

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Wednesday, April 24, 2024

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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: HON. ALTHEA STEVENS, CHAIR

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

RITA C. JOSEPH

LINDA LEE

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COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A P P E A R A N C E S

Nancy Ginsburg,
Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth
and Family Justice at the Administration for
Children's Services

Johan Peguero,
Associate Commissioner for Close to Home and
Nonsecure Detention

Elisabeth Bernard,
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Jan Hassan-Butera,
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Katelyn Greco,
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Pedro Gonzalez,
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Annie Minguez,
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Judith Harris,
The Legal Aid Society
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Daphne Torres-Douglas,
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COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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SERGEANT WONG: Sound check for the Committee on Children and Youth. Today's date is April 24, 2024, being recorded by Danny Wong in the Committee Room.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to the New York City Council Hearing of the Committee on Children and Youth.

At this time, please place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode.

If you wish to testify, please come up to the Sergeant at Arms to fill out a testimony slip.

Written testimony can be emailed to testimony@council.nyc.gov, once again that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

At this time and going forward, no one is to approach the dais; I repeat, no one is to approach the dais. Thank you for your cooperation.

Chair we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS:

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING IN)

Good morning, I am Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair of New York City Council's Committee on Children and Youth Services. Thank you for joining us today for today's Oversight Hearing on: *Evaluating the Close to Home Program*.

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2 This is our first ACS (Administration of
3 Children's Services) oversight hearing since the
4 Committee gained jurisdiction over the agency. I look
5 forward to building a collaborative and productive
6 relationship with ACS since I know our goals to
7 support and empower young people are aligned.

8 The Close to Home Program is a community based
9 alternative to young people who were found
10 *reasonable (*TRANSCRIPTION NOTE: responsible) for
11 committing a delinquent act by the Family Court
12 system. Close to Home participants receive
13 rehabilitative services including family visits,
14 mental health care, and recreational activities in
15 residential setting, close to the community in which
16 they live. This initiative was established in
17 response to a 2008 New York State Juvenile Justice
18 Task Force recommendation. The task force found that
19 the community based facilities led to positive
20 outcomes for youth and are more cost effective than
21 detention facilities.

22 As we engage in a thoughtful review of the
23 program, I think it is important that we do not lose
24 sight of the task force's findings and goals of Close
25 to Home.

1
2 Despite the passage of Raise the Age and an
3 influx of family court cases, the Administration's
4 FY25 November Budget Plan reduced Close to Home's
5 baselined funding by 7.2 percent citing
6 underutilization of the program.

7 Additionally, Close to Home providers have
8 expressed concerns about their ability to hire,
9 retain, and protect staff while maintaining a
10 welcoming environment for young people. Specifically,
11 they have raised concerns about their ability to pay
12 staff a fair wage for this demanding and difficult
13 work. Part of today's discussion will center on the
14 impact of these cuts on both (INAUDIBLE) and
15 providers. The Committee looks forward to gaining a
16 deeper understanding of the program from ACS today.

17 I would like to thank committee staff Christina,
18 Elizabeth, and Casey for their hard work in preparing
19 for this hearing, as well as the entire A-Team back
20 in the district office, who are having a great day at
21 the MET with community members, so I am really
22 excited about that - too sad that I am not there, but
23 it's okay.

24 Now, we will turn it over to committee counsel to
25 swear in the Administration.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, good morning, Christina
3 Yellamaty, Legislative Counsel, please raise your
4 right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
5 whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before this
6 committee, and to respond honestly to council member
7 questions?

8 PANEL: (NO MIC) AFFIRMS

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin when
10 ready.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Good morning, Chair
12 Stevens and Members of the City Council Children and
13 Youth Committee. My name is Nancy Ginsburg, and I am
14 the Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth and
15 Family Justice at the Administration for Children's
16 Services. I oversee the full range of services for
17 justice-involved youth and their families ranging
18 from community based programs engaging youth and
19 families in their communities to nonsecure and secure
20 detention, and of course, our Close to Home program.
21 I am joined today by Johan Peguero, the Associate
22 Commissioner for Close to Home and Nonsecure
23 Detention.

24 There are two types of Close to Home facilities,
25 Nonsecure Placement (NPS) and limited Secure

1 Placement (LSP). Nonsecure Placement facilities are
2 home-like settings typically in retrofitted
3 brownstones that look much like group homes. Limited
4 Secure Placements have more security features, such
5 as a control room monitored 24 hours a day, and a
6 properly maintained perimeter with motion sensors and
7 security fences.

8
9 In 2023, 111 youth were admitted to Close to
10 Home; 88 percent of the youth were male and 12
11 percent were female. The admissions were 61 percent
12 African American, 27 percent Latinx, 3 percent white,
13 and 5 percent Asian.

14 Youth age at admissions range from 13 years to 20
15 years old with 73 percent of the youth being 15 to 17
16 years old at the time of admission. Ninety-two
17 percent of those youth were placed in Close to Home
18 for the first time. The median length of stay was 218
19 days for those youth released in 2023. In addition,
20 in 2023, the average daily number of youth receiving
21 Close to Home aftercare services was 31, and a total
22 of 105 youth participated in aftercare.

23 Close to Home providers are required to implement
24 evidence-based therapeutic program models that serve
25 as the primary mechanism of behavioral support. In

1
2 addition to the providers' evidence-based program
3 model, ACS requires that the youth level of service
4 case management tool be integrated in programming.

5 ACS and our providers have fully embraced
6 programs, interventions, and strategies tailored to
7 each youth's individual development and learning
8 capacity. Through the chosen program framework youth
9 are given the opportunity to address their
10 interpersonal relationships, communication skills,
11 emotional regulation, and achieving the goal of
12 eliminating and reducing concerning behaviors.

13 Most youth in Close to Home receive their
14 education through Passages Academy operated by the
15 New York City Public Schools. Youth in non-secure
16 placement attend school at Bronx Hope or Belmont in
17 Brooklyn. Youth in limited secure placement attend
18 schools at the facility. Youth placed at Children's
19 Village attend the Greenburgh School on the campus in
20 Dobbs Ferry.

21 Passages Academy supports middle school, high
22 school, and high school equivalency instruction.
23 Passages Academy school counselors and social workers
24 provide guidance counseling, special education

1 services, and transition support when youth return to
2 the community.

3
4 Upon entry into Close to Home, youth are
5 evaluated by New York City Public Schools and then
6 placed in a class program that matches their needs.

7 While most youth are in Close to Home placements
8 for less than a year, the youth are successful in
9 earning school credits and passing Regents Exams.

10 In the 2022-2023 school year, 65 NSP youth were
11 enrolled in passages - 88 percent of whom were in
12 high school and earned an average of 7.1; credits 86
13 percent of students earned 10 or more credits during
14 this time.

15 In the 2022-23 school year, 25 LSP youth were
16 enrolled in Passages Academy; 92 percent were in high
17 school, and an average of 6.7 credits were earned,
18 and 73 percent earned over 10 credits. These students
19 also passed a total of 16 Regents Exams.

20 When there are youth in Close to Home who are
21 college ready, we work with New York City Public
22 Schools for CLEP classes (College Level Examination
23 Program), engage with community colleges for courses,
24 and some youth attend college courses in the
25 community.

1
2 These programs offer youth an opportunity to
3 engage in programming that promote so pro-social
4 skills, vocational and academic engagement, Creative
5 and Performing Arts, and positive adult-peer
6 mentoring.

7 Close to Home providers partner with Cure
8 Violence providers to train youth to be junior
9 credible messengers. The program Exalt helps elevate
10 youth voice and provides job training skills. Kite
11 Creative Writing helps youth write and showcase their
12 work. Carnegie Hall offers workshops, musical
13 trainings, and public performances.

14 Most recently, ACS has added the successful Fair
15 Futures coaching model to provide youth in and
16 leaving Close to Home, with coaches that can remain
17 with them until age 23.

18 Youth returning to the community typically
19 receive at least 6 months of aftercare supervision
20 from ACS and support from their Close to Home
21 provider. As mentioned, youth also now have access to
22 a Fair Futures coach when they return to the
23 community which a youth can continue to lean on after
24 they complete our program. Most youth in Close to
25 Home successfully transition back to the community.

1
2 In 2023, 92 percent of the youth admitted to
3 Close to Home were admitted for the first time and
4 just 2 percent of youth admitted to secure and non-
5 secure detention had previously been to Close to
6 Home.

7 In March ACS announced the providers recommended
8 for awards for the new contracts starting July 2024.
9 The providers include Children's Village, Good
10 Shepherd Services, Rising Ground, SEO, and St John's
11 who will operate a total of 14 sites with 147 beds.

12 Notably, the original Close to Home contracts
13 predate the implementation of Raise the Age. Today
14 the youth in Close to Home tend to be a little bit
15 older and often present with more challenging needs.

16 The new contract awards aim to strengthen the
17 Close to Home system of care by rightsizing the
18 system while providing the providers with additional
19 resources needed to care for the post Raise The Age
20 population of youth in their care.

21 Program capacity was decreased from 13 to nine,
22 allowing for more individualized programming. The new
23 contract budgets were increased to fund specific
24 lines to help improve the overall programming and
25 offer a more robust treatment approach. The lines now

1
2 include funding for Fair Futures, an educational and
3 career specialist, Fair Futures coach, Fair Future
4 supervisor, aftercare staff, a crisis specialist,
5 aftercare supervisor and peer mentors, a recreation
6 specialist, an increasing staffing ratio of three to
7 one from six to one, an intake coordinator, and a
8 mental health team required to include a therapist,
9 psychiatrist, and substance abuse counselor.

10 To address permanency issues with our older youth
11 in our system, ACS created a transitional program
12 referred to as a Transitional Residential Care or
13 TRC. Youth entering the TRC will be provided with
14 supports, which encourage personal growth,
15 development, and empowerment to make mature and
16 healthy decisions.

17 The TRC will also offer youth case management,
18 educational and vocational services, and will help
19 them connect with a variety of community resources to
20 enhance their co-design personal development plan,
21 and most importantly, help youth achieve permanency.

22 The TRC will support the goal of serving youth in
23 the least restrictive most homelike setting possible,
24 and is due to begin in July.

1
2 I would be remiss if I did not mention that when
3 Close to Home was created it was a cost sharing
4 partnership with the State where the State funded
5 approximately half of the cost - which was \$30.5
6 million.

7 Unfortunately, after the initial statute sunset
8 in 2018, and the statute was reauthorized, the state
9 eliminated all State funding and support for Close to
10 Home.

11 ACS continues to feel strongly that the State
12 should support New York City youth and Placement as
13 they do for any other youth and placement for any
14 other county. That said, at ACS we are excited about
15 the future of Close to Home and the work that we can
16 do with our providers to help turn the lives of youth
17 around, so that they can thrive and become successful
18 adults. We believe our new contracts build upon the
19 success of the Close to Home Initiative and that we
20 will now be able to better serve the older population
21 in our care, thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. And you did such
23 a great job summarizing. I tell you, you did really
24 great, so I want to shout you out for that.

1
2 Let's jump right into it, because I have a number
3 of questions.

4 But before we get started, I would like to
5 acknowledge my colleagues Council Member Menin,
6 Council Member Williams, and Council Member Lee,
7 thank you for joining us.

8 Please explain ACS's relationship with family
9 court. What factors or rubric does the family court
10 system used to determine whether a young person is a
11 candidate Close to Home programs?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: ACS does not have
13 a role in the family court process. The family court
14 holds juvenile delinquency proceedings where youth
15 are represented by attorneys and the City is
16 represented by the Law Department. The court holds a
17 fact finding to hearing to determine whether or not
18 the young person is found to have committed the act.
19 If the young person is found to have committed the
20 act, there will be a dispositional hearing at. At
21 disposition, the judge determines whether or not the
22 youth is to be placed in a Close to Home facility.
23 The judge also decides whether that facility should
24 be non-secure, limited secure, or unspecified -
25 meaning that ACS determines the level of placement.

1
2 And the court... during this process the court
3 listens to testimony, reviews the probation report,
4 possibly a mental health evaluation, and then
5 determines the least restrictive alternative. ACS is
6 not part of that process.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I thank you for that answer
8 and for clarifying. But, I would love to hear just a
9 little... what is the relationship like? Because
10 that's the role, right? So, it's very clear that you
11 guys don't have a role in that, but what does your
12 relationship look like with family court? What does
13 your communication look? Do you meet, or is it just
14 all separate and they just call you when it's time
15 for your piece? I would love to hear a little bit
16 about your role and relationships that you guys work
17 together with currently.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Sometimes the
19 judges reach out to us if they have questions about
20 the continuum. Sometimes during a hearing they may
21 ask for a member of the Close to Home team to come
22 into court to explain the various services that are
23 provided across the continuum to help inform their
24 decision making about where they will order the young
25 person to go on disposition. We do have periodic

1
2 conversations with judges on in the family court, and
3 so we use those conversations as well as their
4 ability to call witnesses from the Close to Home team
5 in the dispositional hearings to ask the specific
6 questions that they are looking for information about
7 that specific young person to ensure that the program
8 matches the young person's needs.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, ACS does offer some
10 insight sometimes to family court judges regarding
11 placement of youth to Close to Homes? (CROSS-TALK)

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, great.

14 Please explain the difference between LSP and NSP
15 - how do those programs' safety measure differ?
16 Because even when you are... when we were doing some
17 digging and research, and even when I was talking to
18 providers, they seem very similar. And it was like
19 little nuances. So could you just kind of talk about
20 what the real differences are? Because, like I said,
21 when we were doing research, it was, like, one stays
22 in for school and the other one doesn't. And that was
23 kind of a difference...(CROSS-TALK)

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: (BACKGROUND
25 NOISE) The physical plan itself is very different,

1 right. So, like we were saying during the testimony,
2 there's a control room that actually operates and
3 opens all the doors throughout the building in our
4 limited secure facility, so youth cannot just go from
5 one - like, let's say to a rec space to... (CROSS-
6 TALK)
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Sorry, are you talking about
9 the LSPs or the (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The LSPs, yes,
11 uh... (CROSS-TALK)

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We should probably just say
13 the whole thing, because it took me... I'm just
14 learning these things, and I know there's people
15 here, and I'm not sure if my Committee members are
16 also familiar with all the terminology. Because
17 there's a lot of jargon, and I'm also learning.

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: And our... in
19 limited secure youths are not allowed to leave the
20 facility for any reason. So even for... unless
21 there's a medical emergency. So, their medical is
22 done on site, uh, dental, education. The programming
23 is at the building. Our NSP... I mean our nonsecure
24 facilities are able to go into the community. Their
25 education is the community, uh, services, medical/

1
2 mental health could be out in the community. So,
3 there's a... the big difference is the restriction
4 around how they're able to interact with the
5 community.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. So, there's very
7 limited activity? Because even when... like, even
8 with the NSPs; although, it's it... they go out to
9 school, what other activities are they doing? Because
10 when I was talking to providers, it didn't seem like
11 they were out in the community or any of those
12 things. It was still very restrictive (INAUDIBLE)...

13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: (INAUDIBLE)...

15 (CROSS-TALK)

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: is it the movement in the
17 building? (CROSS-TALK)

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No it's a lot
19 more. There are providers that go on trips; they
20 take... they go on events with the kids; they may
21 take the kids out to a local restaurant, or...

22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh! (CROSS-TALK)

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah, so...

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, I didn't hear any of
3 these things. (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: yeah they... they
5 do a lot more than just that. And they're able to...
6 they able to individualize the youth plan. So if a
7 kid wants to get a job in the community, and they
8 reach the level where they can trust the youth, they
9 can actually go to work and come back.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That is not the impression I
11 have gotten on this tour that I've been doing and
12 talking to providers. So, I want to distinguish if
13 they're able to do it and if it's happening. Because,
14 I think that that is a good distinction because I
15 know... and we'll get into some of those questions
16 around funding, because even with that, that requires
17 additional funding. So, we'll get into that a little
18 bit later. But, I want to be clear, from the
19 conversations I've been having, that has not been the
20 impression that I've gotten. But, we'll get to that
21 to a little later.

