

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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Monday, January 27, 2025
Start: 10:10 a.m.
Recess: 12:38 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Deputy Speaker Diana I. Ayala,
Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés
Chris Banks
Tiffany Cabán
Chi A. Ossé
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S

Molly Wasow Park,
Commissioner of the New York City Department of
Social Services (DSS)

Andrea Reid,
Deputy Commissioner of Prevention and Housing
Assistance at the Human Resources Administration

Reesa Henderson,
Chief of Placements at the Department of
Homeless Services

Noam Cohen-Weinberg,
Representing - Self

Elizabeth Mackey,
Representing - Self

Germaine DeLaney,
Representing - Self

Diana Ramos,
Representing - Self

Robert Desir,
Staff Attorney at Legal Aid Society

Timothy Pena,
Founder of Veterans Justice Project

William Botchway,
Legal Advocate for the Housing Defense team at
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

Graham Horn,
Staff Attorney at New York Legal Assistance Group

Helen Strom,
Safety Net Project at Urban Justice Center

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Chris Mann,
Assistant Vice President of Policy and Advocacy
at WIN (Women in Need)

Kate Goldmann,
Housing and Planning Analyst from Real Estate
Board of New York (REBNY)

Eric Lee,
Director of Public Policy at Volunteers of
America Greater New York (VOA-GNY)

Gina Cappuccitti,
Senior Director of Housing Access and Stability
Services at New Destiny Housing

Steve Behar,
Counsel for New York State Senate; Counsel New
York City Council

Juan Diaz,
Policy Associate at Citizens Committee For
Children (CCC)

Laura Lazarus,
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Anthos
Home

Christopher Leon Johnson,
Representing - Self

Reverend Dr. Terry Troia,
President of Project Hospitality

Amy Blumsack,
Director of Organizing and Policy at Neighbors
Together

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, good morning,
3 this is a microphone check for the Committee on
4 General Welfare, located in the Chambers. Today's
5 date is January 27, 2025. Recording done by
6 (INAUDIBLE).

7 (PAUSE)

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Please take your seats, we will
9 be beginning shortly.

10 (PAUSE)

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to
12 today's New York City Council Hearing for the
13 Committee on General Welfare. At this time we ask
14 that you silence all electronic devices, and at no
15 time is anyone to approach the dais.

16 If you would like sign up for in person testimony
17 or have any other questions throughout the hearing,
18 please see one of the Sergeant at Arms.

19 Chair, we are ready to begin.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: (GAVELING IN)

21 Thank you. Good morning, everyone. My name is
22 Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy Speaker of the New
23 York City Council, and the Chair of the General
24 Welfare Committee.

1
2 We are here today to hold an important oversight
3 hearing on the Administration of the City's CityFHEPS
4 Program.

5 The City has a long history of developing housing
6 voucher programs to support New Yorkers in stable,
7 permanent housing. In 2018, then Mayor de Blasio,
8 consolidated a number of such voucher programs to
9 create what is now known as the CityFHEPS Program.

10 CityFHEPS assists households in the community who
11 are at risk of homelessness or are referred by
12 specific city agencies to avert the need to enter the
13 shelter system.

14 CityFHEPS also helps households who are already
15 in the City's shelter system to obtain permanent
16 housing.

17 This program not only provides individuals with
18 vital resources to secure housing, but also provides
19 individuals the opportunity to work with specialists
20 after securing housing to ensure that that housing is
21 the opportunity to work with specialists after
22 securing housing to ensure that that housing is
23 maintained.

24 We know that housing vouchers are an effective
25 solution to address homelessness and affordability.

1
2 And in New York City, the CityFHEPS Program supported
3 over 13,000 households in fiscal year 2024 alone.

4 However, we are all we also know voucher programs
5 can be plagued with administrative issues, delays,
6 and complications that make them difficult to access
7 and use.

8 The General Welfare Committee hopes that this
9 hearing can provide a forum to understand the
10 operationalization of the CityFHEPS Voucher Program,
11 including successes, obstacles, and lessons learned.

12 We look forward to hearing from representatives
13 of the Administration about the operation of the
14 CityFHEPS Program, including current data on how the
15 program is benefiting New Yorkers and where the
16 potential pitfalls lie in ensuring that it is
17 effectively and efficiently implemented.

18 The Committee understands that the CityFHEPS
19 program is currently the subject of ongoing
20 litigation, but we are here today not to discuss the
21 litigation, but to rather understand the way the
22 program is being implemented and has been implemented
23 since before this Council passed the legislation that
24 is subject to the ongoing litigation.

1
2 We thank the Administration for speaking to these
3 components. And I also thank advocates and
4 individuals who are here today that can speak to
5 their direct experience with the CityFHEPS Voucher
6 Program.

7 I would also like to thank the General Welfare
8 Committee staff who worked hard to prepare this
9 hearing, including Sahar Moazami, Legislative
10 Counsel; Nina Rosenberg, Policy Analyst; Julia
11 Haramis, Finance Unit Head; Phariha Rahman, Finance
12 Analyst; Elisabeth Childers-Garcia, Finance Analyst;
13 Ann Driscoll, Data Analyst; and finally my staff,
14 Elsie Encarnacion, Chief of Staff.

15 I would now like to turn it over to our committee
16 counsel to sworn members of the Administration.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, will you please
18 raise your right hand?

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

22 PANEL AFFIRMS

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Perfect, you may begin when
24 ready.
25

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Just one second, I'm sorry, I just want recognize that we have been joined by Council Member Avilés and Council Member Ung.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Good morning, I want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the Committee on General Welfare for holding today's hearing on *the Administration of CityFHEPS*.

My name is Molly Wasow Park, and I serve as the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services, which is comprised of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). I am joined today by Andrea Reid, Deputy Commissioner of Prevention and Housing Assistance at the Human Resources Administration, and Reesa Henderson, Chief of Placements at the Department of Homeless Services.

The City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement rental subsidy, better known as CityFHEPS, is a component of the larger DSS/HRA/DHS strategy of providing an integrated continuum of client services to create a path to sustainability for low-income New Yorkers. CityFHEPS is the largest municipally funded rental subsidy in the nation, and

1
2 a vital tool in the agency's pursuit to promote
3 housing stability for all New Yorkers.

4 Rental assistance programs like CityFHEPS are an
5 essential resource in assisting New Yorkers
6 experiencing homelessness move out of shelter and
7 into stable housing. Developing Independent Living
8 Plans (ILPs) and a strategy to support that plan
9 starts upon a client's entry into shelter. From the
10 issuance of the CityFHEPS Shopping Letter, to the
11 point of move-out from shelter, our dedicated DHS and
12 provider staff are laser focused on connecting
13 shelter clients to permanent housing. That process
14 includes case management, connecting clients with the
15 tools to obtain employment, the work of shelter
16 housing specialists, the DHS apartment search team
17 and the Public Engagement Unit to find apartment
18 leads, and shelter housing specialists and DHS staff
19 who collectively make sure subsidy packages are
20 accurate and processed efficiently.

21 CityFHEPS also plays an integral role in keeping
22 New Yorkers at risk of homelessness housed. For
23 clients in community, HRA's Homebase program serves
24 as a key pathway for access to CityFHEPS. HRA
25 oversees 26 Homebase sites across the five boroughs.

1
2 The Homebase program provides various homelessness
3 prevention services and aftercare support services to
4 families and individuals exiting shelter and
5 transferring to permanent housing. New Yorkers may be
6 eligible for Homebase if they are at imminent risk of
7 entering the New York City shelter system, are low-
8 income, and want to remain stably housed in their
9 community. Once in the program, dedicated Homebase
10 staff are available in each borough to evaluate a
11 household's specific needs and offer supports such
12 as: services to prevent eviction; assistance
13 obtaining public benefits; emergency rental
14 assistance; utilities and rent payment support to
15 address arrears; short term financial assistance;
16 educational and job placement assistance; and help
17 relocating.

18 The City's investment in the CityFHEPS rental
19 subsidy, and overall focus on permanent housing
20 placements has proven to be essential in stabilizing
21 the lives of at-risk New Yorkers since the CityFHEPS
22 launch in 2018. FY24 was a record-breaking year for
23 placements from shelter to permanent housing. DSS
24 connected more New Yorkers to subsidized permanent
25 housing than any year in recent history. We helped

1
2 more than 18,500 households move out of shelter and
3 into stable homes - a 24 percent increase from the
4 previous year. The majority of those households
5 relied on CityFHEPS to move out of shelter. Nearly
6 14,000 households - a record number - leased
7 apartments using CityFHEPS vouchers last year,
8 reflecting a 42 percent increase compares to FY23.

9 These record-breaking outcomes were delivered to
10 New Yorkers despite a historic low in the City's
11 vacancy rate. The New York City vacancy rate of 1.4
12 percent is the lowest since 1968, and when we focus
13 in on the vacancy rate for affordable rental units
14 its is even lower. For households searching for units
15 under \$1,100, the vacancy rate was 0.39. Those
16 vacancy rates have ongoing impacts on securing
17 affordable housing. In the face of that challenge the
18 City and DSS continue to innovate and partner with
19 sister agencies in mobilizing resources to assist our
20 clients.

21 Recognizing we are in a housing emergency, DSS is
22 leaving no stone unturned in our efforts to connect
23 New Yorkers in shelter to housing and has embarked on
24 a program to use social service dollars to actually
25 create deeply affordable housing. We announced our

1
2 ground-breaking Affordable Housing Services program
3 in the beginning of 2024. Through this initiative we
4 are fast-tracking the creation of newly constructed
5 high-quality and deeply affordable housing for
6 CityFHEPS voucher holder in shelter. The agency will
7 develop nearly 900 units through this program during
8 the Adams' Administration. To date the agency has
9 brought four high-quality sites comprising of 240
10 units online with most of these units leased up in a
11 matter of weeks.

12 We understand that CityFHEPS is a complicated and
13 intricate program. DSS is committed to progressively
14 strengthening the program over time. In recent years
15 we have worked to increase subsidy access by reducing
16 work requirements for families with children,
17 eliminating the 90-day rule, and allowing for the use
18 of CityFHEPS statewide.

19 We have also focused on ways to generate more
20 housing packages by holding providers accountable for
21 meeting exit targets, and training shelter staff on
22 best practices for complete and thorough submissions
23 to ensure housing packages can be expedited to get
24 clients housed as quickly as possible.

1
2 And finally, we have invested in technical
3 improvements to help streamline the process. We
4 continue to work to reduce client and landlord
5 administrative burden by improving systems like
6 Access HRA and CurRentNYC. We are streamlining
7 workflows and thinking critically about what
8 documentation we really need. Doing so reduces the
9 clients' paperwork and form-filling burden. To give
10 just one example of how we are approaching this work:
11 we are currently partnering with a nonprofit,
12 Re!Institute, that has a long history of bringing
13 together people with lived experience of
14 homelessness, government and providers to facilitate
15 housing placements for households experiencing
16 homelessness. This is work that they do all over the
17 country. They are helping us bring down our package
18 return rate, since we know that when we have to
19 return a CityFHEPS package to a shelter provider
20 because documentation is missing or inaccurate, it
21 adds time to that household's shelter stay.
22 Re!Institute is looking at both DHS and provider
23 workflows to identify ways we can improve.

24 Process improvement is an ongoing endeavor, as,
25 step by step, we gather input, reflect, and reassess

1 based on client and stakeholder experience. We are
2 committed to listening to feedback from our clients
3 and stakeholders and exploring what we can make work
4 better - even in the face of a tight affordable
5 housing market and other complex challenges.
6

7 Though our focus is CityFHEPS today I do want to
8 highlight that this subsidy is part of a larger
9 landscape of housing subsidies that serve New Yorkers
10 experiencing homelessness and low income households
11 generally. In addition to CityFHEPS, the New York
12 State Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention
13 Supplement (StateFHEPS), the Housing Choice Voucher
14 Program, also known as Section 8, and New York City
15 Housing Authority (NYCHA) housing all serve as
16 important tools in providing crucial aid.

17 Situating CityFHEPS in a broader policy context,
18 it is important to recognize that other levels of
19 government share the responsibility to devote
20 resources to protecting housing stability overall,
21 and through the avenue of rental assistance in
22 particular. Relatively speaking, our municipal City
23 government, has the least latitude and fiscal
24 capacity when compared to state and federal partners;
25 while we can provide evidence of the efficacy of our

1 policies and strategies, I would like to underscore
2 the need for further investment by our government
3 partners. Investment in these other housing subsidies
4 is essential to ensuring New Yorkers at risk of
5 housing instability receive as many resources as
6 possible.
7

8 Lastly, I want to briefly deviate from CityFHEPS
9 entirely, and flag a time-sensitive issue that will
10 affect many voucher holders and your constituents
11 generally. As of April 2025, households receiving
12 Medicaid must recertify in order to maintain their
13 coverage. The COVID-era extensions are fully
14 exhausted, and it is crucial that Medicaid recipients
15 recertify. We want every eligible household to
16 maintain their coverage, so strongly urge everyone to
17 respond to DSS recertification notices. We welcome
18 the opportunity to collaborate with the Council on
19 getting this message out.

20 We appreciate the opportunity to testify today
21 and welcome your questions. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I am making myself a note to
23 make sure that I am properly getting that information
24 out.

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Commissioner.

Can you describe the process in which a family is provided information about their potential eligibility for the CityFHEPS Program and how they would go about applying?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Sure, let me start and my colleagues can chime in.

That looks a little bit different depending on whether we're talking about a household in shelter or a household in the community. So let me do a high level overview of each of them.

So for a shelter... a client in shelter, the conversation about housing should start on day one. The client was going be meeting with their case worker to complete an independent living plan. That's something that they update, every two weeks in most cases. And then Housing Specialists should be, helping to certify that client for any subsidy for which they appear to be eligible.

For clients who meet initial... who are in shelter who meet initial CityFHEPS' eligibility requirements, they'll get a Shopping Letter automatically, and about 75 percent of the Shopping Letters are in fact issued automatically.

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2 If a family isn't, for example, on cash
3 assistance or working when they first enter the
4 shelter, they'll work with their case manager to deal
5 with, uhm, address those issues first, and then as
6 soon as they do meet the standard, that letter will
7 get issued.

8 For clients in community, it is a little bit
9 different. So many of the people in community, you
10 know, there are many people in community now who have
11 a CityFHEPS voucher. They obviously know about the
12 program if they would like to move, or have changes
13 in life circumstances that they need to make
14 adjustments, or even, frankly, just the annual
15 renewal, that can be done on Access HRA.

16 For somebody who believes that they are eligible
17 for CityFHEPS, or thinks they might be eligible for
18 CityFHEPS, we have quite detailed frequently asked
19 questions on our website. The, you know, core
20 requirement, there a whole slew of varieties, but
21 through the basic requirement for in community
22 eligibility is imminent risk of eviction and has
23 prior shelter history. And then households should go
24 to Homebase, and then they can move the process from
25 there.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, they had to be in shelter
3 prior?

4 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: There are absolutely
5 exceptions around veterans, people in rent controlled
6 units, some other special populations, but for most
7 people in community, the eligibility requirement is,
8 uh, does require a previous shelter history.

9 Andrea, anything you wanna add to that?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER REID: Thank you,
11 Commissioner. Thank you, Council Member for the
12 question.

13 There's the adult protective services, group as
14 well.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And they're not required to
16 have prior...

