

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

1

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH

----- X

March 16, 2026

Start: 9:46 a.m.

Recess: 5:11 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Althea V. Stevens,  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés  
Tiffany Cabán  
Simcha Felder  
Jennifer Gutiérrez  
Rita C. Joseph  
Linda Lee  
Chi A. Ossé  
Nantasha M. Williams

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

## ACS Representatives

Melissa Hester

Elizabeth Wolkimer

Nancy Ginsberg

Luisa Linares

Ina Mendez

Margaret Plentikoff

Stephanie Gendell

Winette Saunders

## DYCD Representatives

Sandra Escamilla - Davis

Alan Cheng

Nevita Bailey

Julia Bretman

Denice Williams

Wanda Ascherl

Daphne Marinez

Wendy Johnson

Jessica Ralthel

Angelina Martinz Rubio

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

Valerie Mulligan

Daniel Guillen

Susan Haskell

Mike Bobbit

Darryl Rattray

In-Person Witnesses

Sophia Shi  
NYCCAL

Teresa Alk  
NYCCAL

Ira Yankwitt  
NYCCAL

Kaveh Safehouy  
NYCAA

Susan Graves  
NMIC

Sarah Cauperberg  
NMIC

Micharez Amanzar  
NMIC

Lisabeth Delgado  
NMIC

Ilana Amaro  
NMIC

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

Josiah Martinez  
NMIC

Rebecca Chennalier  
Legal Aid Services

Gerlad Kimbrough  
Center Justice Innovation

Sebastian Vante  
Safe Horizon

Gregory Brender  
Daycare Council of New York

Kate Connolly  
United Neighborhood Houses

Hizam Wahib  
Arab American Family Support Center

Sasha Kouptsova  
Anthos Home

Chanel Staggers  
Anthos Home

Amanda Mccarthy  
CASES

Yessenia Serra  
Make the Road New York

Derk Carter  
Forestdale

Lakeraj Gangadin  
Forestdale

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

Samina Gariyeva  
The New York City Alliance for Sexual Assault

Emma Mckhann  
Girls for Gender Equity

Ponny White  
The New York City Alliance

Debra Sue Lorenzen  
St Nick's Alliance

Stephanie Skakff  
Play Ground NYC

Joe Titus  
Hive Class

Adelo Ramirez

Aaron Sanders  
Grand Street Settlement

Trenton Price  
Saivadori

Piyali Basak  
Neighborhood Defender Services

Aastha Mehta  
Common Justice

Mark Papish  
Center for Family Representation

Nila Natarajan  
Neighborhood Defender Services

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

Keith Baurman  
Neighborhood Defender Services

Jonee Billy  
PowerPlay

Barneet Kaur  
Sadie Nash

Jahad Hayle  
Expand Ed Schools  
Caitlyn Passaretti  
Citizen Committee for  
Children

Galloway  
Ali Forney Center

Joshua Castillo  
Visions

May Depierro  
Advocates for Children

Zoom Witness

Elijah Batson  
Student

Destiny Celestine  
Student

Aaron Culver  
Student

New York Edge Advocate

New York Edge Advocate

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

New York Edge Advocate

Dr Sophine Charles  
Council of Family and Childcare Agencies

Sierra Kraft  
I CARE Coalition

Peter Basica  
360 Smarter Care

Kevin McEwen  
Kofago Institute

Allison Hollihan  
Osborne Association

Nicole Carta  
Healing New York

Sitan Sako

Annie E Miguez  
Good Shepherd Services

Benjamin Tocker  
Graham Wyndham

Alex Stein

1  
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check on  
3 the Preliminary Budget for Financial Year 2027,  
4 recorded by James Marino in the Chambers on March  
5 16, 2026 for the Committee on Children and Youth.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Good morning.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Welcome to  
8 today's New York City Council Hearing for the  
9 Committee on Children and Youth. Please silence all  
10 cellphone and electronic devices. If you wish to  
11 participate in today's hearing, please fill out an  
12 appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms. If you  
13 need anything else, please contact the Sergeant at  
14 Arms. Moving forward, no one is to approach the  
15 dais.