22 Is the Agency tackling with communities and Close
23 to Home participants come from (sic), is the Agency
24 coordinating with other agencies like DYCD to ensure
25 that the community has consistent members of Close to

1
2 Home program participants receiving resources and
3 support?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, ACS does know
5 what communities the youth come from. In 2023, 111
6 youth were placed in Close to Home - 37 from the
7 Bronx, 27 from Brooklyn, 10 from Manhattan, 24 from
8 Queens, and five from Staten Island.

9 The neighborhoods that were most represented were
10 Mott Haven and East New York. ACS is intentional
11 about providing these informational sessions and
12 participating in community events in these
13 neighborhoods. So families know how to access our FAP
14 (Family Assessment Program) community-based
15 alternatives, which are at the preventive end of our
16 continuum. Also, we work closely with DYCD and share
17 information about where court-involved youth come
18 from. DYCD has programs in these communities, such as
19 Cure Violence. We also work closely with DYCD to
20 ensure that all youth currently or previously
21 receiving services from ACS, including prevention and
22 FAP, are prioritized for recruitment through the
23 Emerging Leaders Program, which served a record
24 number of youth last year. Additionally, DYCD
25 conducts targeted recruitment across priority

1
2 precincts working with CMS groups, NYCHA, and other
3 City agencies. All youth residing in priority
4 districts and NYCHA developments are prioritized in
5 the program lottery. Do you want to talk about After-
6 School?

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I have some questions before
8 you even go into afterschools. Because this is one of
9 the things that I've have been harping over for the
10 last (BACKGROUND NOISE) two years. Even with DYCD, a
11 lot of these young people are... and not just...
12 because I want to be clear, CMS is probably... it's
13 one section of DYCD, and they just got that. But they
14 have a host of programs where young people are at, so
15 how are you guys communicating at that first touch
16 point even before the kids get to you? Because I
17 think that that's another piece that I feel like
18 there's a huge disconnect - where we have these
19 programs, where ,you know, we have Saturday Night
20 Lights, which everybody knows I'm not a fan of, we
21 have Cornerstones, we have community centers, how are
22 you... but that's the first touch point. So, are we
23 tracking to, like, if those kids are enrolled in
24 those programs? Even before they get to you, how does
25 those communications happen?

1
2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, I don't think
3 we have that detailed of what you're referring to in
4 reference to the community services that they're
5 asking... We do know kids that come to our care who
6 have been involved within our continuum such as JJI
7 or the FAP program. Those kids are receiving
8 preventive services from some of our community
9 providers. So, we would know that information. I...
10 the more specific information that you're asking,
11 we're not... unless the kid shares it with us we,
12 don't really have a way to identify that.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, and I think we need to
14 get to a place where we are, right? Because the
15 reality is all of these programs should be
16 preventative services, because the goal should be for
17 young people not to get to your facilities, right?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes, we
19 agree... (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We don't want them to go
21 there, right? But, I think if we're not having these
22 conversations about what that looks like, it's a
23 continuous cycle - especially if it's two City
24 agencies. So, this is something I've been talking
25 about for two years, and welcome to my madness. You

1
2 guys will see, and I'm not going to let it go until
3 we figure this out, but I think that it's really
4 important that we're thinking about how we use these
5 other places as touch points so we can prevent them
6 from going there.

7 But I know you wanted to talk about After-School,
8 so...

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: I was just going
10 to mention that DYCD offers After-School programming
11 for our District 79 schools, and... who we partner
12 with the community or the Center for Community
13 Alternatives. And they also they provide the Cure
14 Violence, as you are aware, as well as... they also
15 help with the aftercare piece when it comes to Cure
16 Violence and Community Alternatives.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. I just want to go on a
18 record again. DYCD just got Cure Violence, so we
19 can't use that as a touch point for the information.
20 They've only been there a year.

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, uh, well they
22 were with MOCJ (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Exactly, so, like, even when
24 we're talking about that, I just want us to make sure
25 we keep that into to perspective.

1
2 But, according to the 2023 RFP, contractors must
3 maintain a No Reject/No Eject policy for referrals
4 of young people during the term of their contracted
5 award. Providers have reported pressure to accept all
6 referrals. Are young people ever turned away because
7 a program is full to capacity? And, if so, how many
8 accepted referrals were turned away in 2023?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, our youth do
10 not come from the Children Center. All of our youth
11 are held in detention pending disposition. We do have
12 a No Reject/No Eject policy, but if a provider has
13 concerns about a youth being placed in their
14 programs, we have conversations to learn more about
15 the reasons that they may have. Luckily we have not
16 had the experience with in any of our providers being
17 at capacity. Also because youth are placed by the
18 family courts, we do not have the option to turn any
19 youth away from our Close to Home program.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, I just want to make sure
21 we clarify some things, because you said you don't
22 have a No Reject/No Eject policy... (CROSS-TALK)

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, no we do have
24 a... We do have a No Reject/No Eject policy, so...

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, yeah, you can't reject
3 them, but if... so what's the point of the
4 conversation? Because if a provider can't reject them
5 or... I'm voicing a concern. They can't reject them,
6 so what is the conversation about?

7 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: They may make
8 some good points about maybe they read the youth
9 documentation... (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But if you tell someone you
11 can't deny them, and then say, like, well let's have
12 a conversation, it seems... (CROSS-TALK)

13 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah, but it's a
14 productive conversation, because... (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But, if I'm a provider, and
16 I just... and this is a perspective, right? You are
17 also their funder. And this is the thing that I
18 (BACKGROUND NOISE) hop on a lot with DYCD, you're
19 their funder and they're the provider. So, how do I
20 come to you and have a conversation and say, like,
21 "this isn't a good fit," without feeling like I might
22 get in trouble, because, you have already told me
23 that I can't reject or eject them? So, even in that
24 that sentiment, it's flawed. And I think we need to
25 think about what that really looks like, because it's

1 really hard for someone to come to their funder and
2 say, "This is going to be a... (CROSS-TALK)

3 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: (INAUDIBLE)...
4 (CROSS-TALK)

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm just saying.

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: I don't fully
7 agree with that. We have providers that have multiple
8 facilities...(CROSS-TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm.

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, they may tell
11 us, uh, "No don't place him at this site, we believe
12 he's going to do better at this facility." So, we
13 would change the recommendation.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm going to tell you, I was
15 a provider for 20 years; it is hard to have a
16 conversation with your funder. And sometimes those
17 difficult conversations... so, they might say let's
18 go here or whatever, but I'm telling you it is...
19 that's something we have to think about right?
20 Because it is... you are still their funder, so
21 there's limited pushback that they can give, and
22 especially when you've already have a policy that
23 said you can't reject or eject. So, it's... that's
24 a hard conversation. And, let's be clear, the
25

1
2 pressure is on the provider not you. So, I just want
3 us to make sure that we note that. Because that's
4 important.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, I understand
6 what you're saying, but the policy is a system
7 policy... (CROSS-TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Where they go
10 within the system is up for conversation. So, there
11 might be a provider that is more suited to meet a
12 young person's need than another provider. So, I
13 think that's the conversation that we're having at
14 the point of placement.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Listen, I understand, and I
16 agree, but I'm just being clear: As a provider, that
17 is a hard conversation to have, because now either
18 way, you still make the decision. So to... let's say
19 even if they give push back, they still have very
20 limited capacity. And I'm not saying that they
21 wouldn't have the conversation, but what if they're
22 truly, like, "we really can't do this", but you're
23 going to be like, "fine". But even the reject/eject
24 thing, that does not... it does put limitations on a
25 provider, and it's still on the provider side. So,

1
2 I'm not saying that they're not having the
3 conversations, but let's think about a provider who
4 might be having ,you know, struggling in some areas
5 or are doing some stuff, and they're like, "We don't
6 have the capacity," and they tell you that you guys
7 have the authority to say, "This is how we're moving
8 forward." I'm just saying it's an uncomfortable
9 position for providers. Uhm...

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Can I just say one
11 more thing about that?

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm!

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Because the
14 conversation... post placement, the conversation is
15 ongoing. So the staff from... the ACs staff from
16 Close to Home is in conversation with the providers.
17 So, sometimes there are struggles that are projected
18 that are not actually realized, but sometimes there
19 are struggles that are projected and realized. So
20 that conversation continues throughout the placement,
21 so if adjustments have to be made there is an
22 opportunity for the provider to raise that with the
23 staff.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm. No, and I'm sure,
25 and here's the thing, right, I am sure there are some

1 providers who are probably a little bit more vocal
2 than others, and even thinking about smaller
3 providers who are, like, I just, "I'm not going to
4 say anything, because it's harder," so I'm just
5 saying, as an agency I want us to make sure we're
6 thinking about those conversations and what that
7 looks like, because I know as a provider sometimes
8 that it is hard to go to your funder and admit ,
9 like, "I don't have capacity." So, I'm sure in some
10 cases... and I'm not saying that you guys are
11 pressuring, t that could happen, right? So, we need
12 to just think about that and make sure we're noting
13 that, because that to me is really important. I
14 remember being a provider, and being , like... I
15 wasn't a Close to Home provider, right? But, I
16 remember not being able to reject kids and being in a
17 situation where it was uncomfortable.

19 What are some alternative programs or agencies
20 that Close to Home can refer you to ease some of the
21 pressure to accept referrals? Are there other
22 programs other than that?

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, we can only
24 refer to our Close to Home contracted providers.

25 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

1
2 month we can have 10, the other month five, so that's
3 how it's determined. We have not seen an increase in
4 length of stay, so we are not sure yet that this type
5 of decrease is actually a trend, uh, and could be
6 impacted by when the youth started placement. But
7 we'll continue to monitor that.

8 The other question was? (CROSS-TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What are some of the trends
10 Close to Home (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, I wouldn't
12 call them trends, we would... if there's just some
13 individual circumstances when it comes to the kids,
14 so it is important that we take these types of steps
15 to ensure youth successfully transition back to the
16 community or aftercare. Say if kids are struggling
17 with the program itself, that can hold the youth
18 back. If the youth doesn't have a successful plan to
19 be transitioned back to the community, that can hold
20 a youth back. So, it's all on the individualized
21 based on what's going on with that specific youth.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I mean when I was
23 visiting one of the providers they did speak about
24 the struggles especially with young people who
25 didn't have a plan and sometimes would have to stay

1
2 longer in in those facilities. And it was often
3 sometimes hard even within going to other ACS
4 facilities, like the communication wasn't there, and
5 there was a lot of difficulties around finding other
6 placements.

7 Could you guys talk a little bit about that
8 piece? Because that was one of the things that
9 providers have said has been an issue, and it has
10 been a growing concern.

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: If I am correct,
12 it is mostly around kids who are already in foster
13 care and need to find a foster care placement. And
14 sometimes kids who have a history of delinquent acts
15 maybe ,you know, when we're finding... we're trying
16 to work with the foster care side, it is... they have
17 a reject policy, and they can decide which youth can
18 come into their care or not, and that makes it a
19 little bit difficult on our Close to Home providers
20 and our youth. Because then finding a permanency for
21 them is much harder.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, because it wasn't even
23 a... like they were young people who, uh, it wasn't
24 foster care. What was what was the program? I

1 forgot... I will remember it and come back to that...

2 (CROSS-TALK)

3 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But, we do , you
4 know... (CROSS-TALK)

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because it wasn't the foster
6 care... Because it was young people who were... who
7 didn't have places to go. It was placement in other
8 facilities that they were having issues with. I'll
9 remember it at some point and I'll come back to it.

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But, but you know
11 we do have now, uh, with the new RFP, we're going to
12 have a transitional residential care site... (CROSS-
13 TALK)

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah that's what it! Thank
15 you... (CROSS-TALK)

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, that is going
17 to allow us to move those youth into that setting, so
18 that they can continue to work on their permanency
19 and integration back to the community.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because that that's what I
21 was hearing, because it was a pilot program
22 currently, right?

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well not right
24 now. We had it, but it didn't work out so well. But
25

1
2 with the RFP we're able to reinstate it and get
3 someone to do it. So, we're going to be working
4 through the new... the next fiscal year on this
5 program, and hopefully be very successful at it.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, I'm going to come back
7 because I'm trying to remember, because I've been
8 having a lot of meetings... So I'm trying to just
9 remember all the things in my head. But, I'm going to
10 come back, because it was a specific issue that
11 providers had raised around the transition piece.
12 But, I'll go to the next question.

13 Following the implementation of Raise the Age,
14 Close to Home providers are concerned that older
15 youth are being housed with younger youth. Has the
16 mixing of age group raised any issues? Has the agency
17 explored separate Close to Homes for older and
18 younger youth?

19 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Typically we try
20 keep the older youth separated from the younger
21 youth. And we have a designated facility for younger
22 youth. So we do understand that the development
23 should be separated. So (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

24

25

1 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How are you doing that?

2
3 Because what I was... that's not the experience I've
4 gotten from what the providers have been saying.

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We try to keep
6 the middle school kids together. So, during our
7 intake process we have a... we assign... when kids
8 are newly placed with us we have an intake worker,
9 those intake workers go out, interview kids, look at
10 their profile. And depending on how they look, we do
11 our best to assign kids by sight. However, you know,
12 we do also have to be conscious, there may be some
13 ,you know, challenges that kids come with from the
14 community, so placing kids together from the same
15 community could be a little bit challenging - or
16 opposing gangs. So we take all that into
17 consideration. And at times we may end up with one or
18 two kids who are younger. We haven't seen a
19 significant back set for that. There are times ,you
20 know, minimally where kids who are younger tend to
21 follow the older crowd, but, you know... you know,
22 we haven't seen a huge issue in this area.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Definitely want to make sure
24 that we keep our eye on that, because I don't want it
25 to... I don't want us to wait until there is an issue

1
2 for us to address it. So, definitely we need to
3 figure... make sure we're monitoring that, and
4 figuring it out, and thinking about solutions before
5 things happen. Because I am very much a solution
6 oriented person, and I don't want to be sitting here
7 a year from now having a hearing on an incident that
8 took place because we weren't being proactive. So,
9 definitely want to make sure we keep an eye on that,
10 because that was another concern that providers have
11 brought up. And, again, there hasn't been an
12 incident, but we don't want it to be an incident
13 either.

14 In the Mayor's November 2023 Fiscal Plan, Close
15 to Home baselined funding was reduced by \$7.2 million
16 starting in Fiscal 2025. ACS cited underutilization
17 of Close to Home programs as the reason for the cut.
18 What are the root causes for underutilization of
19 Close to Home? Because I just... I... even before
20 you answer this, I just want to say, I am concerned
21 because we are seeing a huge rise in juvenile
22 detention centers. And then to then say that there's
23 underutilization for Close to Home, I am concerned
24 that we're not using all the tools in our toolbox to
25 ensure that we are not placing young people in these

1
2 programs, and now we're saying it's underutilization,
3 because the math is not mathing. Because we're at 80
4 percent capacity at the Horizon sites, but we're
5 saying that it's underutilization in the Close to
6 Homes programs. So, I need some real answers, please,
7 thank you.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Okay, so this...
9 thank you, thank you for this question. We would not
10 necessarily describe Close to Home as underutilized,
11 because we see it as a positive that the family court
12 is placing fewer youth in Close to Home placements.
13 The past few financial plans have instead worked to
14 right size the system, because we did have more
15 capacity than needed. We previously had 301 beds for
16 less than 100 youth, and our new contracts strengthen
17 resources for providers while bringing capacity more
18 in line with the need. We have about 100 youth in
19 placement, and the new system will have 147 beds.

20 As for your question about Horizon and
21 Crossroads, 98 percent of the kids who are in secured
22 detention are not eligible for Close to Home, because
23 they are... (CROSS-TALK)

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, then what's... then why
3 are we not pushing that 2 percent out then to the
4 Close to Home programs? That's my thing, right?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: (INAUDIBLE)...
6 (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because, if we're going to
8 talk about capacity and stuff like that, because I
9 get it, I keep hearing this, they're like, oh, 80
10 percent, they're gun charges, dah, dah, dah, so then
11 why are we not focusing on making sure we can pull
12 out those other young people, so that we could have
13 more capacity? Because we literally... and I'm
14 concerned, because, as we all know, we are expanding
15 Horizon. And everyone knows I am not for that,
16 because that is going to... if we build it they will
17 come. So, if you're saying 98 percent are not
18 eligible, then why is that 2 percent not being
19 referred to the Close to Home programs? Because then
20 that still brings it down to 96. So I okay, I...