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER REID: No, no prior shelter
18 history.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

20 Well, two things about the shelter, process. Is
21 there, like, an internal audit to ensure that folks
22 are getting that information on day one?

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So, I don't know that I
24 would necessarily characterize it as an internal
25 audit process, but, yes, we are monitoring our

1
2 processes and our shelter performance very, very
3 closely, and ex... housing exit performance and
4 subsidized exit performance is one of our key
5 metrics... The key metrics that we look at.

6 So we have expectations for how many placements
7 each shelter subsidized placements in particular that
8 each shelter should be doing. It is adjusted a little
9 bit based on the population. Right, we're gonna...
10 we're not gonna necessarily give the same targets to
11 say, a mental health shelter and an employment
12 shelter just because the life circumstances of the
13 people in those shelters are different.

14 But, we give targets, and if they aren't meeting
15 their... those targets, we will put them on a
16 corrective action plan, and we will engage.

17 Chief Henderson has also recently launched a
18 program that I think is really innovative to provide
19 some extra support to the shelters who are struggling
20 a little bit, so I will let her speak about that.

21 CHIEF HENDERSON: Thank you Commissioner, and
22 thank you Council Member for that question.

23 So as the Commissioner said, we're doing a
24 variety of different strategies to help providers
25

1
2 set the supports that they need, as well as to hold
3 them accountable.

4 We just launched a concierge pilot, which is
5 aimed at providing the blueprint for housing to
6 show... to help providers understand their roles and
7 expectations in supporting clients in their journey.

8 Our staff is embedded in shelters that require
9 more hand holding, and the requirement is to ensure
10 that clients are getting access to information, to
11 support, as well as helping them navigate the system.

12 We're also providing, uhm, reporting and
13 analytics to help providers zone in and target the
14 clients who are most in need of the services that
15 they deliver.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We've been joined by Council
17 Member Cabán on Zoom.

18 How is the Administration sharing information
19 about the new utility allowance?

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Terrific question. So,
21 just to take a step back so we are all on the same
22 page, the utility allowance is really a reflection o
23 the fact that utility costs are a part of housing
24 costs. Right? And our desire is that people are
25 paying 30 percent of their income for housing at

1 large, and that includes utility costs. So what we
2 have done recently is to - this is about a year ago -
3 is to adjust... the maximum payment standard is
4 adjusted depending on what forms of utilities the
5 client is responsible for. So, I just want to pull up
6 my notes here to make sure I'm doing accurate
7 examples here. But, so the maximum payment standard,
8 if all utilities were included for a two bedroom is
9 \$3,027.00. But if the tenant pays gas and
10 electricity, which is a very common scenario, it's
11 \$2,885.00. Right? So there is a \$142.00 difference.
12 And all of this is coded into our systems. Right? So
13 that it is... The client doesn't need to know to ask
14 for this, that this is set when their voucher is
15 getting processed.

16 So, in that case, the maximum that the landlord
17 can collect is the \$2,885.00. And also varying based
18 on legal rent and things like that. But I pretending
19 for the moment that that's not an issue.

20 The client is paying 30 percent of their income
21 in rent. So if you theoretically, let's just say 30
22 percent of their income was \$300.00, they are
23 actually paying \$158.00 of that in rent, and then
24 that \$142.00, that shelter allowance, is available
25

1
2 for use of utilities. So this aligns with Section 8,
3 the way Section 8 has been doing it for a very long
4 time, those utility allowances are posted on our
5 website, but as I said, this structure has been now
6 codified into our system so that it is processed on
7 an automatic basis.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Cabán, did you
9 want to ask a followup question on that? Oh, we don't
10 have quorum, sorry. Send it to Alexa.

11 How many households were found eligible for
12 CityFHEPS vouchers in the previous and current fiscal
13 year? And can you disaggregate by household type?

14 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So the eligibility
15 process for Section 8 for, excuse me, for CityFHEPS
16 is slightly different than the eligibility process
17 for many other benefits where you have a clear cut, I
18 am applying, and then and there is a yes/no rejection
19 moment, you know, as is the case for, say, SNAP or
20 cash assistance.

21 With CityFHEPS this sort of early upfront and
22 frankly rolling assessment about eligibility. If you
23 appear to pass that upfront, uh, the eligibility
24 assessment, right, you're in shelter, you're on cash
25 assistance, you have some work income, you get the

1 Shopping Letter. At that point, the formal
2 eligibility of processing the voucher happens much
3 later after the client has identified the apartment.
4 But because we've done that early assessment, we find
5 there's almost never a formal ineligibility
6 determination. And if a household is, uh, doesn't
7 appear to pass the initial upfront assessment on day
8 one, we'll do it again at day three, at day five, at
9 day 10, right, as their circumstances change.
10

11 So it's much more of an iterative and rolling
12 process, which is a long winded way of saying I don't
13 really have ineligible numbers to give you.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm. Do we know how many
15 households were found newly eligible for APS
16 households?

17 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So as my colleague
18 noted, APS is one of the criteria. APS is very
19 sensitive medical information. So while we, it is...
20 the clients can be routed to CityFHEPS because of
21 their APS eligibility. We don't, in their rental
22 assistance data, tag them as APS clients because
23 we're trying to protect the confidentiality of that
24 medical information. So that's another one, I'm
25 sorry, that that I can't add.

1
2 To give a little bit of context on, so that we do
3 have quite a bit of data on CityFHEPS, in FY 24,
4 there were 13,400 households who did lease up with
5 CityFHEPS. For this fiscal year through December,
6 there's been 7,100 households that have done so, and
7 I can, you know, certainly break out that data in
8 other ways. We have about almost 52,000 households
9 that are currently receiving CityFHEPS in total.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You said 52,000?

11 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Uh, the exact number is
12 51,921 as of December.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, hold on. The, okay, I'm
14 just trying to go back to the APS issue because I
15 just, I find it a little confusing.

16 So how would personal medical information be
17 accessible to anyone if...

18 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Well, so in order to be
19 APS eligible, you must be so mental... meet a
20 definition of mental or physical impairment that you
21 may not... you cannot manage your own affairs.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm.

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Right? So and it is
24 critical that the program staff within our APS team
25

1
2 understands that and knows that, and they certainly
3 have data on their clients.

4 We have a whole other universe of people who are
5 managing rental assistance vouchers. Right? And to
6 know that client "Molly" is physically - seriously
7 physically impaired, they don't necessarily need to
8 know that. Right? So it is important that the APS
9 program staff are monitoring their caseload, and they
10 absolutely are monitoring their caseload. They engage
11 with everybody on that caseload on a regular basis.
12 But the people processing the rental vouchers don't
13 need that medical information on the client.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But I would argue that DSS
15 would need that information, or should have that
16 information, because you're the largest advocate for
17 these types of programs and how we are able to assess
18 whether or not there's a specific need in the aging
19 population that ,you know, we're not able to respond
20 to...

21 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So we can certainly
22 follow up with information about the APS caseload in
23 general. Absolutely. We agree that there is, uhm,
24 that is a critical vulnerable population.

1
2 And just to expand a little bit on the
3 intersection between APS and CityFHEPS, and to speak
4 broadly about APS in general, but there are very
5 specific eligibility criteria for APS in, uhm, that
6 are in state law, right, around physical, mental
7 impairment, ability to manage your own affairs, and
8 nobody other... else who's able or willing to take
9 responsibility for that individual.

10 And there is some curtailment of civil liberties
11 when somebody is participating in APS. So it's a
12 very, very specific program without a lot of
13 discretion for the agency. So we process all... we
14 look at all of the referrals that come to us. You
15 know, the fact that somebody isn't... is or isn't
16 qualified for APS is whether or not - it's strictly
17 based on whether or not they meet those state
18 requirements.

19 There may be many other, you know, somebody can
20 meet their... not meet their requirements for APS and
21 still have other kinds of housing stability needs, at
22 which point we would really engage with them to look
23 at our full complement of can we bring our emergency
24 rental assistance to bear? Do they need assistance
25 with a lawyer? Are they SCRIE eligible? Right?

1
2 There's a slew of benefits. So APS is a very narrow
3 slice of it and very constrained by state law, but
4 there other resources for seniors facing housing
5 instability.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I would... I mean, most
7 of the cases that you described to me warrant some
8 sort of supportive housing, not necessarily CityFHEPS
9 where they're living independently after they've had
10 a history of not being able to do that on their own.

11 I had another question about it. It just left...
12 go ahead. Alexa had a follow up.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I wanted to... I want to
14 back to the question about ineligibility. I know you
15 noted that the process is iterative and can change on
16 a daily basis. But it's a little shocking to me that
17 there is no way for you all to note how many times a
18 person or family, whatever, a client is tagged as
19 ineligible, and what that cycle and where it's
20 happening throughout the system. I would expect the
21 staff is inputting all this information- Is this a
22 technological problem, or is it that that's just not
23 a metric we're interested in in following?

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yea, and I understand
25 where you're coming from certainly. But for... by

1
2 deeming somebody ineligible, essentially, we're
3 saying this is not an option for you. And what we are
4 instead saying for, let's focus on families on
5 households in the shelter system, just because as I
6 say, it does look a little different outside. But for
7 families in the shelter system, you may not... if you
8 are ineligible for a shop you don't get a Shopping
9 Letter today. Our goal is that you are gonna get a
10 Shopping Letter at some point in the near future.
11 Right? So, but I don't want to qualify somebody as
12 ineligible because that feels to me like we're
13 drawing a line under what is and isn't part of their
14 planning process.

15 So we absolutely know how many... which
16 households have a Shopping Letter and which
17 housing... which households don't have a Shopping
18 Letter. And then our goal is to work with those who
19 don't have a Shopping Letter to try and help them get
20 into that Shopping Letter category.

21 As of January 20th, there were over 11,000
22 households in the shelter system with Shopping
23 Letters. So there's also, you know, a big piece of
24 making the CityFHEPS program work is thinking about
25 housing supply. We have a lot of people with vouchers

1
2 who are struggling to find places to use them. But,
3 but then with the remaining households that don't
4 have a Shopping Letter, right, I don't wanna... I
5 don't want to label them as ineligible, because that
6 sends, to me, sends the message and to the, you know,
7 very diffuse groups of staff that we're working with,
8 that is... we're crossing CityFHEPS off the list as a
9 resource that that household has available to them
10 when it's not the case.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So how... so it sounds
12 like... it sounds like there's like a soft process
13 happening. And I guess, from the perspective of a
14 client, when you're not given the Shopping Letter,
15 you're like inedible and moving other places without
16 real clarity around why.

17 So I guess I just would like to understand if the
18 agency is really looking at those, uhm, at those
19 particular moments and looking at the data and
20 understanding why it is happening at that point, to
21 look at trends that could help us kind of, uh,
22 ensure that that the service provision is able to
23 respond to gaps and/or challenges that maybe we're
24 not set up to look at.

25

1
2 So that's a little bit of my concern with this
3 not reporting in some kind of ways where these gaps
4 are happening, because we see the back end of it. We
5 just get people who are frustrated and say, "I'm
6 constantly bumped out. I'm not eligible. I don't
7 understand. I'm, you know, in a hotel."

8 So I guess I'd love to understand more how the
9 Agency can be more nuanced and assess those
10 particular points in time.

11 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So, and I hear you, and
12 we can, you know, we have been doing a lot of
13 training with our staff. I can ask my colleague here
14 to speak more about the training. And I think one of
15 the things that we should be making sure is that
16 housing specialists and case workers are making sure
17 to communicate with clients about the full spectrum
18 of resources that are out there. Right? CityFHEPS is
19 a big one, and growing. Right? We have grown
20 overwhelmingly in the last several years, but also
21 that making sure that people understand that there
22 may be Section 8 vouchers, there may be NYCHA
23 vouchers, there are StateFHEPS is a resource that's
24 available, and helping them understand that spectrum
25 of resources.

1
2 But absolutely, we do look at data. You know, the
3 two primary qualifications for CityFHEPS for those in
4 shelter are receipt of public assistance and the work
5 hours.

6 And absolutely, we look at data (TIMER CHIMES)
7 on public assistance on a very regular basis. It's
8 important to us for all kinds of reasons. It plays
9 into not only the resources that clients have for
10 their own financial stability, but it affects our
11 ability to claim shelter costs from the State, so it
12 matters very much for the City's budget as well as
13 for CityFHEPS eligibility.

14 We're monitoring cash assistance enrollment on a
15 shelter by shelter basis. We are doing outreach. We
16 are following up with the providers where it looks
17 like the cash assistance rates are not as high as
18 they should be. There may be a slew of reasons for
19 that. If you have, you know, a shelter with a higher
20 proportion of recent immigrants, it's going have
21 lower cash assistance rates. But we do a lot of
22 follow up.

23 As my colleague mentioned, we are looking at
24 exactly how many placements people have, how many
25 Shopping Letters that they have, and anytime we see

1
2 any deviation from where we expect people to be, we
3 will absolutely do that.

4 CHIEF HENDERSON: I'll just add to the
5 Commissioner's point that part of the resolution of
6 this is really making sure that providers are doing
7 intense case management, focusing on individual
8 living plans, is key to understand each client's,
9 journey and options available to them.

10 We are laser focused on providing real time
11 support to help expedite some of those inquiries,
12 that's part of our natural process.

13 Providers are expected that clients that are not
14 automatically generated, that they are reaching out
15 and investigating specific issues or circumstances
16 around the client's needs. And our office is laser
17 focused support those decisions in real time as
18 possible.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So in terms of, you noted
20 the shopping letters that you have, 11,000 people who
21 were given Shopping Letters. We understand that there
22 are significant delays in even getting those Shopping
23 Letters and that, I think delays since October.

24 So how do you explain this current issue of
25 delays, and then where people are kind of not meeting

1
2 eligibility gaps? So if you could speak to that,
3 please.

4 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We don't have any
5 systemic delays in our CityFHEPS program, which is
6 not to say that a package cannot occasionally get
7 delayed. But in terms of across the board, we are not
8 seeing anything systemic.

9 About 75 percent of the letters that get issued
10 are done so automatically. And for the remainder of
11 those, by definition, it is a manual process. So
12 there is more client by client engagement on those
13 circumstances, but we are, uh, we set very clear
14 expectations for what that process should look like.
15 And our DHS program administrators program analysts
16 are following up on a regular basis with sites to
17 make sure that that is happening as it should be.

18 So, you know, if there's particular instances, or
19 cases that you would like us to follow up on, happy
20 to do that. As I say, you know, the fact that we do
21 not have across the board systemic delays does not
22 mean that there aren't sometimes an issue that,
23 across the board, in a relatively complicated process
24 where mistakes can happen, and we are always there to
25 follow up on that.

1
2 Something that that, Chief Henderson has
3 instituted recently is an office hours process where
4 shelter providers and clients can call and get
5 information on a specific package.

6 So we want to make sure that we have really clear
7 lines of communication across the board so that if
8 there is a hiccup, we have a way to solve for that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So what's the gap between,
10 uhm, you mentioned there's automatic responses. I
11 guess, in terms of the overall percentage, how many
12 are getting automatic responses, and how many are
13 undergoing this manual assessment?

14 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So about 75 percent of
15 the Shopping Letters are issued automatically. So
16 that's for households that meet requirements that we
17 can that are easily codified within administrative
18 data. Right? So that we know somebody is on cash
19 assistance or and working, or that they are receiving
20 SSI, for example, all of that would generate an
21 automated letter.