16 Chair Stevens, we're ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: [GAVEL] Good morning  
18 everyone and welcome to the first part of today's  
19 budget hearing. My name is Council Member Althea  
20 Stevens and I serve as the Chair of the Committee on  
21 Children and Youth.

The first part of today's Committee hearing is on  
the Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget and the  
Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the  
Administration for Children Services or ACS. Thank

1  
2 you to the Interim Commissioner Melissa Hester for  
3 joining us today. We're also joined by Deputy  
4 Speaker Nanatasha Williams and Finance Chair Linda  
5 Lee.

6 Following testimony and questions from ACS, we  
7 will hear from DYCD at 12 noon, and then public  
8 testimony around 2:30. Thank you to all the  
9 advocates and the community members who have joined  
10 us today. I will keep my comments here brief, as I  
11 always do and request that the Interim Commissioner  
12 keep her oral testimony as brief as possible so we  
13 can move to the questions from the Council Members.

14 ACS's Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget is \$3.42  
15 billion and \$283.2 million or 90 percent greater than  
16 the Fiscal 2026 Adopted Budget. The Preliminary Plan  
17 includes increased investments in several areas  
18 including childcare vouchers, detention programs and  
19 foster care payments.

20 New needs of \$18.3 million are added for Fiscal  
21 2026 in the Preliminary Plan growing to \$336.8  
million to additional funding in Fiscal 2030. ACS is  
the center of so many issues important to the Council  
this budget cycle, providing free or low cost child  
care, strengthening our systems, our city's threats

1 and uncertainties from hostile federal government,  
2 shining a light on areas where underfunded mandate or  
3 costs originally brought on by the state have deeply  
4 affected our city agencies. I was delighted to see  
5 that the data in the PPMR showed a 39.8 percent  
6 increase in childcare voucher enrollment in the first  
7 four months of Fiscal 2022 when compared to 2025 due  
8 to the successful outreach and much more efficient  
9 application process. In fact, demands for ACS  
10 childcare vouchers have grown so much that the agency  
11 now maintains a waitlist for over 1,600 eligible  
12 children, providing free or low cost childcare is one  
13 of the most important challenges our city faces; well  
14 one of them. And I look forward to discussing ACS  
15 work in this area, as well as the urgent need to  
16 maintain the agency's current caseload and in the  
17 waitlists.

18 Juvenile Justice is also an area of ongoing  
19 concern to the Council. According to the PPMR, for  
20 the first time since Fiscal 2022, ACS has seen a  
21 decrease in detention admissions. ACS saw admissions  
to juvenile detentions decline by 3.7 percent in the  
first four months of 2026 compared to the same period  
Fiscal 2025. A modest but meaningful improvement

1 that speaks to the importance of the agency's  
2 preventive services. At the same time, the agency's  
3 daily population in juvenile detentions increased by  
4 21.5 percent for the first four months of Fiscal 2026  
5 asking parents in the same period in Fiscal 2025.  
6 This decrease in admissions paired with the increased  
7 average daily population can be explained by longer  
8 average lengths of stay by juvenile detention  
9 facilities for youth.

9 I would like to learn more about ACS strategy to  
10 meet the needs of this increased youth population  
11 with more complex or serious cases requiring  
12 extensive periods in detention. I would also like to  
13 learn about the agency's plan to ensure that the  
14 trauma informed and community based treatments are  
15 provided whenever possible and prevent involvement in  
16 a juvenile system in the first place. I look forward  
17 to hearing about ACS dealing with staffing issues as  
18 well as capital upgrades and conditions at the two  
19 secured detention facilities, Horizon and Crossroads.

