

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Thursday, June 27, 2024

Start: 10:22 a.m.

Recess: 1:31 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Nantasha Williams, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Rita C. Joseph
Christopher Marte,
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
Kevin C. Riley

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COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Sideya Sherman,
NYC's Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of
the New York City Mayor's Office of Equity &
Racial Justice (MOERJ)

Dabash Negash,
Deputy Commissioner the New York City Mayor's
Office of Equity & Racial Justice (MOERJ)

Rachel Natelson,
General Counsel for NYC Commission on Racial
Equity

Linda Tigani, MSW
Chair & Executive Director
NYC Commission on Racial Equity (CORE)

Jennifer Jones Austin,
Former Chair of the New York City Racial Justice
Commission

Jimmy Pan,
Former Policy Director and Special Counsel, New
York City Racial Justice Commission

Michael Matos
Chief Executive Officer for Personal Protective
Concepts

Sharon Brown Jeter,
Rose of Sharon Enterprise

Rajesh Kamal Mehra, MA, LCAT, ART-BC,
License Creative Arts Therapist at Rikers Island
Correctional Facility

Andrew, Self

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COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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2 SERGEANT MESITI: This is a microphone check for
3 the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. Today's date
4 is June 27, 2024; located in the Committee Room;
5 recording done by Rocco Mesiti (phonetic).

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: (INAUDIBLE) New York City
7 hybrid hearing on the Committee on Civil and Human
8 Rights. At this time please place all electronic
9 devices to vibrate or silent mode. If you have any
10 questions, please raise your hand and one of the
11 Sergeant at Arms will kindly assist you. Please, at
12 no time, do not approach the dais. Once again, thank
13 you for your kind cooperation, Chair we are ready to
14 begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING IN)

16 Good morning, everyone, My name is Nantasha
17 Williams, and I serve as Chair to the Committee on
18 Civil and Human Rights. I want to start off by
19 thanking everyone joining us for this morning's
20 hearing. Today we are focusing on a very important
21 topic: Implementation of the City's 2022 Charter
22 Amendment to Promote Racial Equity.

23 These amendments came about as a result of a
24 thoughtful, multi-year process commenced in 2021
25 under then Mayor Bill de Blasio, who established the

1
2 Racial Justice Commission or RJC for short. RCJ
3 examined historical and present day racial inequities
4 in New York City, and its findings it recommended
5 revisions to the City's Charter to help eliminate
6 structural barriers to racial equity.

7 This committee held a hearing on RCJ's proposed
8 ballot measures with the goal of learning of more
9 about their process for identifying structural
10 barriers, their engagement with experts and impacted
11 communities, and the conclusions drawn that led to
12 their proposals. These proposed amendments were
13 passed by referendum by an overwhelming majority of
14 New Yorkers during the November 2022 elections. They
15 officially took effect in December of 2022. Now a
16 year and a half later, this committee is looking to
17 learn more about the implementation and progress so
18 far.

19 The amendments are as follows:

20 First, the addition of a preamble, which serves
21 as a statement of values to the City Charter to guide
22 government in its decision making and understanding
23 its duties to all New Yorkers.

24 Second, the Charter now requires a biannual
25 process of citywide and agency planning and reporting

1 with the goal of eliminating racial inequity, also
2 known as a Citywide Racial Equity Plan.

3
4 The Racial Equity Planning process was developed
5 in time to coincide with the budget planning cycle in
6 order to ensure that the City's budget aligned with
7 and supports New Yorkers' equity priorities.

8 Lastly, the City was required to create an Office
9 of Racial Equity and a commission on racial equity,
10 now known as MOERJ and CORE respectively.

11 MOERJ is designed as the lead agency for racial
12 equity and is tasked with working across city
13 agencies to improve equity in government operations
14 and planning.

15 CORE is designed to lead engagement with
16 communities effected to racial and other forms of
17 inequity across the city, and to champion their
18 voices in the halls of government.

19 While the first amendment, the addition of a
20 preamble, has been completed, the mandated work of
21 MOERJ and CORE is ongoing.

22 While I understand and appreciate that such work
23 takes great effort, time, and diligence, there have
24 been significant delays overall. For example,
25 although the Charter requires the first preliminary

1 racial equity plan was due on January 16, 2024, in
2 early 2024, MOERJ published a new timeline, and
3 states on its website, the Racial Equity Planning
4 process kicked off with agencies between March and
5 May of 2024, and that draft agency racial equity
6 plans are currently under review; a finalized
7 citywide Racial Equity Plan is expected to be
8 published in November 2024. As a result of the new
9 timeline, this year's Racial Equity Planning process
10 does not align with the ongoing budget process for
11 FY25, despite the intent of the Charter amendment.

12 With respect to CORE, the Charter states that
13 commence their work on August 1, 2023. However,
14 severe delays in appointments did not allow for their
15 work to begin at the designated time. In fact, 11 out
16 of 14 appointments were not announced until May 13,
17 2024, with another two appointments announced only
18 three days ago on June 24th. As it stands, there
19 still remains one vacancy remaining on the commission
20 nearly a year after the start date required by the
21 Charter.
22

23 While I greatly look forward to hearing about all
24 of the work that is ongoing, it does not lessen the
25

1 importance of identifying and tackling any roadblocks
2 that may have or are anticipated to come up.

3 We will also be hearing some legislation today:

4 Introduction 833, by Public Advocate Jumaane
5 Williams, requiring the placement of an informational
6 sign near the intersection of Wall and Pearl Streets
7 in Manhattan to mark the site of New York's first
8 slave market.

9 Resolution 108, sponsored by Council Member
10 Hudson, recognizing the duty of the Federal
11 Government to develop and implement a Transgender
12 Bill of Rights

13 Resolution 280, sponsored by Council Member
14 Louis, designating November 30 annually as, my sorer,
15 Shirley Chisholm Day.

16 And lastly, my own bill, Introduction 471, in
17 relation to establishing a New York City freedom
18 trail task force - a bill originally held by my
19 colleague, Council Member Marte.

20 I will now turn it over to our committee counsel,
21 who I would also like to thank for all of their hard
22 work in preparing for today's hearing, to administer
23 the oath. Oh, yes, and we also have opening
24

1 statements, so we will do opening statements before
2 we swear everyone in.

3
4 And I want to acknowledge that we have been
5 joined by Council Member Riley, Council Member Marte,
6 Council Member Louis, and Council Member Hudson is
7 somewhere, and Council Member Joseph.

8 And I will turn it over to Council Member Louis.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair Williams,
10 and good morning, everyone.

11 Chair Williams, thank you for your continued
12 support in recognizing foundational leaders who have
13 strived to make our city and our nation more
14 equitable for all. And I'm grateful to see my bill
15 Resolution 280 being heard today: a resolution that
16 would designate November 30th annually as Shirley
17 Chisholm Day in the City of New York. It recognizes
18 her immense contributions as an educator, activist,
19 and elected official who served the people of New
20 York City with passion and dignity. Shirley Chisholm
21 was a trailblazer, in 1964 she became the second
22 Black person ever elected to the New York State
23 Assembly, just four years later she made history as
24 the first Black woman elected to the United States
25 House of Representatives, representing New York's

12th congressional district for seven terms from 1969 to 1983. During her tenure she was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. As someone myself born to Caribbean immigrants, and a Council with a large population of Caribbean Americans, it is fitting to honor Shirley Anita St. Hill Chisholm, born in Brooklyn on November 30, 1924 to Charles St Hill, a factory worker from Guyana, and Ruby Seale-St Hill, a seamstress from Barbados. Shirley's famous quote, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair," exemplifies her grit and determination. Despite facing stereotypes and prejudice, she tirelessly fought for equal rights. Establishing Shirley Chisholm Day is not only a gesture of respect and gratitude towards her groundbreaking achievements, but also means to promote inclusivity, inspire future leaders, and foster a deeper understanding of the importance of equality and social justice in our community. It commemorates a remarkable leader whose impact continues to resonate and inspire generations. Shirley Chisholm has certainly inspired many from the Black diaspora and many future generations to come, particularly women of color, to pursue leadership

1 roles in policy advocacy and social justice. Her
2 courage, determination, and resilience in challenging
3 status quo serve as a powerful example of how
4 individuals can affect change -- positive change,
5 despite facing adversity.

6
7 I am excited to see this bill come to fruition. I
8 want to thank the Committee and our Chair for
9 allowing me to speak today during this hearing, thank
10 you, Chair Williams.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Any other...

12 I'll turn it over to you...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, we'll turn over to you,
15 and then when Council Member Hudson is ready, we will
16 pause to also hear her opening remarks or statements.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Good
18 morning, everyone, my name is Jessica Boulet, and I
19 am counsel to the Committee on Civil and Human
20 Rights. Today, we will hear a testimony first from
21 the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice and
22 then from the Commission on Racial Equity.

23 Joining us for our first panel we have
24 Commissioner Sideya Sherman and Deputy Commissioner
25 Dabash Negash.

1 Panelists, if you could please raise your right
2 hands? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
3 truth, and nothing but the truth, before this
4 committee, and to respond honestly to council member
5 questions?
6

7 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I do.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Council
10 Member Hudson, if you would like to... All right,
11 before we start testimony.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Oh. I thought you were
13 gonna call me, but...

14 (LAUGHTER)

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And now we'll turn it over
16 to Council Member Hudson...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Sorry...

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: for remarks on her
19 resolution.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much, Chair,
21 and though it's Pride Month in New York City, and our
22 community is out celebrating our identities, we're
23 also raising our collective voices to protest
24 systemic oppression of LGBTQIA+ people in New York
25 City and across the world.

1 In New York City we've seen our transgender and
2 gender non-conforming neighbors come under attack.
3 We've had attempts to ban trans inclusive books and
4 prohibit trans girls and women from playing sports
5 right in our backyard. We purport to be an inclusive,
6 welcoming city, but that's not the case for
7 transgender and gender non-conforming people. It's
8 even worse across the Nation; last year at least 32
9 transgender and gender expansive people were
10 murdered, half of whom were Black trans women. Amber
11 Miner in Missouri, Amir Reid in Ohio, LaKendra Andrew
12 in Louisiana, Ashia Davis in Michigan, and Ashley
13 Burton in Georgia to name a few.

14 The bill that is being heard today is of utmost
15 importance, and I thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, and with that,
17 we can turn it over to you Commissioner.

18 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Chair Williams, members of
19 the Committees on Civil and Human Rights,
20 distinguished members of the City Council, and the
21 public, good morning. I am Sideya Sherman, New York
22 City's Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of the
23 New York City Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial
24 Justice (MOERJ). I am pleased to be joined today by
25

1
2 Dabash Negash, Deputy Commissioner, and other members
3 of the MOERJ team.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to provide an
5 update on our efforts to implement the historic
6 racial justice ballot measures New Yorkers passed in
7 late 2022. Our team has been hard at work uplifting
8 these mandates with an eye toward transforming
9 government toward racial equity and justice.

10 I want to begin by acknowledging that this
11 hearing is taking place on the heels of Juneteenth.

12 We are all here today discussing the
13 implementation of racial justice amendments to our
14 city charter because of those who came before us.
15 Many whose names we do not know -- people who
16 suffered and fought for freedom, demanded their
17 humanity be recognized, organized, shared
18 information, and formed many traditions that endure
19 today.

20 Their legacy is a powerful reminder of our
21 collective responsibility to speak up and fight for
22 justice. That spirit lives on in so many who have
23 laid the groundwork for today's discussion,
24 including: The former staff of the Racial Justice
25 Commission and the Commissioners who, with input from

1 communities, examined structural racism in our city
2 and put forward ballot measures aimed at dismantling
3 these barriers and promoting racial equity; and My
4 fellow New Yorkers, who overwhelmingly voted to
5 center racial equity in city governance and empowered
6 us to carry this work forward. As a lifelong New
7 Yorker, I was proud to witness this important moment
8 for our city.
9

10 In recognition of the history and people who have
11 brought us to this day, I wish to read a passage from
12 the new preamble of our City Charter:

13 "We, the people of New York City, united in our
14 resolve to build a just and equitable city for all,
15 recognize the efforts of those New Yorkers, past and
16 present, who fought for racial equity and social
17 justice, honor the contributions of those New Yorkers
18 who have suffered in the name of freedom, and
19 acknowledge all who fought, struggled, and dreamed
20 for a better life and a better city. Together, we
21 stand on their shoulders as we move boldly toward a
22 brighter tomorrow for ourselves, our children, and
23 future generations."

24 Thank you for your attention, and with that said,
25 I am please to update the Council.

1 As highlighted in my testimony before the council
2 last September, the new preamble of the City Charter
3 introduces a groundbreaking set of foundational
4 values designed to "...guide the operation of our
5 city government and inform and shape how the city
6 carries out its duties, obligations, and
7 authorities..." This preamble casts a vision for a
8 multi-racial democracy where we affirm that diversity
9 is our strength, acknowledge the harms of the past,
10 and boldly commit to building an equitable future for
11 all. The preamble urges our government to uphold
12 three core values: That justly value all talents and
13 contributions; That we ensure the conditions for
14 thriving for every person; and that we embrace
15 vigilance, remedy, and reconstruction.

17 In crafting these ballot proposals, the former
18 Racial Justice Commission spent months engaging the
19 public and examining the root causes of inequity.
20 From our perspective, the three resulting proposals
21 were decidedly focused on shifting the direction of
22 government rather than addressing any single-issue
23 area. With that charge, we have oriented our work
24 around these foundational values and the broader
25 vision of our city's preamble, presenting a

1
2 monumental opportunity for us -- as public servants -
3 - to rethink and reshape how we serve New Yorkers. As
4 MOERJ leads implementation of these new charter
5 amendments, we endeavor to translate these values
6 into actionable measures, ultimately
7 institutionalizing progress across agencies and
8 establishing new norms within city government.

9 The Charter calls for the City to create an
10 Office of Racial Equity and an independent Commission
11 on Racial Equity. In October 2023, MOERJ, which is
12 the City's Office of Racial Equity, was announced
13 alongside the Commission on Racial Equity. Leading up
14 to the launch of these two new entities, our office
15 spearheaded months of planning work across the
16 administration to identify and secure fiscal
17 resources, outline preliminary staffing structures,
18 begin to establish personnel and other administrative
19 systems necessary to hire staff, and ensure a solid
20 and sustainable operational footing, all while
21 continuing equity work underway prior to the passing
22 of the ballot measures. Amid a challenging fiscal
23 environment, MOERJ and CORE were among the new needs
24 met in the City's FY24 budget, with the
25 Administration affirming its commitment to building

1
2 the dedicated infrastructure needed for long-term
3 racial equity work within city government. As we
4 continue to thoughtfully grow our team and stand-up
5 processes and systems for our nascent agency, we are
6 keeping MOERJ's long-term goals insight to ensure the
7 city has strong equity infrastructure for generations
8 to come.

9 While continuing to operationally stand up our
10 new office and implement existing work, we also
11 convened an Advisory Board of diverse leaders across
12 the city and nation to provide high-level guidance on
13 implementing the ballot measures and transforming
14 government towards racial equity and justice. Drawing
15 on their significant experience implementing and
16 scaling strategies across government systems, the
17 Advisory Board has been instrumental in helping our
18 team build a strategic framework for advancing
19 structural reform through the Racial Equity Planning
20 process and other areas of work overseen by our
21 office. We extend our deepest gratitude to the
22 Advisory Board members for their service and
23 unwavering commitment to building an equitable New
24 York City.

1 As we advance work that is long-term in nature,
2
3 MOERJ has also remained focused on collaborating with
4 partners to invest in and implement strategies to
5 address the needs of New Yorkers in real-time,
6 including but not limited to: Over \$6 million
7 investment in new and expanded services for LGBTQ+
8 New Yorkers that builds and expands on the work of
9 the NYC Unity Project within MOERJ; Partnering with
10 SBS to launch Merchant Organizing grants to support
11 diverse communities - many hit hard by the pandemic -
12 in building vibrant neighborhood business communities
13 and commercial corridors; Working with our internal
14 Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity (TRIE) and
15 community groups to identify existing and new
16 strategies that can be targeted to help address long-
17 standing disparities in the Bronx; and Collaborating
18 with city and public partners on the citywide
19 expansion of the Save for College program, New York
20 City's universal college savings program.

21 The Charter requires the City to produce a
22 citywide racial equity plan, inclusive of individual
23 agency racial equity plans, on a biennial basis. Per
24 the Charter, the City's racial equity plan should
25

1 encompass: Outcome measures, short and long-term
2 goals, and strategies to reduce racial disparities.
3

4 The Commission on Racial Equity ensures community
5 voice is bought into the process -- proposing
6 Community Equity Priorities and outcome indicators
7 for possible inclusion in the plan.

8 The MOERJ team has been working diligently to
9 roll out the City's inaugural citywide Racial Equity
10 Plan. We have designed a planning process that is
11 first and foremost focused on structural reform and
12 moving government towards equity and justice in
13 greater unison. To get at the heart of this, our
14 planning process is focused on the core levers of
15 government: budget, staffing, procurement, service
16 delivery, and policymaking, to name a few. This is
17 not a mere compliance exercise, but an opportunity
18 for the City to pursue long-term transformation.
19 Agencies are examining their priorities relative to
20 the foundational values of the Charter, assessing
21 disparity data and Community Equity Priorities, and
22 developing short-, mid-term, and long-term goals and
23 strategies that are responsive.

24 Over the past months, our team has worked on
25 multiple fronts to ensure a successful Racial Equity

2 Planning Process. We have briefed senior leaders,
3 identified planning teams across agencies, developed
4 planning tools, and led full-day training workshops.
5 We are providing continuous support to agencies
6 throughout the process through dedicated office hours
7 and one on one technical assistance sessions.

8 This is the first time our city has taken on
9 Racial Equity Planning at this scale. Together, we're
10 building a shared understanding of structural
11 inequity, operating with a common set of values, and
12 building the uniform tools and processes needed to
13 upend the ways structural racism impacts our city.

14 Agencies have enthusiastically embraced this
15 process. This fall, we look forward to sharing a
16 preliminary plan with the public and a final plan
17 thereafter. Once the plan is released, our work
18 continues, with MOERJ quickly shifting towards
19 implementation and working closely with agencies to
20 advance critical goals, track progress, and make
21 continuous improvements to eliminate racial
22 disparities and promote fairness for all New Yorkers.