22 And I should say we are perpetually looking at
23 our data. What can we pull in from other systems so
24 that we can increase the universe of letters that are
25 automated? The ones that are not automated are for...

1
2 are the other 25 percent are clients who are in a
3 slightly more complicated situation.

4 So for example, a single adult who meets the work
5 hours, they are not on cash assistance right now, but
6 we know that we'll be able to apply for a single
7 issuance case for them at the point in time that they
8 find an apartment. That letter might be manual.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And are you keeping track
10 of the average length of time that these manual
11 assessments are taking?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Again, because...
13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I know they're
15 complicated, but it it's an important 25 percent to
16 track if they're taking six months, a year, or, you
17 know, I guess the time frame is important in terms of
18 metrics and moving people along and making sure
19 they're not getting caught.

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Right. I don't have a
21 metric from the point in time that somebody requests
22 a letter until that is issued. It is a shelter by
23 shelter specific process. I hear where you're coming
24 from, and we'll look at ways whether or not that's
25 something that is trackable going forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So going back - So can you tell us how many households exited shelter to NYCHA?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes, in FY24, 585 households exited shelter to NYCHA.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That was this fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: 585.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. How many households were eligible for vouchers that did not utilize the voucher within the year?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So given this rolling nature of the Shopping Letter process, the within a year part of it is a difficult question to answer.

As I've said, about 10,000 households, slightly higher right now, but in shelter and searching has been a relatively consistent number.

The length of time that it takes to find an apartment with a Shopping Letter can vary really substantially, depending on how specific an individual's needs are. So if you need an accessible apartment, there are fewer of those, and that tends to take longer.

1
2 Domestic violence survivors, right, who might
3 have parts of the city that are not safe for that
4 person to search in, that takes longer.

5 There's analysis, frankly, that it takes... it's
6 harder to find an apartment in the summer than it is
7 in the winter, because there's more people competing
8 in the summer.

9 So there's a lot of factors that play into how
10 long it takes to use the Shopping Letter. But we
11 absolutely know that the City's vacancy rate, that
12 incredibly low vacancy rate is hurting our clients.
13 There's no doubt about that.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, income discrimination
15 is also hurting your clients.

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Absolutely, that is a
17 real factor.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The agency coordinating with
19 the Office of Income Discrimination to report cases?

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Always. Yes. So, we work
21 with the Commission on Human Rights. We will always
22 report cases. I will say, uh, the interplay between
23 source of income discrimination and the tight real
24 estate market makes some of these cases hard. Right?

1
2 There are absolutely instances where, you know,
3 people will say no vouchers allowed, and that's very
4 clear cut and black and white. There's also instances
5 where, you know, at a given viewing, there's 30
6 people there, and 10 of them walk in with cash on
7 hand, and it's harder to say what is income
8 discrimination versus just a really tight real estate
9 market.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm. Can you tell us how
11 many households moved into permanent housing using
12 CityFHEPS Vouchers in the previous and current fiscal
13 years, and can you disaggregate that by household
14 type?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes. So just for FY24,
16 there were 13,400 households who leased up. And I'm
17 using the "lease up" language very deliberately
18 because that includes both community and leaving
19 shelter. Right? So some of those people will use a
20 CityFHEPS Voucher to stay in the apartment that they
21 were in. So that's why I'm using that "leased up"
22 language, uh, 7,100 households to date.

23 There are about 52,000, almost 52,000 active
24 CityFHEPS cases. Of those cases, uhm, 25,643 are
25

1 families with children; 3,966 are adult families; and
2
3 22,296 are single adults.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: And we can certainly
6 follow up with you with detailed data breakouts.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect.

8 I want to note that we've been joined by Council
9 Member Banks, and Council Member Ossé was here a few
10 minutes ago.

11 What was the average time between voucher
12 eligibility and move-in into an apartment in the
13 previous and current fiscal year?

14 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So starting the clock
15 from the point in time that we got the package
16 submitted to us, so that's actually slightly before
17 the eligibility determination, uh, on average it
18 takes about 24 days.

19 And I am really actually quite pleased to say
20 that this is data that we now are tracking on a
21 regular basis. I've testified about timelines before,
22 uh, in front of you beforehand, and have had to use
23 samples that we manually... that we pulled and did
24 manual accounts. We now have the, uh, I'm now looking
25 at this every single week.

1
2 So we... it's from submission to move-out is on
3 average about 24 days.

4 I will fully acknowledge that there is variation
5 around that average. There are issues that happen,
6 uhm, and we take those very seriously, and we, uh,
7 both troubleshoot and use that to inform changes in
8 process going forward.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: When there are issues, what is
10 the I mean, I'm hoping that is... that those numbers
11 are minimal, but what is the longest amount of time
12 that a person has had to wait?

13 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I don't know that figure
14 off the top of my head, but I would say the most
15 common source of delay is when we return packages
16 back to the provider. Right? So something is missing.
17 Something is inaccurate.

18 And we know that our... I mentioned this a little
19 bit in our testimony, we know that our return rates
20 are higher than we would like. That is a pain point
21 for us and something that we're really focused on.

22 We have done an enormous amount of training with
23 providers to try and assist them in in putting
24 together higher quality packages. We are still not
25 there yet, which is why we're going through this 3rd

1 party process assessment. Want to be looking if there
2 you know, what are things that we should be changing
3 on our side? Is there are there particular documents,
4 forms, pieces of information that we require that
5 are, that are pain points, you know, there's a trade
6 off.
7

8 You know, one of the... we ask for a deed, for
9 example, because there were instances where people
10 represented that they were landlords, in fact, did
11 not own the building, and we paid the wrong person
12 money. Right?

13 So we do an inspection because we don't want
14 people moving into substandard conditions, but
15 there's always a trade off between how quickly we
16 move and how diligent we are. So we wanna make sure
17 we're getting that right and not asking for too many
18 things. So that is an ongoing and iterative process.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's a lot of work.

20 The CityFHEPS Program currently provides the
21 opportunity for voucher holders to receive a month
22 hold on an apartment as the apartment is being
23 reviewed for suitability. Can you provide us with the
24 number of month holds that are sent to landlords in
25 the previous and current fiscal year?

1
2 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So the way we're doing
3 it right now, is that we're paying the unit hold
4 essentially as a matter of course unless it is an
5 HPD... the unit is an HPD finance development.

6 So, at the moment, the unit, uh, number of unit
7 holds roughly aligned to the number of CityFHEPS
8 moves. In FY24, it was 10,274, and in FY25 through
9 December, it was 6,497.

10 So you, you know, I think there is some
11 association with unit hold and paying for delays on
12 the agency's part. Actually, that's not the way it's
13 being used right now. This is something that we are
14 looking at going forward.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. In IBO's January 2024
16 report, DSS reported that as of November 23, 115
17 landlords were fully participating in the current NYC
18 electronic payment pilot, and 800 were able to
19 receive an electronic payment for at least one
20 tenant.

21 As of December 31, 2024, how many landlords were
22 fully receiving electronic payment for all of their
23 tenants? And how many are receiving electronic
24 payments for at least one?

1
2 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So we have gone up;
3 although, there is still a lot of work to do. There's
4 currently 1,500 landlords receiving EFT. It's
5 multiple tenants associated with most of those
6 landlords. We did start with bigger landlords. I
7 don't have the exact number of tenants associated
8 with that; although, we can try and pull that.

9 We've been really focused on Current. Over the
10 last year, our focus was getting all of the shelter
11 providers to use Current. Current is our new end to
12 end CityFHEPS voucher subsidy processing system.

13 So at this point, I can say that virtually all of
14 the shelters are using Current. As of this month to
15 date, something like 91 percent of the CityFHEPS
16 packages are getting submitted through Current, which
17 is at the, you know, a year ago it was single digits.

18 So we put a huge focus on getting our providers
19 to use Current, and now we're turning our attention
20 to really focus on landlord enrollment. We have a
21 couple of tech tweaks that are happening, I think, by
22 the end of this month that will facilitate that. And
23 really, as I say, it is a Calendar Year 25 priority
24 for us. We've been moving, I would say, deliberately
25 slowly with Current, although I think it's an

1
2 incredibly important system. We also have track
3 record with, uh, across the City with tech systems
4 that when you move too fast, there are problems, and
5 this is too high stakes. We cannot screw it up. So
6 we've been moving pretty slowly.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Has there been any update to
8 the CityFHEPS' Landlord Information Form? Because I
9 know that it was last updated in June of 2023, but it
10 didn't indicate any option for electronic payments.
11 Has that changed?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I am going to need to
13 follow up with you on that one, Council Member.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. How many CityFHEPS
15 tenants had their vouchers terminated for failure to
16 renew in the current and past fiscal year?

17 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So about 90 percent of
18 tenants renew every year, and that's been quite
19 consistent over time. And I do want to just caveat
20 that figure a little bit to say we would never expect
21 it to be a 100 percent . So, right, people move, they
22 pass away, they... their income changes such that
23 they're not gonna renew. So from where we sit, we
24 think that 90 percent number is reaching the
25

1
2 overwhelming majority of the people who should be
3 renewing.

4 We have recently added CityFHEPS renewals to
5 Access HRA to try and make that easier for people.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And what is the outreach
7 effort to both the tenant and the landlord as these
8 cases approach their renewal deadline?

9 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: There are multiple
10 mailings. Andrea, is that something you can speak to?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER REID: Yeah, thank you,
12 Commissioner, and thank you Council Member for that
13 question.

14 Three months in advance before the lease is up
15 for renewal, a notice goes out to the household. A
16 second notice goes out about at the two-month marker,
17 and then a third notice goes out to say that you are
18 at risk.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I just I get a lot of
20 cases where folks are telling me, you know, are
21 complaining that they did not receive anything
22 letting them know that the voucher would be expiring.

23 And I wonder, uh, and I... and I actually had a
24 case like this the other day where I had an elderly
25 woman who has, you know, serious issues, actually the

1
2 Commissioner was very helpful with, who had the
3 letter in her bag of documents and didn't know what
4 it was.

5 I wonder if there's a better system, because I
6 feel like a lot of folks are receiving, I mean, when
7 HRA sends documents, they usually send it in, like,
8 different languages, so you may get the same package
9 two and three times, right?

10 I don't know if that's overwhelming folks that
11 they're not realizing what it is that they're
12 receiving. But I do acknowledge, right, that in some
13 of these cases, people did receive the letter, they
14 just didn't know what it was.

15 And I wonder, I mean, it seems difficult, but if
16 there's a better way, you know, highlighted in red, I
17 don't know.

18 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We're certainly happy to
19 work with you to think about ways that we can,
20 improve our tenant and client communication. You
21 know, we really do try and think about different ways
22 that we can get notices out.

23 It is important that we are sending them in
24 writing and sending them in multiple languages
25 because it's a legal requirement. But, you know, we

1
2 have... you can't do this on an individual level, but
3 how are we using social media to communicate with our
4 with our clients? We're try... we are experimenting
5 with different things. There's not necessarily in the
6 CityFHEPS renewal contracts, but we've been
7 developing videos and things like that that we can
8 put out there.

9 So, you know, if you have thoughts about ways
10 that will be, uh, that might resonate in terms of
11 communication strategies, happy to talk about that.

12 I also just should add that we are fairly
13 flexible on our CityFHEPS rule strategy. So if
14 somebody doesn't renew at the year mark, but then
15 comes in, you know, a few months later, we will put
16 them back in the program.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I just wonder, I mean,
18 since the percentage is not that high, is there...
19 are there other means of communication, you know,
20 telephone calls, maybe, communicating directly with
21 the landlord who can then, right, ensure that the
22 resident completes their recertification or at least
23 can add some clarity as to what's happening with that
24 individual tenant.

1
2 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: mean, I do think the 90
3 percent renewal rate is relatively strong.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It is.

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: And, so but we will...
6 we can certainly think about different alternatives.

7 You know, there's a challenge, and, sorry, one
8 other piece that I wanted to say, we do actually auto
9 renewals for people in many different circumstances.
10 So that if we have, uh, if they're on fixed income,
11 there's other categories, that we... that we they
12 don't have to submit paperwork for recertification.
13 So there's a universe that we are auto renewing as
14 well.

15 You know, I think there's a challenge with
16 communicating with landlords about tenant
17 responsibilities and tenant individual dynamics that
18 I think can be hard that some people, you know, most
19 landlords are very good actors and are there to look
20 out for their tenants, and will understand that also
21 ongoing receipt of CityFHEPS is in their best
22 interest, but there are landlords, as you indicated
23 before, that will discriminate against voucher
24 holders. So I think how we pull landlords into that
25 is also a somewhat complicated one. But...

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But you stated that, you know,
3 you're already... that they are already receiving a
4 notice three months ahead. Right? (CROSS-TALK)

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: (INAUDIBLE)

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That that letter goes out to
7 the tenant and the landlord?

8 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: It's the tenant. Just
9 the tenant...

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Just the tenant?

11 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: usually. So, but I hear
12 the point, and it is certainly something that we can
13 take back.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I just figured it, you
15 know, it becomes more expensive to not address it in
16 the beginning, because now a person doesn't have it,
17 doesn't realize they don't have it, they enter, you
18 know, into arrears, they have to go to court, they
19 have to come back to you. You have to help them pay
20 the arrears.

21 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes...

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And, you know, and now see if
23 they qualify again.

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Right. Absolutely. And
25 that's, you know, it's why we send multiple notices.

1
2 It's why we are flexible, you know, give some
3 flexibility on the date, things like that. But at the
4 end of the day...

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: there is a level of
7 tenant engagement that we do need.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, understood.

9 How many CityFHEPS tenants had their vouchers
10 terminated after reaching the five-year cap on the
11 current and past fiscal year?

12 And how many of those household had previously
13 held an older type of voucher such as LINK that
14 counted towards their five-year cap?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So the extension rate at
16 year six is very similar to the previous, the prior
17 years, that we're seeing about 90 percent qualify
18 for that that good cause extension.

19 We've done some analysis on it and, you know,
20 majority of the households are on fixed income and
21 therefore qualify. So it's quite high. I don't have
22 it broken out. We don't track it that way, about
23 whether or not they were on any of the predecessor
24 subsidies, but it as I say, it's quite high.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So if the person is on fixed
3 income, they get a CityFHEPS voucher, they hit the
4 five-year mark, they can apply for an extension. How
5 much time are they given after they apply for the
6 extension if they're approved? How long is it
7 extended?

8 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I believe...

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER REID: Thank you,
10 Commissioner, thank you, Council Member.

11 So it's just a regular process of the annual
12 renewal, and so they would just be submitting the,
13 renewal application that says good cause request.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But it but does that... So
15 then they're approved, right? So does that mean that
16 they have a the voucher for an additional year, an
17 additional five years, or do they like, are they
18 coming back annually?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER REID: There's an annual
20 renewal that's required.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is at some point, do you
22 exhaust the amount of times that you can request an
23 extension?

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So we have not time-
25 limited anybody out of CityFHEPS. There is... it

1 looks very similar. The process is essentially very
2 similar to your recertification process.
3

4 So we haven't had any situation where we say, you
5 would keep qualifying, but for the fact that you've
6 now been on for eight years or nine years or
7 something like that.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You haven't gotten there yet
9 because the program is still fairly new. But is
10 there...

11 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Oh, we've absolutely had
12 people who are in their...

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah?