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Okay, I can explain
22 that. So, before you get placed, you are... the kids
23 are held in detention. So the family court judges
24 have a choice of entering an order for nonsecure
25 detention or secure detention. Generally the two

1
2 percent of the family court kids who are in secure
3 detention are... do then transition to Close to Home
4 once they... their disposition is concluded. The
5 length of stay for the kids who are in secure
6 detention on the family court cases is much shorter.
7 So their stay in secure detention is generally much,
8 much shorter than the young people who have their
9 cases heard in the adult court system. And they come
10 on the order of the family court judge to secure,
11 once that case finishes disposition, they move to
12 Close to Home. So, that population is much... they
13 circulate much more quickly through secure detention
14 and then go to Close to Home.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That was a lot. But, I'm
16 going to say again, even if they're circulating more
17 quickly through the secure detention, if we need
18 to... and we're talking about capacity, to me it
19 makes sense to refer them out. You guys did say that
20 you have a good relationship with the court, so we
21 should definitely be trying to use those
22 relationships to say we are at capacity, how do we
23 make sure young people who qualify can go into these
24 facilities - instead of having a short stay in secure
25 detention?

1
2 So, that's just my suggestion, but we definitely
3 are going to have to work it out, because it's still
4 does not make sense to me. Because I am very, very
5 concerned - and even when I had the conversations
6 with the Commissioner when they told me about
7 building it, I understand that they're in a situation
8 where they're at capacity. And, so, for me, we have
9 to be creative about what a real decarceration plan
10 looks like for juvenile justice. And I do not feel
11 like, as a whole, and all players, not just ACS, but
12 all players, in this need to be at the table figuring
13 out what that looks like. Because, I am very
14 concerned that where we're talking about closing
15 Rikers Island, and that's a decarceration plan, at
16 the same time we're expanding Horizons. That's a
17 problem. So we need to be solving for that in
18 addition to doing other things. So, I hear you and
19 understand that, but, again, if that two percent does
20 not need to be in secure detention, because it's
21 going to be a much faster turnaround, we need to be
22 thinking about how we then push for that.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Right. So, we agree
24 with you. And we have essentially diverted all the
25 family court young people who used to be in secure

1 detention to nonsecure detention. So, all the police-
2 admits who historically went to secure detention, now
3 go to nonsecure detention. And almost the entire
4 family court population that is detained is... if
5 they are detained, are in nonsecure detention. But,
6 there is a difference between a pre and post-
7 sentenced young person. So, they can't go to Close to
8 Home until they are... the case finishes disposition.

9
10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, we are
12 certainly in conversation with the family court
13 judges, and when we see a young person who is there
14 for any what we consider an extended period of time,
15 which is very short, we do notify the courts and try
16 to work with the courts and counsel to expedite.
17 We're also talking to corporation counsel about
18 expediting those dispositions, so their stays in
19 secure detention are as short as possible.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: It's interesting, because I
21 had a conversation and, this is a little bit off
22 topic, but I had a conversation with some of the
23 legal providers, and they were stating that they're
24 seeing a trend now where even - specifically around
25 the young people being transported back after court -

1
2 being transport reported back to the precinct and are
3 staying there for, uh, after there's a court case.

4 So, there there's young people who are being in
5 precincts for up to 48 hours not having secure places
6 to sleep, because ACS hasn't picked them up to take
7 them to whatever - whether it's a secure detention or
8 nonsecure detention.

9 Can you just talk a little bit about that,
10 because that is one of the concerns that the legal
11 providers were explaining to me. And they're saying
12 they're seeing an uptick specifically in the Bronx,
13 where they feel like some of the police officers who
14 are supposed to take them... So, can you talk about
15 your relationship with the precinct and different
16 folks like that, please?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes, so we have
18 been in conversation with the providers about this.
19 As far as we know this is only happening in the
20 Bronx. This is not a family court... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, they... No, they said
22 it's happening... it's an uptick in the Bronx, but
23 they've seen it in Staten Island and Manhattan as
24 well... and Brooklyn. It has been happening more in
25

1
2 the Bronx though they said. And I'm on that, too,
3 don't worry.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, we... this is
5 not a family court population. These are young people
6 who are being arraigned in the criminal courts. We
7 have been in conversation with NYPD. Apparently this
8 stemmed from a miscommunication, because what is
9 supposed to happen after... when a young person is
10 arraigned in the criminal court system, their custody
11 is transferred from NYPD to the DOC (Department of
12 Correction). DOC holds them for... and notifies ACS
13 for the pickup. There have been a few outlier cases
14 where the NYPD has retained custody and not released
15 them to Doc. So, they did not notify ACS that the
16 person had been arraigned for pickup. ACS is
17 available for pickup of young people all of the hours
18 that the criminal courts and the family courts are
19 open. So there is no situation where ACS has been
20 notified of a young person post arraignment that we
21 have not picked them up. So, we are working with NYPD
22 to end this practice. I think that there was just
23 some miscommunication at some levels from some of the
24 NYPD players in the court houses to some precincts.

1
2 But, we... I'm hopeful that by the end of this
3 month, we will have this issue fully resolved.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, and I don't... and
5 you're saying it's a few, but from the legal
6 providers, that's not what they're hearing. So, I
7 think there's a little to disconnect there. But, one
8 is too many for me. Right? I think we need to just
9 make sure that we're thinking about what this looks
10 like moving forward and then how we solve for
11 solutions. Because, I... you know, we don't want
12 young people sleeping on a bench...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We agree...

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: or doing all the things...
15 like, that's just really just unacceptable to me.

16 What's the relationship with ACS and Criminal
17 Court? Why are young people going to secure detention
18 when we have nonsecure detentions that are run by
19 nonprofits in the community?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: (BACKGROUND NOISE)
21 I'm sorry can you repeat the last...

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Why are youth going to
23 secure detentions when we have nonsecure detentions
24 that are run by nonprofits in the community? Because
25 you said before that they'll go to secure detention,

1
2 but we have the nonsecure detention systems that are
3 run by nonprofits. Why are we not using those a
4 little bit more?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Okay, so nonsecure
6 detention is only permissible by law for juvenile
7 delinquents - those are young people who are
8 prosecuted in the family court system. Young people
9 who are prosecuted in the adult court system, there
10 are two classifications, juvenile offenders aged 13
11 to 15 charged with the most serious violent crimes
12 and adolescent offenders for are 16 and 17-year-olds
13 charged with any felony. The law only provides... if
14 those young people... if the court enters a detainer
15 on those young people, they must go to secure.
16 There's no nonsecure option for them. Many young
17 people, though, in the youth parts in criminal court
18 are being referred to community-based alternative to
19 detention programs. So, there are many young people
20 who are prosecuted in the adult court system who are
21 in the community. But, if the court detains them, the
22 only legal option is secure detention.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How did the November PEGs
24 impact the slots estimated and recently announced
25 Close to Home awards?

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2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The PEGs did not
3 impact Close to Home. When it comes to capacity, we
4 actually were just, uh, again not utilizing all our
5 capacity. So, we still had room to get kids. So, we
6 didn't really have any negative impact from it.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But, you just said that it
8 wasn't because of underutilization. So, how...
9 explain that to me, please.

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, we had 201
11 beds or had... or today we had 20 per... at the time
12 of the PEGs, we had about 230 beds. So, at that point
13 we were about 20 to 30 percent utilization rate Close
14 to Home. So, reducing the numbers to 201 beds today
15 really did not impact our overall functioning in the
16 system.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm going leave it there,
18 because we just had this the question before that we
19 talked (BACKGROUND NOISE) that about it wasn't
20 underutilization, and we should be thinking about it.

21 Because of the things the provider said that
22 really stuck out to me is ,you know, we see the
23 increase. We know the increase. But, especially when
24 we're taking beds offline, it's not like we can bring
25 them back online. So, I fear that we're not

1 evaluating the system accurately, because we want...
2 because we have to find money. Right? And that's a
3 big part of it, and so it's easy to say
4 underutilization; although, a question ago, you guys
5 just said that it wasn't underutilization. But, we
6 are at a place where ,you know, we're reducing these
7 numbers, and we're not going to be able to get them
8 back if we need them.

9
10 So, I just... I'll leave that there, uh, because
11 we just ,you know...

12 What is the per participant rate for nonsecure
13 placement, uh, limited secure placement, and
14 transitional residence care? How much have those
15 rates increased or decreased since the last
16 (BACKGROUND NOISE) RFP?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: You wanted to
18 know what the rates were for... (CROSS-TALK)

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Nonsecure placement.

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, currently the
21 rate for... the daily rate for nonsecure placement is
22 \$943... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Per day?

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Per day, yes. And
25 limited secure placement rates are \$1,145 per day.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And transitional and
3 residential care?

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: That's going...
5 today we don't have that, but in the new fiscal year,
6 it is going to be about \$1,153.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How much has the rate
8 increased or decreased since the last RFP?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, this is the
10 first time we're having an RFP, so this the rate...
11 the daily rate will be \$1,011 for nonsecure
12 placement. And for limited secure placement, it is
13 going to be \$992... daily rate.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, wait, say that again?
15 So it's \$1,100? So it increased by like \$100?

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Uh, for NSP, it
17 went from \$943 to \$1,011.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: \$1,011? So like \$200? So
19 that was for inflation? I'm just... I'm asking
20 because those numbers seem very similar. And how did
21 you come to that rate?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, they are
23 similar, but we have to think about our overall
24 system. So, we were overly... we had like 30
25 facilities on site, and we reduced them now to 14.

1
2 So, the rates are probably more competitive today
3 than they were in the past.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes. And even with that
5 rate, and I'm happy you brought up the noncompetitive
6 so the RFP in 2023 had 36 beds in Queens; 39 in the
7 Bronx; 54 in Brooklyn; six in Staten Island; and zero
8 in Manhattan. How did ACS determine the slots needed
9 in each borough? Because what I'm hearing is that
10 there is a significant decrease in Queens,

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But there's...
12 so, the way we came up with the numbers was based on
13 how many kids have been placed in our care. So going
14 back in calendar year 2023, we had a total of 111
15 youth that were placed in Close to Home - 37 were
16 from the Bronx; 27 from Brooklyn; 10 from Manhattan;
17 24 from Queens; and five from Staten Island. So
18 that's how we came up with the numbers of beds that
19 we needed in each borough.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm concerned, because
21 it's... specifically in Queens, and when you think
22 about Staten Island the whole point of the program
23 and ,you know, we think about the reasoning that
24 the... this came about from the task force was to
25 place young people close to their communities. And if

1
2 we're reducing the numbers in specific boroughs that
3 is going to have a significant impact, because now
4 they are far out of their communities - which we know
5 is important for them to be close to their
6 communities and their families and the impact is
7 going to have. So with this decrease, I'm concerned
8 what that's going to look like.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, there's
10 essentially an equivalent number of available beds in
11 going into the RFP in Queens and the Bronx. There are
12 39 beds in the Bronx, there are 36 beds in Queens,
13 there are 54 in Brooklyn. So, I think essentially
14 what we did is we looked at where the young people
15 were coming from, and we tried to proportionally
16 allocate beds in the boroughs where they live. So we
17 should not see... because we had many beds that were
18 not being filled, we are looking to have enough beds
19 that will be filled by young people as close to their
20 home as possible.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want to say - and I
22 have a Queen's person here, so I'm sure she's going
23 to ask questions about it - but if I'm a person in
24 Queens and I have to go to the Bronx, and I...
25 especially a lot of these folks come on public

1 transportation, that is like going up state. So, if
2 these beds fill up, then we're going to have to then
3 place them even further, which we do have some
4 upstate. So, that to me should have been taken in
5 consideration, not just with ,like, oh we see these
6 trends. Because we know trends change, things happen,
7 and then we will have to place them in far parts. So
8 that is a concern and one of the red flags that a lot
9 of providers flagged for us as we were preparing for
10 this hearing. So, I think we have to be cognizant of
11 that, because, again, like the provider said, once we
12 reduce these beds and they're no longer there, we
13 can't be ,like, okay, we see a trend, let's get these
14 beds back online. We know that's not the case. So,
15 what would be the alternative? And the alternative is
16 going to be that these young people are going to have
17 to leave their community. And it's literally in the
18 name "Close to Home". It's literally in the name. We
19 want them close to their homes.

21 So. I want to make sure that we are cognizant of
22 those things when we're kind of rolling those things
23 out.

24

25

1
2 I'm going to ask a couple more questions, and
3 then I will turn it over to my... well, only one...
4 do you guys have questions?

5 Okay great, I will turn it over to my colleagues
6 at this time. And I'll come back, because I have a
7 number of more question.

8 Council Member Williams?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Hello.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Good morning.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I just wanted to know
12 the transitional residential care that is what you're
13 saying you're RFPing out now, right?

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, the award
15 was already given.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Oh, so how many of those
17 facilities do you have?

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: At this time only
19 one.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Where is it?

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: It's in Staten
22 Island.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Then what is the
24 plan to create more of those facilities?

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well... (CROSS-
3 TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Well, how many more do
5 you plan to create?

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, maybe not
7 necessarily create more, maybe increase the capacity
8 depending on how many youth we can get in there and
9 the success of the program and the need of it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. I'm trying to
11 figure out what the name of the facility was. I know
12 HeartShare St. Vincent's, or HSVS, one of... I know
13 they have multiple names, they were trying to open up
14 a residential facility for young people. But, I'm not
15 sure if it was the TRC or something else. Do you know
16 what the facility was? I don't know, I'm just asking.
17 Do you know what it was? I see (INAUDIBLE) back there
18 shaking her head.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yeah, it's not a
20 part of our... (CROSS-TALK)

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Oh, it's not part of
22 ACS at all... (CROSS-TALK)

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: continuum...
24 (CROSS-TALK)

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Something completely
3 different? (CROSS-TALK)

4 UNKNOWN: (NO MIC) it's not (INAUDIBLE)

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, cool. I just
6 wanted to know if it was the same thing.

7 Okay, what is ACS doing to ensure that older
8 youth at Close to Home have access to GED and
9 vocational training programs at all CTH facilities?

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, through
11 District 79 we are working with them to offer GED
12 exams to our kids. They do prep our GED - our GED
13 students who are... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm, in that age...
15 (CROSS-TALK)

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: In that GED
17 track... (CROSS-TALK)

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm.

19 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: However, our
20 providers, if they feel like the youth should be on a
21 GED track, they're able to refer that young men or
22 woman to the community and get GED schooling.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. How is ACS
24 addressing staff retention issues at Close to Home
25 facilities given what appears to be high staff

1 turnover rate? And what is ACS doing to ensure the
2 continuity of Close to Home staff?

3
4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, the RFP
5 actually includes increased rates for staff salaries.
6 We're very appreciative of the 3 percent COLA that
7 was awarded this year, and we are hopeful that those
8 things together will help with staff retention. We
9 are in conversation with the providers about
10 providing... supporting them with additional
11 training for their staff to allow for ,you know,
12 issues that have not necessarily arisen in the past,
13 but that they're currently facing.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And, I'm sorry, the RFP
15 is currently open or it was just awarded? The new
16 Close to Home RFP was just it awarded? (CROSS-TALK)

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: It was awarded and
18 begins in July.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. What Is ACS doing
20 to meet the needs of crossover youth in Close to Home
21 - that is young people in foster care who also have
22 juvenile delinquency cases? Uh, given that youth are
23 being held at Close to Home placement longer than
24 necessary waiting for foster care placement,
25 discharge planning must start earlier. Has ACS the

1
2 identified barriers to finding foster care placement
3 for these youth? And how does ACS support families
4 with voluntary placements who may be willing to take
5 their child home with services after Close to Home
6 placement?