23 Simultaneous to the citywide Racial Equity
24 Planning process, we are also working to produce the
25 City's first True Cost of Living Measure. As outlined

1 in the charter, the New York City True Cost of Living
2 measure will establish what it costs to live in our
3 city with dignity, without consideration of public,
4 private, or informal assistance. Recognizing the
5 inadequacy of the federal poverty measure, the True
6 Cost of Living measure will move beyond basic poverty
7 calculations to capture what it costs to meet basic
8 needs, weather emergencies, and have the economic
9 stability needed to plan for one's future. This
10 measure will analyze costs across various household
11 sizes, age groups, and essential areas of need to
12 create a comprehensive understanding of what it takes
13 to thrive in our city. As one of the first cities to
14 pursue a measure of this type, NYC's True Cost of
15 Living measure can help inform state and national
16 policy priorities and help us further advocate for
17 the needs of working people in our city. We are
18 committed to getting this right and taking the
19 necessary steps to develop the measure carefully,
20 including leveraging local and national research. We
21 look forward to providing an update later this year
22 and sharing our full report in 2025.

24 We recognize the painful history of slavery that
25 endures throughout our city and country and the

1 importance of highlighting the often-under-
2 appreciated history of the resilience of New York
3 City's Black communities. We are proud of the
4 Administration's important work happening on this
5 front. For instance, earlier this month, the New York
6 City Landmarks Preservation Commission and Mayor
7 Adams announced, "More Than a Brook: Brooklyn
8 Abolitionist Heritage Walk," an interactive audio
9 tour exploring Brooklyn's history related to the
10 National Abolitionist Movement and the Underground
11 Railroad. In this spirit, the City looks forward to
12 working with the Council to advance Introduction
13 1150, sponsored by Council Member Marte, in relation
14 to establishing a New York City freedom trail.

16 Furthermore, the City, led by the NYC Department
17 of Transportation (DOT), commits to installing or
18 working with a third party to install a new
19 informational sign to mark the site of New York's
20 first slave market near the intersection of Wall
21 Street and Pearl Street. DOT looks forward to
22 continued discussions with the Public Advocate and
23 historians to identify an appropriate location and
24 content for the sign in response to Introduction 83,
25 sponsored by, Public Advocate Williams.

1 At a time when diversity, equity, and inclusion
2 initiatives are under attack nationally, our city has
3 an opportunity to demonstrate how government guided
4 by racial equity and justice works best for all in
5 our city and, therefore, across the nation.

6 Over the coming months, we will steadfastly
7 advance these major government reform efforts while
8 continuing to roll out new equity initiatives through
9 our office. Recently, we were proud to announce the
10 launch of NYC Her Future, a new companion office to
11 the Young Men's Initiative, focused on developing
12 programs and addressing disparities experienced by
13 young women and girls. Furthermore, as we close out
14 Pride Month, we are thrilled to continue sharing
15 investments through the NYC Unity Project, including
16 the recently announced expansion of the Family
17 Acceptance program, focused on LGBTQ+ Youth.

18 Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss
19 our efforts to create a more just city. We welcome
20 your questions.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, and thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 I have a few questions on appointments and
24 staffing. So, Commissioner, prior to your appointment
25

1 as Chief Equity Officer for MOERJ in October 2023,
2 you had already been serving as Commissioner for the
3 Mayor's Office Of Equity known as MOE, Moe, since May
4 2022. Is that correct? I think that's correct.
5

6 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Yes, that's correct.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It was not until October
8 2023, nearly one year after the Charter amendments
9 took effect, that the Mayor formally established
10 MOERJ. During that interim year, can you tell us
11 about what preparations if any the Mayor's Office of
12 Equity was able to undertake to prepare for MOERJ's
13 launch?

14 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, between in that
15 period between establishing and transitioning to the
16 Mayor's Office of Equity And Racial Justice, there
17 were a number of steps that we took to really make
18 sure that we were setting up a new office. And just
19 to give some context, our transition from the Office
20 of Equity to the Office Of Equity and Racial Justice
21 was not a turnkey operation. It literally is standing
22 up a new agency. Right? A new budget, new hiring
23 systems, new civil service titles, et cetera, to
24 really make sure that we're standing up a fully
25 functioning team. So, our first step was making sure

1 that we secured the budget. In the next fiscal year,
2 we spent a lot of time doing strategic planning,
3 building out staffing models, as well as prospective
4 staffing models for the Commission on Racial Equity
5 as well, securing the budget, and making sure we're
6 securing the lines, building the systems to even post
7 for jobs, developing the job descriptions and posting
8 for those as well, uh, as well as bringing in experts
9 to help advise us on the overall framework for
10 implementation. So, I shared that we launched an
11 Advisory Board, that was in April 2023, and that
12 Advisory Board included former Racial Justice
13 Commissioners, uh, as well as former city government
14 leaders -- former mayors, other folks who've been
15 crucial to change management efforts and city
16 government. So, we worked with them and had their
17 advisement during this period.

18 This is all while still of course carrying on the
19 day-to-day work of our office.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, and this is kind of
21 like a similar question, but outside of the
22 preparation work you did to stand up the new office,
23 can you share how this new office builds on work that
24 was already being done in the previous office?
25

1
2 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, so the we are the
3 Office of Racial Equity, but we are ,you know, the
4 Office of Equity And Racial Justice to really reflect
5 all the other disciplines that are still part of our
6 office. So, while we are carrying forward the Charter
7 mandates, we still include the NYC Unity Project, NYC
8 Her Future, The Commission on Gender Equity, the
9 Young Men's Initiative, and all the other units that
10 were originally part of our team. So, that work has
11 still continued, we still have the program management
12 portfolio that we oversee, and I included some of
13 those programs and initiatives, those are still
14 ongoing. So, there's lots of connectivity between the
15 work, but obviously the work that is reflected in the
16 Charter is brand new to the Office in the City.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And I just want to
18 acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member
19 Salamanca.

20 Can you tell us if at all... I'm sorry, can you
21 share if you've added new work streams compared to
22 the work that MOE is doing to comply with the 2022
23 charter amendment? So, if there's anything in
24 addition to your previous work?
25

1
2 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Absolutely. I mean the
3 Racial Equity Planning process in itself is an all-
4 encompassing work stream that really is encompassing
5 ,you know, much of the focus and effort of our office
6 -- pulling in folks from across our office to make
7 sure that we execute it. So, this is designing Racial
8 Equity Planning tools, training, curriculum, working
9 with agencies one on one. It's a whole new set of
10 activities and responsibilities that we have as an
11 office that didn't exist prior to the charter
12 mandates. That's just one example, obviously I shared
13 the research and the work that we have underway
14 around the True Cost of Living, as well as many of
15 the other efforts that the charter calls upon. It's
16 obviously in its initial year, a lot of our focus has
17 been the Racial Equity Plan and the planning process,
18 and that has pulled in all members of our team,
19 myself included, to really make sure that we're
20 focused on that effort.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I have some questions on
22 the Racial Equity Plan, but I will stick to questions
23 around appointment staffing timeline (BACKGROUND
24 NOISE) for right now.
25

1 So, several aspects of MOERJ's mandate including
2 with respect to the Citywide Racial Equity plan have
3 been significantly delayed. To what extent was the
4 Mayor's Office of Equity able to prepare for the
5 Racial Equity Planning process prior to your formal
6 appointment as Chief Equity Officer? And to what
7 extent were these delays inevitable given MOERJ's
8 late launch in 2023?

10 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, so I would
11 acknowledge obviously that ,you know, we shared an
12 updated timeline in January acknowledging that the
13 delay, and certainly it's not a reflection of ,you
14 know, the seriousness that we see with this, it is
15 actually the opposite. We see this is very important,
16 and are making sure that we do it correctly. So, even
17 in our role as the Office of Equity a lot of the
18 planning work started because this is again ,you
19 know, as we learn from the work of the Racial
20 Justice Commission really a focus on building the
21 foundations that shift government. A lot of the early
22 planning efforts started in concert in with our
23 Advisory Board in April 2023, where we built out
24 various varies of change, different models for Racial
25 Equity Planning , uh, we began to think through

1
2 KPI's, structures for the plan, templates, et cetera,
3 so that even as we moved into, uh, expanded Mayor's
4 Office of Equity and Racial Justice, we had some
5 foundation and some footing to start that work. Were
6 it not for that work, even in the previous iteration
7 of our office, we wouldn't be where we are today. So
8 that was instrumental to making sure that we were
9 able to move forward and work with agencies in the
10 fashion that we are now.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I just wanted to
12 know, like, I know I'm totally going off script but,
13 as I was thinking about the work and some of the
14 delays, I will say that it is a very large system,
15 New York City is very large, and it is a very large
16 system that was not built for equity. So, I was
17 thinking a lot about how the intents and the and the
18 timelines probably may not have been accurate from
19 the start to endeavor in this important work. But
20 really wanting to understand what has been the cause
21 of the delays, because we know that accountability
22 and really working towards making our city more
23 equitable is important, so thank you for sharing a
24 little bit about your timeline.

1 So in terms of staffing levels, how many staff
2 members are currently employed within MOERJ, and how
3 do these staffing levels compare to staffing levels
4 of MOE in October 2023?

5 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, so, currently we have
6 10 staff on... 10 people on staff, five people in our
7 pipeline, meaning folks who are in some form of
8 vetting and waiting for a start date. For our
9 remaining positions, we are all in the
10 recruitment interview hiring process somewhere with
11 those roles, but we hope to be at 15 people pretty
12 soon with the next folks starting. In comparison MOE,
13 we -- and I'll defer to my Deputy Commissioner, we
14 had seven lines, I want to say, and MOE, but I would
15 just flag that we also had shifts. So during the
16 course of this process, we also had six people
17 transition out of MOE as we transition to the MOERJ.
18 So, our staffing has also been fluid, where we're
19 hiring for new roles but also backfilling for
20 positions.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (INAUDIBLE) like you said
22 it perfectly, nothing to add. Uh... (CROSS-TALK)

23 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I would just add, sorry,
24 also Council Member, and I know I shared this at the
25

1 hearing that we had on pay equity not too long ago,
2 uh, staffing is our greatest priority. I think I
3 speak for myself and our Deputy Commissioner, nobody
4 wants our team more fully staffed than us for sure.
5 So ,you know, we are focused squarely on that --
6 advertising online, we're on LinkedIn, we're on ,you
7 know, Idealist, a number of sites, we'll be at the
8 City's hiring Halls. So we're really all hands on
9 deck to try to make sure that we find the right
10 people and we do it thoughtfully, but really build a
11 strong foundation for this team.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Awesome.

13 Are there any open vacancies? Is the five in the
14 pipe the vacancies that you mentioned? Or is there
15 separate lines that are current vacancies that are
16 not included in the 15?

17 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I'll...

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And, if so, are they
19 currently any ongoing hiring process? You kind of
20 answered that question, so I guess if you could just
21 share what the vacancies are if you have them?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Sure. I can jump in
23 on that. So, we have a total of 38, well when we're
24 fully staffed we're at 38...
25

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: 38?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yes. So, as we bring
3 on these additional five folks, we will be at about
4 15, and then we're in parallel continuing to hire for
5 additional positions separately. And I'm happy to
6 share a full list after the hearing if that's all
7 right. We have several of those positions posted as
8 well, including a general counsel role.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Did you say 38?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Correct.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: and that... and I
14 should mention that includes positions that will
15 directly work on the Racial Equity Planning and the
16 Charter amendments, but it also includes positions
17 related to the work that Commissioner Sherman
18 mentioned for NYC Her future, which is a new unit in
19 the office.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I think I'm confused, but
21 it may be me and not you, so please allow me to
22 clarify. You mentioned 10 staff, five in the pipe,
23 and then you said a total of 38. Can you explain to
24 me the weirdness of, I'm pretty sure, the City's
25

1 hiring process, the 10, the five, the 38? Like, what
2 is that?

3
4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Sure, absolutely. So,
5 the 38 is just the total to within our office...

6 (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That includes the different
8 commissions and...

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: That includes all of
10 yes, this is... Yeah, I understand the confusing...

11 (CROSS-TALK)

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Help me understand, I'm not
13 in the inside...

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: So, that includes all
15 of the personnel lines within the Mayor's Office Of
16 Equity and Racial Justice within our mayoral agency,
17 and then it also includes some additional... so that
18 includes the staff that work on the Racial Equity
19 Planning process, our office was alongside the
20 Commission on Racial Equity, was funded in the Fiscal
21 Year 2024 for that expansion. So, includes all of
22 those lines, but it also includes positions for...
23 to support the new unit, the NYC Her Future that the
24 Commissioner mentioned as well. So, it includes

1 positions that are supporting the Racial Equity...

2 (CROSS-TALK)

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (INAUDIBLE)...

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: planning process, but
5 also positions supporting the office as a whole.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Because you have different
7 commissions and initiatives, and so the 38
8 encompasses all of the things.

9 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: So, I it's a little
10 complicated, and we can also follow up if it's
11 helpful, too...

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

13 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: But, just big picture as
14 Deputy Commissioner Negash shared, uh, that includes
15 everyone who's within this new mayoral unit. And the
16 new mayoral unit, this new budget unit includes
17 everyone tied to the racial equity mandates and the
18 new team that was created for NYC Her Future. The
19 offices that report to me as Chief Equity Officer,
20 like, Commission on Gender Equity, Young Men's
21 Initiative, for instance, all sit in different budget
22 areas and are part of our overall team. So, we're not
23 speaking to those teams, so we can also give you the
24 big picture of all of our various teams that report
25

1 into me. But for the newly created positions those
2 are the 38, and of those 38 we have 10 incumbents,
3 five in the pipeline, and we're hiring on the rest of
4 the lines.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, so the vacancies make
7 up pretty much 38 minus 15?

8 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Exactly.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

10 So, how are staffing levels projected to change
11 in FY 2025, and I guess if I could guess based off of
12 what you've just answered, and you can just tell me
13 if I'm right or wrong, you would be seeking to
14 fulfill the full 38 positions? There are no
15 additional position, it would just be a fully
16 functioning office with all 38 positions filled?

17 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Exactly, we move forward
18 with the same headcount.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, and at the end of FY
20 2025, does MOERJ project that it will be adequately
21 staff to fully carry out its full mandate under the
22 charter, or is MOERJ projected to continue ramping up
23 into FY 26?

24 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Our goal is to be fully
25 staffed with an FY25. We're aiming to do that by Q2

1 of the fiscal year, uh, if not earlier. Again, head
2 count fluctuates, people separate, people join, but
3 we're aggressively hiring.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. So, was MOERJ
6 involved in the selection or vetting process for CORE
7 Commissioner, so deviating a bit to the selection
8 process of CORE, and then I have some budget
9 questions.

10 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, so the process for
11 CORE commissioners is led by The Mayor's Office of
12 Appointments. While we certainly ,you know, can
13 recommend commissioners, they lead that process and
14 work on all mayoral appointments.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, about the budget back
16 to staffing and personnel budgets, was the Mayor's
17 Office Equity able to undertake any preparations for
18 MOERJ staffing efforts prior to your appointment as
19 Chief Equity Officer? I believe you kind of answered
20 that ,you know, mentioned that a part of your
21 preparation was figuring out budgets and staff lines?

22 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, we also prepared job
23 descriptions for all of the roles did the strategic
24 planning we also share ,you know, preliminary job
25 descriptions for CORE to consider as they came on

1 board, and also ,you know, work to stand up some
2 just basic infrastructure, uh, so that there were
3 lines, seating, et cetera available for the
4 commission when the commission was active as well.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: The Charter further
7 includes a budget mandate that "appropriations
8 available to pay for the expenses of the office of
9 racial equity during each fiscal year shall be not
10 less than an amount sufficient to fund personal
11 service costs for full-time and part-time personnel
12 necessary to implement the charter mandated
13 requirements of the office." What was More's budget
14 for personnel in FY24?

15 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I will turn to deputy
16 Commissioner Negash.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: For FY24 is \$4.3
18 million.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Was MOERJ able to use all
20 of its resources allocated in the budget for
21 personnel expenses in FY24?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MONTALBAN: I'm sorry, could
23 you repeat that? I just couldn't hear it.
24
25

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I just wanted to know if
2
3 you were able to exhaust the \$4.3 million this fiscal
4 year?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: No, we were not, uh,
6 we had some savings for the reasons that Commissioner
7 Sherman mentioned. We were standing up the Office,
8 the Office was announced in the second quarter of the
9 fiscal year, and as we were standing up the office
10 and posting jobs, that was happening within the
11 second quarter of the fiscal year as well. So, all of
12 that funding was not exhausted, and we had some
13 savings.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And in reference to your
15 operational budget, what was MOERJ's total funding
16 for OTPS in FY24? And was this sufficient to cover
17 necessary supplies, equipment, utilities, and et
18 cetera.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yes, so for FY24, it
20 was about \$600,000, it was enough in that fiscal
21 year, again, since we're still standing up the office
22 there's, still a lot that we need to do. But we
23 evaluate our budget on an annual basis, and of course
24 ,you know, work with our colleagues if anything else
25 is needed.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, did MOERJ ever
3 reach out to OMB to discuss budget needs, and if so
4 could you share a response?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Chair, I...

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: A response from OMB? Have
7 you had conversations with them about your budget,
8 fine with your budget, could you share any insight
9 around your budget?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yes, we work very
11 closely with our colleagues at OMB on establishing
12 the budget back prior to the start of FY24 in
13 ensuring that the needs of the office are met. We
14 consistently work with them ,you know, between fiscal
15 years, as well between the fiscal year, uh, the
16 beginning and the end of the fiscal year as well to
17 just ensure that needs are met, and if adjustments
18 need to be made that we're connecting with them
19 directly about it. We also ensure that they're very
20 familiar with our work. We've briefed the staff on
21 the uh Charter mandates and the work that we aim to
22 do to also ensure the work that we're doing the,
23 direction we're headed, is understood.

24

25

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, do you think you
2 have adequate office space for your current staffing
3 levels and the projected staffing levels?
4

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Do we currently have,
6 sorry?