18 I look forward to today's discussion and budget  
19 actions, including the preliminary plan, performance  
20 matrix, including the PPMR, ACS Capital Plan, and  
21

1  
2 virtual programs such as child - vital programs such  
3 as childcare prevention services and foster care.

4 I am particularly interested in hearing ACS  
5 strategy to meet the multifaceted needs at risk  
6 families across the city and working to increase  
7 utilization in preventative services that ensure  
8 health and safety and stability for our families. It  
9 is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the  
10 city budget is fair, transparent, accountable to all  
11 New Yorkers.

12 As the Chair of Children and Youth, I will  
13 continue to push for accountability, accuracy and to  
14 ensure that the budget reflects the needs and  
15 interests of our city's youth.

16 I would like to take this time to thank my staff  
17 that helped prepare, Margaret Barnsley(SP?), Julia  
18 Haramis, Assistant Director, Richards Gates Wong,  
19 uhm, the Fellow Ria Ogasawara, Elizabeth Artz, and  
20 my entire staff back at the district office and my  
21 Deputy Chief of Staff Gray Mayors(SP?).

I will continue - I will now turn it over to the  
Committee Staff to administer the oath. I would like  
to acknowledge Felder, Council Member Felder who has  
also joined us.

1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now hear testimony  
3 from the Administration. Before we begin, I will  
4 administer the affirmation. Panelists, please raise  
5 your right hand. I will read the affirmation once,  
6 then call on each of you individually to respond.

7 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth  
8 and nothing but the truth before this Committee and  
9 to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

10 Thank you.

11 MELISSA HESTER: Good morning. Happy Women's  
12 History Month. My name is Melissa Hester and I am  
13 the Interim Commissioner at the Administration for  
14 Children Services. I am joined today by Winette  
15 Saunders, the First Deputy Commissioner, Margaret  
16 Plentikoff, the Deputy Commissioner for Financial  
17 Services, and Stephanie Gendell, the Deputy  
18 Commissioner for External Affairs. Nancy Ginsberg,  
19 the Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth and  
20 Family Justice, Luisa Linares, the Deputy  
21 Commissioner for the Family Services Division, Ina  
Mendez, the Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency  
Services, and Elizabeth Wolkimer, the Deputy  
Commissioner for the division of Child and Family  
Wellbeing are also here and available for questions.

1  
2 I am also joined by the full ACS cabinet and many  
3 of the senior leaders who lead ACS's work and helped  
4 us prepare for today's hearing.

5 Thank you Chair Stevens and Members of the  
6 Children and Youth Committee for holding today's  
7 hearing on our Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year  
8 2027. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you  
9 the important work that ACS is doing to keep children  
10 safe and to provide support to children, youth and  
11 families. I also want to take a moment to thank the  
12 ACS team and our provider agency partners for their  
13 commitment, compassion and dedication to this  
14 important work.

15 As you will hear more about today, our  
16 Preliminary Budget plan includes important actions to  
17 help ACS build on our accomplishments and continue to  
18 move this important work forward. Childcare is a  
19 critical support for families and we are thrilled  
20 that the Mamdani Administration is committed to  
21 strengthening and expanding the city's early  
childhood system so that families across the city  
will have access to high quality, affordable  
childcare.

1  
2 Starting in 2022, ACS spearheaded an effort to  
3 substantially increase the number of children  
4 enrolled in childcare with costs paid fully or mostly  
5 by an ACS issued childcare voucher.

6 In 2022, approximately 7,500 low-income children  
7 were enrolled in the ACS issued voucher and today,  
8 approximately 71,000 children are enrolled. As the  
9 Council and advocates will surely recall, at this  
10 time last year, the state had not committed to  
11 maintaining funding for these vouchers. We faced a  
12 billion dollar deficit and the prospect of thousands  
13 of families losing their childcare vouchers. ACS is  
14 grateful to the City Council, as well as the  
15 advocates for your invaluable partnership in  
16 advocating for additional state support for the  
17 childcare assistance program.