7 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, when it comes
8 to crossover youth, we try to make sure that we keep
9 the foster care agency involved from the moment the
10 youth enters our facility. So, we want to make sure
11 that they participate in our conference, that they
12 meet with the youth in person. We do have a person
13 who monitors the crossover cases within ACS, so if
14 we're having challenges we will reach out to that
15 person so that they can help bridge the gap. We
16 provide as much information as possible to the foster
17 care agencies, so that they can find that young man
18 or woman a foster care placement, so that they don't
19 linger in our system. There are times that we do find
20 challenges and that the youth is stayed much longer
21 in our system than we would like. So ,you know, we're
22 trying to continuously work with our partners within
23 ACS and foster care agencies to try to make sure that
24 the kids don't linger.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And what about the
3 voluntary placement - so, for families who are
4 willing to take their children back who have had
5 services at Close to Home?

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, if kids are
7 in our system and the families are requesting
8 voluntary... Close to Home specifically doesn't do
9 it, but we do reach out to the parts of the agencies
10 that manage them.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: What can be done to fund
12 more alternative to placement programs and slots in
13 the community so that less youth are placed within
14 Close to Home? Why have so many of these... I think
15 this question (TIMER CHIMES) was kind of answered.

16 I can stop there and come back if there's a
17 second round.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, keep going.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, regarding the plan
20 decrease in the number of Close to Home beds, and at
21 the same time the plan construction to increase
22 capacity of the Horizon detention facility, why can't
23 underutilized Close to Home beds be used instead of
24 increasing the size of a detention facility? Would
25 ACS be willing to explore this option with the state?

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2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, that's really a
3 legal question.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, Horizon is a
6 detention facility, which means it's pre-sentence
7 pre-disposition. And we can't... you can't go to
8 Close to Home until the court has reached disposition
9 in a family court case. Most of the young people -
10 the vast majority of young people in secure detention
11 are not in family court, and their only option is
12 secure detention if they are detained.

13 So, we are open to exploring all options, but
14 that would require a change both in the Family Court
15 Act and the Criminal Procedure Law.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So, are you saying that
17 the law needs to be changed, or are you just saying
18 that it's a judicial decision making process? (CROSS-
19 TALK)

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, Close to Home
21 is a post sentence option. So, it only is available
22 to family court kids. So... (CROSS-TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay... (CROSS-TALK)

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: You have to have a
25 case pending in Family Court to go to Close to Home.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So all the young folks
3 who are in Horizon, they are in criminal court or
4 family court? (CROSS-TALK)

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes, 98 percent of
6 them are in criminal court... (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: (INAUDIBLE) Okay. How
8 many girls are in Close to Home, and are they
9 effectively isolated? What is ACS doing to prevent
10 isolation if they are being isolated in ways that are
11 harmful?

12 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We have 15 girls.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Fifteen?

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yes. We don't use
15 isolation in our system.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Close to Home was
17 envisioned to connect youth to services in their
18 communities while incarcerated to facilitate
19 continuity upon discharge, is that happening? If not
20 what can be done to make it happen?

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, our providers
22 provide both residential and aftercare. So, when the
23 youth is placed with the facility they continue to
24 work with that youth until they end their
25 dispositional order.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, uh, last question,
3 why has the discharge rate to aftercare decreased? Is
4 it a lack of adequate programming for the youth in
5 Close to Home?

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: I wouldn't say
7 that the discharges are decreasing, it's just that
8 they all ,like, that number is going to change month
9 to month depending on when the youth came into our
10 system, because they typically spend eight to nine
11 months in in the facility. So, if you have a low
12 number month, it may be that we just got less kids
13 throughout that period.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you so much.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you, the Chair had to
16 step out for a minute, so she's asked me to
17 temporarily chair. So, I'm going to turn it over to
18 Council Member Lee for her questions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi, thank you. So, my
20 questions are going to be focused around more of the
21 mental health cognitive behavior of evidence-based
22 therapy, as well as OASAS (Office of Addiction
23 Services and Supports) substance abuse questions.
24 Because, one thing I've noticed, and this is
25 regarding treatment courts across the age

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2 demographic, whether you're talking about veterans,
3 whether you're talking about adults. And, similarly I
4 was just wondering, because understanding is that the
5 treatment courts are an effective tool, they're not
6 utilized enough, and I'm just wondering what that
7 process looks like in terms of the screening - if
8 they have, specifically, more mental health related
9 issues, uh, what type.... what does that look like?
10 And, then how do they get treated after that?

11 And if you could just walk me through that
12 process - and are there enough mental health
13 professionals who are there?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: You're asking about
15 the court process?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: The court process and then
17 also the handoff.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, family court,
19 unlike criminal court, is really more like a problem
20 solving court. So, for kids who present with higher
21 needs, the court can access the... each court has a
22 mental health clinic. So, they can order, if they
23 have concerns about that, they can order a mental
24 health evaluation on the young person to help them
25 inform what dispositional plan should look like. And

1 because the Family Court Act requires an analysis of
2 what the least restrictive alternative is, given the
3 needs of the young person and public safety issues.
4 Each Family Court judge is charged with identifying
5 the issues, getting the information both from the
6 mental health professionals in the courthouse and
7 probation to determine whether or not the child's
8 needs can be met in the community with services that
9 are available in the community continuum - Or a
10 placement order may need to be issued, and then the
11 dispositional plan may designate certain services
12 that they want provided while the young person is in
13 Close to Home - or the Close to Home providers, along
14 with ACS staff, will designate which services should
15 be provided to meet that young person's need. And
16 there are specific Close to Home facilities that are
17 designated for young people with specified needs-
18 like developmental disabilities, or other issues.

19 One of the things that we built into the RFP was
20 additional mental health professionals for the
21 providers along with individuals who are trained in
22 substance misuse who can address those young people's
23 needs.
24

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Because, I noticed... So,
3 going back, because one of the answers that you
4 provided earlier mentioned that sometimes it's not
5 always that the folks are... the younger folks are
6 screened for those types of perhaps potential mental
7 health issues. But, shouldn't they all be screened?
8 Or, is it based on what documents you receive from
9 the family courts and their evaluations. And then, on
10 based on that, is that how you determine if certain
11 folks need to be screened for other services?

12 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah, they...
13 they're all screened. So, when they come to us, they
14 do have... most young people has a mental health
15 assessment. However, when... and we get a copy of it.
16 However, when they reach the facility, uh the
17 providers...(CROSS-TALK)

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: All right, and what does that
19 assessment look like?

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The mental
21 health? Uh, it is done by a psychiatrist or a
22 psychologist, and it's a very detailed report that
23 describes the youth's history, how they came to us,
24 it describes their educational component,
25 psychosocial components, and if they have trauma or

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2 not, uh, as well as our partners in Bellevue, who are
3 also in detention, would also meet with the kids if
4 they need another assessment - and they will share
5 that with us as well. Then the providers have all
6 that information, and their psychiatrist would also
7 meet with the with the youth.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: And then also, if you could
9 just talk a little bit about what your sort of
10 relationship is and coordination with perhaps either
11 DOHMH (Department of Health and Mental Hygiene) or
12 OASAS at the state level when it comes to the care,
13 and the programming, and the ,you know, comprehensive
14 care around some of the youth in these programs?

15 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, our
16 relationships with them is ,like, if we have to refer
17 a youth that has a higher level of mental health,
18 and we need to put them in RTC, uh, we'll reach out
19 to OMH, discuss the case, try to see if they fit the
20 program. Uh, the same is with the OASAS, if they need
21 an inpatient program, we would try to communicate
22 with them and collaborate and see if we can get the
23 youth in that program.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Then is that the same also
3 with OPWDD (Office for People With Developmental
4 Disabilities)? (TIMER CHIMES)

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yes... (CROSS-
6 TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Then is there any sort
8 of coordination at the City level?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, we are in
10 conversation as a system consistently with ,you know,
11 with our state partners and our city partners. So, as
12 we identify gaps in the system, or an increasing
13 need, we are in conversation with our State and City
14 partners as to how to meet that need. So, some of
15 that need is met in the community; there's obviously
16 lots of discussion about creating a stronger
17 continuum from community through placement, uh, for
18 these young people to access. So that conversation is
19 ongoing.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Sorry just one more,
21 Chair.

22 Aside from the individual cases that you have.
23 are there more coordinated efforts ,like, I hate the
24 word *task force*, but some kind of task force or some
25 sort of regular ongoing meeting to evaluate how the

1
2 systems amongst each other are working in terms of
3 coordination?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, we are in
5 regular conversation with... I'll give you an
6 example - So, we've been working with um with OASAS
7 and DOHMH on drug substance misuse issues, on Narcan
8 training; we are in conversation as a coalition
9 discussing how the continuum of services are either
10 meeting or not meeting young people's mental health
11 needs and family needs. Many of our community-based
12 services are in conversation with the mental health
13 continuum, because there's so much overlap between
14 family friction issues and mental health. So, we are
15 in constant coordination with the mental health
16 system to access supports that ACS may not be in a
17 position to access when the needs get to a certain
18 level.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. In terms of the
20 providers that you awarded for the RFPs, was... and
21 forgive me for not reading about this ahead of time,
22 but were there requirements in the RFP to make sure
23 that the providers have either licensed professionals
24 or the Article 31, or their necessary licenses to
25 offer the services?

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2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yes, they
3 require... (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Then, also another
5 thing in terms of the beds, because one of the things
6 that you were all talking about is, uh, the capacity
7 to increase, was... I just want to throw this out
8 there, because I feel like with this population also
9 there's not enough of what's equivalent to the crisis
10 respite centers - but specifically for youth.

11 Because, I believe there's only about 15 beds in the
12 city. And we put something out last year requiring
13 the city to expand that, but I'd be curious to know
14 if some of those beds could be almost used in that
15 similar type model where if there are beds that are
16 not filled, which I would think that they would be,
17 but if not, are there different similar services that
18 the beds could be used for? Because right now there's
19 not enough places for them to go in case of emergency
20 or anything else.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: ACS does have some
22 respite beds; they are available, they can be used as
23 a diversion. If a court orders a placement in Close
24 to Home, respite is not part of that continuum. But,

1
2 a court can work with counsel to allow for a respite
3 referral.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, if the court is
6 willing to allow a less restrictive placement for the
7 young person, than that's possible.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, interesting, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Council Member Menin?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Great, thank you so much.

11 So, you mentioned earlier in your testimony that
12 young people who are part of the Close to Home
13 program have access to after school activities, trips
14 et cetera. Can you be specific ? What percentage of
15 young people are being offered these opportunities?

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, all the kids
17 that are attending Passages Academy are offered these
18 opportunities. So, essentially all the kids that are
19 at Bronx Hope and at Belmont.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: And what about the other
21 young people in the program?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The kids at
23 Greenburgh Eleven, uh, they do have After-School, and
24 they do participate, but it's through Greenburgh
25 Eleven.

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COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: I'm sorry, I couldn't hear?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: It's through Greenberg Eleven, which is...

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: I see...

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The private school that's on the Dobbs Ferry campus.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay. In terms of proximity to families, since that is obviously one of the policy reasons behind this program, can you specifically indicate how close young people are to their families and how many are regularly seeing their families?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, I don't have that exact data, but we can get back to you on it. But, most families are less than an hour from their youth in the placement site.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: So, when you say most families are less than an hour...

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yes (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: The majority of families...

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Are close...

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: And what about the other?

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ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, we have some kids in Westchester, which is about 20 minutes from the Bronx, so those would be kids who are most further away.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Can you provide to the Committee the specific numbers of young people who... and the distance? Because, I think that is very relevant. Also, can you provide, in terms of after school programming, you mentioned in the beginning when you were speaking with the Chair, that you're offering... I would love to see specifically what after school programs are being offered to how many students, and if you could be specific about that, please? Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Just to clarify a little bit, so the NSP kids go to either Bronx Hope or Belmont, and the after school programs happen at those sites. All of those kids in those facilities have access to the after school programs. So, we don't pick and choose populations. If you're in the building, you have access to after school programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, understood, thank you for clarifying that.

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2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: All right, I have I still
3 have a number of questions.

4 Council Member Williams started to allude to some
5 of these questions, but we want to dig a little bit
6 more into the staffing piece.

7 Providers have shared that there's a high staff
8 turnover for CTH facilities, because the pay is low
9 and the work is very demanding. (INAUDIBLE) conducted
10 a work comprehensive survey in 2022 and found that
11 staff is, in voluntary agencies like CTH with high
12 higher school degrees or GEDs are starting at \$15,000
13 less than ACS counterparts. What is, if anything, is
14 being done to address the staff salaries?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: ACS of course
16 appreciates the work of our Close to Home providers,
17 and we understand that the job is demanding and that
18 it's very important for staff to be adequately
19 compensated. Our new RFP for contracts, beginning
20 July 1st of this year, has allocation for increased
21 staff salaries. We additionally provided funding
22 specifically for an Education Specialist, a
23 Programming Specialist, and a Behavioral Health
24 Specialist. And, we are, as we mentioned, grateful to
25 the Mayor for including the 3 percent COLAS over the

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2 next three years. The new Close to Home contracts
3 enable the providers to increase compensation for
4 staff, and we believe that they are in the process of
5 allocating that new money for salaries. So, we hope
6 that that will mitigate against some of these issues.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And just even thinking about
8 that, because I know you're saying that there was
9 money increased for salaries. What... did ACS provide
10 a sample budget of what that could look like to
11 providers to show what that breakdown can look like?
12 Because, and that's why I say sample, because ,you
13 know, sometimes you might think like, oh, they can
14 increase salaries. Is there an example that they can
15 look to?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We're in
17 conversation with the providers, and it is our
18 understanding that they have already allocated...

19 (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, absolutely... (CROSS-
21 TALK)

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: the money for staff
23 salaries. So, they seem to know how to proceed in
24 this area... (CROSS-TALK)

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2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But that's not what I asked.
3 So, obviously providers know how to proceed in the
4 area, but I think specifically when we're thinking
5 about RFPs, and when we're gearing up, that a lot of
6 times agencies will say like, "Oh, we gave an
7 increase," but we know, especially with costs rising,
8 and rents and all the things that they have to
9 account for, sometimes it is an increase, but it
10 can't go to salaries (INAUDIBLE) other things. So, I
11 would have loved to see some type of sample that you
12 could have given providers to kind of help with that
13 guidance. Just ,you know, just best practices - no
14 one is doing it, so this is not (INAUDIBLE) ACS - no
15 one is doing it. This is something that I'm pushing,
16 because I think that it's important, especially as
17 agencies, that we are modeling what we want to see.

18 Uh, the next question is, are there baseline
19 Close to Home staffing hiring requirements? For
20 example, are staff required to have a degree in
21 education fields, or several years of experience with
22 juvenile-involved justice... involved youth?

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We do have
24 staffing requirements that require... certain
25

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2 positions do require certain educational
3 requirements... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Could you give some examples
5 of that, please?

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: For example,
7 social work workers, we require them to have a
8 master's level; case planners, they should require a
9 bachelor's level degree. And the YDA staff, uh, the
10 frontline staff should have a high school or GED
11 equivalence.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I mean, so one of the things
13 that I know when I was talking to providers that they
14 were very concerned about is that when you look...
15 it's very similar work to places like Horizon and
16 Crossroads, and they're getting paid a lot higher
17 salary. So, staff is literally migrating to those
18 areas, because they can just get paid more. So, that
19 is also a part of retention, and I'm I want us to
20 also be mindful and think about what it looks like to
21 ensure that there's equity. Because if I can go do
22 pretty much the same job here and make double the
23 money - well not double, it's a little bit more
24 money, but not double, I'm taking it too far - and
25 make more money then, obviously they're going to

1 recruit. So, now I just want to point out, you are
2 the funders who are now recruiting for the same
3 staff. So, it becomes a double entendre, so we've
4 really got to get to a place where pay parity is
5 something that we're moving towards. Because ,you
6 know, one of the things that I found when we were
7 doing research, and we were going through some of the
8 documents, I found it really very interesting that
9 Close to Home, uh, the task force said that it was
10 cost effective. So, that means even in the imagining
11 of this we knew that this was going to be... we were
12 going to be paying people less. And that's not your
13 fault, that is what the task force said, because it's
14 cheaper to do this, and so we should move in this
15 direction. Obviously it has other benefits, too. I
16 don't want to... I don't want to try to side like
17 that. But, if we are going with the thought of
18 thinking that we're going to come in and save money,
19 uh, that is already putting us at a disadvantage.