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Enough adequate office
8 space, really I'm interested in the projected
9 staffing levels, because you are projected to go up
10 times two. So, do you feel like you have adequate
11 office space for your projected staffing needs?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yes, we've been
13 working with our colleagues DCAS and others across
14 the Administration to identify additional space. We
15 have a space currently that will fit additional staff
16 members that are in our pipeline, but we recognize
17 that need more space for staff coming on board this
18 fiscal year. So, we've been working on identifying
19 additional space.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: In terms of resources,
21 MOERJ did not participate in a Council Preliminary or
22 Executive Budget Hearing this year. How did MOERJ
23 determine its budget needs for the coming year? Did
24 MOERJ request any additional or new resources for FY
25 2025?

1 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: So, I can just jump in. So,
2 we, ,you know, as Deputy Commissioner Negash shared,
3 we work with OMB going through each budget cycle. Our
4 headcount is remaining the same into the next year,
5 and it is sufficient for our needs as well as our
6 OTPS is relatively the same. So, I know the budget is
7 still being finalized as we speak, uh, but it least
8 in terms of what was shared in Exec, uh, we are about
9 at the same levels, and I think that is consistent
10 for what we need at this point.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What are the key
12 operational costs that MOERJ foresees for FY25, and
13 are these fully reflected in the Executive Budget?

14 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: So, outside of our
15 personnel costs, in terms of our OTPS costs, we have
16 ,you know, some potential contracting needs that ,you
17 know, based on our projected OTPS budget, we think
18 will be sufficient to meet. We will need some
19 additional capacity potentially around some of the
20 work that we are doing on True Cost of Living or even
21 our planning process. Other than that, we don't have
22 a heavy, heavy OTPS spending need at this time. But,
23 we have been able to, again, as Deputy Commissioner
24 Negash shared, have conversations with OMB as we have
25

1 needs that may emerge throughout the fiscal year-
2 round
3

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: A few more questions. I am
5 going to ask a few questions about fulfilling the
6 mandate, and get a little bit more into the Racial
7 Equity Plan.

8 So, one, uh, as you have also mentioned, uh, the
9 most important mandate is to lead a Racial Equity
10 Planning process that will result in a citywide
11 Racial Equity Plan. The Charter's Racial Equity
12 Planning schedule is meant to ensure that racial
13 equity priorities can be considered and reflected in
14 the budget planning process. I know I would love to
15 see that report as a council member, and also a
16 member of the B&T to make sure we are being
17 equitable, so, I am looking forward to it. So,
18 despite the delays in the former Racial Equity
19 Planning process, has MOERJ been able to engage in
20 the City's budget process for FY25?

21 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: So, outside of the needs
22 for our office or programs that our office is
23 connected to, we haven't been part of ,you know, the
24 overarching budget negotiations. But, we do know that
25 going into the next budget cycle, the City will have

1 the Citywide Racial Equity Plan. It will express the
2 priorities of all agencies, but also the city
3 overall. Our office is responsible for building the
4 citywide plan, which is collection of those agency
5 plans, but also the priorities of the Administration.
6 So, as we go into FY26, we are excited for the City
7 to have a plan that's strong, that's meaningful, and
8 that will express those priorities. I would just also
9 add, as I shared, we started an advisory board as we
10 went through the planning process. OMB was also part
11 of that advisory board, so as we thought through the
12 Racial Equity Planning process, how we wanted to
13 structure it, how we design the process, they were
14 also partners to us to help us translate the types of
15 tools that they need as they access the budget for
16 instance, the types of uniformity of definition, of
17 process across agencies, so that they have some
18 objective criteria that they can use as they actually
19 review that plan. They have been valuable partners
20 and (INAUDIBLE) partners in thinking through change
21 management in city government. And, so, as we go into
22 the FY26 budget cycle, I think ,you know, it's
23 promising that City, the Council, uh, and the City at
24 large will have this plan to reference.
25

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You mentioned objective
2 criteria, can you share if at all, like, objective
3 criteria that has been discussed or decided upon in
4 terms of how to assess the budget for equity?
5

6 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, so, we are, uh, as we
7 go through the Racial Equity Planning process, as I
8 shared we have asked agencies to really focus on the
9 core levers of government. And, so, we spent time
10 looking at plans from other cities, we, again, spent
11 a lot of time in conversations with our advisory
12 board. While we anticipate certainly having a plan
13 that has a number of programs, and initiatives, and
14 polices, what we are really looking for is the plan
15 that has a number of long term goals that are tied to
16 how and where we allocate our resources, how we are
17 addressing pass harms for instance, uh, as well as we
18 are advancing efforts that are considered to be anti-
19 marginalizing. So, we have worked agencies to share
20 clear definitions of equity, clear definitions of
21 structural racism, of marginalization to create tools
22 that agencies can use to sort of cross check the way
23 in which they design programs and policies. These are
24 not designed to be rigid and to lock agencies into
25 any particular way of doing work, but to create some

1 uniform understanding, so that when we are using the
2 word equity, we are all operating with the same
3 definition.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think from a
6 philosophical lens, that sounds amazing. Are you able
7 to provide an example of something or like a
8 particular item or use an agency as an example to
9 help me understand how this... the theories of what
10 you're doing and the definitions then actually get
11 applied to the tangible work of a particular agency,
12 and maybe some work they need to do to be a little
13 bit more equitable, or ,you know, fix their budgets
14 to make sure that it reflects the necessary
15 investments in communities that have been
16 historically marginalized as ,like, a particular
17 criteria that you mentioned?

18 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, everything you shared
19 is exactly the way in which we were focusing the
20 plans... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That was my guess, I didn't
22 know.

23 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: So, we... so I don't want
24 to get ahead of -- we're still working with agencies
25 to finalize plans, and I certainly don't want to get

1 ahead of that. In this planning process, we certainly
2 have used hypothetical fake agencies to help agencies
3 think through their planning process. But, I think
4 big picture, you know, what we've designed as a
5 process where agencies are first and foremost
6 reexamining their missions relative to these
7 foundational values. They are next setting short-term
8 goals that are really tied to the disparities that
9 they see in the data. So, for instance if I'm an
10 agency focused on employment, and I'm seeing
11 disparities within certain populations, I'm setting
12 short-term goals to start to close those disparities,
13 but the goals are very specific. The goals may be
14 more than connecting someone to a job, but connecting
15 someone to a job that has a living wage for instance.
16 Then moving towards midterm goals that are a little
17 bit more transformative for my agency, so for
18 instance, uh, thinking through strategies to update
19 my RFPs, for instance, to include some of the values
20 and principles that can combat marginalization. And
21 then, I'm looking towards long-term goals that are
22 potentially 10 years, where I am potentially shifting
23 my recourse to specific neighborhoods or specific
24 districts where we're seeing a disparity that's
25

1 deeper than the rest of the City. So, that's the kind
2 of exercise that agencies are going through ,you
3 know, the Charter calls on agencies to certainly have
4 goals that can be accomplished in two fiscal years,
5 so you will see a number of short-term goals.
6 Agencies also certainly are lifting up work that's
7 happening across this administration that's aligned.
8 But, they also are taking this deeper look at their
9 work, their processes, and we'll be sharing that in
10 the plan.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, in terms of like the
13 work of your office -- these are like literally
14 questions off the top of my head as you're responding
15 - so, in terms of the work of your office, is it that
16 you provided that framework to agencies to then do
17 their own analysis? And do you have the proper
18 authority to hold them accountable for doing said
19 analysis, and ,like, either reporting back up to you
20 or reporting back to the public? I'm just interested
21 in the workflow of that. Is it that you told them,
22 "this is how you should be looking at the work of
23 your agency."? And what obligation do they have to
24 turn that stuff over in timely fashion, actually
25 implement it, and then what is that oversight going

1
2 to look like for the agencies? Because, in other
3 hearings with other agencies that have these
4 oversight-like powers, the agencies sometimes do
5 their own thing and don't necessarily comply with
6 another agency's request of them. So, I'm just
7 wondering if you feel empowered to do the work you're
8 doing? And, then, I think my first original question
9 is, what does that work look like? What have those
10 conversations been? What did you give the agencies as
11 ,like, you know, was it a document of framework? Was
12 it a conversation? How are they... what tools do they
13 have to do this analysis, and then how are you
14 empowered to hold them accountable for said work?

15 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. We are empowered to
16 design, execute, require, and really define how this
17 plan is moving forward. We are fully empowered to
18 doing that. There's been support across the
19 Administration, including at the very top with the
20 Mayor issuing notice to agency heads, ensuring that
21 they understand the importance of this process and
22 the importance of committing to it. We've briefed all
23 senior leaders; we've briefed all agency heads, and
24 the good news is that agencies have enthusiastically
25 participated in this process. So, to your point, we

1
2 have laid out tools that are ,you know, prescriptive,
3 but still offer flexibility. We don't want to stifle
4 innovation. We've created training, we're providing
5 support --technical assistance -- we're receiving
6 draft plans, and they are drafted for a reason,
7 because we're going to work with agencies to bring
8 them the final. I'm really, to your point, I've
9 certainly been through many other City processes,
10 and I think part of the early planning work that we
11 did, particularly learning from other change
12 management efforts in government, as well as other
13 cities, we did that upfront work so that we could
14 build out a process that really brought agencies to
15 the table in a way that they're full partners. And
16 they've been great partners. So, I think that ,you
17 know, I'm encouraged, and I think that the City will
18 have a really strong plan. And I think ,you know, the
19 values and the priorities across the Administration
20 seem very aligned as we move forward in this process.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That's good to hear. And, I
22 guess this is more of a future question as you
23 endeavor to be a part of the FY26 budget cycle,
24 because ,you know, as you said, we're in budget
25 negotiations, and I think there's been plenty of

1 times where myself, colleagues ,you know, talk about
2 how commissioners will complain to them about OMB.
3 And so... And afraid of OMB. And OMB is like the end
4 all be all, and, so I almost, and I hope, and I'll be
5 really interested in how, again, your office is
6 empowered to be a strong voice in the budget process.
7 And I just... and maybe you can't answer, because
8 ,you know, politics... but I'm just wondering how
9 you feel about your role going into the next budget
10 cycle, and if you do feel, once again, like,
11 empowered to even have a strong voice within the
12 budget cycle, and if your office is... OMB,
13 specifically, is valuing the work of your office as
14 they seek to draft City budgets year after year?
15

16 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. So, I don't want to
17 speak for OMB, but I will say, again, they've been
18 partners in this process. And I think ,you know, as
19 we have a final plan, it will express the priorities
20 of agencies in the Administration, and I think that
21 that's important, uh, critical information as the
22 City Budget is created. Obviously ,you know, new
23 needs are a fraction of the City Budget, so while we
24 know that agencies of course will propose and
25 identify areas of need, we also are asking agencies

1
2 to take a look at how they allocate their existing
3 resources. So, that's part of the process as well --
4 as well as the many non-monetary actions the City can
5 take to advance equity, whether it's policy reform,
6 removing impediments, et cetera.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I just thought of another
8 question ,you know, it's one thing in one agency to
9 look at how they're spending their resources in
10 different communities, with different types of
11 demographics across the City. But. in your
12 assessment, are you also going to be looking at how,
13 let's say, I won't even say any names, because I'm
14 trying not to... I'm trying to be good, uhm, "Agency
15 A" that people might find to be a problematic agency,
16 and perhaps should be defunded in some way, because
17 of the work that they've done that some might feel is
18 targeted to certain communities, and maybe looking at
19 "Agency B" that is doing really great work in areas
20 around equity and improving things for Black folks in
21 New York City as an example. Are you looking across
22 agencies too to see how funds could maybe be
23 reappropriated to best serve the City more equitably?
24 Or is it just focused on ,like, agency by agency
25 spending? Is there any cross agency work? Because, to

1
2 your point, and I get it, uh, and I understand ,like,
3 OMB's mandate. So, not even thinking about how we can
4 increase money, but how are we spending the hundred
5 billion dollars that we have right now across the
6 City, not just within a particular agency, but across
7 agencies? And if money could be reallocated from one
8 agency to another agency, not just reallocation
9 within the agency? Uh, to me that seems something to
10 be analyzed as well. So, I'm just wondering if that
11 is a part of your thinking, not just within agencies,
12 but have you also been thinking across agencies how
13 spending could be more equitable?

14 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, so we've been
15 thinking across agencies around how goals can be
16 aligned. I think goals then lead to how and where and
17 ,you know, you allocate resources, and that that
18 helps that decision-making process. But our focus has
19 been on how we align goals. So, while there are
20 collection of individual agency plans, there is a
21 citywide plan. The purpose of the citywide plan
22 certainly is to cast citywide goals, but also to
23 connect the dots. So, a lot of our work is connecting
24 the dots between various city agencies to build
25 alignment. And I think that that, again, uh, creates

1
2 whatever the priority is. I you know our job is
3 certainly, we are not allocating the City budget.
4 Right? But, I think that we are providing the
5 information and setting the priorities necessary for
6 us to think about resource allocation in the context
7 of those shared goals.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, like, in my head, you
9 can tell me if this is how you feel the intent of
10 this office would be implemented, is that there would
11 be ,you know, some type of documentation analysis
12 that provides a clearer picture on how the City
13 could be spending more equitably and serving certain
14 communities that have been historically underserved.
15 And, then ,you know, OMB and whatever agency head
16 would be using that information to craft budgets that
17 reflect whatever ,you know, recommendations, reports
18 that you put out.

19 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Yeah, and I... so the,
20 yes, so the plan I think provides us an opportunity
21 to identify how resources are or can be allocated
22 across certain communities or certain issue areas,
23 uh, not necessarily how they're allocated across
24 agencies, but really organized how it's allocated
25 across the priorities...

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm

2 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: whether that be ,you know,
3 geographic population, issue area, et cetera.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, so part of your plan
5 is more so focused on the priorities, and almost
6 means testing the budget to the priorities that you
7 have identified through the plan?

8 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Yeah, I mean the plan
9 really is ,like, setting these goals, the strategies
10 that are short and long term to achieve these goals,
11 uh, with an understanding that many of the goals are
12 cross functional. So ,you know, if you think of any
13 challenge in the City, it's no one agency's job to
14 solve, and so our expectation is the citywide goals
15 are capturing those. And that's used to inform all of
16 our decision making.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, and given some of
18 your answers, I guess you haven't really reviewed the
19 Executive Budget this year, right? The goal is to
20 really do that analysis next year?

21 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Exactly, we'll have a plan
22 at that point, mm-hmm.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, according to the
24 Charter's 2024 Racial Equity Planning schedule, MOERJ
25

1
2 must publish its first Racial Equity Progress Report
3 no later than 3 weeks after the Mayor submits the
4 Citywide Racial Equity Plan, does MOERJ expect to be
5 able to follow this schedule for the currently
6 projected Racial Equity Planning timeline? So, in
7 other words, can we expect this progress report by
8 the end of the year?

9 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: So, I think that that may
10 be, uh, the progress report is due the year after,
11 uh,

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: 2026...

13 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I think maybe that is
14 the... the Commission on Racial Equity... (CROSS-
15 TALK)

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Provides a
17 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

18 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Exactly. So, the Commission
19 on Racial Equity ,you know, which is an independent
20 commission, and I know you'll hear from them later
21 today, they provide an evaluation of our plan, uh,
22 after it's prepared. And then we prepare progress
23 report in the next year, and we'll be on track to do
24 that.

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Does MOERJ expect to
2 revert to the originally envisioned schedule for
3 racial equity plans after this year? So, in other
4 words, will the Racial Equity Planning process for
5 2026 follow the timeline outlined in the Charter?
6

7 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Our goal is to get this
8 back on to the original timeline after this initial
9 report -- for all of the deliverables.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Could you speak
11 to how the Racial Equity Planning process is going so
12 far? And how MOERJ has been engaging with or plans to
13 engage city agencies and systems?

14 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, I will turn to our
15 Deputy Commissioner Negash to speak about that.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: So, as the
17 commissioner mentioned, we've briefed our leadership
18 here at City Hall. We've also briefed our agency
19 commissioners, chiefs of staff, other leaders within
20 the Administration; we spent a considerable amount of
21 time also preparing to kind of what we're calling
22 ,like, onboarding agencies into the process, training
23 them, and ensuring that they have the understanding -
24 - uh, we have shared understanding of the language
25 that we're using, the work that we're doing, and the

1
2 goals that we're setting, and, uh, give them the
3 tools, as I said, that they really need to complete
4 their plan.

5 We've also been meeting with agencies one-on-one
6 to just brainstorm and be a thought partner in this
7 work. Uh, as the commissioner mentioned ,you know,
8 we've had a number of agencies that are just
9 extremely excited to move this forward, have a lot of
10 ideas. We have ,you know, City staff who have been
11 with the City for a long time, and have also been
12 doing equity work just in their ,you know, divisions
13 or working to push it forward within their agency, so
14 they're excited to build on that.

15 So, we're providing one-on-one support, technical
16 assistance, and we've recently hired a Director of
17 Equity Planning and Technical Assistance who's
18 helping to lead that process as well. And we're ,you
19 know, utilizing a collaborative process once draft
20 plans are submitted to really review them, understand
21 them, and see how we can partner to just finalize
22 them and ensure that they're quality, they're
23 transformative, and they ,you know, meet the demands
24 of the Charter, what the Charter is asking us to do,
25 and what New Yorkers have asked us to do.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. And you kind of
3 somewhat answered the next question, uh, which is how
4 would you describe Agency's general level of
5 preparation for engaging in this Racial Equity
6 Planning process? And it does seem, as you mentioned,
7 that some agencies might already have an equity
8 officer or ,you know, someone that is serving in an
9 equity role, uh, already doing this work. But, I
10 don't know if you have anything else to add in terms
11 of the general sort of level of preparation that they
12 have to engage in this process?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: I would add that ,you
14 know, every I think we recognize that every agency is
15 in a different place. So, what we're trying to do is
16 ,you know, understand where they are first and
17 foremost ,you know, meet them where they are, and
18 then see ,you know, where we need to go to, uh, to
19 meet the goals of the plan and what the Charter has
20 asked us to do.

21 So, we have ,you know, general tools and
22 resources that we're providing, but ,you know, when
23 we're connecting and meeting with agencies, we're
24 also asking them what they need from us -- maybe
25 that's outside of that frame ,you know, what we've

1 provided, so that we can ensure that they have what
2 they need to move forward. But, yes, I just ,you
3 know, reiterate that we have agencies that are
4 really excited to do this work.