18 Thankfully, this joint advocacy helped us receive  
19 additional state support, so that ACS has been able  
20 to continue to recertify the vast majority of  
21 eligible families, allowing families to maintain this  
critical support.

We are encouraged by the additional C-CAP funding  
in this year's State Executive Budget. Based on the  
city's analysis, the governor's budget would allow us

1  
2 to continue our current policy of providing  
3 continuity of care for low-income families and  
4 support the growing need among families on chase  
5 assistance served by the Human Resources  
6 Administration.

7 While the current funding wouldn't immediately  
8 allow us to begin offering care to children on the  
9 voucher waitlist, we will continue to regularly  
10 assess enrollment across ACS, New York City Public  
11 Schools, and HRA to see when this may be possible.

12 The city's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget includes  
13 \$1.1 million dollars when fully implemented for ten  
14 new staff to bolster our ability to maintain program  
15 integrity and compliance, safeguarding the over \$1  
16 billion in federal and state aid for C-CAP as the  
17 childcare system continues to grow.

18 Supporting and uplifting families and communities  
19 so they have the resources, information and services  
20 they need to thrive is our critical mission - is  
21 critical to our mission. We want families to get the  
resources and connections they need to foster healthy  
childhood development and relationships, so there is  
never the need for child protection involvement.

1  
2 Our prevention providers, community partnerships,  
3 family enrichment centers, and Office of Child Safety  
4 and injury prevention do this in every community of  
5 the city and every day.

6 We have now completed our plan to expand from 3  
7 to 30 family enrichment centers with the contract for  
8 the 30th FEC getting registered in January.

9 FEC's are welcoming walk in family centered  
10 spaces open to all community members. Everything  
11 from the name, the furniture and the offerings are  
12 co-designed with families. These spaces are intended  
13 to enhance the family and child wellbeing by  
14 promoting protective factors, such as resilience and  
15 social connection.

16 The 30 FEC's in various stages of implementation  
17 are in various stages of implementation and are all  
18 now engaging families and neighbors in their  
19 respective communities.

20 We have also been intentional about our efforts  
21 to ensure that families in need are able to access  
services and supports through ACS or other nonprofit  
community based providers. We are continuing to  
collaborate with our sister agencies, including New  
York City Public Schools, DHS, DYCD, and Health and

1  
2 Hospitals, to both get the word out about the support  
3 line and ensure that they know how to access services  
4 for families without the need to make a report to the  
5 statewide central register.

6 We have trained over 27,000 mandated reporters  
7 across schools, shelters, hospitals, and afterschool  
8 programs. As a result, we have seen a steady  
9 reduction in the number of reports from those we have  
10 trained, down 16 percent for education and childcare  
11 reporters, down 16 percent from social service  
12 agencies, and down 7 percent by health.

13 In November 2023, we launched a support line  
14 staffed by MSW's whose sole purpose is to connect  
15 callers to the resources they need. The support line  
16 now receives an average of over 300 inquiries each  
17 month, and I encourage you to share this resource  
18 with your constituents. The phone number is  
19 212-676-7667.

20 With the aid of our support line and our  
21 collaboration with our prevention provider partners,  
we have also focused on increasing community  
referrals to prevention so families can get connected  
to supportive services that help them so that they  
and their children can thrive. We see these efforts

1  
2 working with new enrollments and prevention up nearly  
3 ten percent last year and community referrals  
4 increasing from 12 percent of prevention referrals in  
5 January 2023 to 25 percent in January 2026. Earlier  
6 this month, ACS along with the New York City  
7 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Deputy  
8 Mayor Arteaga announced strong foundations. Our new  
9 collaboration with DOHMH for which you will see the  
10 intercity transfer from ACS to DOHMH.