21 So, I just wanted to make sure that I highlighted
22 that. And, again, that was not something that came
23 from ACS, that came out of the task force who said,
24 "this is a cost effective mechanism that we're
25 putting in place." So, I don't think I let you

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2 answer the question, because I started rambling. Did
3 you answer the question?

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yes, we...

5 (CROSS-TALK)

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, great

7 In the new RFP, staffing ratios were reduced from
8 8 to one to three to one. Why were the staffing
9 ratios changed, and does the reduction jeopardize
10 staff safety?

11 And I just want to say that providers have been
12 in to the staff reduction, but I just wanted to have
13 a conversation about it.

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, the staffing
15 ratio is changed so that instead of eight youth to
16 one staff, there's now three to one youth, there's
17 more staff. We made the change, because we appreciate
18 that the youth in Close to Home are now older, due to
19 Raise the Age, and presenting more challenges, given
20 the impact of Raise the Age. We think this new
21 staffing ratio will make staff more safe, make youth
22 more safe, and help address some of the staffing
23 issues our providers were facing.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: According to the PMMR,
25 youth on staff assault increased from 2023 to 2024.

1
2 What is being done to (BACKGROUND NOISE) train and
3 protect staff?

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: I'm sorry repeat
5 that again?

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The PMMR said that assaults
7 increased in 2023 to 2024 on staff. So, what are we
8 doing to protect and provide protection for staff in
9 these programs?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, staff in in the
11 provider agencies are trained in SEM, which is the
12 same training that is provided in secure detention.
13 We are aware that the training need is real. We are
14 actually in discussion now about moving at least one,
15 and maybe more, of our staff from secure detention to
16 make them available for training to the providers to
17 increase the opportunity and the frequency of SEM
18 training for staff in the Close to Home sites.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, this is something we're
20 going work towards? So, we're thinking about...
21 because, I know ,like, obviously your staff who are
22 in secure detention, they get specific training. So,
23 we're looking at ways that we can also help train
24 some of our Close to Home staffs with that same
25 training techniques?

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, they're already
3 trained. The Close to Home staff is already trained
4 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, no, no, I know they're
6 trained, but I was saying like are.... because I know
7 you just said that you're looking to have some of
8 those cross trainings... (CROSS-TALK)

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, that's something we're
11 already working on?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes, we are already
13 working on that.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Great, thank you.

15 Do CTH providers receive specific training on how
16 to manage gun or gang involved youth? Because I know
17 one of the things that the providers were mentioning
18 is that they've seen an increase in young people in
19 their facilities with gun charges. So, do we have
20 specific trainings? Are there things down the pipe to
21 kind of bolster that training and support?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: I'm going to say
23 this about young people who are involved in heavy
24 duty activities on the streets. Many of them are

1
2 drawn to that because of their own trauma
3 histories... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, absolutely.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, we... our
6 model across the continuum is a relational model and
7 building the core competencies of our young people,
8 so that they can build their self-esteem; so that
9 they can develop the skills that they need to engage
10 in their communities, uh, and be more supported. So,
11 because it is a counseling, uh, based approach, we
12 spend a lot of time, and we have spent a lot of time
13 in the provider agencies talking to the young people.
14 As the young people spend time in these facilities,
15 they learn to develop pro-social relationships with
16 adults, and they're connected to pro-social
17 activities. So, they start to see their futures in a
18 different way. And when they start to see their
19 futures in a different way, they are less likely to
20 attach to negative forces that are in the community.
21 So, the goal really is to replace the activities that
22 they might have been involved in before they come
23 into placement with activities that allow them to see
24 a positive future. So, reengaging them in school,
25 engaging them in vocational training, allowing them

1
2 to identify a future path for work, and to engage
3 with their families - and working on some of the
4 issues that they might have had with their families-
5 so that they can live peacefully with their families
6 upon reentry into the community. These are all
7 protective factors that allow these young people to
8 not go back to the same activities that they were
9 involved in when they came in.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I agree, and I think that
11 obviously we... therapeutic approach is always the
12 first step, and also when we're talking about young
13 people, especially who may be involved in gangs, it's
14 a lot of (INAUDIBLE), because they want to feel
15 connected. And I say it all the time, we have to find
16 other ways for them to be connected to positive
17 activities. But still just thinking... and when
18 talking to providers, they're saying there is a level
19 of care especially for the young people who are gun-
20 involved that they feel that is needed. So even with
21 that, I think we should still be thinking about if
22 that means some of the work we need to do is more
23 intense or whatever, but it is a place where I think
24 we should be kind of digging our heels into to think
25 about what other things we could do could do.

1
2 Because, this was a point of concern for providers,
3 so I think obviously what they're doing is
4 therapeutic and supportive, but we should just be
5 thinking about how we do it a little bit more
6 intensely. But thank you for your answer.

7 Staff has reported that young people who exit
8 detention facilities and enter CTH care are often
9 armed with contraband including weapons. Providers
10 have no way of screening young people upon entering,
11 because CTH facilities do not have metal detectors.
12 Has ACS explored screening young people before
13 entering Close to Home facilities? And does ACS
14 document when a young person enters Close to Home
15 armed with contraband?

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, youth
17 entering Close to Home, uh, the providers do have the
18 ability to search the youth. So all providers are
19 required to conduct what we call a personal search on
20 all youth entering their facility to ensure that they
21 have not concealed contraband. Personal searches
22 consists of pat/frisk searches and security searches,
23 which require a youth to change in to a robe after
24 removing his or her undergarment. The agencies are
25 also equipped with handheld metal detectors to detect

1 metal objects on a youth. And the question around if
2 we have a... we do Incident Reporting Unit where
3 providers call in to our hotline incidents that are
4 reportable.
5

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We have also
7 increased the intensity of the searches in secure for
8 youth coming in and out of those facilities. And
9 since implementing the enhanced search procedures, we
10 have seen many fewer youth leaving the facilities
11 with anything they should not have.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

13 Staffers have reported they do not have a secure
14 system, nor the capacity to transport youth to and
15 from court. What more can ACS do to provide staff
16 with the right vehicles and supports?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We have not
18 experienced a high level of challenge around this
19 area in our Close to Home program, uhm, you know...
20 (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You have not experienced or
22 the providers? Because this is what they are saying.
23 And these... (CROSS-TALK)

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: (INAUDIBLE)
25 providers... (CROSS-TALK)

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: there are... I'm telling you
3 now, I do not come up with these questions by myself.
4 So, the providers are saying that they are having
5 trouble, and this has been a difficulty. So...

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: And I know we've
7 experienced this in our nonsecure detention - most of
8 Close to Home providers are the same providers,
9 but... (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: All right, so you just said
11 it. They're the same providers, and they they're
12 struggling in one piece. Do you think they're not
13 struggling in the other piece? Maybe they're just not
14 saying it... (CROSS-TALK)

15 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, it's...
16 there's less court involvement, so when youth come
17 Close to Home, most of them don't have to go back and
18 forth to court... (CROSS-TALK)

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But, you... they're saying
20 that they're struggling... (CROSS-TALK)

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah, but ,you
22 know, we're... they haven't brought this to my
23 attention, and I'm always open to... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, great, I'm bringing it
25 to your attention.

1
2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, we will talk
3 to the Close to Home providers to discuss this
4 specifically to see what exactly the concerns are
5 around this area.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, let's talk about it,
7 and also let's come up with some solutions. I'm
8 telling you, I didn't make these questions up, I
9 promise you I did not, I promise y'all, I'm getting
10 this from the providers.

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But, just to add,
12 in our RFP we did add a transportation to their
13 budget.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, because I... I mean, I
15 think some of the concern was even thinking about
16 when it does happen with the staff ratios, and
17 especially because it's less ratios now. So, I think
18 there are some other factors in there that we also
19 need to consider. But, this was one of the things
20 that they did raise around it. So, they're probably
21 not going to court as much as probably the secure
22 detention, obviously, but the few times that they do
23 have to go there ,you know, it does become an issue.

24 But, again this is just a place where we can
25 find solutions.

1
2 One precaution providers have shared that would
3 ensure safety for both staff and youth, is keeping
4 defendants' name confidential for court hearing
5 appear appearances. Is this something CTA can
6 request? CCH can request?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, this is a
8 little bit more complicated, because...(CROSS-TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I don't think your mic is
10 on.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Sorry. In family
12 court the names are not available. So, I think that
13 this is a Criminal Court/Supreme Court issue. We
14 don't... we are certainly open to having these
15 conversations with the with the judges, but because
16 these... the young people are being prosecuted in the
17 adult system and facing adult sentences, even after
18 Raise the Age, unless they get youthful offender
19 treatment, which seals their cases, up until that
20 point the name are not confidential in the court
21 system. So, that would require a change outside of
22 our system. But, we are certainly open to
23 conversation with the judges about it.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Another place for us to do
25 work. We have so much stuff to do. We're about to be

1
2 your best friend. We have a lot of stuff and a lot of
3 solutions to come up. I am always open to sit down
4 and talk and come up with solutions, because it does
5 sound like that is something we should be thinking
6 about. Because I will say this, part of my district
7 is the courts in the Bronx, and we've had a lot of
8 activity outside the court houses. And, uh, it is an
9 issue even ,you know, for juveniles and for older
10 adults. And it's been a real issue, where we've had
11 fights outside. We've had shootouts. We've had a lot,
12 and so it has been... it's become a place where
13 they're like, "Oh, I know you're going to be here at
14 this day at this time, so this is when we're going to
15 get you." So, I think this is something that's not
16 just something that ACS needs to be thinking about. I
17 think a system overhaul is something we should be
18 talking about. So, definitely a place for us to
19 collaborate and come up with some solutions.

20 Which providers are currently contracted to
21 provide aftercare services?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, we have a
23 continuity of care model. So, the provider where the
24 youth enters the facility is the same provider that
25 will be providing the aftercare services.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

Providers have reported that young people who return home to their families can often fall into the same pattern of gang gun violence related violence that leads to high rates of recidivism. How do aftercare providers work with young people to help them avoid that cycle?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So aftercare services within Close to Home Initiative is comprised of supportive and sustainable services that are available to youth as they transition back to their home. Service aimed to create a smooth transition from residential to community settings. These services can include mental health and substance abuse, case management and support, uh, along with community based programming. Our youth are also connected to Fair Future coaches, and we also make sure that the providers, along with ACS, meet with the youth weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly depending on the youth's risk.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: And the Cure Violence providers work with the young people while they're in placement continue that relationship.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: All right, I have some
3 questions about that coming up.

4 Are aftercare providers trained and equipped to
5 respond to the needs of gangs and gun involved youth,
6 and does ACS keep track of youth who reenter the
7 Close to Home program? How many young people
8 reentered the program in 2023?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, the youth
10 who entered Close to Home placement in calendar year
11 2023, 92 percent of 102 youth were first time
12 admissions, and 9 percent, eight youth, had a
13 previous Close to Home placement.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And the aftercare
15 providers trained and equipped to address some of the
16 needs that they ,you know, get involved in
17 afterwards?

18 So, could you talk a little bit of about what
19 those services look like and what they're providing?

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Depending on the
21 youth needs... so we have providers who used the
22 multisystemic therapeutic model for use on aftercare.
23 We have providers who use family function therapy on
24 aftercare. Uh, we are also able to refer families to
25 preventive services during aftercare if that is

1
2 needed. We try to meet the youth's needs based on
3 their case plan and what would be... so maybe a
4 youth would rather go to The Door or the YMCA, so
5 we'll connect the youth to that type of programming
6 as well.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I think that that's even a
8 good place where... and where I feel like... we have
9 like DYCD and not just with Cure Violence. They have
10 all these other programs, and how are we placing them
11 into those programs and connecting them with those
12 providers? Because the other thing is, all of these
13 providers are the same people. We sometimes pretend
14 like they're not, they... the ones who are running
15 the nonsecure detention centers are running the
16 After-Schools, they're running the senior centers,
17 they're running the food pantries - like, they're
18 all the same people, but we put them in these boxes.
19 So ,you know, it's really thinking... they're also
20 running the homeless shelters. They're all the same
21 providers. And because we contract them differently,
22 we're interacting with them differently, so my goal,
23 before I get out of here - I'm talking about Council-
24 that we figure out how to break down those walls.
25 Because, it's really frustrating sometimes to hear

1
2 how we are just not using all these of things at our
3 disposal.

4 How does the agency ensure that aftercare
5 services are not only readily available but
6 satisfactory to former youth and their families? So,
7 what are we doing to make sure that it's useful and
8 it's just not a box that we're checking?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We do have
10 conferences with the families and the youth, and
11 their voices are infused in those conferences. So,
12 we make sure that whatever services are tailored that
13 they are in agreement, and if they're not in
14 agreement we hear why. We also take into account what
15 type of services they feel with benefit them. And we
16 have about five conferences throughout the life of
17 the case where youth and family are definitely in the
18 room talking about their needs.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: For youth who had their
20 aftercare placement revoked, is there a reevaluation
21 process, and do youth rejoin CTH programming, or are
22 they dropped from the program entirely?

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, uh, we
24 continue to offer services to youth until they
25 complete the program and beyond that as well - now

1
2 that we have Fair Futures, if a youth is returned,
3 they typically return back to the program that they
4 were in. We would hold a conference to talk about
5 what went well, what didn't, and talk about maybe
6 what's needed to be able to reintegrate the youth
7 back into the community.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Are there any patterns among
9 youth who break their release terms? If yes, what's
10 being done to better support youth and reduce
11 violations?

12 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: That would be the
13 same, bring the kid back into our facilities. So,
14 again if the youth is not complying, we we'll try to
15 engage the youth. If the youth is not engaging in the
16 community, will bring them back again to try to reset
17 the youth and continue to work with them.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: CCH providers have reported
19 a desperate need for more transitional housing. What
20 temporary housing options are available for youth
21 exiting residential care who are not returning to
22 their home settings? How do aftercare providers work
23 with young people to find temporary or permanent
24 housing?

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ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, for kids who are placed in nonsecure placement, they actually are able to qualify for special housing codes, uh, depending if their goal is independent living. So, they are able to get priority codes for, like, New York/New York III and things like that. We're also...
(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm sorry, what's what is the priority code? Could you explain what that means?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, a priority code is a code that our youth could get to kind of put them higher on the list. They will get a higher list number, so that they can get housing.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: A higher list number? Tell me... I'm sorry, explain to me, because I don't know what you're talking about. What list (INAUDIBLE) list... (CROSS-TALK)

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, there are certain... So, the way the housing... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Are you talking about like in a lottery?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We don't call it a lottery, but it's like a housing list that that HRA has... (LAUGHTER) (CROSS-TALK)

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2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Don't get me started, you
3 brought up the HRA. So, they... so we are just
4 putting them on list, because we know that ain't
5 (sic) going nowhere.

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah... (CROSS-
7 TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And don't say they are
9 getting a CityFHEPS voucher either, because we know
10 that's not happening either.

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, no, we
12 don't... I mean we've been able to get some kids
13 housing. However, like ,you know, it's very
14 challenging here in New York City to get permanent
15 housing for anyone. But we do get them on those
16 lists; we're not saying that it's expedited, but...
17 I mean, they're not going to get a home tomorrow or
18 even three months from now. But, we do get them on
19 those priority list, which is something better than
20 not being on any list for our kids.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I mean if you're homeless,
22 it ain't nothing because you still ain't got nowhere
23 to go. So, I mean...

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But that's why...
25 part of the reason in our RFP we created the

1
2 transitional residential care is so that kids can
3 have somewhere to go and for us to have more time to
4 work with the kids.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Question, are you
6 coordinating with the RHY (Runaway and Homeless
7 Youth) centers? Uhm, what...