5
6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Awesome. And ,you know,
7 understanding that no agency is alike, are you able
8 to provide an estimation around how many agencies
9 already have an equity officer or somebody maybe
10 doing diversity? I know a lot of times these
11 positions are sitting in HR offices, like, EEO, I
12 feel like a lot of EEO officers in the agencies tend
13 to be doing this work. So, are you able to roughly
14 say, across agencies, you know, how many agencies
15 actually have someone doing this work?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yeah, so... (CROSS-
17 TALK)

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What would be your
19 estimation?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yeah, I mean I
21 would... just to answer that, I would say that what
22 we have asked commissioners and agencies heads,
23 executive directors, to really do is we don't want to
24 rely on one single person to carry out this work
25 across the agencies. It is way too big and a very

1
2 important process, and we, as the Commissioner said,
3 we want these to be quality plans. So, what we have
4 asked agencies to do is really form a Racial Equity
5 Planning Team within their agency, that cuts across
6 different functions, to really ensure that plans
7 speak to core business, and we are not just relying
8 on a single person with an equity title, or a
9 particular division, to really craft that plan. It
10 has to cut across, uh, it has to cross, uh, cut
11 across functions if we want to ensure that it's
12 transformative.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: No, I think that's right.
14 But, are you able to share agencies that already
15 either have a person or an office?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: As in like an equity-
17 titled position?

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, or someone that may
19 not have the title of equity, but when you speak to
20 them, like, their portfolio includes some forms of
21 ,like, assessing equity, whether it is within the
22 agency itself and/or the work that they are doing for
23 New Yorkers?

24

25

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: We can follow up. I
3 don't have a list like that with me today, but we can
4 certainly follow up.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, no problem...

6 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: And I would just add, I
7 mean, obviously all offices have EEO officers... All
8 agencies have EEO officers, who may or may not be
9 involved or the person in the planning process. All
10 agencies also have chief diversity officers, usually
11 these folks have responsibilities associated with
12 M/WBE (Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise)
13 contracting, but sometimes they have a
14 responsibilities that are beyond that. But, to your
15 point, there are other types of equity roles in
16 different agencies, some may not be titled that we,
17 too. And this planning process is also helping us
18 identify those folks.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Are you intentionally doing
20 that or is that happening by chance?

21 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: It is... So, we.... to
22 Deputy Commissioner the Nagash's point, when we
23 reached out to create planning teams, we've asked
24 agencies to identify someone who reports to the
25 agency head as part of the planning team that could

1
2 be a deputy commissioner, for instance, that could
3 also be their equity person, whether it's an officer,
4 et cetera. So, we've intentionally asked agencies to
5 include those people in this this process.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: And, I sorry I would
7 just also add that we've also asked agencies to
8 include staff that have equity expertise background
9 and already do that work.

10 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: And that their teams be
11 diverse and reflect the City.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I love that. How MOERJ plan
13 to measure accountability to the City's Racial Equity
14 Plan going forward?

15 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Every plan will have a
16 goal, set of goals, set of strategies, as well as
17 indicators. So our role, as we move into the
18 implementation phase, will be to work with agencies
19 to not just track indicators, but also to understand
20 how we're moving along the process so that we could
21 also mitigate any challenges that are happening. So,
22 the progress report will provide that public update.
23 You know, I shared earlier that the Commission on
24 Racial Equity, and I know they've shared a set of
25 Community Equity Priorities, they also have an

1
2 opportunity to share potential indicators, too. So,
3 that can also be part of the plan, and that's
4 something that we would make sure to track and report
5 publicly as part of our process.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, almost done
7 here.

8 How is MOERJ working with the Commission on
9 Racial Equity in relation to Racial Equity Planning?

10 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, CORE has also been a
11 really great partner in this process. They've hit the
12 ground running and have developed a set of draft
13 Community Equity Priorities. We brought CORE into the
14 training sessions that we've had with agencies, so
15 that they can directly deliver those Community Equity
16 Priorities to agencies and explain them, uh, and
17 provide an opportunity for agencies to ask questions
18 to really understand them, unpack them, so that they
19 can ,you know, consider that in their planning
20 process. So we regularly exchange updates,
21 information with CORE, and we look forward to
22 sharing a draft plan with the Commission in the fall.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, just a few more
24 questions.

1 Measuring the True Cost of Living, could you
2 describe MOERJ's work today to develop, implement,
3 and report on the True Cost of Living metric that the
4 2022 Charter amendments require?
5

6 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. So, we, as I
7 mentioned in my testimony, we've certainly have
8 started some initial research and assessment of
9 various tools and measures across the country, as
10 well as meeting with other folks who've done this
11 research. We've also done some internal assessment,
12 obviously the City produces a poverty report, which
13 is different than what this is, but also offers us
14 some ideas on how we develop methodology, potential
15 data sources, and how we create something that's
16 sustainable over time. Our work right now, after
17 we've done some of that initial research, is moving
18 forward with an initial methodology from the City.
19 We're also working to bring on some third party
20 support to increase our capacity as we go through
21 that planning process.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

23 There's other questions, but I think you're still
24 formulating it, but ,you know, just, I guess,
25 understanding ,like, what the methodology will be,

1
2 how do you plan an evaluate or determines the
3 measure, the true measure to measure the true cost of
4 living? You have that information now, or you're
5 working to get to that place?

6 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: We're working to get to
7 that place. I can just share ,you know, this is of
8 great importance to us and to our city, uh, you know,
9 a true cost of living measure, as I shared in my
10 testimony, really offers an opportunity for us to
11 understand the magnitude of people across our city
12 who are certainly ,you know, working to get by. And
13 ,you know, can certainly be a way in which we
14 advocate for what we need as a city on behalf of
15 working people. So, we're looking to ,you know,
16 certainly measure basic needs, also make sure that
17 we're measuring ways in which people can withstand
18 emergencies. But also making sure that people... that
19 we're creating a measure that accounts for the
20 economic stability that people need to really plan
21 for their future. This is uncharted territory for
22 sure, so we want to make sure we do this in a way
23 that's really thoughtful. So, again, we look forward
24 to sharing that methodology and briefing the Council.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Now on the Task
3 Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity, can you tell us
4 about the current activities of the task force and
5 its plans and priorities for the coming year -- and
6 how the task force's work has shifted, if at all
7 since MOERJ was established?

8 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, I'll turn to Deputy
9 Commissioner Nagash.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEGASH: Yes, the Task Force
11 on Racial Inclusion and Equity's work continues. Our
12 focus has been primarily, and the Commissioner
13 referenced this in her testimony, on responding to
14 long-standing disparities in the Bronx. So, that's
15 been a big focus of our work and will continue to be
16 in this fiscal year. We've worked with a subcommittee
17 within the task force on Racial Inclusion and Equity
18 to look at... to form kind of a vision, some
19 overarching areas of issue areas, and goals, and
20 start to really think about what existing... strong
21 existing strategy should we be potentially expanding
22 within the borough? What are... both from within the
23 City, but also with community, and then what new
24 strategy should we be thinking about moving forward?

1 So, we've worked with our task force to do that;
2
3 we've held a number of engagement sessions, also
4 within the Bronx, to really connect directly with
5 community on the direction of the plan and ensure
6 that it's informed, uh, by community. And we'll
7 continue to do that in this fiscal year.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you very much for
9 your testimony and answering my questions. I really
10 appreciate the work that you're doing. I know it's
11 very hard work, and you have a lot to handle within
12 the next year. So, good luck to you; I'm here to be
13 supportive.

14 Just, thank you so much for this very important
15 work. I think more people should know about the work.
16 I think you should be completely empowered. Yeah,
17 just thank you so much for being here.

18 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Thank you, Council
19 Member... (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Especially, you
21 Commissioner, I know you're ,like, still not here.
22 (LAUGHTER) So, thank you so much.

23 PANEL: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: We are going to switch to
25 the CORE panel now.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for your patience. I will turn it over to Jessica to swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, still, I think, yes. Thank you for being with us today. I will swear in our new panel now, which is the Commission on Racial Equity. We have the Chair and Executive Director with us, Linda Tigani. If you could please raise your right hand?

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: (NO MIC) (RESPONSE COULD NOT BE HEARD)

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Very good, thank you so much. Please begin whenever you are ready.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Good morning, Chair, Dr. Nantasha Williams, and members of the Civil and Human Rights Committee. My name is Linda Tigani, and I have the honor of serving as the inaugural Chair and Executive Director of the NYC Commission on Racial Equity referred to throughout today's testimony as CORE. I lead CORE in partnership with 13

1
2 Commissioners and look forward to welcoming one more
3 Commissioner to be appointed by Mayor Adams.

4 Today's testimony represents a significant step
5 toward further establishing the Commission within
6 city government. CORE's focus is to ensure that
7 members of the public who have inequitable power, who
8 historically have been oppressed, and are denied
9 service, are included in groups that the government
10 feels accountable to. Accountability is critical to
11 democracy and the building of public trust in
12 government. CORE was created to offer a public
13 channel to bring community and government together to
14 transparently discuss how the legacy of slavery and
15 the structural denial of civil and human rights show
16 up in the practice of multiracial democracy. We are
17 one of a kind. There is no comparable independent
18 accountability body on a local, state, or federal
19 level whose explicit mission is to channel community
20 accountability to identify and uproot racism in the
21 fabric of our city, and to reimagine a city and a set
22 of social systems centering racial equity and social
23 justice.

24 CORE is a partner to the public and our city
25 agencies in the efforts to advance racial equity in

1
2 New York City's public engagement, legislative, and
3 budgeting processes. Although this testimony is
4 presented in the final days of the Fiscal Year 2025
5 budgeting process, the budget process is not over. I
6 hope that the discussion today will encourage members
7 of City Council, ahead of any final decisions, to
8 reflect on how our city's Fiscal Year 2025 budget
9 addresses racism, the legacy of historically racist
10 policies, and how our budget can move oppressed
11 communities past mere survival and instead ensure
12 that they receive all of the services they need to
13 live healthy, happy, and safe lives to a place of
14 thriving.

15 Since May, the CORE team has reached over 140
16 organizations, and their members have consistently
17 expressed excitement for our work. Throughout my
18 conversations with the public, I continue to hear "I
19 remember this, I voted for it." Many expressed their
20 excitement in seeing the measure they
21 enthusiastically voted for come democratically to
22 life.

23 At the same time, community organizations and
24 advocacy groups have shared concerns about CORE's
25 capacity to fulfill its mandate to increase

1
2 accountability for racial equity in government
3 operations. In February 2024, Robin Hood released a
4 new poverty tracker report that shows poverty in New
5 York City rose from 1.5 million to 2 million between
6 2021 and 2022. Latino New Yorkers were twice as
7 likely to live in poverty compared to white New
8 Yorkers; poverty rates were similarly elevated among
9 Asian and Black New Yorkers (24% and 23%,
10 respectively). Black New Yorkers had the lowest life
11 expectancy among racial and ethnic groups at 76.1
12 years, while white New Yorkers had the highest at
13 81.8 years. None of this should be surprising.

14 Racial disparities in access to government
15 services are the direct product of policy, procedures
16 and decision-making processes. Racism in our
17 operations is not accidental but, rather, the result
18 of deliberate decisions -- whether they are dictated
19 through the administrative code, agency handbook,
20 funding formulas, or legislation. New York City is
21 operating agencies and programs that were created
22 during or in response to Jim Crow, widespread upset
23 over forced desegregation, and the current attack and
24 rollback of civil and human rights protections.

1 In recognition of these inequities, New York City
2 Charter outlines five pathways for CORE. First, our
3 Commission must identify and propose Community Equity
4 Priorities and outcome indicators relevant to the
5 wellbeing of community members for possible inclusion
6 in the upcoming citywide and agency racial equity
7 plans, in accordance with the equity planning
8 schedule. Second, following the releases of the
9 Administration's preliminary citywide racial equity
10 plan and of the citywide racial equity plan, the
11 Commission shall make public a statement assessing
12 the extent to which the plan is responsive to the
13 Community Equity Priorities, and make recommendations
14 on strategy, indicators, and goals set forth in the
15 plan. Third, CORE will track and publicly report on
16 agency and citywide compliance with the racial equity
17 planning process. Fourth, we will receive complaints
18 about agency conduct that may have the effect of
19 exacerbating racial equity disparities, and we will
20 make recommendations to agencies to address such
21 complaints where appropriate. Lastly, CORE is
22 mandated to respond to requests of the Speaker of the
23 Council and its committees regarding racial equity
24 concerns.
25

1 Now, I would like to turn to the development of
2 CORE and provide updates on our work. In Fiscal Year
3 2024, the Commission started with a total budget of
4 \$1.3 million which is separated into personnel
5 services at \$905,000 and operating costs \$395,000.
6 Our FY24 budget accounted for seven staff including
7 myself and a small amount of operational funds to
8 conduct community outreach. We accepted a proposed
9 cut under the Plan to Eliminate the Gap also known as
10 the PEG in Fiscal Year 2024 for \$451,000 which was
11 covered by underspending in personnel costs due to
12 delay in hiring. The accepted cut is expected to
13 cover the full five-year target providing there are
14 no subsequent PEGS.

16 CORE launched on October 11, 2023, three months
17 after the identified start date in the New York City
18 Charter and has since accomplished an extraordinary
19 amount, in my view, in view of the scarcity of
20 resources. As the only staff member from October 2023
21 to March 2024, I focused on fostering CORE's
22 relationship with the public and government agencies.
23 At this point, I would like to take this opportunity
24 to thank the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial
25 Justice (MOERJ) who worked to ensure CORE was in the

1 Fiscal Year 2024 budget, was afforded staff lines,
2 had desk space, and provided support announcing the
3 City's Commission, provided administrative support,
4 and collaborated with appointing bodies to identify
5 Commissioners.
6

7 Within my first three months, I held over a dozen
8 introductory sessions with organizations that
9 partnered with the Racial Justice Commission. I
10 launched the CORE website with the support of OTI and
11 MOERJ. I reviewed more than 600 applications to fill
12 six positions on the inaugural team.

13 Starting in mid-March 2024, I began onboarding
14 the first Commission staff after six months of
15 operating as a team of one. CORE is closing out
16 Fiscal Year 2024 fully staffed.

17 On May 13th, CORE released 16 Draft Community
18 Equity Priorities both to the public at large and to
19 city agencies for their review, consideration, and
20 feedback. Prior to public release, CORE held seven
21 virtual sessions and received feedback from 21
22 community-based organizations participating in the
23 Taskforce on Racial Equity and Inclusion Neighborhood
24 Network Initiative and from organizations that
25 conduct Participatory Budgeting to shape the draft

1
2 priorities. Additionally, CORE Commissioners shaped
3 the language and identified the inequities that we
4 must address.

5 The Draft Community Equity Priorities and a
6 public response form can be found on our website at
7 nyc.gov/core. I have included the priorities in
8 today's testimony to be submitted to public record.
9 We have presented at each of the Citywide Racial
10 Equity planning in-person and virtual trainings.

11 We conducted training for 24 community
12 organization staff to further these efforts within
13 their respective networks and are continuing to
14 receive requests from other partners. We presented to
15 over 160 faith leaders coordinated by the Mayor's
16 Office of Faith Based Partnerships, and at various
17 Manhattan Community Board meetings. We're currently
18 continuing to expand our reach to Community Education
19 Councils, Community Boards, social justice networks,
20 advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, and other
21 community organizations to ensure we are meeting New
22 Yorkers wherever they are and through service
23 providers they trust.

24 Additionally, I have appreciated the partnership
25 with Council thus far. While launching the Draft

1 Community Equity Priorities, I began working with
2 your team, Council Member Hudson, Council Member
3 Nurse, and Council Member Louis to operationalize how
4 the City can move forward the work of undoing racism
5 through two critical pieces of legislation on
6 reparations, reconciliation, truth, and healing:
7 Intros 242 and 279. CORE remains a partner to all
8 members and staff of City Council and looks forward
9 to exploring how legislation can be strengthened to
10 advance racial equity and social justice, regardless
11 of whether CORE is named.

12 To build on this foundation and fulfill its
13 promise to the electorate, it will be imperative for
14 CORE to receive adequate funding.

15 Now, I would like to turn to Fiscal Year 2025.

16 In Fiscal Year 2025, I will request additional
17 money to close the CORE funding gap and complete the
18 launch of our Charter mandates.

19 In Fall 2024, we expect the Administration's
20 preliminary racial equity and citywide racial equity
21 plans to be released. Following the release, CORE
22 will have 30 days to review and provide public
23 comments. CORE Commissioners are expected to finalize
24 Community Equity Priorities. Concurrently, CORE staff
25

1 will launch guidance for New Yorkers on how to file a
2 complaint with CORE. We will expand to 12 team
3 members, hiring five people in FY25 to provide
4 support to each area of our work. To support the
5 expanded integration and use of data, CORE will ask
6 for a data system lead to manage the collection,
7 tracking, maintenance, compliance and development of
8 our use of data.
9

10 CORE will need to expand our team beyond the
11 allocated five lines. To fulfill our mandate, we need
12 to grow our Research and Policy team, along with our
13 General Counsel and Legislative team, to support the
14 second charter mandate, the assessment of the
15 Administration preliminary racial equity and citywide
16 racial equity plan; Charter mandate three, which is
17 the subsequent tracking of the final plan; and
18 Charter mandate four, to address complaints about
19 agency conduct that may have the effect of
20 exacerbating racial equity disparities and make
21 recommendations to agencies to address such
22 complaints where appropriate. New staff will be
23 requested to carry out Charter mandates two, three,
24 and four, and to partner with the Council to leverage
25 the Racial Equity Impact Assessment Tool to

1 sufficiently respond to requests from the Speaker of
2 the Council and council committees on matters
3 regarding racial equity; Charter mandate five.

4
5 In Fiscal Year 2025, CORE will launch robust
6 community organizing and engagement practices to
7 ensure that community voices are at the table. We
8 will need additional funds to increase payments to
9 community groups for the time and resources they are
10 contributing to CORE's work. We will also need to pay
11 Commissioners per diem for their time and
12 reimbursements for their expenses related to work
13 conducted for the Commission. Projected funding for
14 Fiscal Year 2025 does not include a budget to pay
15 Commissioners as mandated by law.

