



**EXAMINING THE PROGRESS OF COMPUTERIZED TESTING CENTERS &
THEIR ROLE IN REDUCING PROVISIONAL EMPLOYEES**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON CIVIL SERVICE & LABOR**

**TESTIMONY BY THOMAS PATITUCCI
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, EXAMINATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF CITYWIDE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
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Good afternoon Chair Addabbo and members of the Civil Service & Labor Committee. I am Thomas Patitucci, Assistant Commissioner for Examinations for the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services ("DCAS"). I am joined by my colleague Matthew Morrongiello, Director of the Computerized Examining Group. On behalf of Commissioner Martha K. Hirst, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss the progress of DCAS's Computerized Testing Center (the "Center"). Last week, we were pleased to give a tour of the Center to Civil Service & Labor Committee staff, and we welcome Committee members who are interested in touring the Center as well.

BACKGROUND ON THE COMPUTERIZED TESTING CENTER

In December 2007, DCAS opened its Manhattan Computerized Testing Center at 2 Lafayette Street. The Center provides exam candidates the opportunity to walk in unannounced and take exams at pre-arranged times throughout the day. The first examination offered at the Center was the open-competitive Police Officer exam. In May 2008, DCAS added the Correction Officer exam to the Center's exam schedule, and in September 2008, an exam for Child Protective Specialist was also added. As of last Friday, November 21st, we have tested 7,563 candidates at the Center.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMPUTERIZED TESTING PROCESS

The Center is designed to accommodate 50 test takers at one time and gives DCAS examiners the capability to administer either the same exam or exams for different titles simultaneously. For example, during one test session all 50 test takers could be taking an exam for Police Officer, and during the next test session some test takers could be taking the Correction Officer exam while several others could be taking exams for Police Officer or Child Protective Specialist. Although

there are pre-arranged exam starting times, test takers are individually timed at their work stations and can begin at different times throughout the day if necessary.

The administration schedule for each exam offered at the Center is publicized in the relevant Notice of Examination, on the DCAS website, and in local media advertisements by hiring agencies. Exam sessions are scheduled at the Center twice each weekday during regular work hours, several times each week at night, and twice during the day on Saturday. The actual combination of exams and sessions may vary from month to month and is subject to City agency hiring needs and the level of public turnout at the Center.

When test takers arrive at the Computerized Testing Center, they are directed to the DCAS Application Center located on the same floor. These individuals are asked to complete an exam application and pay the appropriate application processing fee (which can be done by credit card, debit card, bank card, or money order), if required. The test takers are then escorted into the exam processing area where they are asked to complete several forms (i.e., admission card, fingerprint card, and selective certification request), are fingerprinted, and then are given instructions on what to expect when they take the exam.

Following the completion of pre-examination procedures, test takers are led to assigned work stations in the examination room adjacent to the processing room and are seated in front of computer terminals. Test takers are given headphones that they can keep after the exam, which allow them to listen while watching a 10-minute video that describes how to take the exam on the computer. Prior to the start of the tutorial, test takers type in their Social Security Numbers twice for verification. This is the only time that the keyboard is used since the computers use touch sensitive screens, enabling test takers to use their fingertips to navigate through the exam and respond to test items. These screens operate in the same way as those used in MetroCard vending machines. With touch sensitive screens, test takers can easily change any of their answers during the exam, answer test questions in any order that they wish, and access a summary screen that indicates which questions have been answered and which questions are incomplete. In addition, a marquee at the top of the computer screen continuously displays the time remaining for the exam and the number of completed as well as outstanding questions. When test takers complete the exam or when the time allotted for the exam expires, printers located at each work station automatically

generate their tentative exam scores, their own individual records of answers, DCAS's proposed answer key, and instructions on how to protest the answer key.