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We're not allowed
9 to. Our kids... we're not supposed to release them to
10 RHY. They're not supposed to be homeless leaving our
11 care.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, then what happens? We
13 just hold them while we wait for the list? Look,
14 she's giving you a paper... (LAUGHTER)

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: That's why we
16 created the transitional beds, because we recognized
17 that we needed a place for these young people to be
18 while we could work out these issues. The majority
19 of young people who leave Close to Home go back to
20 their families. So, it's only a small percentage that
21 are in this situation, and we're hopeful that the
22 transitional residential center will meet the needs
23 of that population until we can access longer term
24 options for those kids.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I will say, uh, I
3 think the transitional housing obviously is needed,
4 but we should never say a small percentage, because
5 even if it's one kid, it's one too many. So, I know
6 in scope, it's ,like, okay, well it's not that many,
7 but still those young people still have to suffer
8 through it. So, I do think... and definitely as the
9 transitional house is rolling out, that we need to
10 continue to think of other solutions. Because, there
11 was another... Remember how I was talking about... I
12 couldn't remember what happened with the kid in the
13 transitional... So, apparently some of the issue
14 is... and families are having issues - and not just
15 the kids - families who are homeless are having
16 issues, but it's not the NSPs and LSPs, it's the NSDs
17 Families who are homeless, they're having a hard time
18 being released because the family is homeless. So,
19 they don't... they've been staying longer and having
20 some issues there.

21 Could you kind of talk about that, because I
22 think that's a whole other separate issue where it's
23 ,like, yes, sometimes the kids don't have any place
24 to go, but sometimes neither does the family. So how
25 are we solving for that? And I'm going to say the

1
2 word, are we working with the HRA and DHS to kind of
3 help and support families around that - which that's
4 a whole other can of worms. What does that
5 coordination look like?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We actually have an
7 entire Committee of people at ACS who are working
8 with HRA to address some of these issues. I think
9 ,you know, I would like to say that we found a
10 solution to homelessness in New York City... (CROSS-
11 TALK)

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We have, oh...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We're not quite
14 there.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But, we have not found the
16 solution...

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes, correct. So,
18 we are in conversation with them. We are raising the
19 issues as they arise. We are reporting our trends to
20 them, and we're trying to identify solutions
21 collectively for those issues. But, these are ongoing
22 issues kind of (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No...

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: issues.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I mean, it's a real issue,
3 and I think one of the things that you can't solve
4 alone. And we really have to think about what it look
5 likes on the other end. So, this is this is an issue
6 in general, but definitely something that we have to
7 continue to monitor.

8 And I have a question also about the NSDs. There
9 has not been... Uh, haven't been provided
10 information, what data can you for that youth that's
11 being served in NSDs? What is the average stay, and
12 what is the coordination between the nonsecure
13 detentions in ECS?

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, I think we
15 can give you those numbers, but we don't have them
16 here today.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But, ACS oversees
19 the nonsecure detentions... (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I know that's why I'm
21 asking.

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Okay, so you said
23 what's the correlation between... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, what's the average
25 stay? What is the coordination between the nonsecure

1
2 detentions and ECS? What is... and I guess it's like
3 the NSPs, (BACKGROUND NOISE) because what resources
4 does NSD have, and how do those compare to the NSPs?

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: What's the what?

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What the resources does NSDs
7 have, uh, and how does that compare to NSPs?

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The Close to Home
9 sites have more resources, given that the kids are
10 there for much longer periods. The kids in NSDs
11 typically spend about 45 days in in our system.
12 However, on site, the NSDs do have access to mental
13 health and psychiatric services which are provided by
14 Bellevue. And the educational services are also
15 provided by District 79. And, they ,you know,
16 depending on how the nonsecure detention facilities
17 are doing, they also get to go on trips and outings.
18 But, the resource... there are many more resources
19 under the Close to Home, given that our kids are
20 there much longer.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, definitely you can get
22 back with those other numbers, and we'll follow up
23 afterwards.

24 Transitional residential care, TRCs, are designed
25 for males, not females, preparing to leave CHT

1 facilities without permanent living arrangements.

2 Could you explain the need for this program, and are
3 there a disproportionate number of males struggling
4 to find permanent living arrangements following care?
5

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, most of the
7 kids in our care are males - about 92 percent
8 compared to females. Most of the youths who have a
9 hard time going back are our males. So, we decided to
10 start it with males to see how we can help that side
11 of the population.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. So, we're like this
13 because it's new, so we're assessing and so we're in
14 an assessment phase? Okay. I can with that. But we'll
15 follow up after it's released and see how and see
16 where we are.

17 Providers report that insignificant funding for
18 the Fair Future programs are resulting in coaches
19 with limited capacity to serve a growing population
20 of justice-involved young people. What is the agency
21 doing to address this? Because we all love Fair
22 Futures.

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, we are
24 pleased that there has been such a good engagement in
25 Fair Futures by the juvenile justice system. This is

1
2 our original rollout, and we will be assessing and
3 looking forward to discussing this with our
4 providers.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: When I was talking with some
6 of the providers, they definitely expressed that
7 Fair Futures, they don't feel like it's... they don't
8 have enough resources to be as robust as they would
9 like. So, we know that this has been a priority, uh,
10 not only for the Council but also the
11 Administration... I mean ,you know, ACS and the
12 Commissioner, so we definitely want to make sure that
13 we're keeping this in the forefront of like how we
14 make sure that this program is being funding
15 adequately and giving the providers the support so we
16 can continue to grow the out. Because, I know this
17 has been something that everybody has ,you know,
18 really championed.

19 ACS conducted specific programming for youth with
20 intellectual and developmental disabilities, and
21 youth who exhibited problematic sexual behaviors,
22 approximately how many youth were placed in IDD
23 (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) or PSB
24 (Problematic Sexual Behavior) programs in 2023?

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, we had a total
3 of five youth last year who were placed in the PSB,
4 and a total of 25 in the DD settings.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm. What's the process
6 for determining whether youth need those specialized
7 services?

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, again we do
9 have an Intake and Assessment Unit that goes out and
10 interviews the youth, talks with the parents, uh,
11 talks with uh youth who've been in contact with the
12 youth while in detention. We look at the evaluations,
13 and depending on if youth has like a IQ score that
14 would that is a developmental delay, then they would
15 be placed with the that population. And, then the
16 youths who have problematic sexual behaviors, those
17 youth typically come in with those type of behaviors
18 outlined, and we'll refer them out to the program
19 that does that specialized service.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. How do you evaluate
21 the effectiveness of those specialized services?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: How do we
23 evaluate the effectiveness?

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm, yeah.
25

1
2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: We see whether or
3 not the kids are coming back to us. We also have case
4 managers that meet with the kids regularly and assess
5 how they're doing in program. I also speak with the
6 providers around the effectiveness of their work.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How does aftercare for those
8 youth differ from the aftercare of youth who didn't
9 require specialized services?

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, the youth who
11 are in the specialized program stay with that same
12 core group. So, the specialized population is trained
13 and have the experience to work with this population.
14 So, for example the problematic sexual behaviors will
15 continue to get that treatment even when they're out
16 in the community.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

18 According to 2023 CTH RFP and NSPs and LSPs
19 facilities have more than doubled the capacity for
20 male than for females, and there are no IDD or PSBs
21 facilities for females at all. Are a disproportionate
22 number of males in need of specialized services? And
23 what can ACS do to expand this program to better
24 serve the female population?

1
2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: So, in our
3 nonsecure placement facilities, uh, for our female
4 population, if they are exhibiting these type of
5 behaviors we are we are able to refer out to the
6 community or have a provider come into the facility
7 to provide the services. Our limited secure facility
8 is actually able to provide these services in house.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

10 I have... and this was a question I realized that
11 I should have asked earlier, but when I was at one of
12 the facilities one of the thing the providers were
13 telling me was that sometimes they have to turn over
14 their facilities very quickly, so they'll be male,
15 and then they'll get a call and, like, "Hey, we need
16 you to turn over to female," and that has raised an
17 issue, especially around staffing capacity. Can you
18 talk to me a little bit about what that looks like
19 and what that process is? Because, I can't imagine
20 being a male facility and ,you know, obviously your
21 staff is going to reflect that, and then now being
22 ,like, all right you're turning over to a female
23 facility. Can you talk about that process? What
24 supports are given to the provider when they have to
25 have such a fast turnaround?

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: This is not in
3 our Close to Home program. This is in our nonsecure
4 detention site. There are... we only have one
5 facility that is dedicated to females. And if we do
6 have to flip a site it is in there, and we do talk to
7 them - they do not have to turn around... (CROSS-
8 TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, what you're saying that
10 doesn't happen in Close to Home? (CROSS-TALK)

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No... (CROSS-
12 TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because that definitely was
14 a Close... (CROSS-TALK)

15 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: yeah, no...
16 (CROSS-TALK)

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: to Home provider I was at.
18 And they said that they had to do that... (CROSS-
19 TALK)

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: It was... Yeah, I
21 think you were talking with one of our providers in
22 Brooklyn. And there's... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: It was not... (CROSS-TALK)

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: In the Bronx?

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: It wasn't, it was as Close
3 to Home facility (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah, no we... it
5 doesn't happen in Close to Home.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, I'm going to come back
7 to you, because you just said it on the record...

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: (INAUDIBLE) I
9 am... (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I going to come back to
11 that...(CROSS-TALK)

12 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: I am 100 percent
13 confident... (CROSS-TALK)

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Listen, I'm going to text
15 them right now, and I'm going to ask. And while I'm
16 texting, I would like to acknowledge Council Member
17 Rita Joseph, who has questions. And I will come back
18 to you with my questions, thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you so much, Chair.

20 I have a few questions, when students return from
21 the Close to Home program, how often are they left
22 without school placements?

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: I don't
24 understand. When the kids ,like, when they... (CROSS-
25 TALK)

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah, when they return
3 home, how long does it take for them to be placed
4 back into schools?

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, they're
6 placed immediately. We don't release the kids back
7 into the community without being connected to school.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay.

9 Do you track the number of days between students
10 exiting a Close to Home program and a student
11 enrolling in school?

12 I had a case, that's why I'm asking this
13 question.

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: No, I don't...
15 maybe the Department of Education may track it.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Say that again?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: The Department of
18 Education may track that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: No, because I had a
20 situation with a student, and it took a very long
21 time for him to get back into school.

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Oh?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: His criminal justice-
24 involved case was over, and he still was not placed
25 in school.

1 So, sometimes they're sent to schools, is
2 there... are you involved in their safety transfer?
3 Let's say the problem they had was the school, and do
4 you often place them back into the school if the
5 school was the problem?
6

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, New York City
8 Public Schools handles safety transfers and
9 enrollment. So that...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So you guys don't talk to
11 each other at all in helping... (CROSS-TALK)

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We do talk to
13 them... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, okay...

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We certainly talk
16 to them, but we don't have access... (CROSS-TALK)

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: No, I know that...

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: (INAUDIBLE)
19 implementing those... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: No, I'm just asking if
21 there's a communication between you and York City
22 Public Schools in reentering a student back into a
23 school where it was unsafe for them?

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yeah, DOE has,
25 uh, on the District 79 side, they do have the

1
2 counselors whose primary role is to help the kid
3 transition back into their community school.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, thank you.

5 While students are in the Close to Home program,
6 is it important that their families continue to have
7 opportunities to be involved in their in their
8 child's education?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Yes. In our
10 District 79 school, they have open school night. They
11 can come to the school, talk to the teachers. They
12 also participate in in our monthly treatment team
13 meetings, and they can ask questions around the
14 school... the youth's education.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: What are the percentage of
16 students in your Close to Home program have IEPs?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Well, we would
18 have to get back to you on that question, but all of
19 the kids that come in through District 79 get a
20 specialized IEP completed. But, we can talk to DOE
21 and get back to you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How can ACS work with New
23 York City Public Schools to ensure students receive
24 notice of IEP special education plan meetings once
25

1
2 they're in placement? And when is their schedule? Is
3 that communicated back and forth with the parents?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, New York City
5 Public Schools does that communication, because
6 they're responsible for the IEPs and the SEPs. So,
7 that communication would come from New York City
8 Public Schools.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And ACS has no involvement
10 in that, is that correct?

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: But we could we
12 ad... we advocate for... (CROSS-TALK)

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: We might be made
14 aware of it, but the... (CROSS-TALK)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay...

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Because we don't
17 handle the evaluations or those meetings, they're
18 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I know you're not part of
20 the (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: (INAUDIBLE)...
22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: team. I know that. So, I'm
24 just asking are you... you're in communications with
25 New York City Public Schools around that, right?

1 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay.

3 How can ACS work with New York City Public
4 Schools to ensure parents receive regular progress
5 updates? Are you guys in communication?
6

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: So, District 79 is
8 committed to communication with the parents, and they
9 have parent teacher conferences. Parents have access
10 to... they have counselors... guidance counselors and
11 social workers, uh, who have ongoing communication
12 with the parents. And the parents have access to
13 their schooling through those counselors.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Why I'm saying... and why
15 I'm asking those questions is because I think there's
16 a lack of communication between the two agencies when
17 both of you have a child in care - New York City
18 Public Schools have the child care. So, do you...
19 so I just always think it's the lack of communication
20 between the agencies.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PORTER: So, we have staff
22 that are present on site at both Bronx Hope and
23 Belmont. So, the communication is daily. If a young
24 person is struggling in school, the New York City
25 Public School staff will... is in communication with

1 our staff so that issues may be addressed.

2 Communication can always be improved...

3 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Absolutely.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: But, I think as of
5 right now, there is a lot of communication. For the
6 limited secure students, they are actually attending
7 school on site in their facility, so they... the
8 school, teachers, and administrators have access
9 (TIMER CHIMES) to the facility staff every day.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Are students being
11 screened for dyslexia?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: That is a DOE
13 question...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Mmm! And, but, again,
15 here's my thought process, it's both of you in
16 care... the child is in your care and New York City
17 Public Schools' care. So, I am thinking that the
18 communication should be better between two agencies.
19 So, if I ask that question, you should be able to
20 tell me how many students in your care have received
21 dyslexia screening while they're in your in your
22 care. Okay? Thank you, ma'am, thank you, Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: All right so I stand
24 corrected, because, let me tell you, all right, I'm
25

1 learning, so you were correct, and I apologize.

2 Because clearly I'm learning; I'm not an expert yet,
3 but give me another four months and I will be.

4 Because it's NSP, LSP, it's too many p's and l's and

5 all the things, so... but, thank you, I really

6 appreciate your testimony today and answering these

7 questions. And we really look forward to continuous

8 conversations around solutions, because I think that

9 there's a lot of places that we can definitely be

10 collaborating on and thinking about different plans -

11 and some things that I think you guys even admitted

12 and talked about - where there's some holes and loops

13 that I know you're trying to fill. So, I definitely

14 want to just say thank you for your testimony today.

15
16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PEGUERO: Thank you.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GINSBURG: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I now open the hearing for

19 public testimony. I want to remind members of the

20 public that this is a government proceeding, and that

21 decorum shall be observed at all times. As such,

22 members of the public, shall remain silent at all

23 times. The witness table is reserved for people who

24 wish to testify. No video recording or photography is

25 allowed from the witness table. Further, members of

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the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing recording.

Once again, if you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. Once recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic: *Evaluating the Close to Home Program*.

If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so via email to testimony@council.nyc.gov up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing, audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

At this time, I'll ask Katherine, Joanne, Hassan Bruta? I'm sorry, I'm going to butcher these names... Elisabeth Bernard, and Pedro Gonzalez. Whoever wants to start...

ELISABETH BERNARD: All right, just to clarify, you said two minutes not three?

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Two minutes, I said two minutes, and you might want to start, because it already started.

1
2 ELISABETH BERNARD: Okay, well thank you for the
3 opportunity to testify today. My name is Elisabeth
4 Bernard, and I am a staff attorney at Advocates for
5 Children.

6 As an attorney on AFC's School Justice Project, I
7 represent court-involved youth as they navigate the
8 significant challenges of receiving educational
9 services and special education services both while
10 they are in placement and as they are transitioning
11 out of placement.

12 In recent years, we have seen some positive
13 shifts in the education services youth receive while
14 in Close to Home programs and the quality of
15 transition services once their time in Close to Home
16 programs ends. Despite some positive changes, there
17 is still a need for improvement in certain areas,
18 including ensuring families get needed information
19 about their child's educational progress while
20 attending Passages Academy and ensuring students have
21 a safe and appropriate school to attend as soon as
22 they return home.