16 Our Fiscal Year 2025 budget will increase to
17 \$1,329,093 and in Fiscal Year 2026, we are expected
18 to be baselined at \$1,335,741. Increases in Fiscal
19 Year 2025 and 2026 are a result of collective
20 bargaining and managerial adjustments. It does not
21 account for the development of CORE staff, workflows,
22 or for Commissioner costs --per diem, and
23 reimbursement.

24 In closing, I want to urge the City Council to
25 fulfill its mandate to apply a racial equity lens to

1
2 New York City government operations and reflect on
3 the following questions in the final negotiations
4 over the City's budgetary items: How does this
5 investment counteract racism and the history of
6 racism, if at all? Will this policy or investment
7 reduce, perpetuate, or exacerbate racial inequity in
8 service delivery? Will it reverse the breakup of
9 families and communities, or reduce the over
10 marginalization and overcriminalization of New
11 Yorkers of color? Is the policy or investment based
12 on needs and goals expressed by impacted communities?
13 And finally, does the investment reflect the
14 foundational principles expressed in the Preamble of
15 the Charter of the City of New York? Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. In my head I
17 was, like, "Listen, Linda," when you're asking us the
18 real questions. And my very quick macro answer to
19 that is, bureaucracy is racist. I really want to do a
20 report on this, because I think the way that we do
21 our budget process is bureaucratic in nature and
22 doesn't really allow for us to ascertain the
23 questions you asked in the negotiation process. So,
24 it is very frustrating for someone like me who really
25 wants to see some change ,you know, see funding moved

1
2 around to reflect all that you mentioned. But, the
3 process in itself doesn't always allow for us to
4 properly be able to assess and negotiate the budget
5 based off of these questions. So, I think we need to
6 really look at the process in which we do budgets in
7 New York City, the process in which we pass
8 legislation, it's all a system that we are just all
9 continuing to perpetuate with not really taking a
10 step back to change the system itself that we are
11 currently operating in. So, thank you for your
12 testimony and your questions.

13 So, I will also start with questions around
14 appointments, staffing, and timeline. So, the Charter
15 states that the first term for each member shall
16 commence on August 1, 2023. Currently there still
17 remains one vacancy on the Commission; although,
18 you've been very busy with lots of things, I wanted
19 to say that, too -- you have worked very hard since
20 you've been hired under a very racist bureaucracy.
21 So, additionally, two appointees were only just
22 announced on June 24, 2024 while they're remaining
23 appointees were announced on May 13, 2024. What are
24 the reasons for the nearly year-long delay in
25 commissioner appointments?

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Thank you for the
2 question. Appointments are made by the appointing,
3 bodies in this case the two appointments that you
4 referring to are made by the Mayor's office handled
5 by The Mayor's Office of Appointment. So, I'd have to
6 defer to them to better understand their timeline.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (NO MIC) Are you able to
9 share any information or a timeline (INAUDIBLE)
10 report of what your (LOST AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE)

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: At this time we are
12 only waiting for one more commissioner, we are hoping
13 to be able to complete that process before the
14 Community Equity Priorities are finalized, which we
15 expect to be finalized in the fall. However, CORE is
16 not a part of the appointment process, so that
17 timeline does sit with the Mayor's Office of
18 Appointments and Mayor's team. I'd recommend uh
19 reaching out to them.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (NO MIC) Okay, uhm, but is
21 it true that you also do have the power to make a
22 appointments on your own?

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes, so, CORE is very
24 unique in that we can use our authority to take a
25 seat that has not been filled after 90 days. Uh,

1 after doing some research and talking with folks
2 that created the Commission, my understanding is that
3 that authority was really intended if an appointment
4 was not... well, one not intended for the inaugural
5 seats, and if someone was not appointed sort of in
6 the second round of commissioners. I did share with
7 our commissioners that we do have that authority. At
8 this point in time, we have elected not to use it,
9 and we may change the decision in the future.
10 However, we are currently still waiting for the
11 Mayor's team to appoint.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (NO MIC) Were these newly
14 appointed Commission able to begin their work prior
15 to the public announcement? (ACTIVATES MIC) Oh, I
16 wasn't on this whole time? Oh, gosh, sorry. Yikes,
17 the public missed so many of the important things I
18 said.

19 Were these newly appointed commissioners able to
20 begin work prior to these public announcements?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes, they were. So, in
22 the first set were received the Comptroller's
23 appointment first, then the Public Advocate's
24 appointment, uh, and they started once I received
25 their information. I reached out to them, uh, and

1 then we began to receive Speaker and Mayoral
2 appointments. We waited until May 13th to announce
3 everyone that we had, because they were trickling in
4 over time, and then called it on May 13th, because we
5 wanted to release the draft Community Equity
6 Priorities. And we wanted the public to know who was
7 in the room to help shape those priorities, even
8 though they were a draft. I believe our... of the
9 last two commissioners appointed, Almirca and Wendy,
10 uh, Almirca was also able to start prior to her
11 formal announcement. Everyone started after their
12 appointment letters were issued, but there certainly
13 was a little bit of time between when we publicly
14 announced them and when they joined.
15

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. How many times
17 has the Commission been able to meet so far?

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We meet every month at
19 least once a month, so it's the first Friday of every
20 month. And we have met we've met six times.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. So, back to the
22 commissioner selection process, can you tell us about
23 the selection or vetting process? I know you don't
24 play a core role, but if you could share if any, at
25

1 all, the selection or vetting process and your role
2 in that process as Chair?

3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I do not have a role
4 in the selection or vetting process.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, do you know, if any,
6 what criteria and considerations were taken into
7 account when selecting and vetting commissioners?
8

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, the Charter
10 mandate outlines key requirements. Not (BACKGROUND
11 NOISE) my apologies not requirements, but
12 considerations for the (BACKGROUND NOISE) (INAUDIBLE)
13 bodies. So that includes... sorry... that includes
14 never having served on a board before, representing
15 communities that are traditionally underrepresented,
16 uh, and also having a background either in advocacy,
17 racial equity, and public service.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you feel like the
19 current appointments reflect that?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I do. I'm very honored
21 to work with the 13 commissioners that have been
22 appointed. They are a diverse group; they represent
23 everything from labor to environmental justice to
24 civil rights to health equity. I think this is a
25 great team to work with... (CROSS-TALK)

1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-
3 TALK)

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I'm really excited...

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you describe a little
6 bit more about the appointed commissioners'
7 qualifications with respect to some of the things
8 you just mentioned -- civil rights, community
9 leadership?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Sure, so we have Dr.
11 Torian Easterling who was the Health Department's
12 inaugural Chief Equity Officer, and he led the Race
13 to Justice team, and Health Equity, as well as the
14 COVID Vaccine Equity campaign at the Health
15 Department. So, his expertise is both content based,
16 but also understands the tools that we're going to be
17 using to assess both the plan as well as requests
18 that we get from the Speaker's office or Council
19 committees. Reverend Kirsten John Foy also has
20 extensive experience advocating on behalf of
21 communities, uh, also from a faith-based perspective
22 advocating faith-based... advocating with faith-based
23 communities to advance civil rights, not only in New
24 York City, but across the nation. We also have, uh,
25 let's see, Cristobal Gutierrez, who is a Speaker

1
2 appointee, and who comes with extensive experience in
3 employment law and works with Make the Road New York,
4 he's a lead attorney there. And I would say just one
5 other example from the Mayor's team, we have Andrew
6 K. Gabriel, Drew Gabriel, as he goes by, and he has
7 extensive experience working with young people and
8 really being able to advocate on the needs for
9 individuals under the age of 25. He is also the
10 representative of voices... for he's the
11 representative of young people or people under the
12 age of 25.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I'm going to channel Chair
14 Stevens who always says this, which is, we always
15 talk about young people, but they're not in the room.
16 And I love Drew, I know him, but he's not under 25.
17 So, I think it's weird when we say someone represents
18 the voice instead of just getting the voice itself in
19 the room. So nothing against Drew, he's great, hi,
20 Drew, if you're listening, you deserve to be there.
21 But I think someone probably under 25 should probably
22 also be in that space, because he's not under 25.
23 But, it's like he's an ex... I don't know, I'm just
24 channeling Chair Stevens, who is the Chair of our
25 Committee on Youth. She always says that, and this is

1
2 another case where age demographics are not really
3 seen on the commission, kind of strange.

4 Okay, so how many potential candidates were
5 vetted for the commissioner role? Are you able to
6 share that, do you know how many have been vetted?

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: For the...

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: For the commissioner role.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I don't, because I'm
10 not a part of that process.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Several commissioners also
12 have current roles in city government, does CORE
13 foresee any possible conflicts of interest between
14 CORE's watchdog responsibilities and the
15 commissioners who are actively serving in their
16 government roles?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, at this current
18 moment we are developing our bylaws, which will
19 include a process for recusal for any commissioner,
20 for any subject, and it will apply to any
21 commissioner that is a City staff member, regardless
22 of who has appointed them or what their what their
23 City role is.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Right. You know, when
25 Commissioner Sherman was speaking and talking about

1 her work versus CORE, I really feel like CORE is
2 supposed to be the people driven arm. So, I do also
3 find it a bit strange that we have government
4 employees who are a part of this commission in this
5 sort of like volunteer capacity. I'm not really sure
6 how government actors can speak to community needs,
7 as they are also acting on behalf of ,you know, their
8 nine-to-five day-to-day jobs. Like I don't really
9 understand that... (CROSS-TALK)

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Well, if it's okay,
12 I'd like to offer a point of clarification.
13 Commissioners are of course appointed by particular
14 appointing bodies, but this is not specifically a
15 reflection of their day job. When they come to
16 participate in Commission activity, whether it is
17 doing outreach with our staff at a block party, or at
18 a public event, or if it's to join in to a community
19 conversation, they're there representing Community
20 not their appointing body, not their nine-to-five
21 job. So, in that respect, also commissioners are paid
22 per diem, and they are offered reimbursement for any
23 expenses related to the Commission. The only people
24 who are not paid per diem are Commissioners that are

1
2 currently City staff. All other commissioners are
3 afforded that financial reimbursement for their time.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. I think similar to my
5 comments on Drew, is the same here where you have an
6 opportunity to have individuals who are directly
7 impacted, and maybe, I don't know, arguably closer
8 to the many issues that your office is seeking to
9 address. So, I mean, I'm not... I think it's a missed
10 opportunity, and we should have probably really been
11 more thoughtful around how the Commission reflects
12 representation of the City and the intent of CORE.

13 How many staff members are currently employed
14 within CORE?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We have filled all of
16 our FY24 lines, so we have seven staff members.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Are there any open
18 vacancies? No... How are staffing levels projected in
19 the next fiscal year, because I know you mentioned
20 that you would want to potentially increase your
21 staff lines.

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Correct. We have five
23 additional lines, rather we have five lines that are
24 projected for FY25, four of those jobs are currently
25 posted. And just to note, to your earlier point

1 around youth voice, we absolutely want them in the
2 room, and they are self-determined young people
3 themselves, so they need to be able to speak their
4 truth. We have met with young people already to
5 provide feedback on the draft Community Equity
6 Priorities. This process is open to anyone over the
7 age of 11 and older, which aligns with our Civic
8 Engagement Commission, Participatory Budgeting
9 Process, and one of our lines for FY25 is
10 specifically focusing on youths' voice. So, we will
11 be adding a staff member to our Director of
12 Organizing and Engagement Team that will specifically
13 work on organizing young people for the Commission.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, I mean, in your
15 testimony you talk about how for now you seem to be
16 okay, but do you want to ramp up in subsequent years?
17 Do you feel or do you project that you'll be
18 adequately staffed to fully carry out your mandate?

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: At this current moment,
20 without additional staff, I don't believe that we
21 will. We do need additional lines to be able to
22 assess the preliminary plan and the final plan but
23 also to be able to assess the complaints that are
24 going... we expect to come in from Community already
25

1 during introductory sessions. We hear people tell us
2 ,like, can you accept this type of a complaint? Is
3 this an issue that you could work on? So, I am
4 expecting that we're going to receive complaints in a
5 higher volume, and at the current moment, our staff
6 really can only work on what they have on their
7 plate. Additional... any complaint that comes in
8 would be a stretch if we're not able to add capacity.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, as you ramp up your
11 full capacity how will work be prioritized with the
12 lower staffing levels?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I'm sorry, how will
14 what?

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, how will work be
16 prioritized with the lower Staffing levels? Like,
17 let's say you are not able to ramp up, but your work
18 is going to increase over time. So, how will you
19 prioritize your work in lieu of not potentially
20 having enough staff first to complete the work?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That's a great
22 question.

23 I suspect at this current moment, both with our
24 seven staff right now, and our five staff that will
25 be coming in, we will have at least one person

1 assigned to each Charter mandate. We do want to
2 expand the support in CORE to include college and
3 high school internships to be able to have year-round
4 interns as well as to have SYEP (Summer Youth
5 Employment)interns. We're actually going to be
6 bringing on SYEP interns this this summer so that we
7 can support organizing an engagement work. And I am
8 exploring other opportunities to bring in researchers
9 and different collaboratives to, one, make sure that
10 Community voice is at the table, but also to help
11 with the types of reporting that we're expecting will
12 happen in the fall and in subsequent years.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

15 So, turning my questions over to budget, and
16 we'll read this again, "The Charter states that
17 budget appropriations for CORE's expenses during each
18 fiscal year shall be not less than an amount
19 sufficient to fund, personal service costs for full-
20 time and part-time personnel necessary to implement
21 Charter mandated requirements of the Commission."

22 You did, and I appreciate you talking about your
23 budget, and the FY24 budget was \$905,000, was CORE
24 able to use all of its resources allocated in the
25 budget for personnel expenses in FY24?

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We had under spending
2 in FY24 because of the delay of hiring. So, we did
3 not get to use all \$905,000. We were cut \$451,000;
4 we accepted the PEG that came from OMB, because we
5 had savings from not having been able to hire, or
6 rather our first staff member didn't start until
7 March. We are expected to spend down all of FY25
8 personnel costs pretty early in the year, because we
9 do have job postings up right now. So, we're
10 expecting to hire those five additional lines closer
11 to the start of the fiscal year than we were able to
12 in FY24.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

15 Turning to the operational components of the
16 budget, FY24 Adopted Budget allocated \$395,000 to
17 OTPS costs, which is meant to cover necessary
18 supplies, equipment, and utilities et cetera. Was
19 CORE able to utilize the full budgeted amount?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We were only able to
21 utilize a partial amount. That particular budget is
22 used for community organizing and engagement
23 activities. We started our work paying public...
24 paying the public, so paying organizations to
25 participate in community conversations, either host

1 them or invite CORE after the draft Community Equity
2 Priorities were released, which means we've only had
3 from May 13th up until this day to plan with
4 organizations. While they're absolutely excited,
5 they've joined introductory sessions, they've joined
6 facilitation sessions; we are now in in actual sort
7 of like date mode, and the dates that we're getting
8 from groups is really all set for July. And groups
9 are setting their schedule, they're preparing for
10 their own end of year activities. So, because of that
11 we had under spending in our OTPS, which we expect to
12 spend down in the first quarter of FY24 because of
13 the number of engagements that we already have on the
14 calendar.
15

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

17 And OMB, you didn't receive a PEG for OTPS, like
18 are you going to be able to have that same line item
19 going into the next fiscal year, or was your budget
20 decreased?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We will have...

22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: In (INAUDIBLE)...

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: this same line item
25 going into the next fiscal year, and we have already

1 flagged that we anticipate needing additional funds.
2
3 When we began talking to community organizations this
4 year about funding community conversations, they said
5 that we need to increase the amount, that the number
6 that we were offering -- so it's \$1,750 to host a
7 conversation, which means we would train one of your
8 community members to lead a conversation on the
9 priorities. One of our team members would be in the
10 room, and one of our commissioners would be in the
11 room. Because we do want commissioners to be in the
12 room when people are voicing what their concerns are,
13 and any reflections they have to the Equity
14 Priorities. We then offered \$1,000 for any
15 organization that can create the conversation, and
16 then one of our team members would host it -- which
17 means they're doing all of the outreach, they're
18 getting the food, they're making sure that people are
19 in the room. Each conversation should have 15 to 20
20 people. And then the one requirement across both of
21 those options is that community members must be paid
22 for their time, no less than \$15 either in a gift
23 card in whatever process the organization deems best.

24 I've received several calls saying that both of
25 those amounts are low, because of the amount of time

1 it takes to ensure that you have 15 to 20 people in
2 the room. So, they rightfully so are asking for
3 additional funds to host a community conversation.
4 And we would like to be able to meet that request,
5 because they are doing the hard work of getting
6 people in the room and getting folks to meet with us
7 and commissioners.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, I concur with that. I
10 sent a mailer, I did emails, we had gotten another
11 organization to do canvassing of hundreds of doors
12 for a town hall hosted a few weeks ago, and there
13 were only ,like, 20+ people that showed up when
14 thousands of doors got snail mail, they got canvased,
15 and I did a robocall, and I did emails. So, yes it is
16 a challenge to really bring people out. So, I would
17 concur with that for sure.

18 Was CORE... Does CORE have adequate office space
19 for its current staffing levels and projected
20 staffing levels?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, currently core
22 sits with MOERJ, so we have seven seats that were
23 allocated to us in FY24 and we have filled those
24 seats. We do not have seats for FY25. We are talking
25 with DCAS and with OMB, uh, I would say as often...

1 probably is once a week our Director of Operations
2 and Administration is on the phone, uh, really trying
3 to find space for FY25, so that we can bring people
4 on, and they have a ,you know, they have a place to
5 sit.
6

7 So, we're hoping to be able to have a space
8 identified within the next month or two. But, again,
9 that's ,you know, that's another area that's out of
10 my hands.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Government is slow. So, if
12 you are not able to have new space within two months,
13 and you bring people on, do you intend to bring new
14 people on within two months, or is it a further
15 projection when you expect people to come on board...
16 new people?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That's a great
18 question.

19 I would say the work cannot wait. We are already
20 stretched with the amount of requests that we're
21 getting for community conversations, and we only have
22 two staff members in that particular area of work.
23 Thankfully we do have a work from home policy that
24 aligns with the City's policy, so our team is coming
25 up with creative ways to ensure that everyone can

1
2 come into the office and meet at least three days,
3 meet the requirement of at least three days in the
4 office. But, again, we're continuing to work with
5 DCAS and OMB to get into another space or find
6 additional desks in the meantime. But, we ,you know,
7 we do need our own office.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, essentially you're
9 playing musical chairs throughout the week?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I'm sorry, say...

