voucher or the information was sent to the foster care agency and then I was never

1 notified. So I went to Section 8 myself and I
2 went to the Borough President's Office at the
3 time, Millie who was assisting me, and they told
4 me that the Section 8 was sent to the foster care
5 agency but no one ever told me. So I follow up
6 with the foster care agency, excuse me, and they
7 said they didn't know.
8

9 So what I did was get a copy from
10 Section 8 stating where they sent the information
11 to, called the--under the Federal government,
12 under Obama Administration, the person who's in
13 charge of the voucher, her name is Laura, to
14 follow up with Section 8 and Section 8 here in the
15 City. Well she did correspond to someone and I do
16 have records and documentations of everything I'm
17 saying. And I can give you a copy.

18 But anyhow, they claimed that they
19 didn't have an original copy from--they didn't
20 receive an original copy from Section 8
21 themselves. Now this is Section 8, these are
22 Section 8 people. I don't know his name, I think
23 his first name is John, I don't know if he's under
24 the Commissioner's Office but my voucher which I
25 never received which puts me in another

predicament. I never received the voucher so am I going to get Section 8.

So now they tell me to reapply. So I reapply again in 2008. And then there's another issue with ACS and the worker stating that they didn't have an '01, which is my oldest one like in order to get qualified or eligible for housing again or Section 8, your child has to be returned to the parent. And so they said they didn't have that documentation so I'm waiting at ACS with them to verify my situation so I can receive Section 8 again because it was their negligence in the first place. They didn't have the proper documents. So ACS couldn't forward the application.

So that puts me back in the same position I am. So we need some type of intervention here with all of these agencies. Everybody and everything needs to be investigated. Because I should not still be in the shelter system. And I have been to Bloomberg Administration and I have been to the Commissioner's Office regarding the very same complaints.

Also I just want to mention another

1 thing which is the conflict of interest. Most of
2 the landlords who have these shelters do have
3 regular tenement apartments. So when you go to
4 these landlords and they say no programs you
5 already have regular apartments in there that have
6 programs in them. And not only that they're
7 saving these apartments for shelters so they can
8 make more money. And I now this because I've been
9 to a landlord and I asked him, I know you have
10 regular tenement buildings, can you give us an
11 apartment. And he says no, as soon as he gets a
12 vacancy, he will turn it into a shelter. And
13 that's what has been happening throughout the
14 City.

15
16 So it's hard for us to get
17 anywhere. No matter what voucher we have. So
18 all--I mean everything is just blocked for us as a
19 people. And I just pray somebody's heart is
20 touched here to really expose it and do something
21 about it and challenge these landlords. Thank
22 you.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you for
24 your testimony.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And I just

want to tell Ms. Hill thank you for keeping your attorney here and thank you for staying and giving your testimony. I hope that I can continue to see this world through your eyes. Okay. The next panel is Rosa Munoz, Lindie Ann Springer, Rock Hakshaw, and Yolanda Allison. And that will be the last panel. And I want to remind everyone that we will then adjourn this hearing and we are trying to get a confirmation as to when the Administration is going to be available. So I urge you to please come back on that day so you can hear their testimony as to why somehow they didn't know and had to rescind all these vouchers and didn't know that the money was eminently not going to come. Whoever is ready you can please identify yourself for the record and start giving your testimony. But let me just see, I think we're one person short, so I'm just going to double check. Rosa Munoz? Okay. She's--Lindie Ann? Rock Hakshaw? And Yolanda Allison. Okay. Thank you so much.

MS. LINDIE ANN SPRINGER: Good evening. I'm grateful to the Committee and to all the elected officials for giving me the

opportunity to testify today. I am here because I
am very concerned about--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing)
Ma'am? You still have to say your name--

MS. SPRINGER: [Interposing) Oh.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --so that when
they--

MS. SPRINGER: [Interposing) Okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --when they
record this--

MS. SPRINGER: [Interposing) Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --they know
that it's--

MS. SPRINGER: [Interposing) My
name is Lindie Ann Springer and I am a disabled
housewife. I am here because I am very
heartbroken because of what Section 8 has done to
me. I, at the age of 5 years I had polio so I
walk with a long legged bracer in order to move
around.