23 Currently, we are assisting a family whose child
24 spent 11 months in a Close to Home program. During
25 the student's time in the program, the family never

1 received progress reports, phones calls, emails, or
2 notice of their child's progress while attending
3 Passages Academy. The DOE never gave the family an
4 opportunity to attend IEP or Special Education Plan
5 meetings or notified the family if the student had
6 earned any credits. The family, instead, often made
7 visits to the Close to Home site, where they were
8 merely told the student was doing "Okay, but could
9 make improvements." Especially considering this
10 specific student had an IEP and needed additional
11 support to succeed in school, the parent expressed
12 her concern about the lack of information and the
13 uncertainty around her child's graduation status.

14
15 To help keep students on track, it is important
16 for the DOE and ACS to ensure families are informed
17 of their child's educational progress while in the
18 Close to Home program.

19 The City must also ensure there is better (TIMER
20 CHIMES) communication between ACS, Passages Academy
21 staff, and the various DOE offices that help to re-
22 enroll students in school as they return home. Often,
23 we see a lag in the amount of time it takes a student
24 to receive an enrollment letter from the DOE once
25 they return home. In fact, we have seen students

1
2 spend anywhere from three weeks to two months waiting
3 for a school placement...

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds...

5 ELISABETH BERNARD: Thank you for the opportunity
6 to speak with you today, and I will be happy to
7 answer any questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

9 JAN HASSAN-BUTERA: Good afternoon. My name is Jan
10 Hassan-Butera, and I am the Director of the Close to
11 Home Program at SCO Family of Services.

12 I would like to thank Chair Stevens and all of
13 the Members of the Committee on Children and Youth
14 for allowing me to speak today.

15 SCO currently operates five Close to Home
16 Programs throughout Queens and the Bronx. We utilize
17 an evidence-based approach, the Missouri Approach,
18 which has a strong focus on group dynamics and
19 positive peer influence. There is a large focus on
20 accountability, family dynamics, victim empathy,
21 boundaries, communication, and healthy relationships.
22 During placement youth are engaged in a wide array of
23 services including onsite medical and clinical
24 services, casework counseling, mentorships,
25

1
2 psychoeducational group meetings, education and
3 vocational services.

4 SCO has been fortunate to share in many
5 successful outcomes for our youth and families. Close
6 to Home has given youth the opportunity to become
7 stronger community members through community service
8 activities. A working relationship has been made with
9 SYEP providers helping youth to gain early work
10 skills. Youth have been certified in OSHA and have
11 received assistance finishing their education and
12 gaining employment.

13 SCO has fostered a strong partnership with Gallop
14 NYC, allowing youth the unique opportunity to work
15 with horses, participate in riding lessons, and
16 volunteer with younger youth with disabilities.

17 Additional highlights include youth registering
18 to vote and voting for the first time, exposure to
19 new and diverse educational, recreational, and
20 cultural activities helping to expand their horizons.
21 Youth have also had opportunities to perform at
22 Carnegie Hall, be members of their school Student
23 Council, and display their artwork at art exhibits.

24 SCO is especially proud to have a former client,
25 James, join our workforce as a Youth Specialist.

1 James was in our program from 2015 to 2016. He worked
2 extremely hard and made incredible progress. Today is
3 a role model and credible messenger to the youth and
4 an inspiration to all who know him. His journey
5 proves that change is indeed possible for the young
6 people of the Close to Home program if they are given
7 the opportunity. There is (TIMER CHIMES) still a need
8 for this important program. Youth need and deserve
9 treatment not incarceration. They have experienced...

10 (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

12 JAN HASSAN-BUTERA: trauma, neglect, and lack of
13 opportunities. The Close to Home Program addresses
14 all of these areas and does much more. On the behalf
15 of the young people I serve, thank you for the
16 opportunity to speak today.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

18 KATELYN GRECO: Hello, am Katelyn Greco, Director
19 of Prevention, Juvenile Justice and Equity at the
20 Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies or
21 COFCCA. COFCCA represents more than 100 nonprofit
22 child welfare agencies across New York State,
23 including the five agencies that provide Close to
24 Home programming here in New York City. Thank you
25

1
2 Chair and Council for the opportunity to provide
3 testimony today. We also have submitted written
4 testimony - a bit more comprehensive.

5 Close to home was created has a commitment from
6 the City to keep juvenile justice-involved people
7 close to their families, communities and support
8 systems. Moreover, Close to Home operates as a trauma
9 informed setting acknowledging that young people
10 deserve the opportunity to be equipped with the tools
11 needed to create healthy choices.

12 Currently the young people in Close to Home
13 programming need more support and expansive level of
14 services than ever. The ripple effect of programs
15 closing down due to the pandemic, coupled with new
16 legislation, has led to older youth in care
17 exhibiting more complex needs such as continuous
18 justice involvement, substance abuse, violent
19 behaviors, and gang or gun involvement.

20 Today we uplift the following priorities as
21 identified by our member agencies: One, invest in pay
22 parity and workforce enhancements. As we know, lot of
23 our agencies lose their workforce to government
24 agencies due to the high pay -as mentioned earlier;
25 two, the City needs a contingency plan in place to

1 address the growing needs for additional capacity and
2 demands for Close to Home. The system is set to
3 reduce capacity from 201 to 147 slots when the new
4 contracts are effective July 1. Since the release of
5 the RFP, the census has continued to rise with a 46
6 percent increase in admissions and 61 percent
7 increase in Close to Home census calendar year-to
8 date - January through February.

10 To meet the demand of increases in census in the
11 past programs have been asked to add beds to increase
12 capacity. This is not always a feasible solution due
13 to staff vacancies and other barriers; three, invest
14 in addressing safety concerns and facilities and for
15 young people transitioning back to the community we.
16 We ask the City to invest in and expand de-escalation
17 trainings offered to all facility staff - so staff
18 are equipped with tools to mitigate violence while
19 upholding a trauma informed environment. We also ask
20 for the City to create, enhance, and expand tailored
21 programming, (TIMER CHIMES) especially for young
22 people at gang or gun involvement; and then our
23 fourth priority is the enhanced flexibility for new
24 contracts, making sure that funding matches mandates,

1
2 as well as the ability for agencies to meet basic
3 needs of young people in care.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you

5 PEDRO GONZALEZ: Good afternoon to this committee.
6 My name is Pedro Gonzalez, former veteran of the
7 United States armed forces, and father of two.

8 I am well aware that in this testimony we're
9 focused on the youth aspect for DYCD; however, I have
10 been reaching out to the City Council's office about
11 a particular matter that I wanted to raise some
12 concerns about with ACS. The Administration for
13 Children's Services had been involved in my case for
14 about seven years now. There are some good things
15 that the agency has done to support my family;
16 however, the agency history with my family has been
17 very contentious. So, I wanted to raise some concerns
18 that I have as a father.

19 I want to thank this committee and Althea
20 Stevens, uh, 'm also from the Bronx. Last year, in
21 2023, my children were removed more than four times
22 from the home. There has been an uptick since 2023
23 and emergency 1024 removals from the home without
24 court intervention. Oten times ACS has case
25 conferenced my case time and time over again. And

1
2 even in the deputy director's case study conference
3 that was discussed - that my family model is one of
4 the best models to be used for family reunification
5 approaches. Often times I understand that it takes a
6 village to raise children, but everyone in the
7 village not always agrees on what's best for the
8 children. I believe firmly that it is the
9 responsibility first and foremost of the parents, who
10 are willing and want to care for their children. As
11 such, I would ask three things of this committee:
12 One, what can this committee do to ask ACS to push
13 the agenda of family reunification for the families
14 first and foremost? That should be the priority. It
15 is more of a priority than even property.

16 Second, what can be done to limit the
17 interactions to make those interactions with the
18 families much more positive than adversarial? Nine
19 times out of 10, a lot of these family court cases
20 can be settled outside of the family court without
21 burdening or encompassing these cases more than it
22 already has.

23 Third, (TIMER CHIMES) what can be done for ACS to
24 train its employees and managers on how to approach
25 cases on a case-by case basis with the facts? I

1
2 believe each case has its own caveats, and as such
3 each case should be thoroughly looked at.

4 I believe ACS should also conduct frequent case
5 study conferences on each family.

6 I also want to thank this committee for taking
7 the time to hear me. I am a concerned father, and I
8 wouldn't be here standing before everyone expressing
9 these concerns that I have if I didn't genuinely
10 care. I have been dealing with this situation since
11 at least 2019, and it is now 2024.

12 Again, I want to thank you, Althea Stevens, the
13 ranking committee member, and other members of this
14 committee for hearing me out with my concerns. Thank
15 you.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well thank you, to this
17 panel. And, one, I just want to say Mr. Gonzalez,
18 thank you for being here today, and it's okay that
19 it's not related to the topic. I don't want to go
20 into the details of case, but I do have staff here
21 who I'll get your information from so we can talk
22 more. This has been a concern that I've actually
23 heard from a number of parents around not feeling
24 like their cases have been heard in a real way. I
25 have a friend who had a case, and some of the stuff

1
2 did not make sense. She was a licensed social worker,
3 and almost got her license taken away, because of a
4 situation that didn't really make sense. So, I was
5 able to escalate it, but that should not be the case.
6 So, definitely my staff who's here will get your
7 information. Because I don't want us to have an open
8 discussion about your case and your situation. ACS
9 still here, and so we'll definitely all get together
10 to have a conversation about how to best move
11 forward.

12 PEDRO GONZALEZ: I have one more question, uh what
13 else can this committee do to - when NYPD involvement
14 is necessary, what can be done to not just
15 impartially protect the family from harassment or an
16 adversarial conflict, but also to remind every party
17 that even the parents have rights. Can this committee
18 make it very pointed to state that there should be a
19 Parental Bill of Rights provided to the family on
20 first contact with ACS?

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely. And we already
22 have some of that, that's already in place. So, those
23 things should be happening. And that is something
24 that we'll definitely be working on. So, again, I
25 don't want to go into the specifics around your case

1
2 or go into details. But my staff is here, they will
3 get your information, and we'll continue the
4 conversation. And I see ACS staff is still here, and
5 they'll definitely talk to you as well to continue
6 this conversation. Because ,you know, I think some of
7 the things you're saying are general, but we
8 definitely want to get more to the specifics to be
9 more helpful, thank you.

10 Ms. Bernard, I have so many questions for you. I
11 was reading through your testimony, and I know you
12 talked about, uh, there was this a situation where
13 the young person had their IEP reevaluated.

14 Could you tell me a few more details about that,
15 because I was under the impression that for IEP
16 specifically, that parents would have to sign off on
17 that. So, was the IEP changed? Were there a
18 conversations? Could you tell me a little bit more
19 information about that, please?

20 ELISABETH BERNARD: Right, as we understand it,
21 when a young person enters a Close to Home program
22 with an IEP, there has to be a meeting that happens
23 within seven days. Basically this will kind of
24 transition the IEP into something called an SEP,
25 which is the Special Education Plan. And this will

1 provide every service, or some of the service, or
2 equivalent services that are in the IEP in an SEP.
3 Basically, what this means to us is that a lot of the
4 services that are available to a young person with an
5 IEP that are in their community, in a public school,
6 are not necessarily available within Passages while
7 they're in Close to Home. So, this is supposed to
8 mirror what an IEP would look like.
9

10 So, it's our understanding that parents are
11 supposed to be in communication with Passages' staff
12 about such meetings, so that they can agree or
13 disagree to what is being changed - or what is being
14 reevaluated in that young person's SEP.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Are parents not... are
16 parents not required to be a part of that meeting,
17 or is this something that is happening without
18 parents knowledge or being present?

19 ELISABETH BERNARD: So in our uh in our
20 experience, parents have expressed that they have no
21 idea what's happening and that they're not being
22 included in those meetings. So, obviously this is a
23 large problem.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Just full transparency, I
25 actually... the providers were suggesting that I

1
2 visit the school before I came. And I just was not
3 able to fit in my schedule. So, it is on my list of
4 things to do to kind of get a better understanding of
5 what's happening in Bronx Hope and the other schools.
6 But, this is definitely something I'm very interested
7 in continuing to dig into.

8 Then you mentioned later on in your testimony,
9 because I know you didn't get to read it all, but I
10 read it. You mentioned later on your testimony about
11 families and the transition out of the facility and
12 having idle time, but I know we talked extensively
13 today about the transition plans and all these
14 things. But you're experiencing and seeing that young
15 people aren't being placed into schools, and I see
16 that you had one young person who was actually jumped
17 when they returned from the Close to Home program,
18 because they were sent back to an unsafe school. So,
19 is ACS not coordinating safety transfers with DOE so
20 that students can go to new schools when they are
21 going to Close to Homes? Can you talk to me a little
22 bit about that as well?

23 ELISABETH BERNARD: Sure, so the young person who
24 was sent back to an unsafe school was jumped within
25 the second day of his of his attendance. At that

1
2 time, obviously the young person did have some of the
3 resources that were mentioned. So I want to say Fair
4 Futures coach, a slew of other folks; however, a lot
5 of these individuals don't have the knowledge and
6 resources about how to make those safety transfers
7 happen. So, that is why... (CROSS-TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, that's my question. So
9 are ACS and DOE not coordinating those safety
10 transfers so that when they're coming out of the
11 Close to Homes programs and being returned home, that
12 they're automatically going to a new safety transfer?
13 Is that not happening, or that has that been your
14 experience?

15 ELISABETH BERNARD: I think the issue is that
16 there are not a lot of informed conversations around
17 making sure that the re-entry is safe. So, we're just
18 saying, okay, well what are the needs of this young
19 person? What grade? How many credits have they
20 earned? Let's put them in a school that's in their
21 neighborhood and available. However, there needs to
22 be more informed conversations with the young person
23 around ,like, is this school safe? Are the needs
24 being able to be appropriately met? How do we make
25 sure that young people returning to schools are safe

1 in actuality? I think that is more of the issue.
2 Conversations are being had, but I don't think
3 they're targeted and intentional around safety. And
4 that is a problem considering we know the barriers
5 around safety, specifically for young people... who
6 are court-involved.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, this is really
9 helpful. Like I said, I am trying to get on my
10 schedule to get to these schools so I can get more
11 information. I just got the Committee in January, and
12 I'm on a fact finding mission. Because I take this
13 very seriously. So this is definitely something I'm
14 going to continue to have on my watch, and I will
15 definitely be in contact with you to get into some
16 more details around some of the things that you're
17 seeing on the ground, uh, just so we can, again, look
18 for solutions. And if there's loopholes, and there's
19 things that we need to readjust and think about, I'm
20 all for it, and a let's and let's go for it. And I
21 know my lovely folks at ACS are happy to hear all of
22 our great solutions.

23 I believe Council Member Williams has some
24 questions, and I believe Council Member Ossé is with
25 us remotely.

1 Council member Williams?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I just wanted to know if
3 ,like, anyone has - any of the folks who are familiar
4 with Close to Home have any just initial reactions
5 from ACS testimony? I think it's always interesting
6 to hear the testimony from the agency, and not that
7 you don't believe the agency, but ,you know, I'm not
8 on the ground. You're on the ground, so you see it in
9 real time. So, I was just wondering if you just had
10 any general response back to the testimony and the
11 things that you heard?

12 ELISABETH BERNARD: So, like I said in my
13 testimony, I do think that there have been
14 improvements. And I want to give space to that. I
15 think there has been, across the board, some
16 improvements. However, this population is very
17 complicated, and I think it takes staff who are
18 culturally competent, who understand the navigation
19 of what we're talking about - young people throughout
20 the Bronx and Brooklyn, what their needs are, and how
21 to address those needs head on. I do think that ,you
22 know, many of the things that were stated are more
23 data driven than day-to-day ,like, how are we
24 creating concrete solutions and plans? Like you
25

1 said, I want to be solution oriented, and as an
2 advocate who's seeing family issues from day to day,
3 I know that, case by case, there are a lot of things
4 that aren't being addressed that need addressing. And
5 I think those are more complicated conversations that
6 need to be had. And I think often times we think very
7 macro instead of micro. And I think that's really a
8 large part of the gaps that we're seeing.