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, essentially you would
12 be playing musical chairs throughout the week. It
13 would be...

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I hope that... (CROSS-
15 TALK)

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It would be the (INAUDIBLE)

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I hope not.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, (INAUDIBLE)

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I hope not. But...
20 and I will say DCAS is working to identify space. So,
21 I feel confident that we'll be able to move into a
22 space, but I personally do not want to delay the work
23 of CORE and what community is asking for. I would say
24 it's a... right now it's a hard decision.

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, so in lieu of
2 adequate space, essentially you are being creative
3 and innovative around how people are able to come in
4 the office and have a place to sit throughout the
5 week.
6

7 Has CORE ever reached out to OMB to discuss
8 budget needs, and, if so, what was the response?

9 So, I know you mentioned that you have been
10 having conversations in your testimony. I don't know
11 if you have anything else to share -- And if you
12 intend to have further conversations with OMB for
13 future budget cycles?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes, so we talk to OMB
15 regularly. We keep them apprised of all of our
16 hiring, when candidates accept, when we expect them
17 to come through the system. We've talked to them
18 about our community organizing and engagement plans.
19 We've also talked through what the numbers are with
20 respect to reimbursements for commissioners as well
21 as their per diem rate. We plan to keep those
22 conversations going and, again, periodically update
23 them on what's going on. They know right now all of
24 our FY25 plans, and they are aware that we are both
25 in need of space, uh, but that we are also going to

1 need to ensure that we meet the legal mandate and pay
2 our commissioners for their time.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

4 CORE did not participate in the Council's
5 Preliminary or Executive Budget Hearing this year,
6 how did CORE determine its budget needs for the
7 coming year?

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, our determination
9 for our budget needs is actually based on a few
10 different pieces -- the first is being able to
11 understand what's the volume and interest in CORE
12 from the public so that we have a sense of how many
13 conversations, how many organizations we need to be
14 working with, and how many of those are hard to
15 reach, how many of those may have a fiscal sponsor
16 versus the 501(c)(3). We actually used this first
17 round of community... we're using this first round of
18 community conversations to better understand what the
19 payment is that is needed to community organizations
20 to get the amount right so that they can fully
21 engage.

22 We also have been working to better understand
23 each of our Charter mandates and approximate how much
24 staff, as well as consultants that may be needed, our
25

1
2 Communications team has identified a list of both
3 licenses as well as programs, whether they be
4 advertising programs or else, to properly communicate
5 with the public, because we do not... we haven't
6 done that yet. We have to purchase some licenses, uh,
7 and really raise our social media profile,
8 specifically so that we can engage with young folks.
9 And we have also begun to draft our bylaws, which I
10 think is extremely important for understanding the
11 ways in which commissioners are going to show up for
12 CORE. We expect those bylaws -- and really the first
13 step is the formal adoption process for Community
14 Equity Priorities to come this fall. So, the
15 calculations that were created were really based on
16 staff time as well as better understanding ,you know,
17 what are the complaints informally, just sort of
18 questions about our work -- and that particular
19 mandate that we're getting to really estimate what we
20 think we're going to get once we go live and we have
21 a formal guidance on our website.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

23 The Fiscal 2025 Executive Budget... and you also
24 have testified a headcount increase of five in the
25 coming fiscal year compared to last year, can you

1
2 tell us about the new roles that CORE is planning to
3 add in the coming year?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, the five lines
5 that we currently have right now, four of which are
6 posted, and we're waiting actually just to clarify
7 what the title is going to be for... the Civil
8 Service title for the last one. So we will have a
9 Senior Legislative Aid that will specifically work on
10 Charter mandate number five. We are adding a
11 Community Organizing and Engagement Associate that's
12 specifically going to focus on youths' voice and
13 organizing young people under the age of 25. We are
14 going to have an operations and Administration
15 Associate. That person will play the role of
16 Commissioner Manager -- so helping me work with all
17 13, and what we hope will be all 14 commissioners,
18 making sure that all their onboarding is set, they've
19 got everything that they need for meetings, and they
20 feel ready and prepared to come to a conversation at
21 a Commission Meeting either to make decisions or
22 provide guidance. We are adding a Communications
23 Associate who's going to help increase what right now
24 is organic growth across all social media platforms,
25 but also allow us to get creative and really work

1
2 with community to better understand and promote how
3 they see racial equity in government, and what it is
4 that they want to see racial... how racial equity
5 will grow in government.

6 We are also adding an Associate or our Research
7 and Policy Team, and that person is going to work
8 with our current director to ensure that we are doing
9 the work around both the preliminary and the final
10 plan for the assessment, but also that we're
11 developing community equity profiles -- that we'll do
12 an analysis of the Equity Priorities that we have and
13 be able to provide long-term support to tracking
14 change relating to the Equity Priorities that the
15 city of New York has identified through CORE.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, as you were speaking
17 I was thinking you should consult my colleague,
18 Council Member Chi Ossé, because I will say he has
19 done a really good job of getting messages across
20 platforms and ways in which resonate with that
21 demographic. I also noticed with his page and other
22 pages, I was at a conference and I met a young woman
23 who has essentially tagged herself as a political
24 influencer, so she has tons of followers and ,like,
25 specifically focuses on getting, uh, in this case

1 voting information out to younger demographics. So I
2 appreciate your foresight there, because there is
3 almost an industry for that on social media in very
4 unique targeted ways to get sound bites, information
5 -- factual information out to literally under age 25.
6 There was a whole panel on that of under age 25, in
7 this case, thankfully they were in the room --
8 experts talking about their work. So, that's awesome
9 that you're doing that. And I encourage you to tap
10 into ,like, this whole little world of influencers
11 and individuals who are focused on this specifically.

12 So, the next questions I have are about your
13 resources. So, Fiscal Year 2025 Executive OTPS Budget
14 reflects \$85,000 decrease compared to the Fiscal Year
15 2024 Adopted Budget, do you believe this decrease
16 accurately reflects CORE's projected needs for FY25?
17 I think you've talked extensively about what you feel
18 your projective needs are. So, I'm going to guess
19 that it isn't, but I would love to hear from you. And
20 can you tell us, uh, ,you know, why or why not?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, my understanding
22 is that the decrease of 85k is already accounted for
23 essentially -- both in the OTPS Budget but also in
24 the overall budget for CORE for FY25. And my
25

1 understanding is that you would actually see that in
2 the out years as well, even though it has been
3 accounted for in the overall numbers. Again, I do
4 expect that I am going to be going to OMB and saying,
5 this is essentially how much money we've spent this
6 far and what our engagement plans are, and it is why
7 I consider consistently update OMB on how we're doing
8 with community engagement, and also how we're doing
9 with requests from organizations. So, I am
10 anticipating that that particular decrease will cause
11 a concern, but I'm anticipating that we will need
12 additional monies regardless.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

15 Did CORE request any additional or new resources
16 for FY25? And I think that was no, right? You think
17 you're fine. I think it's more so FY26 is where
18 you'll be...

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We do plan to request
20 additional resources for FY25. We'll be submitting...
21 well we're going to be submitting new needs in
22 September, uh, when, my understanding is, we as a
23 city accept new needs. So,. we would want to see that
24 money come in to the FY25 budge, and we will be
25 putting in new needs for FY26.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

To the mandate and fulfilling the mandate, The Racial Equity Plans, what has been CORE'S role so far in the Citywide Racial Equity Planning Process?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, our first role and responsibility is to issue Community Equity Priorities, because of the abridged timeline, we issued draft Community Equity Priorities so that the community could respond and reflect, but also tell us if there was something that was missing. Those priorities were developed after having reviewed footage of public feedback that was given to government in different scenarios whether it be the town halls that happen from time to time, or previous engagement sessions or forums that were live streamed. We released the draft Community Equity Priorities the day that the Racial Equity Planning kickoff occurred. So, so we've been able to present at every training that MOERJ has held, whether it be in person or virtual. We've given agencies the opportunity to also give us feedback, and we've been able to provide examples of how you input -- or rather how you allow the draft Community Equity Priorities to influence your decisions on the work

1 that you're putting forward in the plan. We've also
2 offered the key recommendation to every agency,
3 please consider.... sorry, "please consider allowing
4 one community equity priority from each value set,"
5 so that the Community Equity Priorities align with
6 the fundamental values. And we understand that
7 agencies may not be able to take up all 16 at the
8 same time, but they certainly can take up an equity
9 priority in the first value set, which is that our
10 government justly values all talents and
11 contributions; the second one, our government ensures
12 the condition of thriving for every person; and then
13 our government vigilantly embraces remedy and
14 reconstruction.
15

16 We're offering that they identify at least one
17 Equity Priority within those sets and include it in
18 their plan.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

20 Part of CORE's mandate is to track and publicly
21 report an agency and citywide compliance with the
22 Racial Equity Planning Process, in what ways has CORE
23 been able to monitor the Racial Equity Planning
24 Process thus far?
25

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, Commissioner

Sherman and I meet, I would say every two to three weeks. We also both agreed on the timeline that was released to the public. So, it did account for both my work as well as the Racial Equity Planning work. So, we can ensure to stay as close to both the language of the law but also the spirit of the laws, allowing Community Equity Priorities to influence the plan. And we continue to keep each other updated. One of the practices that we're going to be implementing in the next two months is being able to provide updates to MOERJ as well as the city agencies producing a plan to give them insight on what community is telling us so far. So as we're actively collecting feedback from the government, from the public, we are also going to be providing periodic updates. So, we're really taking them along with us in this process so that our final decision is not a surprise.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you please describe any opportunities CORE has had to provide feedback on the current budget process and proposed budget priorities, including with respect to the draft Community Equity Priorities?

1
2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: At this point and time
3 CORE was not a part of the FY25 budgeting process.
4 We haven't been able to provide feedback; however, we
5 are looking to do that for future budget seasons.
6 This is actually why I raise these particular
7 questions. But I would also say that this is another
8 opportunity to uplift Charter mandate number five,
9 which is that Council does have the power to call us
10 in and use us to really raise these questions, uh,
11 and bring us in when you're talking about particular
12 investments or proposals, and also bring in the
13 voices that CORE is bringing to the table. And I
14 would argue that that's really the most important
15 piece.

16 One of the questions that we uplift is ,you know,
17 is the policy or investment based on the needs and
18 goals expressed by impacted communities? So, this is
19 really about how we bring people into the budgeting
20 process and how that would change our investments.

21 So, I look forward to working with all of Council
22 to really bring this particular Charter mandate to
23 light and to fruition.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I appreciate that.
25

1 So, a few questions on community engagement and
2 interagency coordination, and then you're done.

3 Can you tell us about the community engagement
4 efforts that CORE is currently undertaking?

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Sure. So, we have a
6 few step, uh, that we... well a few different
7 offerings for a community. So, the first is we have a
8 public response form, you can go to our website at I
9 believe it's www.nyc.gov/content/core/pages/. I admit
10 I just type in CORE. I don't know the full URL. So,
11 you can go to our website and you can download the
12 response form. We currently have the response form in
13 English, but we are going to be uploading the
14 response form in 11 other languages, so that folks
15 from different languages are also able to
16 participate.

17 You can join an introductory session, and you can
18 do that by emailing ask CORE core.nyc.gov. And you
19 can just get an intro session on what CORE is, who
20 we are, and what we are doing, uh and then be invited
21 to host a community conversation. Uh, and then you
22 let us know if you want to host it and have one of
23 your team members trained to lead the conversation,
24 or would you like a member of CORE to lead it?

1
2 We've also done tabling at various event, uh
3 sometimes it's a block party, sometimes it's a Health
4 Wellness event -- we attended a Queens Youth Summit.
5 And I'm saying "we", but I do want to uplift that
6 that's really the Director of Community Organizing
7 and Engagement who started and on their first day,
8 uh, was joining our introductory sessions and then
9 took them over by the end of the week, which has been
10 a huge blessing that they've been able to lead that
11 work. And I would say the last piece is, we did issue
12 a call for public testimony, and we're going to also
13 update that particular page just so that we can shine
14 some light. We're going to be reaching out to
15 advocacy organizations across New York City to offer
16 written testimony to CORE on a reflection on the
17 Draft Equity Priorities.

18 We are hoping to receive all feedback by August
19 16th, so that we can properly prepare memos and
20 briefing packets for commissioners as they get ready
21 to finalize the Community Equity Priorities.

22 I would also say we're open to talking to any
23 organization that you would advise that we speak
24 with. I have spoked to some council members who would
25 like to share lists of organizations that they work

1 with, and I would invite that for you and your team
2 as well -- as well as for all of Council. If there is
3 someone, whether it's a group or an individual that
4 you want us to talk to, certainly please either send
5 them our way, uh, ask for them to email Ask CORE
6 core.nyc.gov. They can also reach us through social
7 media, all of our social media handles are
8 @RacialEquityNYC. We have... I really can't say this
9 enough, we have an amazing team, and our Director Of
10 Communications is also amazing and is very much on
11 social media all the time and being able to connect
12 us with different groups, uh, as well as different
13 opportunities to table at.

14 So, we're open to all.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, and you
16 definitely, uh, well, one, I want to say I always
17 appreciate your proactive nature, even your testimony
18 attaching the Draft Community Equity Priorities. And
19 ,you know, we had a series of questions around your
20 process thus far, but we have ,you know, the proof is
21 here in terms of your process and determining the
22 Community Equity Priorities.

23 So, what kind of engagement have you seen from
24 communities you work with and from the general public
25

1
2 with respect to CORE's work, uh, including what you
3 have shared with us today, uh, the Draft Community
4 Equity Priorities?

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, I'll say first
6 that it's pretty exciting to be a walking ballot
7 measure come to real life. So, people are really
8 excited to talk to CORE; and I hear often, "Oh, I
9 remember voting for this." And I would say for some
10 of the younger folk that I talked to this is actually
11 the first thing that they feel like they voted for
12 and they saw come to life. Which is I think a pretty
13 substantial note for just their civic engagement as
14 well.

15 The second thing I'll say, and it is both I think
16 a blessing, uh, and maybe a little bit of a
17 challenge, folks read our Community Equity
18 Priorities, and they say, "This is great, this is
19 exactly what we would say." And, so then they don't
20 fill out the response form, because they think, "Oh,
21 you guys got it." So, we just... we're doing our work
22 to remind people, even if you agree, you know, we do
23 want to make sure that we are properly collecting
24 responses from the public, and so we either have it
25 in an email - well, what we have in email is, I saw

1
2 your Community Priorities, and they really align with
3 our work. We want to set up a call to meet with you.

4 We've also heard, "Thank you so much for
5 including, uh, for including this Community Equity
6 Priority," and we've heard that around priority
7 number 16, which is to reduce the jail population, as
8 well ,uh, individuals of all ages that are in jail or
9 court monitoring. And we've also heard this from CUNY
10 -- from CUNY students across the City, Thank you so
11 much for uplifting CUNY, and really speaking to how
12 tuition costs are a barrier to receiving our
13 education, which then becomes a barrier to receiving
14 employment that will allow us to thrive, rather than
15 just survive.

16 So, we do get a lot of really positive feedback,
17 and we're just pushing for people to complete the
18 form, which, at this point, the average completion
19 time is about 10 minutes. I think people feel so
20 connected to it, which is great, because that means
21 we did our job, you know, we really heard what folks
22 were saying. And this is yet another process for
23 community to engage with. I will also say while
24 they're excited about the topics that are addressed
25 in the Equity Priorities, they continue to raise, how

1
2 are you going to get this done? And are you funded to
3 do this? So they are raising both real operational
4 questions, to not only me, but as well as the CORE
5 staff, uh, because they're really excited to see this
6 happen.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, me too.

8 I know you said you received some complaints
9 already, are you able to quantify the number of
10 complaints that you have received with respect to
11 agency operations?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Sure. So, we have
13 received inquiries that could potentially be a
14 complaint. What we get from the public is, "I have an
15 issue with why we don't have a public hospital in
16 Staten Island. Is this something that you can take
17 on?" So, with question questions like that, we sort
18 of talk through, well, how did we get here? What is
19 it that you're thinking? What are the groups that
20 you're working with? At this point in time we don't
21 have any complaint guidance on our website. We are
22 not preventing anyone from emailing ask core
23 @core.nyc.gov. However, we haven't received any
24 formal complaints. I also want to note that even
25 naming something a complaint is actually in itself uh

1 a little bit of a tricky space, because we don't have
2 a definition of a complaint in the Charter that I'm
3 aware of. So, that's one of the things that we want
4 to work on as CORE. And we have not issued an
5 official definition in large part, because when
6 community members spoke with me when I first started,
7 they said, "we want to work with you to develop this
8 particular area of work." Because of the nature of
9 the work, uh, I did want to wait until we had a
10 general counsel on board, so that we were aligning
11 with actually what is mandated by law. Because, again
12 remember this particular mandate, uh, we can't force
13 an agency to do anything different. We are only able
14 to hear what the challenges communities are facing
15 because of the conduct that they are experiencing by
16 agencies. It is also clear that community... the
17 burden of proof on about racial disparities with
18 respect to the complaint is actually not on the
19 community member ,you know, they just have to tell
20 us, this is what we're experiencing, and we think
21 that this is going to cause an exacerbation of a
22 racial disparity. And then CORE has to figure out
23 what the next steps are, and community has said that
24 they want to do that with CORE.
25

1 So now that we have a general counsel on board,
2
3 we are launching that area of work. So, what I hope
4 is that in this next quarter we'll be able to launch
5 some guidance, and then we can come back to you in a
6 year when we've had more interaction with the public
7 to better understand what the total number of
8 complaints are, and what are the trends that we're
9 seeing?

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

11 Do you feel that CORE has sufficient resources to
12 conduct whatever outreach is needed to ensure robust
13 community engagement with the City's racial equity
14 work?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I would say for FY24 I
16 think we did a great job working with what for up
17 until two days ago -- actually up until yesterday,
18 uh, we had only a Director Of Community Organizing
19 and Engagement, who's been absolutely amazing. We now
20 have an associate with us, so now it's a team of two.
21 We will need additional staffing for that particular
22 arm. We've got five boroughs in a city of eight
23 million people. I need additional folks to do an
24 adequate amount of organizing and engagement, and
25 ensure that the public is truly being heard. And I

1 think that's a very critical part of the work that
2 we're doing and why we were set up in the first
3 place.
4

5 This cannot look like traditional government
6 engagement; this must be new and innovative, it must
7 have young people at the table. And community members
8 must feel and know not only that we hear them, but
9 that we're working alongside them, and we're creating
10 the proper channels for their voices to be heard.