11 This program, funded at approximately \$20.1  
12 million over three years with \$19.2 million from ACS  
13 will enable DOHMH to expand programs that support new  
14 parents and their children, reaching more families in  
15 the community. Specifically, the funding will  
16 support one, expanded eligibility for a nurse family  
17 partnership called NFPX to include late registrants,  
18 pregnant people in their 3rd trimester up to the  
19 birth of the child and people with previous live  
20 births nurse family partnership.

21 Populations typically not eligible for the  
program. Two, expanded capacity in the prenatal and  
early childhood mental health clinics to serve more  
families and offer additional clinical peer and  
material supports. And three, expanded trainings,

1 funding prenatal mental health certification and  
2 establishing a three year fellowship to develop a  
3 pipeline of staff with prenatal and early childhood  
4 knowledge and skills to support families with young  
5 children.

6 There is no mission more important than keeping  
7 children safe from harm and this remains our  
8 northstar.

9 For ACS, safety means protecting children from  
10 the harms of abuse and neglect as well as from the  
11 harms of avoidable separation from their families.  
12 At the same time, as we are working to reduce  
13 unnecessary reports. If a child is not safe, calls  
14 are warranted and we need to be sure that our child  
15 protective staff have the tools and the skills they  
16 need to identify those children truly in danger and  
17 to connect families to services and supports and  
18 foster care if necessary so children can be safe.

19 The average child protective caseload is  
20 currently 7.6, which is well below national standards  
21 and greatly strengthens the capacity of our child  
protective teams who do their work with all the  
skill, compassion, teamwork, and professionalism for  
which they are trained and supported. In January, we

1  
2 launched our new clinical support program for child  
3 protection, which provides our teams with licensed  
4 professionals who have expertise in mental health,  
5 substance abuse, and intimate partner violence.

6 Through the newly enhanced program, these experts  
7 add critical insight to our work and can engage  
8 directly with families to offer hands-on support and  
9 connections to services specific to each family's  
10 needs.

11 Earlier this month, we launched a new Citywide  
12 Child Safety Campaign to get the word out to parents  
13 and caregivers about keeping children safe from  
14 preventable injuries. These messages include how to  
15 put children to bed safely, how to store toxic  
16 household products and the importance of window  
17 guards, especially as we head into nicer weather. We  
18 hope that you can share these messages on your social  
19 media pages too. We have included sample images at  
20 the end of this testimony.

21 The number of children in foster care has  
continued to decline each year. At the end of 2025,  
there were 6,292 children in foster care, down from  
nearly 6,400 at the end of 2024 and over 7,500 just  
five years ago. We have also seen the number of

1 children at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center  
2 decline to an average of 61 children in FY 2025  
3 compared to 74 in FY 2024.

4 While the numbers of children at the Children's  
5 Center and in foster care continue to decline, it  
6 remains critical that we provide the highest quality  
7 care and support the children in our care. Over the  
8 past year, we have further enhanced our policies and  
9 protocols in staff trainings to further support a  
10 safe and trauma informed environment for youth  
11 residing at the Children's Center. This work has  
12 included physical changes, including a restructured  
13 entrance area to include more modernized security  
14 equipment and additional medical triage operation to  
15 support more timely medical clearances at admission.

16 A new bedroom sleeping area for younger teen  
17 girls, such as 13 year olds separate from older  
18 teens, and a paint, furniture, decoration color  
19 scheme that is more trauma informed.

20 In the coming months, we will be launching a new  
21 allowance program for youth ages 13 and older who are  
residing at the Children's Center and opening up a  
new music studio.

1  
2 The FY27 Preliminary Budget includes additional  
3 support for our work at the Children's Center so that  
4 we can maintain a safe and secure site and better  
5 meet the needs of youth, specifically the plan  
6 includes a baselined amount of \$4 million starting in  
7 FY27 for additional children center staff and support  
8 services. This includes funding for 13 additional  
9 staff, including a behavioral health manager, a  
10 deputy director of intake, and additional special  
11 officers to provide 24 hour security and support for  
12 the facility.