COMPUTERIZED TESTING ITEM BANK

The core of the Computerized Testing Center is the electronic item bank that serves as the repository for test items and is the mechanism used to send examinations to the various computer terminals in the Center. Several thousand test items for each exam offered at the Center must be stored in the item bank in order to ensure that different versions of an exam can be produced with an assorted combination of test questions and can be administered over a number of test sessions each day. At the command of an examiner at the Center, the electronic item bank automatically and randomly selects test items from among thousands according to a test plan that has been previously uploaded into the bank. The test plan, which is uploaded by an examiner, dictates how many items to select from each relevant exam content area. The length of time needed to make a specific exam available at the Center depends on how long it takes to enter thousands of legacy test items into the bank. However, once the items have been entered into the bank along with a single test plan, hundreds of different versions of the exam can be produced with minimal overlapping of the same questions from exam to exam.

BENEFITS OF COMPUTERIZED TESTING

The Computerized Testing Center provides a myriad of advantages to both the public and the City by both modernizing and centralizing the civil service examination process. Individuals seeking City employment can stop in at various times during the day, night, or weekend to apply for and take civil service examinations, as well as receive their tentative scores immediately upon completion of the exam—all in the same location. This means that civil service examinations are more easily accessible to even more New Yorkers. The Center allows for the administration of more frequent exams for specific titles as a result of an increased capacity to schedule additional testing sessions. Moreover, people who are in search of a City position can take exams for different titles at the Center during the course of a week if they choose to do so.

The amount of time from exam administration to eligible list establishment is also significantly reduced because the answer key for a particular exam is, in effect, posted when test takers immediately receive a copy of the proposed answer key upon exam completion. Thus, the Center's

streamlined operations expedite the process of generating eligible lists from computerized exams, making these lists readily available to hiring agencies more quickly and more regularly.

THE FUTURE OF COMPUTERIZED TESTING CENTERS

Beginning on December 1st of this year, DCAS will add to the Center's exam schedule the titles of Caseworker and Traffic Enforcement Agent. On January 2nd of 2009, the exam for Environmental Police Officer will be added as well. Exams for other titles are also currently under consideration to be added to the Center's schedule. The decision regarding which exams are selected for administration at the Center is contingent upon several factors, including a need to enhance a hiring agency's recruitment effort for a title, a high attrition rate within a targeted title, and the promptness with which DCAS staff can enter into the electronic item bank the thousands of test items necessary to produce multiple versions of an exam for numerous test sessions.

At present, approximately 2,000 test takers are administered exams at the Center each month. With the addition of three exams to the schedule over the next two months, DCAS expects the number of test takers to reach the Center's present maximum capacity of 3,000 individuals per month. DCAS also plans during the next two months to add two more exam sessions to the Center's weekly schedule, resulting in an expected increase in total full capacity to 3,500 test takers each month.

In the fall of 2009, DCAS plans to open the second Computerized Testing Center located in the Brooklyn Municipal Building at 210 Joralemon Street, a location easily accessible by numerous subway lines and bus routes. The Brooklyn Center will accommodate 100 test takers, which is twice the testing capacity of the Manhattan Center. With the opening of the Center in Brooklyn, DCAS will have even greater means to offer more examinations for more civil service titles, providing the public with increased flexibility and additional opportunities to take examinations.

Ultimately, DCAS's goal is to open Computerized Testing Centers citywide, with at least one Center in each borough. The greater use of technological advances through computerized testing effectively modernizes and improves the efficiency of the civil service system. Computerized Testing Centers also afford added convenience to prospective City employees since individuals are able to apply for exams, take exams, receive immediate exam answers, and learn how to protest answer keys all in the same location and within the same day. With this strategy, we hope to increase

public awareness that obtaining permanent civil service status is essential for a City appointment; to enhance community access to the civil service examination process; and to facilitate civil service administration overall.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify about DCAS's Computerized Testing Center. We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11-25-08

Name: Thomas Patitucci, Asst. Cmr., Examinations
(PLEASE PRINT)
Address: DCAS

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Date: 11-25-08

Name: Matt Morrongiello, Dir. of Computerized
(PLEASE PRINT)
Address: DCAS Examining Group

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