11 So, for that our staffing structure does have to
12 look different than what maybe another agency or
13 commission may look like. We will need more people,
14 and we do have to institute innovative methods.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

16 Last, but certainly not least, question around my
17 favorite topic inter-agency coordination. Aside from
18 any work with MOERJ, has CORE worked with or
19 solicited feedback from any other New York City
20 agency.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes. As we were
22 drafting the Community Equity Priorities, we
23 presented at two inter agency meetings that had
24 representation from over, my understanding is
25 certainly over 20 City agencies, uh, some of our

1 larger City agencies included in that -- so The
2 Health Department, DOE, DYCD -- so we've been able to
3 provide City staff also the opportunity to give us
4 feedback on the Draft Community Equity Priorities and
5 also tell, us based on their particular agency's
6 content area, how they feel the public is going to
7 respond to these Equity Priorities -- what were the
8 recommendations they had to either shape the
9 language, whether it's expand or maybe use other
10 words. And I would say that was a wonderful
11 experience. We did get really great feedback. We are
12 also working across City agencies to better
13 understand what data is available, so that we can do
14 a deep dive into each of the Equity Priorities, so
15 that we can provide our commissioners with the robust
16 information that they need. And we're continuing our
17 interagency work. You know, one of the benefits to
18 having both a chair and executive director that's
19 been in government, is that I've had the opportunity
20 for the past five years to build great relationships
21 across City agencies. All of my work in city
22 government has focused on advancing equity,
23 specifically racial equity, whether it was working in
24 education policy or mental health, uh, mental health,
25

1 and then also, of course, public health when I was at
2 the Health Department. So, was able to reach out to
3 people when I started this role and say, this is what
4 we're working on ,you know, what are some of the
5 challenges that you think I may experience? What are
6 the ways in which we can work with your agency? And
7 people were receptive, which was wonderful.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That's awesome.

10 Well, thank you so much for your testimony,
11 thank you so much for the work that you're doing on
12 behalf of all of us New Yorkers to advance racial
13 equity. I hope you have a great day.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Thank you, you too.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And I think now we will
16 have public testimony. And I have a nice little
17 public comment protocol to read.

18 So, I now open the hearing up for public
19 testimony. I remind members of the public that this
20 is a formal government proceeding and that decorum
21 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of
22 the public shall remain silent at all times. The
23 witness table is reserved for people who wish to
24 testify. No video recording or photography is allowed
25 from the witness table. Further, members of the

1 public may not present audio or video recordings as
2 testimony, but may submit transcripts of such
3 recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in
4 the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's
5 hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the
6 Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When
7 recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on
8 today's hearing topic... This is my first time, this
9 is a new protocol, that I have had to read this. So,
10 if you have written statements or additional written
11 testimony that you wish to submit for the record,
12 please provide a copy of that testimony to the
13 Sergeant at Arms. You may also submit written
14 testimony by email to testimony@council.nyc.gov
15 within 72 hours after the close of this hearing.
16 Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

17
18 And, now I will call up, oh, a very esteemed
19 panel: Jennifer Jones Austin, Jimmy Pan... Oh, sorry,
20 that's panel one. Sorry, got you, so just those two.

21 Welcome, our formal Racial Justice Commission
22 friends, you're back again. Hello, thank you for your
23 patience and waiting to testify -- the people who
24 made all this happen.

25

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JONES AUSTIN: Good afternoon,
2 good morning? Not quite sure what time of day it is,
3 but it is good to be with you, Chair Williams and
4 those Committee members who are here, other
5 distinguished members of the Council. I really
6 appreciate the opportunity to testify at this Council
7 hearing.
8

9 First and foremost, I just want to thank you for
10 taking the time and giving attention to this critical
11 issue. If we do not stay ever-vigilant and engage in
12 this work, we know that it will not happen.

13 I had the pleasure of serving as Chair of the
14 Racial Justice Commission. It was a privilege, it was
15 a pleasure for the most part. I was a daunting task,
16 but I am glad that we got through it. And serving as
17 Chair, I had the privilege one day of talking with
18 the former the former counsel for South Africa's
19 Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The former
20 counsel said to me very sage advice, very sage words,
21 he said, "Always remember, throughout your
22 deliberations, that those who created the system,
23 created it to persist." And I think we are seeing
24 around the country right now, I should say I think, I
25 know we're seeing what that means, what that looks

1 like with the erosion of so many advancements that
2 have been made over the course of the past 60+ years.
3 We are seeing them fall to the wayside if you will.

4 But, New York is differently positioned, because
5 we have these measures now made law, and in the New
6 York City Charter, the New Yorkers have spoken. They
7 have said, we believe equity -- racial equity --
8 should be the foundational law for this city. So, we
9 are in a better place, and that gives me hope.

10 I want to commend the City Council for doing its
11 part. The City Administration is responsible for
12 implementing the racial measures that were passed by
13 the city of New York. But, the City Council has
14 stepped up, too. This hearing is an indication, the
15 earlier hearing that you held, Chair Williams, but
16 also the passage of those pieces of legislation to
17 provide, to require, that City employees and human
18 service workers under contract with the city of New
19 York receive annual annual anti-racism and bias
20 training if they are going to work on behalf and in
21 behalf of New Yorkers, especially those who have been
22 made vulnerable (TIMER CHIMES), that legislation
23 providing for training requirements is critical to
24 ensure that they're showing up with the competency
25

1 and the sincerity to do the work in ways that do not
2 perpetuate harm. So, I appreciate you all for
3 stepping up and doing that work. I will tell you that
4 since the Commission did its work, uh, pursuant to
5 laws of the city of New York, the Commission no
6 longer ceased to exist. However, I am privileged to
7 serve, along with 14 other persons, four of whom, in
8 addition to myself, were commissioners on the Mayor's
9 NYC Racial Justice Advisory Board.
10

11 And serving on the board, I can attest that the
12 City is working diligently to implement the measures
13 that were passed. We are behind, uh, the timelines
14 that were set. Those timelines with a sense of
15 urgency that something has to be done - and quickly-
16 to get things going. But, I appreciate that they are
17 building a new infrastructure. They're resetting the
18 foundation. And, frankly, I would rather them move
19 slowly and cautiously than move with haste to meet a
20 timeline and then not get it right. So, I commend
21 them for the work that they are doing.

22 What I will tell you is that, at this stage of
23 the implementation, even with the timelines extended
24 well beyond the Charter mandated timelines, by as
25 many as 18 months, as Chair of the Racial Justice

1 Commission, I am most concerned, most concerned about
2 the City's adherence to the Charter mandate for a
3 True Cost of Living Measure. Specifically, I am most
4 concerned about what costs the measure will include.
5

6 During the RJC's community outreach phase, my
7 fellow commissioners and I heard repeatedly from
8 everyday New Yorkers, mostly persons of color, about
9 their lived experiences, about the measure, that if
10 it does not capture what they need, will ensure that
11 they continue to struggle to get by and get ahead in
12 a city where they can't even begin to plan for
13 tomorrow, because their financially challenged to get
14 through today. Their ability to live, to thrive, live
15 with dignity and to be economically secure, is
16 getting harder and harder, even with college and
17 graduate degrees.

18 The Commission appreciated that existing measures
19 such as the official and supplemental poverty
20 measures, and the self-sufficiency standard are tied
21 to acute deprivation and basic needs, and do not
22 capture adequately and accurately all costs necessary
23 for individuals and families classified as low- and
24 middle-income New Yorkers to get by, get ahead and
25 stay ahead. We proposed to require the City do

1 something never done. The Commission envisioned a
2 first-in-nation true cost of living measure that
3 captures what it truly costs for individuals and
4 families to live here in New York City and adequately
5 meet their daily needs, plan for their futures, and
6 save for rainy days.
7

8 The ballot abstract text states that the new
9 measurement is "intended to focus on dignity rather
10 than poverty," reflecting the intention to root it in
11 economic security --what it costs to get by, get
12 ahead, and stay ahead. Existing measures, including
13 those aimed at providing a more accurate accounting
14 of basic needs such as the Self-Sufficiency Standard,
15 which I have worked with for more than 15 years while
16 a senior leader at the United Way of New York City
17 and still today at FPWA, are not, *they are not*, true
18 cost of living measures but rather measures centered
19 in acute deprivation. The Commission understood this,
20 and that's why we proposed the creation and
21 utilization of a new measure -- one that would
22 capture the true costs of living today and for
23 tomorrow, and that would have the greatest potential
24 in aiding in the undoing of structural economic
25 deprivation.

1 The danger of measures that only track basic
2 needs is that they have the effect of
3 disproportionately harming both low- and middle-
4 income New Yorkers who have lower incomes and less
5 assets due to structural racism. When government only
6 tracks basic needs, it inhibits an individual and
7 family's ability to build wealth and achieve economic
8 security by disregarding the cost of the many forms
9 of debt, and the costs associated with retirement,
10 family needs beyond childcare, and emergent costs.

11 For New Yorkers working to get ahead, especially
12 those whose opportunities have been diminished by
13 structural and institutional racism, the City must
14 select as its True Cost of Living a new measure that
15 captures both present-day daily costs including debt
16 of different types, especially for those classified
17 as poor and middle income, and costs associated with
18 saving for tomorrow and building wealth. This would
19 allow our city to see and understand the full,
20 complex financial picture of New Yorkers who are
21 struggling to move beyond basic needs.

22 Doing anything less than a true cost of living
23 measure undercuts not only the intent of the passed
24 measure in its design but also in its results. I
25

1
2 implore the Mayor and the City Council to do nothing
3 less than effect a fully realized true cost of living
4 measure, which to date has not been put forward, has
5 not been offered up by any city or nonprofit
6 organization here in New York City -- despite what
7 you may have heard.

8 Fortunately, New Yorkers' passage of the true
9 cost of living ballot measure, with a whopping 81
10 percent of the electorate voting in favor, created
11 the spark that ignited a conversation about what it
12 truly means to measure economic security and
13 financial resiliency for Americans classified as low-
14 income and also as middle-income, who may be
15 comfortable from day to day but still are financially
16 precarious because they can't save and plan for the
17 expected and unexpected.

18 What happened? In 2023, my organization, the
19 organization I lead, FPWA, and the Community Service
20 Society launched a nationwide coalition to effect a
21 national true cost of living measure, and we
22 commissioned the renowned Urban Institute to create
23 the measure. The Urban Institute is in the final
24 stages of developing a measure that will calculate
25 the true cost of living both county by county, that

1 means here in New York City, borough by borough, and
2 then for the country overall. New York can learn and
3 benefit directly from the Urban Institute's work,
4 which is unprecedented, and just as was the case with
5 the Racial Justice Commission, be the vanguard for
6 the nation in calculating the true cost of living
7 securely and with dignity.
8

9 I do commend the progress of the Adams
10 Administration in working towards fulfilling the
11 Charter revisions. But I also extort the
12 Administration to act with both a sense of urgency,
13 spurred by the Charter-imposed timelines and a sense
14 of loyalty to the desires of all New York City
15 citizens and their families, who are seeking a more
16 equitable and inclusive and secure life as their
17 votes demonstrated. The System may have been created
18 to persist, but with the implementation of the
19 Charter revisions in the right way, dare I say the
20 righteous way, New Yorkers have instructed their
21 government to push back in this moment and
22 forevermore. Thank you for the opportunity to
23 testify.

24 MR. PAN: Hi, I'm Jimmy Pan, he/him; I served as a
25 Policy Director for the Racial Justice Commission,

1
2 and after the Racial Justice Commission closed down,
3 returned to the Administration to help stand up the
4 ballot measures.

5 I'm primarily here to be able to answer questions
6 about the ballot measures, but I also do want to make
7 a few points, reflecting what I've heard today, that
8 I think are important not just for the Council but
9 for the Administration to take into account as well.

10 So, appreciating the difficulty of transforming
11 government, and appreciating the desire to get it
12 right rather than rushing ahead, I do want to point
13 out that New Yorkers do care about timelines, and it
14 is a matter of whether they trust their government or
15 not. Certainly I can attest to us being on the Racial
16 Justice Commission and people testifying, but also
17 expressing significant doubt about whether government
18 would ever truly move forward--even if these things
19 passed. And I think as we continue to push timelines
20 back, we're really asking New Yorkers to trust us
21 more and more without giving them something to work
22 with.

23 So I would certainly implore Council to continue
24 having hearings like this to create accountability,
25 which, again, is helping the Administration

1
2 understand the importance of this -- but also that
3 the Administration can recognize that this is
4 something that they should really think about the
5 role of government in fostering trust and how many
6 communities have been let down continuously over
7 decades in in hearing promises from government and
8 not seeing that realized.

9 I also note that there's a simultaneous Charter
10 Revision Commission that's happening right now that
11 purports to, again, have voters come to the ballots
12 and change the law. And I would just urge the
13 Administration to think about what it means to delay
14 the production of the past Charter Revision
15 Commission and ask New Yorkers now to vote upon a new
16 set of ballot measures.

17 I would also take this opportunity to urge
18 council members and the Speaker to think about ,you
19 know, as we crest Juneteenth, what (TIMER CHIMES) is
20 Council going to do about creating an racial justice
21 infrastructure in the Council itself, too.

22 There are jurisdictions around the US that have
23 both an Executive Branch infrastructure and a
24 Legislative infrastructure, and as you alluded to
25 earlier, Chair ,you know, it is very important that

1 Council has a framework to think about the impacts of
2 the laws, to think about what's prioritized when it
3 comes to voting on different measures, and to really
4 understand the ultimate effect of the actions that
5 Council is going to take. Every institution needs to
6 understand what it's doing, and what it's
7 prioritizing, and have a strategy for actually making
8 these results happen. That's why the Mayor's Office
9 of Equity and Racial Justice spent a lot of time
10 building the infrastructure for agencies to
11 understand how they're going to make a long-term
12 impact and not be reactive to the issues of the day.
13 I think Council would really benefit from a similar
14 set of processes and really expert staff that help
15 council members and council leadership really
16 understand how to make lasting change -- and also
17 internally operate fairly and with the mind towards
18 focusing on the things that really matter to New
19 Yorkers.
20

21 I want to speak a little bit to your point about
22 OMB's role in all this. And certainly ,you know, my
23 experience working in the Mayor's office for a long
24 time, is that while OMB plays a very major role, I
25 think the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice

1 does have an opportunity to change how we do
2 budgeting in the city. As you correctly pointed out,
3 it can be very opaque, and questions about ,you know,
4 how agencies are funded relative to one another, or
5 why a program is selected over another, it can be
6 opaque in the city as well. I would just suggest that
7 one thing that Council could do as its negotiating
8 budgets to help Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial
9 Justice do this work is to continually ask the
10 question of ,you know, when these budget proposals
11 are mentioned, has MOERJ weighed in on this? Does it
12 comport with the framework that they've put forward?
13 How does this align with the anti-marginalization
14 agenda that we've heard about, et cetera. Just as an
15 example, I think Council does have a role to play in
16 making sure that OMB is consistently understanding
17 that this... these criteria are things that New
18 Yorkers care about, and; therefore, their council
19 members care about as well.

21 Lastly I would just quickly address your point
22 about ,you know, whether an agency is advancing
23 equity or not or whether they should have their
24 funding moved somewhere else. My personal theory is
25 that every agency has a role to play in equity. Just

1 in my work in city government, I don't see one agency
2 as pro-equity and another agency as anti-equity. I
3 think part of what the Mayor's Office of Equity and
4 Justice is really trying to do is help every agency
5 understand their role. Of course if they're not
6 meeting their goals, if they're not closing
7 disparities, if they're not allocating resources the
8 right way, I think that really should be a major
9 consideration for the Administration. But, I just
10 want to push back a little bit, for your
11 consideration, and for the Administration's
12 consideration, that every agency, no matter how big
13 or small, actually has a meaningful and major role to
14 play in our society, and they can all work towards
15 justice.
16

17 So, those are my just some quick points, and I'm
18 here for questions.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I appreciate the
20 testimony. I guess do, you feel that MOERJ and CORE
21 are on the right track, uh, per the testimony you
22 heard today?

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JONES AUSTIN: I believe that
24 they are moving in the right direction. The challenge
25 that we have is that this work is unprecedented in

1 many respects. New York City is the first large
2 municipality to attempt something of this type. So,
3 as we all know and appreciate, the results of your
4 efforts are influenced by design and by
5 implementation. We have yet to see ,you know, what
6 the effects are, because we're not yet fully through
7 the design and the implementation.
8

9 I do believe that it's critically important that
10 the structural foundation be reset in ways that help
11 us to appreciate what the levers of government are
12 that will have the greatest impact in bringing about
13 racial justice and equity for all of New York City.
14 And the Mayor's Office of Equity And Racial Justice
15 is centering on that. As, uh, Jim... as Mr. Pan...
16 I'm used to calling him Jimmy, and he, me Jennifer --
17 as he's talked about, budgeting is critical. And it's
18 not just kind about budgeting coming in at the last
19 minute, but ,you know, how each of these agencies,
20 every one of these agencies, looks at their work and
21 their role and responsibility in advancing equity as
22 foundational in CORE is key.

23 I have not had the benefit of sitting in on the
24 training, so I can't tell how they're helping to
25 develop a shared language, understanding,

1 appreciation for how ,you know, how you live and
2 breathe equity.
3

4 So, I like many people, are waiting to see what
5 this first set of racial equity plans looks like. I
6 do believe the sincerity of heart is there on the
7 part of Commissioner Sherman and her team, and also
8 with respect to Executive Director Tigani and her
9 commissioners.

10 I'm hopeful, I stay very close; they can tell you
11 I stay very close. I don't let up. And, Chair
12 Williams, you know me, I don't let up about anything
13 that I care about, and I care about people in this
14 city, and especially those who've been marginalized.

15 So, again ,you know, they have to control for the
16 consequences that are intended and the consequences
17 that aren't intended.

