

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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May 26, 2021
Start: 1:39 p.m.
Recess: 1:54 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 1)

B E F O R E: Stephen Levin
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Darma Diaz
Vanessa Gibson
Barry Grodenchik
Brad Lander
Antonio Reynoso
Raphael Salamanca Jr.

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

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Computer recording
3 started.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: cloud recording is up.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Sergeant
9 Bradley, with your opening statement, please?

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes. Good afternoon.

11 And welcome to today's New York City Council vote on
12 General Welfare. At this time, will all members
13 please turn on your videos for verification purposes?

14 Thank you, Chair. We may begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
16 much, Sergeant. Good afternoon, everybody. I have
17 my kid's gavel here. I'll gavel in.

18 [gavel]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good afternoon,
20 everybody. I'm very happy to be here today with all
21 of you to vote on Intro 146 C here in the General
22 Welfare Committee. This is legislation that we
23 introduced back in 2018 that would increase the
24 CITYFEPS voucher rate to a rate that someone can
25 actually find an apartment here in New York City.

2 You know, the history of what this city has done for
3 people in shelter when it comes to vouchers is not a
4 history of success. It's not. We have had program
5 after program that has been undermined by the city
6 and the state having unfair limitations placed on it
7 and the people that pay the price for that are people
8 in shelter who just want to be able to get into
9 permanent housing and get their foot in the door.

10 And, you know, I do give credit to this
11 administration for creating a new program where one
12 didn't exist for the last three years of the
13 Bloomberg administration when Advantage was
14 discontinued in 2011. Between then and 2014, there
15 was no program. No voucher program for people to get
16 out of shelter and that's when we saw significant
17 increase in the shelter population, particularly
18 among families. When this administration did create
19 the LINK program in 2014-2015, it was cumbersome. It
20 was dealing with the fallout from the Advantage
21 debacle and it needed to be-- it needed to work and
22 it was set at a very low rate to pay for apartments.
23 That continued when the city moved to CITYFEPS, which
24 is the current iteration of the voucher. And the
25 problem is-- at least one of the problem and, I

2 think, the main problem with the voucher in terms of
3 its effectiveness, and we know that it's not very
4 effective based on data-- is that for every voucher,
5 the value is pegged at far below fair market rent.
6 Hundreds of dollars below fair market rent and, as we
7 all know, in New York City, there are no vacancies at
8 those discounted rent levels. There are no vacancies
9 and so, for every person that has a voucher to get
10 out of shelter, they are all searching for a handful
11 of apartments throughout New York City and maybe a
12 handful of neighborhoods and it is a disgrace what we
13 have done. It is a disgrace because we have given
14 people hope by giving them this voucher and telling
15 them that this will be their exit out of shelter, but
16 we have handicapped that voucher to the point where
17 it is not-- and is not at all usable. And so that
18 is going to change with this bill. In this bill will
19 increase that voucher level to the section 8 voucher
20 level and it will make a meaningful impact in terms
21 of the number of units that are available for voucher
22 holders. Just to give an example, Street Easy a
23 couple of weeks ago did an analysis and showed that,
24 because of the pandemic, with the softening and the
25 rental market in New York City, the number of

2 available units for a section 8 voucher went up from
3 about 29,000 to over 70,000 from 2019 to 2020 as an
4 economist named Nancy Wu that did that report. I
5 reached out to Ms. Wu and I asked her she could do an
6 analysis of CITYFEPS levels and she showed that at
7 those levels there were 564 apartments available on
8 Street Easy compared to the almost 72,000. So, that
9 is what we are talking about here. It's just we are
10 giving people the opportunity to get out of shelter
11 and a place to go and the means to get there. I want
12 to thank all of my colleagues that have been
13 supportive of this legislation. I want to thank--
14 in particular, I want to thank Speaker Johnson who,
15 from the outset, has been supportive of this
16 legislation and this spring when we saw ourselves
17 climbing out of Covid and with the help of federal
18 stimulus dollars, it really made it a priority to get
19 this done. And so, I give a lot of credit for that
20 and I want to thank him for his support. I want to
21 thank Jason Goldman, hours Chief of Staff. Jason has
22 been steadfast in these recent weeks in support of
23 this legislation and making sure that the heart of it
24 comes through and gets past. I want to thank
25 committee staff Crystal Pond, Natalie Amari, Aminta