14 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: They're past their five-
15 year mark. And there is no hard and fast timeline at
16 this point. To the extent that people qualify for a
17 good cause extension, they do need to recertify
18 annually, but that is something that we maintain.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That would be concerning,
20 right? We had this happen with... the one thing, the
21 downside, I think, to some of these programs is that,
22 you know, if when they do expire, they do. They run,
23 you know, we run out of time.

24 Most of these tenants are coming into apartments
25 that they can't afford on their own, because they

1
2 have a fixed income, or because they're working and
3 not making enough to pay the rent. And so when the
4 program expires, so does their time in that apartment
5 because they inevitably end up back in, you know, in
6 shelter. And so...

7 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Right. And we are using
8 the good cause...

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

10 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Extension, which, as I
11 say, is applying to the overwhelming majority of
12 households to prevent having that cliff.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. But it's also... that's
14 also an indicator that we need to be building more
15 subsidized housing.

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I could not agree with
17 you more.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I think that that's the
19 long term solution to this.

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: The fact that we have a
21 1.4 percent vacancy rate is overwhelmingly at play
22 here. Absolutely.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. No, you mean, you always
24 hear, you know, when we're building - these
25 apartments are affordable to who? Right? And I get

1
2 it, like, you know, I think the majority of the
3 public doesn't understand that those apartments are
4 meant to replace, you know, subsidized housing units
5 that we lost to destabilization at some point.

6 However, this still doesn't negate the fact that,
7 you know, while they're affordable to working people,
8 they're not affordable to individuals on a fixed
9 income, to the elderly, to people that are making low
10 wages. Those people really need subsidized housing.
11 They don't need affordable housing; they need
12 subsidized housing and there's a difference.

13 So, you know, I think that any help that we can,
14 I think, you know, as we learn, right, about the root
15 causes of homelessness, and as the numbers continue
16 to climb, I think, you know, that it's imperative
17 that we all step up and advocate for more of that
18 type of housing.

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah. I absolutely
20 agree.

21 One of, you know, obviously, housing development
22 is a little bit out of my lane at the Department of
23 Social Services, but one of the initiatives that we
24 are incredibly proud of is our Affordable Housing
25 Services Program, where what we've done is take

1
2 CityFHEPS and turn it into a Project Based Rental
3 Assistance Contract.

4 So a not-for-profit will get a contract that
5 includes CityFHEPS rent, some maintenance and
6 operation dollars, and light touch social services,
7 and that contract runs for 30 years.

8 And because there is this, you know, long term
9 contract to pay rent, they can take that to a bank
10 and get a mortgage. And we so over the summer, we had
11 three nonprofits acquire four different buildings
12 using this tool. Right?

13 So the not-for-profits actually were able to buy
14 the buildings, and everybody going into those
15 buildings for the next 30 years will be a long term
16 stay or DHS client who's effectively receiving
17 CityFHEPS. And the CityFHEPS is actually running
18 through the contract.

19 It's permanent housing, so the people who move in
20 there might stay for 30 years, or maybe they'll stay
21 for 10 years and, you know, move someplace else, and
22 then the next person that moves in will be also from
23 that.

24 So we, you know, we can't solve all of our
25 problems that way, but recognizing, as you say, that

1
2 the vacancy rate is an... has an enormous impact on
3 our clients, we are trying to actually create those
4 really deeply affordable housing opportunities.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

6 Do we know... I don't, I mean, I'm sure they...
7 I don't know that you would have this on you, but
8 would we know how many - a the potentially 10
9 percent of folks that are not applying for renewal,
10 we would we is there a way to keep track to see if
11 any, you know, if any of them end up back in shelter?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I, you know, I know
13 this, the return rate from subsidized housing to
14 permanent... to shelter is quite low. It's under 1
15 percent for families with children, and just a
16 couple of percentage points for single adults.

17 We have... I don't know that we have done that
18 analysis of specifically people who have not
19 returned, uh, renewed their CityFHEPS vouchers, but,
20 we can take a look at that and get back to you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. And if you could
22 give me the number of households that, uh, received
23 an extension after the five-year limit was up?

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah, we'll follow-up
25 with that.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the referral
3 distribution of CityFHEPS users? How many users are
4 referred through the community versus government
5 agencies?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So of the lease-ups each
7 year, so people who start using a CityFHEPS Voucher,
8 two-thirds of them are people who are in shelter and
9 a third of them are in community users.

10 You know, it varies on the margins from year to
11 year, but those have been relatively consistent
12 numbers.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are there a specific number of
14 vouchers that are set aside for community?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: No.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

17 What is the City's actual spending so far this
18 year for CityFHEPS Vouchers, and what is the
19 projected spending for the rest of Fiscal Year 2025?

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Through December, we
21 have spent \$578 million on CityFHEPS. The FY25 budget
22 is \$1.1 billion.

23 Just by way of context, last year, so FY24,
24 actual spending was \$855 million. So, spending on
25 this program is growing very rapidly.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Will additional funding
3 be needed for the current fiscal year to meet the
4 need?

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We're coordinating
6 really closely with OMB. I feel good about where
7 Fiscal Year 2025 stands. There's many uncertainties
8 in CityFHEPS spending, both the number of people
9 participating, what fair market rents are, things
10 like that. So we work closely with OMB to adjust the
11 budget on an as needed basis.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's a point of contention
13 with the Council because we continue to ask for
14 baseline, you know, funding that accurately reflects
15 the needs of the program.

16 I have confidence that they will fill it in and
17 that the vouchers will be paid, but it's, you know,
18 it's a risk that we're taking. Right?

19 If we fall off the front the, you know, fiscal
20 cliff, like, how do we ensure that we have the
21 appropriate funding if it's not baselined? I
22 don't... it scares me.

23 I will continue to advocate on your behalf. Don't
24 worry.

1
2 Okay, uhm, I think that that's do you have any
3 questions?

4 (PAUSE)

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sorry, I had, one more
6 question.

7 We recently heard from advocates at DSS that
8 there is almost three months behind - Well, I think
9 Alexa asked that question about the Shopping Letter,
10 so I won't ask it.

11 Okay, no, we asked these, all right. All right,
12 that's it. Thank you so much for coming.

13 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you so much,
14 appreciate it.

15 (PAUSE)

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right, I now open the
17 hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the
18 public that this is a formal government proceeding
19 and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As
20 such, members of the public shall remain silent at
21 all times.

22 The witness table is reserved for people who wish
23 to testify. No video recording or photography is
24 allowed from the witness table.

1
2 Further, members of the public may not present
3 audio or video recordings as testimony, but may
4 submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant
5 at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

6 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
7 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms
8 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will
9 have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic:
10 *Administration of CityFHEPS.*

11 If you have a written statement or additional
12 testimony you wish to submit for the record, please
13 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at
14 Arms.

15 You may also email written testimony to
16 Testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the
17 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
18 will not be accepted.

19 We will now be calling the first panel: Germaine
20 DeLaney, Elizabeth Mackey, Diana Ramos, and Noam
21 Cohen-Weinberg.

22 (PAUSE)

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, you can begin on either
24 side. Who wants to go first? Do you want to go first?
25

1
2 NOAM COHEN-WEINBERG: Hi, my name is Noam. I live
3 in a homeless shelter in Brooklyn right now, and I
4 have met countless people who have been waiting such
5 a long time to receive housing, to receive supportive
6 housing, to receive their CityFHEPS Voucher.

7 There are... I know a guy with a Shopping Letter
8 who has been waiting for that has been waiting for
9 many months that lost his voucher, in fact.

10 You know, when you, after four months, if you
11 don't find a place in time - and source of income and
12 discrimination is a big factor in this, where
13 landlords won't accept your voucher, basically.
14 Because, where landlords basically won't accept your
15 voucher because, frankly, it doesn't suit their
16 interest a lot of the time.

17 There are you know, the New York State
18 Comptroller's Report showed that, I'm sorry, it
19 showed that the average waiting time is about 10
20 months. And, you know, in my shelter, the waiting
21 time is about a year. So, I mean, that sounds about
22 right to me, uh, after receiving your Shopping
23 Letter. That's not after just entering the shelter.
24 That's after receiving your Shopping Letter for a
25 CityFHEPS Voucher.

1
2 And I think it's worth noting that, uhm, think
3 it's worth noting that when we tell people that we
4 want them to work, that we want them to obtain
5 housing, but then we... there's all these barriers,
6 and there's all these bureaucratic hurdles to doing
7 so, it's basically telling people that it's more
8 important to prolong your stay in the shelter rather
9 than to obtain your basic needs.

10 (TIMER CHIMES) Because even if you're making,
11 like, \$3,000, right, a little over the voucher worth,
12 in a month, you're still not getting... you're still
13 not gonna be able to get that voucher, and it's just
14 gonna prolong your stay in the shelter.

15 So we need to upgrade the worth of those
16 vouchers, and we also need to directly tackle on
17 discrimination by landlords.

18 An example of that is text messages. You know, if
19 you text a landlord and say, you know, I want to
20 schedule a viewing, then you mentioned you have a
21 voucher. Guess what's gonna happen? A lot of the time
22 they are going to ghost you. They are not going to
23 respond. And that's a serious problem, and that's a
24 serious hurdle towards, obtaining housing.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

1 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Good morning, everyone.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Good morning.

3 ELIZABETH MACKEY: My name is Elizabeth Mackey.

4 Currently, I, okay, currently, I am a voucher holder.

5 I was in a shelter for a year and a half.

6 Thank God for the 90 day new rule, but I had to
7 wait less than really to get my voucher.

8 However, the waiting is... housing, apartments -
9 to get apartments You could get the voucher, but
10 waiting for a year, two years to actually get
11 apartment, that's kinda ridiculous.

12 But to understand the fact that CityFHEPS is
13 needed for those that's unable to afford the rent out
14 here.

15 I used to work for the City 29 years on the ACS,
16 but I came through a lot of medical problems that I
17 couldn't work anymore. So here I am being placed in a
18 shelter system, not knowing so much about the shelter
19 system. But I became a statistic working for ACS,
20 being in the shelter system, seeing all the
21 bureaucracy that goes on in the shelter system.

22 So I was glad that the Mayor, you know, when the
23 Committee passed the 90 day rule, because I didn't
24 understand why you had to be in a shelter for 90 days
25

1
2 just to receive a voucher and to get help. But even
3 though that you could get the voucher, you still
4 remain in a shelter.

5 I know people that the shelter that I was in
6 still is in the shelter. So it was by God's grace
7 that I got out of the shelter.

8 What is needed n shelters is support. It's not to
9 be looked down at, but they need Housing Specialist
10 that are gonna get on the ground to find housing for
11 the people, and also give us a toolkit on how to
12 navigate the system of getting apartment.

13 They need inspections. Inspections are needed in
14 these apartments. I'm in a two bedroom, nicely fixed
15 or, you know, (INAUDIBLE) stuff, but I don't get no
16 heat. The radiator's not working. Windows wasn't
17 working - up and down.

18 So I had to literally reach out to the shelter
19 that I was in to navigate, say, okay, what's going
20 on? I need the landlord attention, this, that, and
21 third.

22 Home based services? Crap. Why do I have to come
23 to you saying I have a problem and I would like to
24 move, but they give me the same run around as if I
25 was in a shelter? I have to do a IOP. Why do I have

1
2 to do a IOP when (TIMER CHIMES) I'm actually, I have
3 an apartment, but I'm requesting because of emergency
4 that I need to move.

5 So they need to look into the inspection. They
6 need to really do a order regarding home based
7 services. Because home based services are supposed to
8 be a resource place that we could go to in time of
9 need, and they do not do anything. Just to get
10 appointment is like six months waiting, and that
11 doesn't make no sense.

12 So there's all little things that need to be
13 improved with the CityFHEPS Voucher.

14 I hope by us testifying here can, like, you know,
15 be able to adjust for the people.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm.

17 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Because I'm looking to say the
18 government of the people, by the people, for the
19 people. Is that really true?

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

21 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Because if we are doing it for
22 the people, for us, then we wouldn't even be here

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

24 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Under these conditions.
25

1
2 So they need to work on a CityFHEPS Voucher,
3 because if they got all these people, 11,000 people
4 that's still in the shelter with a voucher, something
5 is not right.

6 When the Mayor said that he got 65,000 apartments
7 that's available, but who is it available to? Really?
8 Because the people, that's 11,000 that has the
9 letter, should be in one of those 65,000 so-called
10 apart that the Mayor continues saying that he has for
11 the people.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

13 ELIZABETH MACKEY: So the inspections need to be
14 looked into. Home based services need to be looked
15 into, because I shouldn't have to wait and going
16 through all this back and forth just to get a
17 transfer. So that wasn't even discussed neither.

18 So next time when you have a hearing, ask them
19 what is the transfer eligibility, because it
20 shouldn't be a eligibility if I already have a
21 voucher.

22 If I said I need to move, all they should do is
23 process my paperwork and give me my move in voucher,
24 so I could be able to look for a decent, affordable
25 apartment because every apartment is not decent. It

1
2 may look decent, but everything starts falling, you
3 know, apart once you get into the apartment. And the
4 landlord seem like he don't care because he gets his
5 money every month.

6 So those inspections need to be really... Same
7 way Section 8 has yearly inspections, these CityFHEPS
8 Vouchers... Come in my home, inspect my apartment.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I would also
10 suggest that you call 311...

11 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Oh, I did that...

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And report, yeah...

13 ELIZABETH MACKEY: And the landlord got the nerve
14 to tell me, "Don't say nothing," that he will send
15 the super, "because I am making a problem for him."
16 "That it may be a problem, that I may not get my
17 room...", I said, "So, are you threatening me?"

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, no, he can't...

19 ELIZABETH MACKEY: You know what I'm saying,
20 there's a lot of stuff that goes on... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can report that as well...
22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 ELIZABETH MACKEY: (INAUDIBLE) there... (CROSS-
24 TALK)

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's tenant harassment, and
3 we've passed laws against that as well.

4 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

6 GERMAINE DELANEY: Good morning, my name is
7 Germaine Delaney. I want to give a brief perspective
8 on CityFHEPS Vouchers based upon my own personal
9 experience.

10 As the City Council knows, obtaining and using
11 the CityFHEPS Voucher Program often intersects with
12 other social circumstances. You may be facing
13 eviction, you are trying to move to a better and
14 safer neighborhood, which includes moving away from
15 an unresponsive and or negligent landlord or moving
16 out of a shelter.

17 When I first received one 10 years ago, I moved
18 from a shelter to an apartment that was, you know,
19 less than ideal, but you're trying to get out of a
20 shelter.

21 And I also had an apartment that I kind of knew I
22 was going to get. So I said okay, I'll move here,
23 I'll probably be here a couple of years, three at
24 tops. You know, it was, you know, I got the voucher
25

1 based upon what I could afford and my own personal
2 finances at the time.

3
4 So I did get called for that apartment after a
5 couple of years and I went through all the
6 interviews, submitted all the required documents.
7 When I tried to work with Homebase to transfer the
8 voucher, everything feel between the cracks. It took
9 too long and I lost the apartment.

10 No landlord is waiting for you months to get the
11 money. You know, as I understand it, it's still
12 happening to folks today as the lady next to me just
13 said.

14 You know, I had the voucher until March 2020, at
15 which time they deemed my income was too high, and,
16 coincidentally, the very next week, the pandemic hit,
17 and I lost my job.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mmmm...