13 The funding also supports expanded chaperone  
14 services to ensure youth at the Children's Center can  
15 get to and from school regardless of where their home  
16 school is, and other appointments such as visits,  
17 court and doctors.

18 In addition, the funding reflects an increase to  
19 medical consultation services at Bellevue Hospital to  
20 account for collective bargaining adjustments. The  
21 FY27 Preliminary Budget also includes city funding to  
support the state mandated foster care rates that ACS  
is required to provide for foster parent stipends,  
adoption subsidy and kin gap subsidy. This includes  
\$215 million in FY26, which is comprised of \$165

1 million in the FY27 Preliminary Budget and \$50  
2 million that was added in the November Plan. \$263  
3 million in FY27 and \$313 million baselined starting  
4 in FY28.

5 As you may recall, the state increased these  
6 rates several years ago but did not include  
7 additional state funding in the Foster Care Block  
8 Grant. ACS long supported the higher rates and  
9 appreciates the city baselining these funds that the  
state did not provide.

10 The New York City foster parents, adoptive  
11 parents, and relatives who commit through kinship  
12 guardianship open their hearts and homes to children  
13 in need and we are so grateful. When children need  
14 to come into foster care due to a safety concern, we  
15 continue to focus on finding kinship homes with  
16 nearly half of all foster children currently living  
with relatives or close family friends.

17 We have also focused on increasing the number of  
18 foster homes recruited and thank the Chair for  
19 helping to coordinate last year's Foster Parent  
20 Recruitment Day with Council Members throughout the  
21 city. Once children are in foster care, ACS and our  
providers work diligently with families, so that

1 children can return home as quickly as possible. And  
2 if that's not possible, achieve permanency through  
3 adoption or kin gap. We are also focused on  
4 supporting youth while they are in our care and as  
5 they transition to young adults.

6 Last year, the city invested in the Youth,  
7 Safety, and Support Initiative, which enabled us to  
8 expand Fair Futures programming to over 5,500 youth  
9 by FY29 College Choice to over 400 youth and included  
10 funding for a new Career Choice program. Recently  
11 launched, Career Choice provides support to youth in  
12 foster care to attend a vocational or a job readiness  
13 training and financial assistance to successfully  
14 complete the program as a pathway to independence.

15 Additionally, career choice includes an ACS  
16 partnership with DYCD Advanced and Earn Program. The  
17 first youth to join this program are currently  
18 seeking their mechanic certifications. This year,  
19 ACS in partnership with the Center for Fair Futures  
20 and the Mayor's Office of Community Health launched  
21 the Sole Care Pilot, a partnership to enhance mental  
health and wellness for youth ages 13 through 26.

Based on feedback from young people, Sole Care  
aims to enhance mental health and wellness for youth

1  
2 in foster care by empowering youth to care for their  
3 own mental health in ways that resonate with them.

4 Taking a writing class, doing pottery, joining a gym,  
5 going to dance classes or experiencing the job of a  
6 Broadway show.

7 The Sole Care pilot includes collaboration with  
8 five foster care providers and Fair Futures coaches  
9 to provide youth with supportive one on one coaching  
10 and guidance focusing on mental health and wellbeing  
11 with referral. Through specially trained Fair  
12 Futures coaches and referrals to local programs, and  
13 alternative therapy providers that align with youth  
14 preferences and needs.

15 ACS is also focused on providing services and  
16 supports to justice involved youth, both in the  
17 community and for those who are ordered into our  
18 care. As part of last year's Youth Safety and  
19 Success initiative, ACS received funding to expand  
20 two programs that have demonstrated effectiveness at  
21 reducing justice involvement.