2 Kilawan, you have done, you know, just a tremendous
3 amount of work on this. Frank Sarno from our finance
4 division, [inaudible 00:06:38], our unit head, Deputy
5 Director Regina Prater Ryan and our finance director,
6 Latonya McKinney. I also want to acknowledge Louis
7 Chilton brown and Andrea Vasquez in our legislative
8 division. And, in particular, I want to thank the
9 advocates who have really prioritized to this bill
10 and called attention to this issue and I want to
11 thank Christine Quinn, our former Speaker and her
12 team at Win who have done an amazing job of calling
13 public attention to this issue. Neighbors Together,
14 Focal New York, Safety net Project-- Urban Justice
15 Center Safety Net Project. Josh Dean at Human NYC
16 and Linden Vaughn, Giselle Ruthier, and-- let's see.
17 I'm sorry. I'm blanking. I'm not saying everyone's
18 name here. I just want to thank Coalition for the
19 Homeless, Legal Aid Society, let's see if there is
20 more. I think that that is everybody. Beth
21 Hofmeister and Josh Goldfein. Again, there was a lot
22 of work that went into this and it was not easy and I
23 just want to thank everybody for-- Oh. Jackie
24 Simone from the Coalition, as well. It was not easy
25 to do all of this and so I just want to thank

2 everybody for investing the time and energy into this
3 to make this a reality. And also I just want to, in
4 particular, thank Council member Vanessa Gibson who I
5 know has been, you know, stalwart in support of this
6 legislation. So, thank you, Vanessa. And Council
7 member Dharma Diaz, as well. And, with that, I will
8 turn it back over to the clerk.

9 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
10 Good afternoon. This is the May 26th, 2021, General
11 Welfare Committee roll call vote on proposed Intro
12 146 C. Chair Levin, we will start with you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I vote aye.

14 COMMITTEE CLERK: In Council members
15 Lander?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Request permission
17 to explain my vote? Thank you, Chair. I just want
18 to say a big congratulations to you. You have been
19 fighting for this for years and you saw long before
20 this pandemic how urgent it was to raise the CITYFEPS
21 level so folks can get out of shelter and long before
22 the pandemic but, boy, right now for sure. There is
23 no issue that is as important as enabling homeless
24 New Yorkers to get off the streets and out of
25 shelters and into housing and we have done almost

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2 nothing to make that happen in recent years despite
3 seeing it and this is really the most practical, the
4 most immediate thing that we can do and it is going
5 to have an enormous impact in the lives of families
6 and in the lives of our city. So, I want to thank
7 you for your fierce advocacy and then just, you know,
8 the advocacy groups who have been fighting for this
9 are remarkable crews. So, to Local and the Safety
10 Net Project and Coalition for the Homeless and Legal
11 Aid and Human.NYC standing up for homeless New
12 Yorkers is really amongst the most important things
13 anybody is doing. So, thank you for all of it and I
14 proudly vote aye.

15 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council member Gibson?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you.

17 Permission to explain?

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so much.

20 I want to join Council member Lander in expressing my
21 extreme gratitude and appreciation to you, Chair
22 Steve Levin. You have been an incredible leader
23 during this time and certainly recognizing that Intro
24 146 is going to have a transformative impact for many
25 homeless New Yorkers in our city and certainly many