18 I think that they are working very diligently to
19 lay the right foundation, but there are a lot of
20 challenges along the way. I will tell you that, I'll
21 just be very candid and tell you that, uh, I think
22 that the measures provide for New York City the
23 justification to go, go, go, to do, do, do, and there
24 are moments when I felt like, uh, the City has not
25 leaned in having been given the mandate to the

1 fullest extent that it could. That's not to say that
2 there aren't hardworking people in the
3 Administration, but it hasn't been essentially given
4 the prominence that I think it justly deserves --
5 especially in this moment.

6 MR. PAN: I would echo that. You know, certainly
7 having worked alongside Chief Equity Officer Sherman,
8 and having known Chair Tigani and seeing her hard
9 work, I think what they've offered here today before
10 the Council is a very compelling vision of racial
11 equity in government that I actually don't see
12 articulated anywhere else in the country to this
13 extent. So, I think that if they're able to actualize
14 what they've put forward here, I think that'd be a
15 really great thing, not just for New Yorkers. but
16 eventually the country.

17 As, uh, Jennifer, the Chair has mentioned ,you
18 know, speed is a function often of how many resources
19 the Administration has given to a body. I don't
20 really want to talk about any person or think about
21 ,you know, what could have happened, but to the point
22 just made a moment ago, people voted for these things
23 overwhelmingly. I think that is a mandate for
24 permission to say, actually this Administration
25

1
2 should unlock every barrier, should devote every
3 resource, should celebrate when wins happen, and
4 claim that mantle of leading racial equity in the
5 City and true transformation.

6 So, I would urge the Administration to move
7 forward with all deliberate speed or all full speed,
8 and the Council to keep hounding on that.

9 But, yes, I think it's in the right direction.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

11 One of the things I've seen in the agencies that
12 this committee has oversight of is ,you know, these
13 are the agencies that really have been designed to
14 provide resources and uphold the rights of all --
15 civil and human rights, and now racial equity, now
16 Office of Equity And Racial Justice. And these have
17 typically been agencies that have been significantly
18 underfunded, and also don't necessarily have the
19 prominence --I like that you use that word -- You
20 Know, I mentioned being empowered within city
21 government to conduct their work. So, I don't know if
22 you have any additional thoughts on that, because my
23 concern, and this is a future concern, because I know
24 they're still standing up their work, but when I look
25 at EEPCC, that has been in existence for some time,

1 when I look at CCHR, that has also been in existence
2 for some time, while they are doing a lot of amazing
3 things, their ability to, I think do what is intended
4 for them to do at maximum level, because we can
5 always do like things at minimum level, but to do
6 things at maximum level has really never been
7 achieved. And, specifically with EEPC, their ability
8 to truly hold agencies accountable, and for agencies
9 to respect the work that they're doing, uh, also is
10 something that, from my vantage point, has not been
11 realized.
12

13 So, I am just wondering ,you know, if you have
14 any additional thoughts on... because you don't work
15 for the Mayor's Administration, and I understand
16 sometimes it's very difficult for individuals who are
17 commissioners to speak frankly on the record about
18 ,you know, their internal positionality, and voice,
19 and influence amongst both within executive level
20 city government, but also trickling down to the
21 smallest agencies we have. So, do you think -- and
22 just to follow up on that point, do you think that
23 these agencies have been properly prioritized and
24 that the Administration, not the folks who testify
25 today, because; although, I am looking at them

1
2 holistically -- except for CORE a little bit, because
3 they're independent -- you know, I understand there's
4 nuance, and I understand that while they're intent,
5 Commissioner Sherman's intent, uh, is also impacted
6 by politics, it's also impacted by priority of the
7 Mayor-- So, outside of, and removing ,you know, the
8 commissioner and executive director, who's still
9 here, do you feel like the Administration has
10 properly prioritized execution on the ballot measures
11 that were passed?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JONES AUSTION: I'll begin by
13 sharing that I... it was critically important that
14 this work be done as part of the Mayor's Office to
15 create the sense and appreciation that this is
16 administration-wide, it is citywide, it is
17 crosscutting. Very important that this work, and that
18 the leadership of these offices report to a deputy
19 mayor. That deputy mayor must be empowered to work
20 across city agencies and to have them be accountable
21 to the deputy mayor -- along with the Mayor's Office
22 of Equity, for implementation of all the work related
23 to implementing these measures. If that Deputy Mayor
24 is not empowered to move things, and move them at the

25

1 speed and with deliberation as they need be, then we
2 have a challenge.

3
4 So, that's number one. Number two, I think it's
5 very important for us to never forget that what is at
6 the core of structural racism is economic
7 deprivation. Racism, misogyny, sexism are all tools
8 that were created to perpetuate structural economic
9 deprivation and structural inequity when it comes to
10 power. So, we have to make sure that as this city
11 moves to build out these measures that they're not
12 just looking at it as though they're like Band-Aid
13 racial equity plans that are put on top of what
14 agencies and offices are already doing.

15 An example that I will provide for you is, every
16 year, we sit around and we talk about what is
17 happening in Human Resources Administration, in the
18 Department of Homeless. We talk about homeless
19 services, we talk about what the Administration for
20 Children's Services is doing or not doing. And we
21 look at all these agencies as being in place to
22 actually move people beyond poverty and cure their
23 challenges, the challenges that present in their
24 families and in their households. When we know good
25 and well that these agencies have been stood up to

1
2 treat and respond to the problem, but they're not
3 there actually curing the problem. And curing the
4 problems has to do everything with how you get at the
5 structural root of the problems, which in many
6 instances is structural economic deprivation.

7 So, if we do not have workforce, uh, the you know
8 the office of Workforce Development, and I'm not just
9 talking about giving people jobs that pay minimum
10 wage, but if we don't have the City centered on how
11 we cure economic deprivation, occupation segregation,
12 and all of the other ills that attend to building
13 true economic security -- we talk. Uh, Jimmy and I,
14 about wealth. I'm not talking about Jeff Bezos'
15 wealth. But if we don't work to ensure that people
16 have -- and that's why the True Cost of Living is so
17 critically important to me, that's a baseline. If we
18 as a city go on pretending that we can just do equity
19 by making sure we don't pull as many families apart
20 in ACS, and we're providing them with basic supports,
21 but we're not looking at what has caused their
22 challenges in the first place and how it's tied to
23 acute economic deprivation in many instances, we're
24 not doing real equity work.

1 So, that was long, but I think you know where I'm
2 going, and it was important, that fundamentally if
3 we're doing real racial equity work in this city,
4 it's not just how many stops we prevent that should
5 never have happened, that's critically important. But
6 we have to tie all of this to underlying structural
7 racism, and gender inequities, and other that are
8 based in structural economic deprivation and come at
9 it from that frame.
10

11 MR. PAN: I would agree with that, and say that
12 all of the ballot measures are ultimately geared
13 towards that. Even if it's not apparent on the
14 surface, if you read the preamble, if you look at
15 what the Racial Equity Plans required, if you think
16 about the True Cost Living, they all speak to that
17 economic security and economic dignity for all
18 families in New York City. That's what's at the root
19 of so many of these issues and at the root of so much
20 disinvestment.

21 So, I would agree and say, of course, that work
22 is extremely difficult, and we've never gotten close
23 to that in this country or in this city. But that's
24 also why accountability is hard for all government
25 leaders, because it would illuminate how much

1 progress we need to make on that compared to how many
2 band aids we've tried to throw on the issue.

3 So, of course, all accountability agencies,
4 independent bodies that are meant to monitor these
5 things, are by nature not going to be a priority for
6 funding, because it actually shines a spotlight...

7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JONES AUSTIN: That's right.

9 MR. PAN: on how we're failing families.

10 I would just say the Council certainly can
11 recognize this issue and perhaps even coordinate some
12 of these bodies that are meant to provide
13 accountability and also set an example for being held
14 accountable.

15 You know, my theory is accountability is actually
16 helpful, even though it feels very painful. We all
17 need to be held accountable, because that's what
18 keeps us on the ball. And when it comes to an issue
19 that's as deeply rooted, and as long lasting, and as
20 intractable as economic insecurity and economic,
21 Injustice I think we really need to amp that up.

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JONES AUSTIN: And that's why
23 the True Cost of Living, *a true cost of living*, is so
24 vital. Nothing less will do in this moment.
25

1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you both so much. I
2
3 don't know if you have anything else you want to
4 share for the record, but I appreciate you waiting to
5 testify, and for all you've shared, and for the work
6 you continue to do on behalf of New Yorkers, thank
7 you.

8 PANEL: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I now call up Michael Matos
10 and Sharon Brown Jeeter.

11 (PAUSE)

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You can begin.

13 MICHAEL MATOS: Good afternoon, Council Members
14 and my fellow New Yorkers. My name is Michael Matos,
15 and I serve as I serve as the Chief Executive Officer
16 of Personal Protective Concepts, a personal safety
17 company. We teach marginalized communities how to
18 protect themselves from harm using the experience of
19 US military veterans. So you can imagine why I'm here
20 testifying in support of a federally implemented
21 Transgender Bill of Rights.

22 Personal protective Concepts was founded after a
23 group of Black trans activists reached out to me
24 concerned for their personal safety and seeking self-
25 defense education. Their courage and their

1
2 determination highlighted the urgent need for
3 comprehensive protections for the transgender
4 community.

5 The United States Prides itself on freedom and
6 equality, but many transgender individuals face
7 discrimination, violence, and systematic barriers. It
8 is imperative that we take steps to rectify these
9 injustices. A Transgender Bill of Rights is a vital
10 legal framework, ensuring protection against
11 discrimination in employment, housing, health care,
12 and public accommodations. It affirms the right of
13 transgender individuals to self-identify and be
14 recognized without fear.

15 While I am proud to continue leading Personal
16 Protective Concepts, as its CEO, imagine how one
17 wonderful it would be if we lived in society that
18 didn't need our services. This bill is not just about
19 protection, it is about affirmation. It affirms that
20 transgender individuals are valued members of our
21 society who deserve respect and opportunities. It
22 shows that the United States stands for equity,
23 justice, and dignity for all its citizens.

24 I urge you to support the Transgender Bill of
25 Rights. It is a necessary step towards a more

1 inclusive, fair, and just society. Let us lead by
2 example and commit to protecting the rights and lives
3 of all Americans, regardless of gender identity.
4 Thank you for your time and consideration.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

7 SHARON BROWN JETER: Hello, my name is Sharon
8 Brown Jeter. The first thing I would like to say...

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Is your mic on? Do you
10 know?

11 SHARON BROWN JETER: Yes, it's on... (CROSS-TALK)

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, (INAUDIBLE)...
13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 SHARON BROWN JETER: Can you hear me? My name is
15 Sharon Brown Jeter.

16 The first thing I would like to say is release
17 the hostages, let Yahweh's people go. Defend Israel.
18 Remember Israel with whatever you're doing in your
19 day every day.

20 Okay, the racial justice, uh, we need to stop
21 including the false data about race in medical and
22 other instances, then years later, they say it was
23 false, it's not accurate. And then they have
24 infighting among the races when they cite things that
25 are not true, and then they have to go later on, on

1 television and say, well, we have a new finding. We
2 need to place a sign to identify New York's first
3 black slave market. I believe it's necessary. Shirley
4 Chisholm Day needs to be November 30th.

5 I would like to get on the ballot as the first
6 black president, and I believe that we should uh cite
7 Shirley Chisholm. When I was at church many years
8 ago, someone prophesied to me that I would be like
9 Shirley Chisholm. And that's coming to pass. I'm
10 trying to get on the ballot and eventually that will
11 be a reality.

12 The federal government can't have a pedophilia
13 transgender bill. It is Islamic in nature the prophet
14 Muhammad married a six-year-old and waited till she
15 was nine years old to have sex with her. Now in that
16 instance, uh, they could take a six-year-old and
17 change their sex to a girl to a boy and then they can
18 say that this child is not a girl it's a boy. And
19 these transgender are against our Judeo Christian
20 values of what we stand for. This is why we I first
21 said release the hostages. Let Yahweh's people go.
22 (TIMER CHIMES) Defend Israel. It goes against our
23 views... Judeo Christian...

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for your time.
25

1 SHARON BROWN JETER: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I appreciate your
3 testimony. Have a good day. I just want to say for
4 the record that I am not sure how true that comment
5 was around change of gender at that age, but I am not
6 an expert, but thank you so much for your testimony.
7 Thank you.

8 We have one last panel.

9 Rajesh Kamal Mehra? Are you still here? And did I
10 say your last name correctly?

11 RAJESH KAMAL MEHRA: Rajesh Kamal Mehra.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Mehra.

13 RAJESH KAMAL MEHRA: Mehra.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, welcome. And Karen
15 Davis. Oh, Karen has left the building.

16 RAJESH KAMAL MEHRA: My name is Rajesh Kamal
17 Mehra, and I am a public servant, I'm the senior most
18 licensed Creative Arts Therapist at Riker's Island
19 Correctional Facility, where I have provided
20 therapeutic care to marginalized populations for over
21 a decade now.

22 I'm here today to speak in my personal capacity
23 on behalf of the transgender and non-binary
24 individuals who I serve, who are often the most
25

1
2 vulnerable and overlooked within our correctional
3 systems.

4 At Rikers I witnessed the profound impact that
5 incarceration has on transgender and non-binary
6 people. They are disproportionately represented
7 within our Correctional systems, often due to
8 systemic discrimination and marginalization that
9 happens long before they enter our facilities.

10 In years past, back when there was punitive
11 segregation units by name, to me it seemed like these
12 individuals were over represented in that context as
13 well. When serving their (INAUDIBLE) time, if they
14 were let out of their cells at all to participate in
15 my sessions, it was under the condition of having one
16 arm shackled to a table and one ankle shackled to the
17 floor, regardless of whether they had any history of
18 any sort of violence. These kinds of punitive
19 measures only exacerbate the trauma and
20 stigmatization that many have faced throughout their
21 entire lives. The carceral environment inherently de-
22 identifies and dehumanizes individuals, but the
23 impact is especially severe for those who already
24 struggle with societal affirmation.

1 Transgender and non-binary individuals,
2 particularly those who are also people of color, face
3 compounded layers of discrimination. This
4 intersectionality must be acknowledged and addressed
5 in our policies and practices. The absence of certain
6 legal protections for transgender and non-binary
7 people perpetuates a cycle of discrimination and
8 incarceration without access to appropriate medical
9 care, safe housing, and economic security many are
10 left vulnerable to criminalization simply for trying
11 to survive.
12

13 The proposed Transgender Bill of Rights is a
14 crucial step in addressing these injustices. We must
15 recognize that the marginalization of transgender and
16 non-binary people is not just an issue of individual
17 prejudice, but a systemic failure that our government
18 has a duty to correct. By supporting this resolution,
19 we affirm our commitment to human rights (TIMER
20 CHIMES) and dignity for all people. Thank you... for
21 all people regardless of gender identity.

22 As a therapist, I strive to create sessions that
23 stand in stark contrast to the rigid, restrictive,
24 and binary nature of the correctional setting by
25 creating spaces where individuals feel seen, valued,

1 and affirmed. This approach, based on an affirmative
2 therapy model, recognizes and celebrates the unique
3 identities of transgender and non-binary individuals.
4 It is essential that our laws reflect the same
5 commitment to affirmation and respect.
6

7 Incarceration should not strip anyone of their
8 Humanity. The Transgender Bill of Rights is essential
9 to ensuring that transgender and non-binary
10 individuals are treated with the respect and dignity
11 that that they deserve. It will help to reduce the
12 over representation of these individuals in our
13 criminal justice system and provide the foundation
14 for them to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

15 I urge you to support this resolution, and thank
16 you for your time and consideration.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. And, as a person
18 who knows quite a few transgender people personally,
19 I appreciate your testimony.

20 And it appears we have one more person that would
21 like to testify. So, thank you so much for being
22 here...

23 RAJESH KAMAL MEHRA: Thank you. Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And we will bring Andrew
25 up.

1 And something else that I would just like to say
2
3 for the record, well I agree we definitely need to
4 release all hostages, we also should be calling for
5 peace in that region and for a ceasefire. So, I just
6 wanted to also state that for the record.

7 And I would like to welcome up Mr. Andrew.

8 (READING WITNESSES' SHIRT) "Police Are Making People
9 Homeless". Okay.

10 ANDREW: That's the court case, by the way.

11 Can you hear me?

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, sir.

13 ANDREW: Okay, good. This is a court case, right
14 here in New York City. So, police cannot deny that
15 this is not true that they do not make people
16 homeless, because this is a court case.

17 Thank you for your time. I would like to petition
18 the City Council members to do an investigation of
19 police for attacking me in New York and Chicago. What
20 they did was, they assaulted me in two different
21 states. They put me in the hospital with bodily
22 injuries. And in New York City they tossed me in a
23 psych ward against my will. So, during my
24 investigation, I found out that people are identified
25 as being crazy, who have (INAUDIBLE) against a couple

1 of people in law enforcement. Los Angeles police
2 officer, Christopher Dorner, he's one. New York City
3 police office, Agent (INAUDIBLE) and (INAUDIBLE)
4 Gomez, police detective... New York City police
5 detective (INAUDIBLE) Gomez. Everybody that has
6 evidence against police, they identify them as being
7 crazy. So, I have evidence against them, so I am...
8 fall into the same category as being a crazy person,
9 running around killing people, doing all sorts of
10 other things. So, I am asking for an investigation,
11 because they making a false claim against me. And
12 people who are accused falsely by law enforcement,
13 they have no avenue to know where to go to defend
14 themselves. Because I have tried to sue them in both
15 states, they blocked me from suing them. And there is
16 this lady from Chicago, she too had, uh, exposed law
17 enforcement, and they had slashed her tires, they had
18 threatened to kill her. So, corrupt people in law
19 enforcement, they like to do bad things to people.
20 And they are attacking me. So, instead of me acting
21 loud, I come and I speak to people, and I talk to
22 everybody and I let them know, how do you think I
23 should handle this situation of being attacked and
24 terrorized by corrupt people in law enforcement? So,
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I just talk to people. So, that's why I come in here asking for an investigation (TIMER CHIMES) of law enforcement. And you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for your time. And I definitely encourage you, if you have not already, to file a complaint to CCRB (Civilian Complaint Review Board); CORE can also take complaints about agencies, the Commission on Racial Equity that spoke today. So, I just encourage you to reach out to the proper channels to lodge your complaint. And I will come talk to you.

So, this, I believe, if there are no other individuals here to testify, this hearing is concluded.

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING OUT)

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 August 7, 2024