The first is Girls Just Us, a highly successful  
gender responsive juvenile justice diversion program  
targeted at girls with operating in Brooklyn and is  
now expanding to serve the Bronx in FY26 and Queens

1  
2 in FY27. The second program is Assertive Community  
3 Engagement and Success or ACES. An evidence based  
4 program for high risk youth that have been involved  
5 in the justice system. This program provides social  
6 pathways from gang and gun violence to young people  
7 ages 16 through 24 and is in the early stages of  
8 being expanded citywide so that over 500 young people  
9 will be able to participate each year.

10 The FY27 Preliminary Plan, also includes \$194.5  
11 million of state funds replacing city funds starting  
12 in FY26 for ACS. This at-risk youth funding is from  
13 the state and is part of a larger adjustment of \$300  
14 million, state funds replacing city funds across  
15 several city agencies. We are still awaiting final  
16 details from the state and OMB regarding these funds  
17 but we are pleased that the state is adding these  
18 funds and acknowledging our shared commitment to New  
19 York City's youth.

20 There are currently over 340 young people across  
21 our two secure detention facilities, Crossroads, and  
Horizon. While the number of young people has risen  
in the secure juvenile detention centers, the total  
number of 16 and 17 year olds in custody in New York

1 City has significantly decreased in the last ten  
2 years.

3 In 2013, there were over 300 16 and 17 year olds  
4 held on Rikers Island. In 2016, there were 200 and  
5 today, there are less than 200 who are 16 and 17.

6 Second, and relatedly, youth are primarily in  
7 detention pretrial and we are seeing increased length  
8 of stay. This is due to the fact that the youth have  
9 complex serious cases that take a long time to move  
10 through the court process. Over 73 percent of youth  
11 are in detention due to a murder or murder related  
12 charge.

13 ACS strongly believes that despite the increase  
14 in census, young people ordered to be detained should  
15 be receiving age appropriate services in the juvenile  
16 system. We are doing this every day and our efforts  
17 to ensure youth in our care receive trauma informed  
18 and education centered experience as possible is both  
19 taking hold and being recognized.

20 Last year, the Nunez Monitors alerted the court  
21 that their pursuant - that their work pursuant to the  
agreement we entered into voluntarily was complete.

The Nunez Monitor stated the various reforms  
implemented by ACS have decreased violence and

1 improved safety, and has showcased ACS's and facility  
2 leadership's commitment to design and sustain a  
3 durable vision for the facilities operation that  
4 addresses youth, individuals, individual needs and  
5 supports the staff who work at Horizon.

6 Fundamentally, the Monitoring team's goal is to  
7 become unnecessary and ACS has demonstrated its  
8 internal capacity to identify and address its  
9 problems and challenges without the need for external  
oversight.

10 Now that ACS has achieved substantial compliance  
11 with the three final provisions in the fourth  
12 voluntary agreement, it appears the monitoring team's  
work with ACS is complete.

13 The FY27 Preliminary Budget plan includes  
14 additional investments so that we continue to address  
15 the needs of the youth in detention. When fully  
16 implemented, the initiative includes \$8.1 million in  
17 city funds starting in FY27 which adds 40 staff as  
18 well as additional funding for expanded, cleaning and  
19 barber services to ensure the safety and wellbeing of  
20 young people while they are in our care.  
21

1  
2 There are also expense funds for the development  
3 and operation of additional classroom space at  
4 Crossroads.

5 As the Council knows, ACS has been working with  
6 DDC to construct an annex at Horizon, which will not  
7 only expand capacity but also create additional space  
8 for classrooms, programming, vocational training,  
9 health and mental services and dining. The annex  
10 will also include a new exercise pavilion due to open  
11 in FY27 and seven of the additional staff will  
12 support programming in this new space.

13 While the additional 33 staff will ensure safety  
14 and security at both sites. For secure detention,  
15 our capital budget includes funding for the Horizon  
16 Annex and the capacity expansion project at  
17 Crossroads which will provide additional space prior  
18 to the annexes completion. All of these investments  
19 are aimed at enhancing ACS's ability to meet the  
20 needs of the increased census of older youth in  
21 detention.