In 2006 despite my disability I
didn't allow that to keep me back. I decided to
get a proper education and so I can get a good job
so that I can take care of myself and my family.

I have two kids and a husband. And in 2006 when I graduated from Kingsboro Community College with my Associate's Degree in Mental Health, as I was being transferred into St. John's University to do my Bachelor's I fell down and I fractured my right hand, my dominant hand. As I fell and fractured this hand they took me to Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn to attend to a simple fracture and they messed up my hand. Because of it now I cannot use this hand anymore like it was before, so my right hand is disabled, my right leg is disabled. Because of this I have to walk with a long--legged--I mean crutches so that I can balance my body because my whole right side is impacted.

Because of this I cannot work and help my husband so that we can get proper accommodations. I live in a one bedroom apartment, the four of us are crowded into this one bedroom apartment. I went down to Housing Authority, I told them about my situation. They said because of this that I qualified for Section 8. And just as I was about to receive my voucher in September of 2009 they told me that I cannot get it any more that the program was suspended.

This has left me heartbroken and devastated because I don't see any way else out of this apartment. The problem with me is that I only get \$600 a month for SSI. My rent is \$1,038.68-something. My husband and I between the both of us cannot afford to pay the rent even though he is a City worker, he works with the City with the Board of Ed. He works in the school feeding program. He works five hours a day. And even when he saves up, he gets paid, he gets his salary, every two weeks he gets a few hundred dollars. He has to save up all of his salary and I have to put in some of my SSI money together with paying my medical bills so that we can pay the rent.

By the time we finish paying the rent we have no money to pay lights, gas, whatever, basic necessities we have. And it is very, very hard. He is so frustrated. He said I don't know which way to turn because all how I try it seems like he can't get out of this situation. And when I found out about this hearing I said I have to make it my business to come down here and testify about what is going on. Because I mean

1
2 it's decent, honest people, we are no looking for
3 help or a handout, we are just looking to get, you
4 know, make our way like everybody else. And every
5 way you turn is a block, they don't want to help
6 the people, even though we are a citizen here. We
7 pay our taxes which we work, we do what we can.
8 My daughter is in school. She's 12 years. My
9 other son, he's trying to get his GED and I'm
10 pushing them to do the best that they can. And
11 yet still we are held up there and can't get what
12 we need, proper accommodations.

13 So I would really appreciate it if
14 you all would just, you know, get on NYCHA, on the
15 people who are doing this program and let them
16 help the people that deserve their help. Thank
17 you.

18 MS. YOLANDA ALLISON: Good
19 afternoon. Thank you for allowing us to come and
20 speak to you today. My name is Yolanda Allison,
21 I'm a member of VOW, Voices of Women. And I've
22 been somewhat commissioned to come here today to
23 testify on the behalf of the Section 8 recipients
24 here in New York City whose vouchers have been
25 revoked or terminated.

I can speak for myself, my experience dealing with NYCHA. I've been in my current apartment for the past seven years. Prior to that I used to work for the New York City Police Department. I did hold a job. I became pregnant. My son's father is now retired, New York City Police Officer. After he retired he became a Dr. Jekyll Mr. Hyde. He tried to kill me. He tried to smother me. He body-slammed me. I went to New York City Police Department. I was commissioned by the Commissioner to come and testify as to what happened. They were supposed to revoke his license to carry a firearm. A year later they returned the firearm back to him. I went to NYCHA. I gave them all the documents and told them that I was a victim of domestic violence.

I'm going to be very brief. I'm not going to hold up, I know everyone is getting ready to leave. On December 20th, 2009 I received a letter from NYCHA advising me that they were in the process of discontinuing my Section 8 if I didn't return an affidavit of income verification. Then one to two days later thereafter I received

that letter, I received another letter stating that my Section 8 had been terminated effective immediately. I was stunned because I had not received any recertification forms prior to this notice.

Needless to say I began to cry. I felt hurt, angry and sodomized by the very system that's sworn to protect me from my abuser.

Revoking my Section 8 voucher has put me in further jeopardy and I've become re-victimized by the system. I immediately became overwhelmed, I threw my hands up and said dear God I can't take being homeless again. I was in a shelter seven years ago and I didn't want to go back there to the shelter. That was not an option for me.