19 GERMAINE DELANEY: True story. And I'm sure I'm
20 not the first person in this city that that happened
21 to.

22 But, okay, so we go through the whole pandemic
23 and everything. In 2022, I asked for another one, I
24 got one, and, you know, I see that, you know, I'm
25 just not getting an apartment, you know, people not

1
2 really wanting to deal with the voucher, the
3 landlords.

4 So I got a renewal, and my experience at that
5 time was that some landlords, you know, they're just
6 not interested in a voucher. Okay? So which makes it
7 harder to go find an apartment. So it expired, and I
8 tried to get another extension and this is where the
9 procedures (TIMER CHIMES) again fall apart.

10 You know, I followed all the preliminary
11 procedures because you're supposed to call, do, like,
12 a preliminary interview with...

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm

14 GERMAINE DELANEY: A case worker, and then she
15 gives you a case manager, that kind of thing. I guess
16 that's what you do. Right?

17 And then, I did that, and then after repeated
18 attempts, I didn't receive any response from that
19 second case worker. And, you know, Homebase, also
20 known as Catholic Charities -So what I want to point
21 out is that there's some kind of disconnect here with
22 the Homebase and Catholic Charities.

23 Some of the people I've worked with there, they
24 were, you know, seemed like they were better at their
25 job than others maybe, you know, I don't want to, you

1
2 know, really say something, you know, ugly about
3 people - But, you know, here is where I want to be
4 very clear, after the first voucher took so long, you
5 know, that I didn't get that first apartment.

6 So, you know, maybe three years after I got out
7 of the shelter, you know, I keep I became a target of
8 a crime at my current residence, which the police
9 are aware of. And, you know, I'm not a person that
10 blames other people for what happens to me. However,
11 I think about what could have happened if I had had
12 that voucher and could have moved. I could have
13 prevented probably having a crime committed against
14 me, you know - and if the procedures were clearer to
15 an applicant like myself.

16 You know, I do want to say the increase in the
17 voucher amount is a great step in the right
18 direction, you know, and this is fixable. We as a
19 city can fix this if we work on correcting the red
20 tape. Find out what's happening with Homebase and,
21 you know, put the connection there. It's just some
22 kind of disconnect sometimes.

23 Okay, moreover, the City Council and other, you
24 know, authoritative persons, maybe we could work with

1
2 it closely with the State Legislature and come up
3 with creating something close to a Section 8 Voucher.

4 I don't know, I'm just throwing things out there,
5 possible solutions, because as I understand there are
6 certain procedures for tenants that are built into
7 the voucher.

8 Because what I've understood is that, like, this
9 lady is saying the Section 8 would have done that
10 inspection and would have, you know, come to court
11 and said, "Yeah, we did the inspection," and it
12 would've been over. But the CityFHEPS, I don't think
13 it works that way.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Did the City, uhm, did anybody
15 from the shelter come inspect your apartment before
16 you moved in?

17 GERMAINE DELANEY: No. No, I didn't know anything
18 about that. I thought ,you know, I found this place
19 on my own, I saw just an ad in a local Queens
20 newspaper, I found it. Uhm, I went to the, uh, the
21 place and ,you know, I didn't really know if I was
22 going to get it or not. And, then, next thing I know,
23 three months later or something like that, the
24 shelter called me and said, "Oh, you got this
25 apartment." You know, because I had kind of given

1
2 up. Because ,you know, I had the same situation, I
3 was looking for places, and I had kind of given up,
4 and I was kind of looking for other places. So, I
5 said, "Oh, okay." You know? So, I went there, no one
6 ,you know, they went down with me to 16th Street with
7 someone from their management office, but I didn't
8 know anything about that they were supposed to do an
9 inspection or whatever. You know, it's my first time
10 ever getting that. So, I didn't know anything about
11 that.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

13 GERMAINE DELANEY: You know?

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate, thank you.

15 GERMAINE DELANEY: Thank you, thank you for your
16 time.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

18 DIANA RAMOS: Good morning, my name is Diana
19 Ramos. I am a current CityFHEPS Voucher holder, and
20 I receive CityFHEPS.

21 My main issue is lack of information, trying to
22 find information. It is- I, myself, am having an
23 issue where I really need to get out of my
24 apartment and move somewhere safer.

25

1
2 I love to give you a little bit of an
3 experience. Last year, I was left without a working
4 toilet for four days. I did call 311. They, you
5 know, did come - but four days. My maintenance
6 management company left me without a toilet for
7 four days. I'm a diabetic. That puts stress on my
8 body, you know, and then you're afraid to you know?
9 Thankfully, I'm a resourceful girl, military brat.

10 So, that this is a situation. When I initially
11 got into my apartment, it was inspected. They did
12 not do, like, replace some of the outlets that
13 needed to be replaced. Not a big deal. I, you know,
14 don't use that. I don't have, like, a lot of
15 electronics, but I don't have a GFI in my bathroom.

16 These are little things. Well, you know, semi
17 little things. The toilet's a little bit bigger,
18 and I do have mice in my oven and no holes in my
19 apartment. Just you know?

20 So these are situations. I want to move. You
21 know? I wanna go to, you know, closer to where I
22 attend church, closer to where I do volunteering
23 with safety net activists, and I have no clue how
24 to do that.

1
2 I actually you know, thankfully, I am part of
3 safety net activist. I can ask that question. Well,
4 what's good cause? Who do I contact? I haven't
5 heard anything from Homebase. I've, lived in my
6 apartment since September 2022. Haven't heard a
7 darn thing from Homebase. Wouldn't know how to do
8 that. You know?

9 I did not know about the utility allowance. I'm
10 a little bit bitter about this because I was on
11 cash assistance. (TIMER CHIMES) Recently just got
12 on SSI. Don't know what the process is. How, you
13 know, how's that gonna work? I don't know any of
14 these processes.

15 I'm an intelligent woman. I you know, I've been
16 to college, university. You know, obviously, I do
17 activism. So where is this?

18 You know, my neighbors who are about to be
19 evicted because of crises, they're telling...
20 they're being told, they didn't know that, you
21 know, they could be fighting for the CityFHEPS
22 expansion laws to be initiated. Some have families
23 in shelters who are waiting for their Shopping
24 Letters.

1
2 It's a 30-day, uh, 90-day that was supposed, you
3 know, that, "Oh, we were taking away the 90-day,"
4 but it's still waiting 90-days.

5 We requested these in October. It's been over 90
6 days since, you know, we to get these letters.

7 There are so many issues with CityFHEPS
8 Vouchers, and, you know, there's so many little red
9 flags and stuff. I heard nothing on how we're gonna
10 do this. How are you going to get information to
11 someone like myself who wants to know how to
12 transfer her apartment? Because I am tired - my
13 current toilet is currently clogged up again. I am
14 tired of calling my management company and asking
15 to please snake my toilet. I am tired of being sent
16 an exterminator who says your apartment is
17 airtight, you need a new oven; that's why; that's
18 where the mouse...mice are living. You know?

19 I am tired of having to ask for this. Elevators
20 being down, I cannot go up eight flights, you know,
21 eight floors worth of stairs. I have neighbors who
22 are on mobility scooters. I have a neighbor who
23 uses a walker. This is ridiculous. This is
24 absolutely insane. You know, as I said, neighbors
25 who don't know how to renew. They were never given

1
2 that information. I helped them, because I knew the
3 information, but I didn't know anything about that
4 utility assistance. Because when it was enacted, I
5 was already receiving a voucher, didn't receive any
6 mail about how to get utility assistance, how to
7 qualify, here's a form. Nothing.

8 Again, I have SNA, SNP to help me get
9 information. There's people out there who don't. It
10 is absolutely ridiculous. It's absolutely insane.
11 And, yeah, bitter? Yeah. Totally bitter, because
12 I'm in arrears with my electric.

13 ELIZABETH MACKEY: (INAUDIBLE) the mic... So,
14 regarding the inspection, I'm not sure if the
15 inspection was done. And may have been, because I
16 did have a Housing Specialist there, and I think
17 that was back then when DHS had the Housing
18 Specialist to do a video, and then I guess a check
19 off list.

20 But, again, if you're not trained in how to do a
21 home I mean, a apartment inspection, then they
22 don't need to have the Housing Specialist to do it,
23 because if they did, I would have heat. Even though
24 I moved in the spring, they would see that
25 something was wrong with the valves.

1
2 They sure not were seeing that when all the
3 windows was open up in the apartment, that was
4 something wrong with that. So when I actually moved
5 into that apartment, windows was open, but when I
6 went to put them down, couldn't. And so I
7 contacted the landlord. So he had to send someone
8 within maybe two weeks and had to give me new
9 windows.

10 Because HRA, DHS, or wherever they get their
11 funding money, they paid this landlord \$18,000 for
12 the time when I got out of the shelter to get into
13 this apartment. And that's from the months that was
14 being held, because I was supposed to move in that
15 apartment in that February. I didn't move in that
16 apartment until April.

17 Regarding the paperwork that goes through, I
18 think that the shelter, because I hear it a lot
19 from other people with these little minor mistakes,
20 which how you get my last name all of a sudden
21 messed up? How you not sending my Budget Letter
22 that I gave you to them?

23 They're supposed to have a whole list of
24 documentation that they're supposed to send to DHS
25 so DHS could look at the application.

1
2 So when the Commissioner have mentioned 24 days,
3 it could be much more than the 24 days of them
4 actually processing it. Because if the shelter
5 doesn't process it properly, then it gets booted
6 back, and then they'd be asking us, the clients,
7 for more information. And then when you go down to
8 HRA and you're asking them, where's process
9 regarding the checks, they give you the run around.
10 They don't wanna tell you nothing.

11 So I really feel that the client needs to be in
12 that process of making sure all those documents are
13 available for us to read before they submit.
14 Because they're submitting wrong stuff and they
15 having us wait.

16 One thing that I realized, when you are going in
17 the shelter, they want you to stay for that
18 beginning of the month, because if you look at it
19 and take data, no one really moves out of the
20 shelter beginning of the month. They always move
21 out either the middle or the end.

22 Why? Because they wanna get paid their full
23 amount for us to be in that shelter. Period.

24 So they linger around to keep us in there and
25 they come up with so many excuses. So now you have

1
2 to deal with HRA to find out what is going on
3 because the shelter system, like, "Oh, well, your
4 packet has been submitted. There's nothing that we
5 can do."

6 Then give me a phone number so I can make my
7 phone calls. They don't give you the resource to
8 call no one. You go to HRA, you're standing there
9 all day just to say, "Oh, they're processing it."

10 But what is the process? A signature? Because
11 when they processed those checks for that landlord,
12 I wasn't aware of it until I had got... and I'm not
13 on public assistance because I received disability.
14 But I looked on my app, because the worker said,
15 "Go to the app so you would know..."

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm...

17 ELIZABETH MACKEY: when the checks are being
18 processed."

19 So, that's when I found out, when the checks
20 were being processed. Well, they gave this
21 landlord, it was \$17,890-something.

22 So, I didn't have to literally pay my rent until
23 like literally September, because they already -
24 which was a good thing - because they paid it all
25 up to September. And when the landlord thought I

1
2 didn't know, he gonna ask me where is his 30
3 percent? I told him he already got his 30 percent.
4 You already have the money that they gave you,
5 which they told me.

6 So a lot of the landlords don't let... Well, we
7 have clients that are not aware of that, and so
8 many people that came out of the shelter, the
9 landlords have been bamboozling a lot of these
10 clients asking more money, when HRA already had
11 paid them their rental already up to maybe four
12 months in advance. Which gave us a little safety
13 cushion to save for the future months so we won't
14 get into arrears.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

16 ELIZABETH MACKEY: Because sometimes, too, have
17 that 30 percent that you have to take out of your
18 income, can be a little ,you know, steep. Because
19 you've been in a shelter for so long, so now you
20 don't even know how to keep paying your bills or
21 whatever. But they give you a little leeway. But
22 these greedy landlords, they are thinking that you
23 are dumb and that you don't know how to read, and
24 they come to meet people like me. And I told my
25 landlord, "You got the wrong person..."

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CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

ELIZABETH MACKEY: because I know the amount that they gave you."

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So we have to move on. We have...

ELIZABETH MACKEY: But thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: a couple of other panels, but thank you so much...

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: I have question.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Go ahead?

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Were you able to do a walkthrough? Uh, by...

ELIZABETH MACKEY: No! I didn't do a walkthrough...

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: No walkthrough?

ELIZABETH MACKEY: When I moved into that apartment, it didn't even have a showerhead, so I wasn't even involved in... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: to even... Okay.

And, for you, Ma'am, who was the management company that... Where you reside at, what is the name of the management company?

DIANA RAMOS: Wavecrest Management. I will gladly give you a...

1 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Slumlords...

2 DIANA RAMOS: Mm-hmm.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you for telling me
4 that.

5 DIANA RAMOS: Thank you, I agree.

6 GERMAINE DELANEY: (INAUDIBLE)

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Your mic is off.

8 GERMAINE DELANEY: I was supposed to already have
9 been there since January, but I didn't move in until,
10 like she said, the middle of the month in March,
11 because this March will be like 10 years.

12 So, you know, we need something clear for the
13 clients and so that we know our rights and we're not
14 cheated out of them.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, understood. And we agree.
16 We are trying. Thank you, guys, so much for coming to
17 testify.

18 PANEL: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I am going to call up the next
20 panel: Timothy Peng, Robert Desir, William Botchway,
21 and Graham Horn.

22 (PAUSE)

23

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Who wants to start first? Do
3 you want to start on this end? You can begin, make
4 sure the light is on.

5 ROBERT DESIR: Good morning. Good morning, and
6 thanks for the opportunity to speak today.

7 I'm Robert Desir, I am a staff attorney with the
8 Legal Aid Society. We also have written testimony
9 that we'll be submitting later. And when I say we,
10 I'm talking about in conjunction with, VOCAL-NY,
11 Community Service Societies and, Coalition for the
12 Homeless.

13 So first, we want thank the City Council for
14 their tireless efforts in trying to improve the
15 voucher program, trying to make sure that the most
16 vulnerable people are included in the program, and
17 that the program reaches its potential.

18 Unfortunately, the CityFHEPS Program has not
19 lived up to its promise. While well intentioned, the
20 program is riddled with inefficiencies, delays, and
21 unnecessary complexities.

22 Families who qualify for assistance often
23 struggle to access the help that they need because of
24 burdensome eligibility criteria, low rental
25 assistance caps, and a lack of coordination between

1 agencies. As a result, families remain at risk of
2 homelessness.

3
4 Unfortunately, these problems aren't new. They've
5 been flagged by auditors, elected officials, and
6 stakeholders for years, but meaningful reform has
7 been slow to materialize.

8 The October 2024 Comptroller Audit highlights the
9 program's continued failures, problems like
10 inefficient support services, poor communication, and
11 delays in processing applications.

12 If we are serious about preventing homelessness,
13 we need to make key changes:

14 First, we need to implement the CityFHEPS reform
15 laws that were passed in 2023, which expanded
16 eligibility and simplified the application process.

17 We also need to focus on targeting high risk
18 households, and that was part of the efforts with the
19 reforms, and we hope that the reforms will come into
20 play if there is a successful decision in the courts.

21 But we also thank the Council for securing the
22 (TIMER CHIMES) \$215 million in the City of YES
23 legislation. We're very encouraged that that will be
24 something that will at least work as a stopgap if
25

1
2 we're unable to implement the reforms that were
3 passed.