10 KATELYN GRECO: I do want to give ACS credit. I
11 know that they have been talking with providers, but
12 I think the system just looks very different now.
13 Right? Between the pandemic, Raise the Age ,you know,
14 just other policies - we're just seeing older young
15 people, and we're also seeing more complex behaviors.
16 And I think ,you know, kids are entering the system,
17 and the system needs to adapt. And that,
18 unfortunately, is way slower than the kids are
19 entering. Right? So, there's just more conversation
20 that needs to be had and more focus on safety. A lot
21 of our young people in the system are gang are gun
22 involved, even if they don't specifically have those
23 charges. And when they're returning back to the
24 community, if they had conflict entering ,you know,
25 whatever facility they're in, that conflict often

1
2 remains and waits for them. And it's putting young
3 people at risk of being a victim of violence. And I
4 know that our providers are doing the best that they
5 can to ensure safety for young people in their care,
6 but it's really hard, it takes more than just ,you
7 know, what they have in their capacity - it takes
8 community help as well. It also takes more budgetary
9 flexibilities to help young people who are
10 transitioning out of facility to meet their basic
11 needs. That's one way to ensure safety, just making
12 sure a young person knows where their food is coming
13 from or where they're going to sleep. So, I think
14 these conversations are being had, but ,you know,
15 there's space for more improvement as well.

16 JAN HASSAN-BUTERA: As a provider for 12 years, I
17 can say that we've forged really strong relationships
18 with ACS and with our DOE partners. And it does take
19 a village to do anything to find a youth a safe
20 school, to help them in an unsafe community. And I
21 would absolutely say that those strong relationships
22 we've had - do we always agree? No. But, can we come
23 to the table and can we hash it out, and do we come
24 to a mutually agreed upon solution? Yes. And all of
25 us have the same want for our young people. We want

1 them to leave and be healthy, safe, productive, and
2 thrive. I can say that through the years we've
3 developed that strong partnership with many ACS and
4 our DOE staff. And we have had safety transfers to
5 schools. We've had... where a youth would write a
6 letter saying, "I don't want to go to this school,"
7 and we've all put our collective heads together - and
8 hearts together - and found a way to make it happen.

9
10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Well, that's
11 encouraging, because what I'm hearing is ACS isn't
12 entirely bad (LAUGHTER), but there are some complex
13 issues. It is nice and encouraging to hear that there
14 seems to be levels of communication, which I think is
15 sometimes like the biggest issue. So, that's good.
16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I will say this,
18 people have said providers have been very kind
19 towards the work that they've been doing with ACS.
20 So, that is encouraging even to hear from this panel
21 as well. But they've still got work to do. I'm not
22 letting them off the hook. It's my job but
23 (LAUGHTER), but, you know, but thank you guys so
24 much, appreciate this panel.

25 PANEL: Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: For the next panel, I'm
3 going to be calling up Annie Miguez and Dionis
4 Fernandez.

5 ANNIE MINGUEZ: Hello, thank you, Chair Stevens,
6 and members of the Children and Youth Committee for
7 the opportunity to testify. My name is Annie Miguez,
8 and I am the VP of Government and Community Relations
9 at Good Shepherd.

10 Good Shepherd has a nonsecure detention in the
11 Bronx, two nonsecure placement facilities in
12 Brooklyn, and we also have aftercare and Fair Futures
13 Services.

14 I want to focus my testimony speaking to the
15 challenges we are having, while also sharing some
16 resources that could help us.

17 I want to stress that while we are facing
18 challenges, we in no way want to see Close to Home
19 becoming an extension of Crossroads and Horizon.

20 Close to Home began in 2012 to support younger
21 youth between the ages of 12 and 16. And, as ACS
22 mentioned today, given Raise the Age, we are now
23 seeing older youth, which requires a different
24 intervention.

1
2 I served on the Raise the Age campaign and have
3 done advocacy for years at the state level to help
4 get Raise the Age dollars to New York City.

5 That said, in the absence of state funding, we
6 need recourses to support the needs of older youth -
7 including programming offerings that are tailored to
8 support their interests.

9 Thank you, Chair, for raising the staffing issues
10 we are facing. ACS has similar positions offering
11 bonuses, annual cost increases, a City pension, and
12 \$13,000 more than what the average provider is able
13 to offer. We cannot compete with these offerings.

14 On the comment that youth are held with other
15 youth their age, with the new RFP awards, and the
16 fact that we will only have two girl programs across
17 the City, housing youth of similar age will not be
18 possible. While their staff are trained in safety
19 crisis management - Sanctuary and Missouri - they
20 always welcome additional support. Providers can use
21 additional resources are city already has access to
22 such as de-escalation techniques that our Cure
23 Violence staff have.

24 When possible, given proximity, and also credible
25 messenger relationships, and with additional funding,

1
2 partnerships with the Cure Violence teams to help
3 youth return home safely is something that is
4 possible - and to remain engaged with Cure Violence
5 and the crisis (TIMER CHIMES) management system, so
6 that they have an additional support system.

7 Programs like Learning to Work who can best
8 support youth who are behind in school and so on to
9 obtain a high school diploma is another thing...

10 (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten more seconds.

12 ANNIE MINGUEZ: We also want to address the root
13 causes that have brought youth to the system,
14 including food and housing insecurity, and supports
15 that ensure that they have physical safety upon
16 returning home - job training certification programs,
17 so that young people have employment after. Thank you
18 for the opportunity to testify.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

20 DIONIS FERNANDEZ: Hello, how you doing today? My
21 name is Dionis Fernandez, and I have three years
22 fighting to be part of my child's life, and I am the
23 Founder and CEO of a movement called Fathers Speak
24 Up, which is a nonprofit organization for fathers
25 that are fighting to be part of the children's lives.

1
2 It's very important for the father to be there as
3 much as the mother. And as fathers we are not getting
4 the justice we deserve to be part of our children's
5 life.

6 I'm teaming up with another organization which is
7 in Rikers Island, and I'm voluntarily working in
8 there to help fathers in there see how they could be
9 able to reunite with their children, too. Right now,
10 I have 291 fathers that are part of my movement who
11 I'm helping. I started doing this in New York City,
12 and now I'm traveling out of state because this is
13 happening all over.

14 I have a big platform, in the last 30 days I have
15 217,000 people that have reached my account. I have
16 20,000 people that supported my movement, and we're
17 going to continue speaking up and become one loud
18 voice, so we can be able to get this justice that we
19 deserve.

20 So, what I do is I interview fathers that have
21 been going to court, paying child support, paying
22 lawyers, and doing everything we can as fathers to be
23 part of our children's life, and we still don't get
24 the justice we deserve.

1 So, what I do is, while I interview fathers, we
2 speak about everything we got going on, but we just
3 don't speak about the mother, because we want the
4 mother to be there as well. That is all have. Thank
5 you.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I remember you
8 from our budget hearing, so thank you for being here
9 and for the work that you do. Because ,you know, I
10 think it is important that we're uplifting fathers. I
11 know even in Council, Council Member Riley and
12 Council Member Salaam have been doing a lot of work
13 around like trying to promote fatherhood. I know at
14 the budget hearing, I told you DYCD they have a
15 father initiative, and definitely want to think about
16 how to connect you with them to collaborate. Because
17 I think that is something that we do not talk enough
18 about, uh, the struggles of the father, especially
19 around custody and things like that. So, thank you
20 for being here again today. And definitely want to
21 figure out how to make sure we're connecting you to
22 some of the services.

23 And Ms. Miguez, question, and I think you...
24 your organization is a perfect example of how you
25 guys are doing multiple things. Because, now we're

1 like best friends, because I see you all the time.

2 Because, literally you have programs on the DYCD side
3 and on the ACS side.

4 Can you talk about... and even you talked about
5 the LTW (Learning to Work) program piece, which is
6 the DOE stuff.

7 Can you talk about some of the challenges that
8 your agency faces? Because you have all these
9 different multiple funding streams and they're always
10 talked about in buckets. Some ideas you guys might
11 have around like how the interconnection would be
12 much more helpful, because in the way it's now...
13 it's all very separate. I feel like I speak to you
14 about different things separately, because that is
15 just how it's been set up.

16 So, can you talk a little bit about that, please?

17 ANNIE MINGUEZ: Thank you, Chair.

18 I think by nature these programs are siloed, and
19 one of the things that we have been trying to do at
20 Good Shepherd... and I know that other agencies are
21 trying to as well, is to break down those silos and
22 start to think about what programs are young people
23 touching? How can we deepen their relationships in
24 the positive programs? Acknowledging kind of like
25

1 where they've been. Programs like Learning to Work
2 are working with young people that are previously
3 homeless in the juvenile justice system, they're
4 working with this population, and they've figured out
5 how to stay connected with them. One of the things
6 that we want to make sure of is that they're moving
7 from a high touch program to another high touch
8 program, which is why we're talking about Cure
9 Violence and the crisis management system. It is why
10 we're talking about Learning to Work and those
11 advocate counselors, and really thinking about what
12 that continuum looks like for us. It's work that
13 we're doing, and of course I think that all of the
14 providers are trying to figure out like how we stay
15 connected in the lives of young people through
16 extended programs that we're offering. Because, once
17 they have built that trust with us, they want to be
18 able to stay with us. So we ,you know, in the absence
19 of not having a program, it's about how we working
20 with other community organizations through our
21 aftercare program to engage with them, so that
22 there's a transition and they start to see both of us
23 together - like, we are here to serve and to help you
24 as you transition.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I think that it's
3 important, right? And it's why I highlighted even
4 earlier in the testimony of all of these... you guys
5 are the same providers. It's not our fault that the
6 agencies are working differently, right? So, I think
7 we really need to be thinking about how we create
8 synergy amongst the city agencies in the same way
9 some of the nonprofits are doing it. Because, again,
10 you just mentioned your, agency has a Learn to Work
11 contract that's with DOE. I'm sure you guys have
12 community schools, that's DOE. Then you have LSPs,
13 NSPs, all the Ps, uh, ,you know, foster care, you
14 also have afterschool, so that's DYCD. So, there are
15 all these different programs, and in the same way
16 that you have to figure out how to work in synergy
17 ,you know, it's really going to be important how the
18 city agencies are doing the same, because they often
19 are ,like, we're meeting and we're touching, but it's
20 not making sense on the continuation of programs and
21 services. So, I definitely want us to continue that
22 conversation.

23 I do not have any more questions. Thank you guys
24 both for being here.

25 PANEL: Thank you

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We are going to move to
3 remote testimony. If there's anyone else who wishes
4 to testify in person, uh, please see the Sergeant at
5 Arms. I see no one else, so we'll move to Zoom
6 testimony.

7 I'm going to call Judith Harris.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has started.

9 JUDITH HARRIS: Thank you, Chair Stevens and
10 Committee, my name is Judith Harris; I'm an attorney
11 at The Legal Aid Society Juvenile Rights Practice,
12 and I represented youth and juvenile delinquency
13 proceedings for about 15 years in the Bronx Family
14 Court. I also refer you to our written testimony.

15 Regarding plans to reduce Close to Home capacity,
16 yet expand detention at Horizon, instead of this
17 disruption and expense the City should press the
18 State to make changes to allow the use of Close to
19 Home beds for juvenile detention purposes.

20 The children who are placed in Close to Home are
21 almost all Black and brown from under resourced
22 neighborhoods, they should not be incarcerated if
23 they can be better served, as they usually can be, in
24 the community.

1
2 We must continue to reduce the number of children
3 in placement by expanding alternative-to-placement
4 programs.

5 Key concerns with Close to Home and aftercare:

6 We must provide older youth with GED programs and
7 vocational training at every Close to Home at every
8 Close to Home facility. Since Raise the Age, Close to
9 Home has seen an increase in older teens yet, there's
10 not enough availability of GED programs and job
11 training at all facilities - some have none.

12 We must improve staff retention at Close to Home
13 facilities - this has been discussed a lot today. I
14 won't go into it more since time is limited.

15 At times Legal Aid staff have difficulty reaching
16 Close to Home staff, including clinical, and haven't
17 been notified of key transitional meetings.

18 Also, access to interpreters other than Spanish
19 must be consistently provided for in-person meetings
20 and services with families or guardians.

21 Aftercare should be strengthened with better
22 connection to educational, vocational, mental health,
23 and other services in the community.

24

25

2 Some clients, younger clients, would benefit from
3 anti-gun and anti-gang violence programming but
4 aren't getting these types of referrals.

5 Crossover youth who are in Close to Home but also
6 in foster care, need better planning. The failure to
7 timely and adequately planning can result in longer
8 Close to Home facility stays, because foster
9 placement (TIMER CHIMES)... (CROSS-TALK)

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 JUDITH HARRIS: is not set up in time for
12 aftercare. This should never happen.

13 Again, more alternative to placement program
14 slots are needed. Also with regard to crossover
15 youth, ACS case planners on the youth's child
16 (BACKGROUND NOISE) (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds... (CROSS-TALK)

18 JUDITH HARRIS: case often lack understanding of
19 Close to Home time frames. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

21 We now call Daphne Torres-Douglas.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has started.

23 DAPHNE TORRES-DOUGLAS: Greetings to the
24 Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to
25 testify. I'm Daphne Torres-Douglas, Vice President at

1
2 the Children's Village (INAUDIBLE) house. We provide
3 one of the broadest continuums of trauma-informed
4 evidence-based family support interventions-
5 interventions that focus on family reunification and
6 keeping at risk youth at home, in school, and with
7 people who love them.

8 We are early advocates of Close to Home, and we
9 remained active in serving teens and families since
10 legislation was passed.

11 The changes have been dramatic, and for many
12 families, life altering. For many, placement is a
13 result of disconnection from community, family,
14 school, and mental health symptoms from trauma.

15 Close to Home, with this emphasis on therapeutic
16 rather than punitive approaches - pre and post
17 placement, has dramatically reduced the length of
18 stay in placement and increased successful
19 reification with family. This requires inclusion of
20 family engagement in Close to Home immediately upon
21 entry, and follows youth into the community at
22 discharge. When done right, our therapeutic and
23 financial investments in families provide validation,
24 safety, and restore humanity.

1 While therapy that focuses on social and
2 emotional development is fundamental to our approach,
3 we also provide financial assistance when finances
4 and poverty present barriers to success. This support
5 takes the form of rigorous evidence-based aftercare
6 services, life coaching, and mentoring to help
7 mitigate life stresses that weigh heavily on young
8 people and lend extra support to youth who are
9 navigating high school enrollment, college
10 applications, employment searches. Engaging in people
11 working successfully requires a strong workforce that
12 is skilled, invested, and not distracted by their own
13 poverty.
14

15 ACS counselors still earn much more and get
16 better benefits. This impacts our nonprofit sector's
17 ability to hire and retain great employees.

18 We also ask that New York City simplify the
19 budget process and invoice, uh, to make reimbursement
20 faster and more predictable. Agencies like ours
21 struggle with millions in outstanding cash flow and
22 spend (TIMER CHIMES) hundreds of thousands on
23 interest every year due to borrowing... (CROSS-TALK)

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired, thank you...
25 (CROSS-TALK)

1 DAPHNE TORRES-DOUGLAS: to cover delayed payments.

2 Program operation in this manner is not
3 sustainable, everyone loses.

4 The demand for Close to Home is increasing...

5 (CROSS-TALK)

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds... (CROSS-TALK)

7 DAPHNE TORRES-DOUGLAS: We ask the City to renew
8 and expand its investment in this important
9 transformational intervention. Thank you, and I'll
10 submit my testimony.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

12 We will now call on Kimber Jones.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Alex Stein?

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has started.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: With neither of them being
16 online, I would like to just say thank you to ACS for
17 being here and having their testimony. Like it has
18 been stated multiple times, I think that there's a
19 lot of places where we can think about solutions and
20 from the providers today - and even testimony- we
21 heard from folks, I think we're moving in the right
22 direction, but there is still a lot of work to be
23 done. So with that, I would like to adjourn this
24 hearing. (GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING OUT)
25

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 May 23, 2024