Terminating my Section 8 means that I will no longer be able to live in affordable housing. Where will my family go? I guess maybe we have to come here to City Hall and camp out. And this will become a tent city.

[Pause]

You may not notice but I'm legally disabled. It took eight hours, eight hour surgery in the Hospital for Special Surgery to put--mend

and reconstruct my foot and ankle. This coming Friday I have to go back again to the Hospital for Special Surgery because I have 2 disks that's out due to me being body-slammed 6 years ago. And I have to get 12 inch needles inserted into my spine this coming Friday. I have to get this procedure done every 6 to 12 months. I have an 8-year old son and he's really scared and terrified of his father because he has me in court fighting for custody. And I notice with NYCHA you take them all of these documents and I don't know what they're doing with them because I hand deliver, I don't rely on the US Postal Service so I make sure I walk directly in to, what is the address, 55 West 125th Street on the 8th Floor. I go to the Housing Management Office and I hand deliver all the documents.

But prior to this I noticed that last year, again, it's always in December or January, I receive a letter stating that they've terminated my Section 8. And I know I've hand delivered every last document that they requested of me. I don't know what the workers are doing. But I know that it cannot continue. And being

homeless right now, I know we're in a recession but it's no excuse for us to become homeless. And I've paid my taxes and my dues to the system, in the system, and I feel victimized by the system. Thank you.

MR. ROKUMAN HAKSHAW: Good afternoon and thank you very much for this opportunity. My name is Rokumen Hakshaw and I am the Communications Director for Council Member Darlene Mealy of the 41st City Council District in Brooklyn. The Council Member had a scheduling conflict today and she did want me to appear hear to at least put her office on the record as it relates to responding--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing] Excuse me.

MR. HAKSHAW: --to the Section 8 voucher--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --if you're going to give testimony on her--

MR. HAKSHAW: [Interposing] No it's just less than two minutes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yeah but this is the City Council which she is a body of so it

can be submitted into the record and we can just take it. The Council Members don't give testimony or their reps from...

MR. HAKSHAW: You want me to write up? To write this up and--

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
She--yeah or she can come and tell me what the issues are and we are adjourning this hearing to another day where the Administration will be here. So then if she has particular questions of the Administration or wants to raise a particular issue of a constituent and how it gets resolved she can raise it then.

MR. HAKSHAW: Okay then I'll write up this and submit it to you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Yes.

MR. HAKSHAW: Okay, will do.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay?

MR. HAKSHAW: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: For, hold on, what did I do with my list. Ms. Allison. You talked about your foot and the reconstruction of your foot, was that also as a result of the abuse or--

MS. ALLISON: [Interposing) Yes,
yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --what that
something--

MS. ALLISON: [Interposing) Yes,
yes. I was body-slammed and he tried to smother
hem. He weights 350 pounds. And he put me in a
headlock, down on the floor and as a result bent
me up which snapped the disks out of my spine. I
tried to make a police report but of course police
protect police. And I know that because I used to
work in the Police Department. They cover up for
each other.

I have a pending lawsuit, I did
file notice of intent to sue the New York City
Police Department and the City and State of New
York because I've suffered abuse. I'm injured and
I'm legally disabled as a direct result. And the
Police Department is aiding and abetting in a
felon.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I want to
thank you for coming here and sharing the details.
And I want to thank this panel and everyone who
stayed until the very end. I think for me this

has been very informative. And I know that this will be helpful when we continue this hearing later on this month, hopefully, if not at the very beginning of March, where we will have the Administration here.

So once again thank you to this panel and to my colleagues, so we are adjourning this hearing. Thank you.

[Gavel banging]

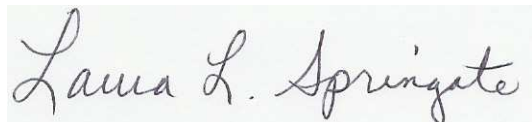
MS. ALLISON: Thank you.

[Background conversation as hearing concludes]

[END TAPE 1002]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Laura L. Springate 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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura L. Springate". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Signature _____Laura L. Springate_____

Date _____February 15, 2010_____