4 I don't know how much time I have left, but I
5 just wanted to go through a couple more,
6 recommendations.

7 We also want to ensure access for homeless and
8 unsheltered youth by upholding the laws that grant
9 them access to CityFHEPS without having to enter a
10 shelter.

11 We want to increase the rental assistance caps to
12 reflect the true cost of housing in New York City and
13 eliminate policies like the Rent Reasonableness Rule,
14 which restrict access to suitable housing.

15 Finally, we wanna streamline the review process.
16 I know many have talked about that, but we really
17 need to focus on that to eliminate the delays that
18 prevent families from securing housing and, leaving
19 shelter.

20 Without these changes CityFHEPS will continue to
21 fall short of its goals to provide safe, stable
22 housing for New Yorkers in need. It's time to take
23 action to fix the system and ensure families don't
24 continue to fall through the cracks. Thank you.
25

1
2 TIMOTHY PENA: (NO MIC) Good morning, my name is
3 Timothy Pena....

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you make sure that the mic
5 is on and facing you? Thank you.

6 TIMOTHY PENA: Good morning, my name is Timothy
7 Pena; I'm a veteran and small business owner here in
8 New York City, and I run an organization for homeless
9 veterans.

10 I came to New York City in July of 2022 and,
11 ended up with an HASSA, supportive housing, with a
12 HUD-VASH voucher. I had an apartment within two weeks
13 of coming to New York City, for an apartment set
14 aside specifically for veterans. Two of those
15 apartments have been empty this entire time, and
16 that's because DHS won't tell us... won't tell the
17 veterans in the shelters that they are eligible for
18 these programs.

19 I was... I sat in... despite having access to an
20 apartment under the HASSA program, I sat in the
21 Borden Avenue for five months waiting on my
22 documentation to be processed.

23 The HUD-VASH program combines Section 8 rental
24 assistance, case management, and supportive services
25 from Department of Veterans Affairs. In September

1
2 2023, HUD and VA were awarded \$16.1 million in HUD-
3 VASH Vouchers to 71 public housing agencies,
4 including those in New York City.

5 Unfortunately, in the last seven years, there
6 have been only 272 HUD-VASH Vouchers that have been
7 issued to veterans in this city - *272 in seven years.*

8 That is because Department of Homeless Services
9 has told (TIMER CHIMES) HUD that veterans don't need
10 HUD-VASH Vouchers. Instead, we sit in VA shelters,
11 veteran shelters, being told that it is our
12 responsibility for finding housing and that it is our
13 fault for being homeless.

14 Meanwhile, we are being subjected to two years of
15 a grant per diem program that the VA is paying for
16 and that the DHS is taking advantage of. And then
17 only to be basically kicked out of the shelter
18 program, the GPD program with a CityFHEPS Voucher.

19 Many of these veterans are under the impression
20 that they're waiting on HUD-VASH Vouchers and that's
21 absolutely not happening. And instead, it's just...
22 so I have a couple of, suggestions, recommendations:

23 One, that instead of doing everything separately
24 and leaving veterans to fend for themselves as far as
25

1
2 when it's CityFHEPS or HUD-VASH Vouchers, that we
3 bridge to gap.

4 Had I been able to use a CityFHEPS Voucher to
5 come into my apartment when I got here in July of
6 2022, I never would have spent as much time as I did
7 in the shelter, have and been able to have that
8 CityFHEPS Voucher transition into a HUD-VASH Voucher.

9 I also would like to see - we have specialized
10 case workers that process for CityFHEPS and then
11 separate ones that do HUD-VASH. HUD-VASH is not doing
12 a good job of processing veterans' vouchers. We could
13 use CityFHEPS caseworkers to assist in processing our
14 HUD-VASH Vouchers.

15 I also like to see an increase, and pressure from
16 the New York City Council, to tell Veterans Affairs
17 and Department of Homeless Services that 272 vouchers
18 in seven years is unacceptable.

19 There are ways... we have seen a 45 percent
20 increase in veteran homelessness in shelters in the
21 last two years, up from 480 in 2023 to over 700 now.
22 And hundreds more are living on the streets because
23 our shelters and our places of refuge have become too
24 violent. And that's Department of Homeless Services'
25 fault - and Commissioner Molly's fault as well.

1 She knows about what's going on in the shelters.
2
3 She has done absolutely nothing about it.

4 Lastly, I'd like to see... I've thought about
5 this for quite a number of years, especially since
6 coming here - there are thousands of empty apartments
7 in disrepair and eligible for rental in this city. It
8 would be my suggestion to provide stipend teams of
9 shelter residents to go into these apartments and fix
10 them up and get them ready for rent.

11 I think last year, I read a report that somewhere
12 in the neighborhood of 440 days is the amount of time
13 that apartment sits empty waiting for repairs and a
14 tenant to flip that apartment. That's over a year, 14
15 months or so. When the private sector could do
16 that... would do that in 30 days.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

18 WILLIAM BOTCHWAY: I'm William Botchway, a legal
19 advocate on the Housing Defense Team and
20 Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem.

21 NDS is a community based public defender office
22 that provides high quality legal services to
23 residents of Northern Manhattan, your district,
24 including representation in Housing Court through
25 the Right to Counsel Program.

1
2 My main duty as an advocate is to assist clients
3 in obtaining public benefits such as CityFHEPS to
4 settle their cases and provide them with long term
5 stability.

6 The Commissioner's statement earlier that there
7 are no systemic delays in the CityFHEPS program is
8 plainly false.

9 So I'd like to share some stories about how deep
10 delays with the current system have impacted our
11 clients.

12 A year after submitting the application and
13 subsequent contact with Homebase, Adult Protective
14 Services, and HRA, it was only when an impending
15 Marshal's notice loomed over our client, Mr. F, did
16 we learn that APS should have been processing his
17 case instead of Homebase.

18 These cases are serious and life changing, yet
19 dozens of people watched Mr. F and my team
20 mistakenly believe that his application was being
21 processed for over a year.

22 The inefficiencies not only deprive our clients
23 of housing but are costly. Ensuring the efficiency
24 of the CityFHEPS Program will alleviate pressure on
25 every government system, save the City money, and

1
2 provide housing security to our city's most
3 vulnerable residents.

4 We once negotiated an arrears abatement,
5 decreasing the amount owed by \$25,000 if paid by a
6 set deadline. CityFHEPS delayed the process,
7 blowing past the deadline and being forced to pay
8 that extra \$25,000 when the client was approved.

9 These inefficiencies not only deprive clients
10 with the ability to secure housing, but they also
11 continue to perpetuate family separation.

12 For example, my client, Ms. S, who was already
13 receiving CityFHEPS, needed a transfer voucher to
14 move to a larger apartment suitable for her family
15 and would not be reunited with her children until
16 that happened. Her application was submitted in
17 April. She did not receive her voucher until
18 September (TIMER CHIMES) without any substantive
19 updates from Homebase in the meantime.

20 The unnecessary delay kept Ms. S and her kids
21 apart for many extra months, creating an extra cost
22 in the foster care system that housed her kids in
23 the meantime.

24 We also find that clients are simply unaware of
25 their housing options. On behalf of our clients, we

1 ask that this committee can consider issuing the
2 following directives regarding the administration
3 of CityFHEPS:
4

5 If not already done, Homebase, APS, and shelters
6 must inform clients upfront during their intake of
7 each step of the process their application will go
8 through and require faster response times from
9 caseworkers.

10 We acknowledge that the Council has proposed
11 major changes to the CityFHEPS program, which we
12 wholeheartedly support. However, we also believe
13 that there are many measures that can be put into
14 place immediately under the current structure that
15 will ensure the stability of our clients and their
16 families.

17 We hope by alleviating the inefficiencies and
18 informing individuals of their options, individuals
19 and families can quickly obtain safe and stable
20 housing that they are entitled to. Thank you.

21 GRAHAM HORN: Good morning, my name is Graham
22 Horn, and I'm a staff attorney with New York Legal
23 Assistance Group where I work on the Shelter and
24 Economic Stability Project and on the Community
25 Access Program.

1
2 I want to start by thanking the Council for your
3 work to expand access to CityFHEPS, and I look
4 forward to continuing to partner with you to push
5 for the enactment of those laws.

6 Our shelter system is broken. Our CityFHEPS
7 Voucher system is broken. And we particularly feel
8 the pain of overcrowded shelters and apartments
9 standing empty on Code Blue nights when the
10 temperature drops below 32 degrees. We've had quite
11 a number of those in a row where my clients and our
12 neighbors are refused access to shelters and drop-
13 in centers that are at capacity.

14 We've also heard a lot today about source of
15 income discrimination. The voucher system is primed
16 for discrimination of all types with little
17 oversight and weak enforcement. At the same time,
18 brokers and landlords are also wary of working with
19 the City because of the bureaucratic problems with
20 the CityFHEPS Program.

21 Payments are late. Benefits get shut off without
22 warning. There are massive delays between voucher
23 approval and move in dates. There's even a website,
24 a kind of blog of sorts, where brokers and
25

1 landlords share horror stories about working with
2 DSS.

3
4 The bureaucratic morass of the CityFHEPS
5 programs cuts against my clients as well in
6 multiple ways. We know that an apartment is a
7 better foundation for a family than a shelter, and
8 for an individual, and it's cheaper for the City to
9 put them in apartments than hold them in shelters.

10 So what do we need to do? We've heard a lot
11 today and great suggestions all around.

12 An online portal system that would allow all
13 stakeholders, brokers, landlords, and voucher
14 holders to see the status of their applications, to
15 see which specific forms have been kicked back for
16 minor errors, would dramatically cut down on wait
17 times, alleviate some of the burden on shelter
18 Housing Specialists who are incredibly overworked
19 and I'm sure underpaid.

20 A switch to digitized check issuance, where
21 possible, would cut back on delays related to
22 mailed or misplaced and check cashing errors.

23 Moreover, (TIMER CHIMES) increased staffing at
24 all levels of the DSS chain - in shelter, at HRA,
25 at Homebase, so that voucher holders, and all DHS

1
2 guests, are able to access their help directly
3 instead of needing advocates like us to navigate
4 those systems for them.

5 Please see my submitted testimony for more
6 details. I look forward to continuing to work with
7 the Committee and the Council at large. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you all for
9 the wonderful suggestions. If you have not already
10 done so, please, if you could submit your testimony
11 electronically, we would appreciate that. We can
12 use some of these ideas in future legislative
13 processes. Thank you.

14 Our next panel will be Chris Mann, Eric Lee,
15 Kate Goldman, and Helen Strom.

16 (PAUSE)

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin.

18 HELEN STROM: Thanks so much. My name is Helen
19 Strom, I work at the Safety Net Project at the
20 Urban Justice Center. I also support the Safety Net
21 activists, and our members have direct experience
22 with homelessness, public benefits, and the
23 CityFHEPS Voucher.

24 Thank you for holding this hearing. I'm
25 disappointed that the Commissioner didn't stay to

1
2 hear from people who are actually experiencing how
3 this program is working, because I think what
4 you've heard in the last couple of panels is much
5 more accurate than what the Commissioner testified
6 to.

7 First of all, I want to say that the CityFHEPS
8 laws that were passed by the Council a year and a
9 half ago urgently need to be implemented.

10 We are working with individuals and families
11 every day who are being evicted, who are eligible
12 under the new laws, who could have saved their
13 apartments, and are ending up in the shelter
14 system.

15 We are working with people in shelters every day
16 who cannot get access to CityFHEPS Vouchers because
17 the laws haven't been implemented. That includes
18 fire victims such as the recent victims of the
19 Allerton fire. They would be eligible under the new
20 laws. They can't access them because the Mayor
21 continues to block access. Homeless youth, people
22 who are working and make just a little too much,
23 all of these people, who could have either stayed
24 in their apartments, or could be housed now are
25 being blocked by the Mayor and his refusal to issue

1
2 people the vouchers that the Council expanded. So I
3 wanted to start with that.

4 I also want to speak about the serious issues
5 that we're seeing with CityFHEPS processing. Last
6 week we reached out about a household we're working
7 with who has been requesting a voucher and the
8 CityFHEPS Voucher Unit told us they're still
9 processing Shopping Letter of requests from the end
10 of October.

11 Systemically, like their inbox, they're
12 processing requests from the end of October. So
13 when the Commissioner sits here and says there's no
14 delays, that is simply not accurate. That came from
15 the head of her CityFHEPS Unit, and to say that
16 there's no delays in Shopping Letters is absolutely
17 wrong. It's a lie.

18 Also want to speak about the utility allowance.
19 This is other legislation that the Council passed
20 and they have done nothing to let existing voucher
21 holders know that this exists. It's not in the
22 renewal paperwork. (TIMER CHIMES) There was no
23 notice sent out, so people who are facing utility
24 turnouts right now have no idea that there's a
25 benefit that they're eligible for that they should

1
2 have been getting for the past year. And we've
3 brought this to the City's attention and nothing
4 has been done.

5 And I just want to echo what people have already
6 said about the delays at Homebase and the delays in
7 packet processing.

8 So at Homebase, a lot of Homebase offices you
9 have to wait three or four months just to get an
10 initial appointment, and that's someone who's
11 facing eviction, and at, like, potentially at the
12 edge of being evicted from their apartment, and
13 just to have an initial intake, it takes three or
14 four months.

15 We have people who've been trying to get through
16 that process for a whole year. We have people
17 who've been evicted while they're waiting for
18 Homebase to try and process a CityFHEPS
19 application.

20 So to say there's no delays there just defies
21 the experience, and this is like people who are
22 working with Right to Counsel Attorneys and have
23 people advocate on their behalf. That just defies
24 the experience of everyone we've worked with.
25

1
2 We've honestly seen very similar delays, like,
3 with the packet processing for people coming out of
4 shelter. People have to resubmit their packets over
5 and over and over, and they lose apartments. They
6 lose apartments that they found in very difficult
7 conditions because there's such ridiculous delays.

8 I don't know where that number of 24 days is
9 coming from. It must be like after it's basically
10 already approved. Because there's no way that
11 that's the actual time period from beginning to
12 end. I've never seen them process a packet that
13 quickly. So I think it must be like some number
14 based on like when you're already very far along in
15 the process.

16 So, thank you again for holding this hearing,
17 and we're looking forward to working with the
18 Council to provide more accountability for the
19 program, and also to get the expansion laws
20 implemented.

21 CHRIS MANN: Good morning, thank you, Chair Ayala,
22 for having this hearing. Thank you for your
23 relentless advocacy around CityFHEPS, and thanks to
24 the Committee members for the opportunity to testify
25 this morning.

1
2 My name's Chris Mann, I'm the AVP of Policy And
3 Advocacy at WIN, the City's largest provider of
4 shelter and supportive housing to families with
5 children. We operate 16 shelters and nearly 500 units
6 of supportive housing across the five boroughs. Last
7 night, just under 7,000 people called WIN home,
8 including over 3,800 children.

9 In 2024, New York City shelter system saw a
10 record 130,000 individuals each night. CityFHEPS has
11 the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing
12 this crisis, but it's held back by administrative
13 issues.

14 That's why we partnered with REBNY, last year to
15 put out Housing More New Yorkers, a report that is in
16 the folder with you up there.

17 Unfortunately, administrative issues started the
18 first step in the process. Although the 90 day rule
19 was repealed, in some cases families are still
20 waiting for months to be able to start their housing
21 search.