2 who have been impacted by Covid 19, our very own
3 constituents that really need the support. When you
4 talk about the CITYFEPS voucher and making sure that
5 it's about you recognizes Covid 19 and the fact that
6 so many families are rent burdened, many of them are
7 paying 30% or over 30% of their income towards rent
8 and many are struggling four basic necessities. We
9 always talk about the faces of homelessness and they
10 are every day New Yorkers that look like us and, from
11 our communities and many of them are working full
12 time. They have a full-time job, but they simply
13 cannot afford the rents of our city and if we are
14 going to have a city that is affordable to everyone
15 no matter where you come from, no matter what your
16 ZIP Code is, nor how much you have in your bank
17 account, it is initiatives like this raising the
18 value of CITYFEPS that recognize that we have to
19 provide equity in the system. So, I want to thank,
20 again, all of the housing advocates and many of my
21 own groups in the Bronx like Northwest Bronx,
22 Community and Clergy Coalition, and CASA Bronx who
23 have been at so many rallies and demonstrations and
24 zoom calls really making their voices heard on behalf
25 of homeless New Yorkers who we must protect. So,

2 Steve, you have been amazing and I know you have
3 never given up on anything you start and so I am glad
4 to see Intro 146, cross the finish line. This is
5 truly a victory for so many of our brothers and
6 sisters that need our support and I am so proud to be
7 a part of this effort and support this bill. I
8 proudly vote yes on Intro 146, making sure that we
9 continue to do our part as a City Council. Thank you
10 so much, Chair Levin, and thank you and all the
11 advocates.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,
13 colleague. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council member Reynoso?
15 Council member Grodenchik?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I want to
17 congratulate Chair Levin. We stood at some press
18 conferences when do one else was around, Steve, and
19 we couldn't even get to step to City Hall to push
20 this legislation and I want to congratulate you for
21 your perseverance and for today taking a step to make
22 New York City just a little bit fairer for all the
23 people who live here. So, with that, I vote aye.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council
25 member Grodenchik.

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2 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council member

3 Salamanca?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Congrats to
5 Chair Levin. Aye on all.

6 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council member Darma
7 Diaz?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Permission to
9 explain my vote? I want to thank you. Thank you,
10 Chair, from the bottom of my heart and from the tip
11 of my toes to all the gray hairs that I've earned
12 throughout my legacy of advocating for housing, for
13 the 13 years that I spent as a case manager, program
14 after program. I definitely believe this is the
15 best. I thank you. I thank all my colleagues for
16 stepping out of the box. I know that it is a
17 financial hit for New York City, but just think of
18 all the positive outcomes we are going to have. All
19 the little people that are going to have a place to
20 call their homes. And, again, thank you. Thank you,
21 New York City, for standing tall. I am proud and I
22 am honored to be a part of this conversation in this
23 process. I think back to my 20 families that are
24 still living in the shelter that I left six or five
25 months ago and say, we're with you. Promises made,

2 promises kept. Thank you, my colleagues in
3 government.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council
5 member.

6 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council member Reynoso?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Congrats,
8 Steve. Good job to everyone. Great, great piece of
9 legislation. This is why we are here. I vote aye on
10 all.

11 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE CLERK: Chair Levin, Intro 146 C
14 is adopted by a vote of eight in the affirmative,
15 zero in the negative, and zero abstentions.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
17 much, Mr. [inaudible 00:15:06] and I just want to
18 thank all of my colleagues once again and staff that
19 worked on this. And, lastly, I just want to thank
20 all of the homeless New Yorkers that have pushed us
21 on this legislation and have pushed us on this issue
22 and have raised their voices and made sure that we
23 heard them and continue to advocate and will continue
24 to advocate beyond this for a fairer city and a city
25 that recognizes our collective humanity and

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2 [inaudible 00:15:42]. I am very honored to be a part
3 of this with you all and, with that--

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Mr. Chair?

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes, sir?

6 COMMITTEE CLERK: Sorry to interrupt. The
7 vote is actually seven in the affirmative. Not
8 eight.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Thank you,
10 sir. And with that, this hearing is adjourned.
11 Thank you all colleagues.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: All right.
13 Congratulations, Steve. Congrats.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Vanessa.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK:

16 Congratulations, Steve.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, guys.

18 Thank you all very much. Thank you.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Okay. The live has
20 ended. Thank you. We have Transportation--

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 30, 2021