22 Even after a family has overcome the heroic feat
23 of finding an apartment, it can take weeks and
24 sometimes months before they're able to move out of
25 shelter.

1
2 To ensure that applications are being processed,
3 inspections are being conducted, and payments are
4 being issued on time, the Council should pass
5 legislation that sets concrete time requirements.

6 The administrative inefficiencies families face
7 are compounded by outdated systems. Access HRA must
8 be updated to allow families to apply for and track
9 CityFHEPS applications and renewals online.

10 Something that they should already be doing under a
11 Local Law.

12 Similarly, the current system, which is the
13 system for processing CityFHEPS application, needs to
14 be updated. It's lacking core functionality, like
15 named based searches. Right? To find a client, (TIMER
16 CHIMES) you have to search by a WMS Case Number. Just
17 absolutely ridiculous.

18 The inspection process should also be
19 streamlined. We recommend categorizing issues into
20 two levels - major health and safety risk requiring
21 full reinspection, minor issues that can be resolved
22 with photo or video proof.

23 With the looming cuts to the social safety net
24 under the new federal administration, we should be
25 looking for ways to expand eligibility. We continue

1
2 to fight for the implementation of the CityFHEPS
3 expansion that you all passed.

4 And we also support Resolution 255, urging Albany
5 to give the City permission to expand CityFHEPS
6 undocumented people. Expanding eligibility to
7 undocumented households could save the City up to \$3
8 billion each year.

9 Additionally, we strongly oppose the Mayor's
10 proposed \$500 million cut to CityFHEPS. Instead, the
11 City should be increasing funding for more vouchers
12 and staff for DSS. Thank you.

13 KATE GOLDMANN: Good morning, my name is Kate
14 Goldman, and I am testifying today on behalf of the
15 Real Estate Board of New York.

16 REBNY thanks the Committee for the opportunity to
17 provide testimony at today's oversight hearing on the
18 administration of the CityFHEPS rental assistance
19 program.

20 Housing vouchers are pivotal in mitigating
21 homelessness, increasing housing stability, and
22 improving long term health, social, and economic
23 outcomes.

24 New York City's CityFHEPS Rental Assistance
25 Program intends to help New Yorkers living in

1
2 shelters or at risk of homelessness secure permanent
3 housing. In practical application; however, the
4 program is flawed and voucher holders find their
5 opportunities limited.

6 REBNY frequently hears from members, owners, and
7 agents that the process is proving to be cumbersome,
8 lengthy, and convoluted.

9 In 2024, REBNY and WIN authored Housing More New
10 Yorkers, a policy paper outlining the challenges
11 facing the City's voucher programs and the subsequent
12 legislative fixes. REBNY and WIN share a common goal,
13 improving the voucher process and helping voucher
14 holders find stable housing.

15 Today, REBNY intends to call attention to
16 administrative delays within the CityFHEPS Program
17 and our proposed fixes.

18 Application processing times are particularly
19 problematic. A 2024 audit executed by the State
20 comptroller found that it took an average of 10
21 months from when households received A Shopping
22 Letter to when they were approved for CityFHEPS.

23 In comparison, the lease signing process
24 typically takes a matter of days for all other
25

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2 apartment seekers, enabling them to move into a given
3 unit within one month.

4 Therefore, the Council should pass a Local Law
5 requiring that the administering agency of a rental
6 assistance application informs the applicant of the
7 determination of approval no more than 15 days after
8 submission.

9 Similarly, inspection and apartment walkthrough
10 walk through times are a pain point. After taking
11 several weeks to schedule, case managers often delay
12 or cancel inspections. All the while, voucher holders
13 remain languishing in shelter while property owners
14 keep units open for unreasonable amounts of time.

15 To address these challenges, we urge the Council
16 to pass a Local Law requiring the preclearance and
17 walkthrough to be conducted within seven days of
18 locating (TIMER CHIMES) the housing unit.

19 Owners and agents also regularly fail to receive
20 payments, particularly the City's share of rent in a
21 reasonable amount of time. REBNY believes that
22 voucher holders and all other apartment seekers
23 should be on an equitable playing field.

24 Under New York State law, a payment is late if
25 received more than five days after the scheduled

1
2 payment date. To that end, we urge the Council to
3 pass a Local Law requiring the administering agency
4 to provide landlords with rental assistant payments
5 within five days of the scheduled payment date.

6 We are submitting our complete comments, and we
7 look forward to working with the Council to address
8 these challenges. Thank you.

9 ERIC LEE: Good morning. Thank you, Deputy Speaker
10 Ayala, and members of the committee for allowing me
11 to testify today.

12 My name is Eric Lee, I'm the Director of Public
13 Policy at Volunteers of America Greater New York, a
14 128-year-old antipoverty organization impacting more
15 than 12,000 adults and children annually through our
16 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey,
17 and Westchester.

18 I'll submit written testimony following the
19 hearing, but I would like to use my time to share how
20 VOA-GNY, worked collaboratively with DHS and HRA on
21 our Street to Home Pilot Program. And we're able to
22 use CityFHEPS to quickly place people experiencing
23 unsheltered homelessness into permanent supportive
24 housing often within one to two weeks of first
25 meeting them.

1
2 While enhanced clinical support services are core
3 to the success of this pilot, DHS's flexibility in
4 processing the CityFHEPS paperwork after the person
5 moved into housing enabled us to drastically shorten
6 the time spent homeless.

7 By increasing flexibility in the CityFHEPS
8 application and lease-up process, similar to how DHS
9 did for our pilot, the city can help households more
10 quickly utilize the voucher to access and maintain
11 permanent housing.

12 Our recommendations include expediting access to
13 public assistance to meet the CityFHEPS requirement
14 more quickly, including waiving birth certificate
15 requirements for people born outside of New York
16 state, but could otherwise prove their identity.

17 Allow providers like VOA-GNY to create photo IDs
18 for our clients or provide expedited access to IDNYC
19 appointments to meet the public assistance photo ID
20 requirements.

21 Assign HRA expeditors to quickly open public
22 assistance cases, especially single issue cases for
23 people with income, and process public assistance,
24 re-budgets post move-in for households well within
25 the CityFHEPS income limits to expedite the lease-up

1
2 process and avoid losing out on housing opportunities
3 that were identified.

4 VOA-GNY also urges the City to prioritize funding
5 to expand headcount at HRA to meet the growing
6 demands (TIMER CHIMES) for public assistance and
7 rental assistance through ensuring sufficient
8 headcount with sustainable caseloads at HRA. They
9 could ensure timely access to public benefits and
10 rental assistance for those who need it.

11 Finally, we urge your Administration to fully
12 implement Local Laws 99 to 102 of 2003 to expand
13 access to CityFHEPS.

14 In addition to the fiscal savings that would be
15 generated by fewer households, and shorter, stays in
16 shelter, it can't be overstated the personal and
17 societal benefits of helping more people avoid and
18 abbreviate the destabilizing and traumatizing
19 experience of homelessness in New York City.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, thank you.

22 I don't have any questions, because I agree with
23 everything that has been said. And we are working on
24 it to ,you know, on a process that makes it easier.

1
2 But I want to thank you all for you service. Thank
3 you so much.

4 I am going to call up the next panel Gina
5 Cappuccitti, Juan Diaz, Laura Lazarus, Steve Behar,
6 and Christopher Leon Johnson.

7 (PAUSE)

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes, go ahead.

9 GINA CAPPUCCHITTI: Good afternoon, Committee Chair
10 Ayala, members of the City Council, and council
11 staff. Thank you for holding this oversight hearing
12 on the CityFHEPS Program and the opportunity to
13 testify on behalf of New Destiny.

14 My name is Gina Cappuccitti, and I'm the Senior
15 Director of Housing Access and Stability Services at
16 New Destiny. Our mission is to end the double trauma
17 of abuse and homelessness among domestic violence
18 survivors. For 30 years, we've been solely dedicated
19 to permanent housing for survivors. We are also a co-
20 convenor of the Family Homelessness Coalition.

21 Why do we do this work? Because domestic violence
22 is the leading cause of family homelessness in New
23 York City. And with so few housing options available,
24 survivors are more likely to move from shelter to
25 shelter instead of into housing.

1
2 I oversee New Destiny's Housing Navigation
3 Program, helping survivors find safe homes they can
4 afford. Many survivors we work with have CityFHEPS
5 Vouchers. As such, we have firsthand knowledge of the
6 program's issue areas and the opportunities for
7 improvement.

8 First, we would like to recommend That Shopping
9 Letters be extended to one year. Currently, Shopping
10 Letters provide only four months to find housing.
11 While this should be enough, with various
12 bureaucratic delays already mentioned, and a record
13 low vacancy rate, it rarely is.

14 In addition, as others have mentioned, Section 8
15 has demonstrated best practices, which we encourage
16 CityFHEPS to adopt in establishing program
17 eligibility.

18 We would recommend the following changes:

19 Number one, changing the maximum income
20 requirement to 50 percent AMI instead of 200 percent
21 federal poverty level.

22 Number two, implementing exception payment
23 standards of codes.

24 Three, eliminating work requirements or offering
25 work exemptions for survivors and other opportunities

1
2 for waiting periods before losing eligibility after
3 loss of employment. And eliminating the reliance on
4 shelter and home based providers to manage the
5 voucher process by allowing voucher holders to access
6 their Shopping Letters on Access to HRA directly
7 rather than relying on providers, allowing landlords
8 or brokers to submit packages directly to HRA, and
9 preserving the, eligibility for survivors (TIMER
10 CHIMES) who exit to homelessness, without securing
11 housing.

12 Finally, New Destiny recommends addressing issues
13 impacting reliable payments to landlords. This
14 directly affects CityFHEPS reputation and our
15 collective ability to convince landlords to accept
16 it. Landlords do not perceive the program as reliable
17 compared to Section 8 due to history of nonpayment
18 from HRA.

19 I will close with just one note of a client that
20 was directly impacted by the failings of CityFHEPS
21 eligibility. This is a client who is mother of one
22 and a survivor, trained as a medical professional.
23 She had to lose... leave the workforce due to
24 domestic violence and faced eviction with the
25 CityFHEPS Shopping Letter in hand. Due to multiple

1
2 delays at Homebase, she lost out on units and ended
3 up going into shelter. Because of her lack of
4 employment, she was not found eligible for CityFHEPS.
5 We were able to secure her a Section 8 voucher,
6 through a temporary stability voucher referral
7 program, and she was able to move into her apartment
8 last month. If it were not for that program, she
9 would still be in shelter languishing because she
10 would not have been eligible for CityFHEPS

11 Thank you, and we'll submit extended written
12 testimony via email.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Your mic is not on.

14 STEVE BEHAR: I've been here a lot, but I've never
15 been at this point. So good to see you, Councilwoman.

16 My name's Steve Behar, and I'm here because I
17 have been trying to help a friend of mine who's been
18 in a shelter for nearly a decade. And I've been
19 trying to help her for the last two years. And, I
20 have been an attorney for nearly 30 years.

21 I spent two years as counsel in the New York
22 State Senate and six years as counsel right here in
23 the New York City Council, and I can't help her.

24 The system is broken, and frankly the people are
25 broken. I'm not gonna use her real name, but I will

1
2 call her Jane. Jane is in her fifties. She's a Black
3 woman, and she walks with a cane. She had a voucher,
4 and I was driving her around to see apartments, and
5 she was clearly discriminated against. She would see
6 an apartment, and she'd write an application, and a
7 few days later, they'd say somebody else got it. And
8 then I would call a week later, and they'd say, it's
9 still available, would you like to come see it?

10 That was bad enough, but she was, at that point,
11 staying in the Bronx in a shelter from Black Veterans
12 for Social Justice. I called them repeatedly. She
13 talked to them repeatedly about meeting with us to
14 try to help her situation. They wouldn't talk to us.
15 I finally called the COO, and they put me in charge
16 of, uh, they put me in contact with her supervisor.

17 They made 12 appointments to see us and canceled
18 each one of them, either the day before or the day
19 of.

20 She was then transferred to Samaritan Village,
21 Women's Shelter in Douglaston in Queens, which is
22 near where I live. At this point, I reached out from
23 my contacts here in in the Council to (TIMER CHIMES)
24 the Community Housing Improvement Program, which is a
25 group of landlords that own rent stabilized

1
2 buildings. And they said we have plenty of landlords
3 that are willing to take her voucher. So I sent them
4 her voucher, and it was expired. The shelter in the
5 Bronx never realized that her voucher had expired.
6 It's been two years, and we can't seem to get another
7 one.

8 She was moved to Samaritan Daytop Village in
9 Douglaston in Queens. I called the main office of
10 Samaritan Village, and I got a call, phone call from
11 a woman named Michelle Demott, D E M O T T, who was
12 the head of External Affairs there. She spoke to me
13 twice and then ghosted me. I've left probably a dozen
14 messages for her, and they've never been returned.

15 And all my messages were saying was, I'm trying
16 to help my friend get out of the shelter, and I have
17 landlords that will take her voucher. No response.

18 I then talked to Ms... I called Ms. MacFarlane,
19 who's the general counsel at Samaritan Village,
20 Samaritan Daytop Village. I've left her over a dozen
21 messages and no reply.

22 I did find out the reason why her voucher expired
23 was that DHS had, when it expired, had sent the
24 renewal paperwork to the shelter, and they don't
25 take... they don't get mail on the shelters.

1
2 So this woman's been in the shelter for years.
3 I've spent two years trying to get her out. And
4 right now, I have nowhere to go.

5 And like I said before, I've been an attorney
6 for three decades, including being counsel in this
7 body for six years, and I haven't been able to help
8 her. I can only imagine what a single mom with a high
9 school education, struggling day by day to go through
10 this process.

11 I will finally say that I've taken Jane to DHS
12 down on 16th Street in Manhattan from Eastern Queens
13 probably a half dozen times. We've gotten no help
14 down there. What we did get was a phone number, a
15 phone number that when you call, rings one time and
16 shuts off.

17 So, I'm asking the Council to, you know, please
18 look into this. I'm also asking for some personal
19 help in trying to help my friend, Jane, get out of
20 this shelter, because, as you guys know, the voucher
21 is \$2,300 - \$2,600 a month. The City's probably paying
22 \$400 a day to keep her in the shelter. It's a mess.
23 Thank you for listening.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, can you send me her
25 name?

1 STEVE BEHAR: I will.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

3 JUAN DIAZ: Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, for
4 holding today's hearing. My name is Juan Diaz. I'm a
5 Policy Associate of Citizens Committee for Children,
6 CCC, a multi-issue children's advocacy organization.
7 CCC is a co-convener of the Family Homeless
8 Coalition, FHC.
9

10 The recent CCC's Keep Track of New York City
11 Children Book revealed that in 2023, over 30 percent
12 of New York City renters pay at least half of their
13 income towards rent. There were more than 1,200
14 residential evictions, and more than 46,000 children
15 reside at a New York City's shelter.

16 As such, we cannot underscore the value of
17 housing vouchers like CityFHEPS. We value the
18 Department of Social Services' efforts to improve the
19 approval to improve the approval of CityFHEPS packets
20 and expedite shelter relocations. However, more
21 investment and programmatic reforms are imperative to
22 ensure that more households receive housing
23 assistance in a timely manner.
24
25

1
2 In our reading testimony, we will highlight
3 recommendations. But today, I want to highlight the
4 following investments:

5 Implement and fund CityFHEPS expansion. We
6 appreciate your support in passing these legislations
7 and look forward to make this a reality.

8 Additionally, significantly increase the budget
9 for Homebase. In recent years, Homebase providers
10 have taken on tremendous increases in caseload as
11 well as ever-expanding set of responsibilities,
12 including CityFHEPS applications, renewals, transit
13 requests, rent portion adjustments, and more. This
14 has not been attached by funding levels to match the
15 new post COVID reality.

16 Additionally, Homebase providers also provide
17 emergency rental assistance for clients in need of
18 CityFHEPS two-state applications and for clients at
19 risk of eviction.

20 I also want to recommend the following
21 administrative reforms:

22 (TIMER CHIMES) The current single issue time
23 frame is 30 days, but often the process for applying
24 and getting the voucher is longer and requires a
25 single issue to be resubmitted again. We recommend a

1
2 90-day time frame. The application package should be
3 readable, fillable PDF forms so that it can be signed
4 electronically and emailed back while still allowing
5 for a paper process.

6 Additionally, consider reducing the amount of
7 paperwork to submit CityFHEPS packets. Currently,
8 case managers must complete and submit large packets,
9 in some cases, over 40 pages.

10 Deputy Speaker Ayala, for several years, I was a
11 supervisor at a Homebase location in Brooklyn. And
12 the amount of work that case managers and staff at
13 Homebase is tremendous. They have to enroll almost on
14 everyday basis. They have several times dozens of
15 CityFHEPS package applications,. And it's with so
16 many pages and so many requirements of repetition,
17 the same information over and over, it makes it very
18 difficult.

19 So that's why it's very important to invest in
20 Homebase to reduce, you know, the time the
21 application needs to be submitted. Thank you for your
22 time.

23 LAURA LAZARUS: Hello, good afternoon, Deputy
24 Speaker Ayala. My name is Lara Lazarus, and I'm the
25 co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Anthos

1
2 Home. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today
3 and share insights about how we can improve housing
4 outcomes for New Yorkers who use housing vouchers.

5 Anthos Home is committed to helping New Yorkers
6 using housing vouchers transition into permanent
7 housing as quickly as possible with the goal of
8 having that happen within two months.

9 We know that housing vouchers are one of the most
10 effective tools we have to address homelessness and
11 housing instability, yet they can be very difficult
12 to use.

13 Here in New York City, it takes families an
14 average of at least a year to find housing after
15 receiving a voucher, and nearly half of all voucher
16 holders cannot secure a suitable apartment.

17 Every day we see how programs like CityFHEPS can
18 change lives, but we also encounter barriers that
19 prevent voucher holders from accessing stable
20 housing.

21 These issues are decades in the making and can
22 prolong shelter stays and leave families in unstable
23 and difficult conditions.

24 The challenges include finding landlords willing
25 to accept vouchers, delays in processing approvals

1
2 and payments, and the need for more robust support
3 services to help tenants succeed in maintaining their
4 homes.

5 Our model helps tenants and landlords overcome
6 these common roadblocks. Here is how it works:

7 We proactively reserve and identify eligible
8 apartments through a network of landlords and
9 brokers, ensuring families with vouchers can access
10 housing options immediately. This is the first and
11 only initiative of its kind in New York City.

12 Additionally, our flexible funding model allows
13 us to cover necessary costs such as repairs to pass
14 inspections, moving costs, application fees, and more
15 removing barriers that prevent families from moving
16 in quickly.

17 And we have seen from our work that this support
18 on the landlord side has been bringing in more units
19 into the system that are willing... with landlords
20 who are willing to work with voucher holders (TIMER
21 CHIMES) because of the support that we are providing.

22 Our expert team also guides both tenants and
23 landlords through the often complicated housing
24 process. From assisting with paperwork to ensuring
25 units and tenants are move in ready, we streamline

1
2 what can otherwise be a slow and just disjointed
3 effort.

4 Once families are housed, we provide wraparound
5 support for at least a year for both tenants and
6 landlords to make sure that a tenant is able to
7 recertify their voucher. This support includes
8 monthly check-ins, help with repairs, and
9 intervention if payment issues arise.

10 Our flexible funding can be used to help address
11 utility costs or to ensure a landlord receives
12 payment even if a government check is delayed.

13 By offering this ongoing support, we reduce the
14 burden on landlords, allowing them to focus on
15 property management while we handle tenant related
16 challenges.

17 This model has been especially effective for
18 vulnerable populations, such as foster youth and
19 individuals with complex health needs who often need
20 extra guidance to navigate the system and achieve
21 stability.

22 In 2023, we entered into a partnership with the
23 New York City Administration for Children Services to
24 support young people who have aged out of foster care
25

1
2 as well as families who are involved with child
3 welfare and are living in shelter.

4 Our approach is working. To date, we have helped
5 nearly 200 families and individuals move into
6 housing, and of those, 100 are former foster youth
7 who are now settled in dignified stable apartments.
8 All of them remain housed.

9 Each element of our model, our partnership with
10 government, direct support of tenants, and working
11 relationship with landlords made this possible. We're
12 in active discussions to bring our approach to other
13 city agencies.

14 CityFHEPS is a critical resource. Its impact
15 could be even greater with targeted improvements.
16 Streamlining the process, addressing inspection
17 delays, and creating more effective landlord
18 engagement would significantly reduce bottlenecks.

19 At Anthos Home, we've seen firsthand how these
20 changes can lead to faster transitions and better
21 outcomes for tenants and landlords alike. We have
22 helped nearly 500 New Yorkers move into permanent
23 housing, significantly reducing the average wait time
24 to just a few months. Our model is creating long term
25

1
2 stability for families and individuals who might
3 otherwise cycle through unsafe conditions.

4 These successes demonstrate that targeted well
5 supported interventions can make a measurable
6 difference.

7 Thank you so much for your support of these
8 improvements and for the opportunity to speak with
9 you today.

10 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: All right, good
11 afternoon. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson.

12 I wanna first up address the fact that, you, the
13 Chair, let a nonprofit, VOCAL-NY, speak for over 25
14 minutes while you give everybody else here, even the
15 REBNY nonprofits only about two minutes to speak. So
16 we all we all know that the City Council is ran by
17 VOCAL-NY.

18 Now I'm here to speak to support CityFHEPS. I
19 believe that when people get CityFHEPS, there should
20 be an increase with the... how much money you should
21 get for to try to get an apartment because... and
22 there should be more investigation into every
23 landlord that refuses to honor and... honor a
24 CityFHEPS Voucher, while at the same time, you should
25

1
2 give a limit from, like, years to unlimited amount of
3 time to use your CityFHEPS Voucher.

4 And I believe that the way you could really solve
5 homelessness is by eliminating these nonprofits from
6 running the CityFHEPS like local New York that is ran
7 by a sex offender, CAMBA, Housing Works, and all
8 these nonprofits take away their rights to hand out
9 vouchers and give it back to the government, give it
10 back to DHS, let DHS run those vouchers.

11 Yeah, VOCAL-NY... And one more thing we need to
12 start doing a little more is to take away all
13 advocacy rights from VOCAL-NY. VOCAL-NY should not be
14 the d... should not be the de facto organization
15 that the City Council listens to support... to vow
16 to... advocate for City vouchers on the basis of the
17 fact that they have a sex offender in a nonprofit
18 that is named Douglas Powell. Until they remove
19 Douglas Powell as the a member of VOCAL-NY, they
20 should not be in the power of advocating on behalf of
21 homeless people that have vouchers, that... (TIMER
22 CHIMES) who want vouchers and who request vouchers.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Time, thank you...

24 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: And it make sure... you
25 gave them more time... you gave them more time...

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Christopher, thank
3 you. Thank you...

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: You... Thank you. You
5 gave them more time...

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We have another
7 panel.

8 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: All right.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

10 (PAUSE)

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, thank you so much.
12 Is there anyone in the public, who has not signed
13 up to speak, who would like to speak? If so, please
14 see the Sergeant at Arms.

15 (PAUSE)

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, so our last in person is
17 Reverend Terry Troia.

18 REVEREND DR. TERRY TROIA: Good afternoon, Deputy
19 Speaker Ayala.

20 I am here representing Project Hospitality. We
21 are a Staten Island-based organization that's been
22 serving homeless people on Staten Island since 1984,
23 40 years. I've been there since the beginning.

24 I am here, first of all, to say that we are
25 grateful for the FHEPS Voucher Program. It's a

1
2 lifeline to move homeless people from a chair in our
3 drop-in center to permanent housing or from our
4 family shelter into permanent housing.

5 It's very important for us. We have a serious,
6 serious growing homeless problem on Staten Island. We
7 always have. We've always had the least amount of
8 services, and our people are stuck on the streets and
9 people die on our streets.

10 We urge the expediting process that can be made
11 possible to allow a person to move from street to
12 home through FHEPS.

13 We also want to note with great gratitude the
14 work of CAMBA, Staten Island Homebase office, and to
15 share that it is really important to know that that
16 Homebase office is absolutely overwhelmed. It takes
17 months to get an appointment. No one answers the
18 phone. And you... I have to go down in person often
19 to advocate on behalf of someone. They are
20 overwhelmed and we really need an additional Homebase
21 office or an extended or expanded office.

22 We need the FHEPS program to work quickly to
23 streamline their process, to expedite the apartment
24 inspections, and to help reduce the crisis of
25 homelessness on Staten Island by such an expedited

1
2 service. This will get our most vulnerable families
3 and single street people into safe, stable housing as
4 soon as humanly possible.

5 And finally, I just want to share that Staten
6 Island greatly needs to be considered for placing
7 Staten Islanders back in shelter on Staten Island,
8 Now that we have, for the first time in our borough's
9 history, a city shelter on Staten Island for homeless
10 single people. It is so critical that people can draw
11 on the resources of their communities, their
12 neighborhoods, and their families who may also be on
13 Staten Island, (TIMER CHIMES) and to and to recircle
14 them back.

15 There are many homeless people who've never been
16 on a subway before or off the island, if you can
17 imagine that. And if we can get them sent back to
18 Staten Island, once they get processed to 30th
19 Street, they can get into a more familiar setting in
20 in the neighborhoods from which they came and use
21 those strengths to move quickly out of shelter into
22 stable housing.

23 Thank you so much for considering our request
24 from the Borough of Staten Island.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much for. And
3 thank you for coming.

4 (PAUSE)

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, we will now be moving on
6 to our online panel. Amy Blumsack?

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 AMY BLUMSACK: Hi, good afternoon, my name is Amy
9 Blumsack. I'm the Director of Organizing and Policy
10 at Neighbors Together.

11 We'd like to thank the General Welfare Committee,
12 and Deputy Speaker Ayala, as well as the Council
13 overall for the opportunity to submit testimony on
14 the Administration of CityFHEPS. And we want to give
15 a deep seated thank you for all of your work to
16 improve the voucher and to fight for its expansion.

17 Briefly, Neighbors Together is a community based
18 organization located in Central Brooklyn. Over 60
19 percent of our members are homeless or unstably
20 housed. We have been organizing with voucher holders
21 for many years now. We fight for policy and
22 legislative improvements to vouchers so that they
23 will be effective tools for moving out of
24 homelessness and into housing. And at Neighbors
25

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2 Together, we also provide direct services such as
3 housing search assistance for people with vouchers.

4 As many others have said, CityFHEPS is a critical
5 tool for moving out of homelessness, that it is rife
6 with problems, delays, and administrative barriers.

7 And so I did want to say that after listening to
8 the Commissioner's testimony this morning, I really
9 need to emphasize, as other panelists have said, that
10 our members' experience of working within the
11 CityFHEPS program is incredibly different than what
12 was described by the Commissioner and her team this
13 morning.

14 To name a few quickly, it's already been covered,
15 but our members as well experience late payments or
16 payments sent to the wrong address; a very unclear,
17 nontransparent application process; significant
18 delays in every single step of the voucher process
19 from receiving a Shopping Letter, all the way through
20 packet submission and processing to move in and the
21 final check cutting.

22 (TIMER CHIMES) Additionally, our members are also
23 experiencing...

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired, thank you.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can finish, go ahead. You
3 can wrap, go ahead.

4 AMY BLUMSACK: Okay, our members are also
5 experiencing really long wait times at Homebase,
6 anywhere from one to four months for an appointment
7 regardless of the urgency of need.

8 And we're also hearing our members say that some
9 of the Homebase locations are not giving them a
10 Shopping Letter at all, but instead telling them,
11 "Come back once you've received your Shopping
12 Letter", which is a surefire way to lose an
13 apartment, which is super hard to come by if you have
14 a voucher or just at all in New York City.

15 I think what I want to emphasize is just that,
16 you know, I know you guys listen to this. You've been
17 listening to it for two and a half hours, and it's
18 you know, it sounds like a list of problems, but
19 behind every problem are many, many homeless New
20 Yorkers who should be treated with the dignity and
21 care that they deserve. Those are somebody's mom,
22 someone's sibling, someone's auntie. And we see such
23 a lack of care for them in the system that the, you
24 know, that CityFHEPS Voucher Program, it is in in the
25 bureaucracy of it all.

1
2 I want to give two examples, and then I'll wrap
3 it up.

4 One of our members had a CityFHEPS Voucher. He
5 was scheduled to move into a set aside unit, which
6 means it was being held through negotiations done
7 through the City Commission on Human Rights for a
8 source of income discrimination. And he, in the
9 middle of the process, the application process to the
10 apartment, his voucher came up for renewal. His
11 renewal took so long, it took months and months and
12 months, it was so difficult to get responsiveness
13 from the agencies that he lost the apartment, and he
14 remained homeless, and he is still homeless.

15 Another member of ours is disabled. It's very
16 hard for her to walk. She is supposed to be moving
17 into an apartment, but over the break, we shut down
18 for the holidays. When we came back, our Housing
19 Specialist followed up with the case manager only to
20 learn that the submission of their preclearance
21 documents hadn't been done yet. So a month went by
22 where no action was taken on this application, and
23 our member is currently in a nursing home. But she is
24 going to have to pay now for an additional month in
25 the nursing home at a cost of \$600 per day. Because

1
2 of the delay in her preclearance, there's no way
3 she's moving in on February 1st. It's gonna be March
4 first at the very earliest, and that's best case
5 scenario. So, you know, she's gonna be paying
6 thousands of dollars that she doesn't have because of
7 an unnecessary delay.

8 So our recommendations are to increase capacity
9 at the shelter system, you know, for the shelter
10 providers and at Homebase; to create better
11 transparent, more efficient tracking processes for
12 the application of CityFHEPS; to baseline and
13 increase the funding in FY26 and out years; we want
14 to see the CityFHEPS reform laws implemented, of
15 course; and we really want to see the \$215 million
16 that was negotiated in the City for All City of YES
17 agreement applied to protecting the most vulnerable
18 New Yorkers, who are at risk of eviction; we need to
19 continue to Resource the Human Rights, uh, City
20 Commission for Human Rights to fight source of income
21 discrimination; ensure access timely access to the
22 utility allowance; and ensure timely distribution of
23 Shopping Letters to name a few.

24 I want to thank you for your, perseverance and
25 patience listening to all of the testimonies today,

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including mine. We'll be submitting more detailed testimony in writing, and we thank you again for your attention to this important issue.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We look forward to receiving that information.

Thank you all for coming today. And with that, is there anyone else that we have missed that has not signed up to speak? No? Okay. Seeing no one, this hearing is adjourned.

(GAVELING OUT)

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date February 15, 2025