As you can see, the ACS team and our provider  
partners have made much progress this past year,  
ensuring New York City's children, youth and families

1  
2 have access to the services and supports that help  
3 them to thrive.

4 As we move forward, we remain committed to  
5 listening to the voices of the parents, children, and  
6 youth, directly impacted by our work and remaining on  
7 the path that enables us to make the best decisions  
8 for each family, child and youth we encounter.

9 Thank you Chair and Members of the Committee for  
10 your continued support, collaboration and commitment  
11 to making New York City a better place for children,  
12 youth, and families.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Good morning. That was not  
14 brief but I'm going to let it pass because you were  
15 new but we appreciate it.

16 I'm actually going to pass it over to Council  
17 Member Williams who has to step out and has a few  
18 questions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you Chair and the  
20 first thing I wanted to say is you all planned the  
21 green and then they told you to?

I was like, is that a coincidence? I'm like wow.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, I just wore green and  
now we're all -

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Wow.

1                   STEPHANIE GENDELL: We wouldn't have left you out.

2                   COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Oh okay thank you,  
3 well, it looks nice.

4                   STEPHANIE GENDELL: Yeah, we would not have left  
5 you out.

6                   COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Very coordinated. We  
7 love it. Okay, the first question I have is about  
8 the rising juvenile detention population and  
9 construction at Horizon Detention Centers. So,  
10 according to the PMMR, juvenile detention admissions  
11 fell during the reporting period for the first time  
12 since Fiscal 2020. More broadly however, since the  
13 passage of Raise the Age, the number of youth in  
14 detention has increased substantially with 2,487  
15 total emissions in Fiscal 2025. To accommodate this  
16 change, ACS has embarked on significant capital  
17 projects, which you talked about in your testimony to  
18 expand and enhance these detention facilities,  
19 including \$275.4 million allocated in the Prelim  
20 Capital Commitment Plan across Fiscals 2026 through  
21 3035 for a project at Horizon Detention Center in the  
Bronx.

                  Does ACS project the total number of admissions  
to detention will increase in Fiscal 2026 and beyond?

1  
2 If so, by how much? And I also wanted to thank you  
3 all for participating and contributing to our youth  
4 convening. Certainly your attendance strengthened  
5 the event because you guys are the experts, so thank  
6 you so much.

7  
8 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I'll start by thanking you  
9 for organizing that event, you and Chair Stevens and  
10 for including us and it was a really, really  
11 impactful day, mostly because we got to hear from the  
12 voices of those most directly impacted. So, thank  
13 you for organizing that. Uhm, you are correct. In  
14 terms of both the projections for detention as well  
15 as the funding in the capital budget plan for the  
16 annex at Horizon. We have seen the population  
17 increase, which Deputy Commissioner Ginsberg can talk  
18 more about. I think it's important before I turn it  
19 over to Deputy Commissioner Ginsberg that uhm, while  
20 the population at Crossroads and Horizon has  
21 increased, the population of 16 and 17 year olds  
coming into detention or jail has not increased.

What we're seeing is really a direct result of  
those young people coming to detention with ACS  
rather than going to Rikers Island and them not being

1  
2 able to stay with us till they turn 21. Did you want  
3 to add? You don't have to.

4 NANCY GINSBERG: Good morning, it's nice to see  
5 you. We are working very, very hard with the courts.  
6 We've done a lot of work with the courts over the  
7 last year to improve case processing times. OCA has  
8 dedicated increased resources to the youth parts to  
9 ensure that they have what they need to process cases  
10 more quickly.

11 Uhm, on the flip side of that, these cases are  
12 very serious. Many of the cases are very serious and  
13 there's the more serious the case, the more due  
14 process attaches and so, we are trying to maintain  
15 the balance of ensuring that the young people receive  
16 the defense that they are due in the courts and that  
17 they are not waiting too long to receive the outcomes  
18 that they are also due.

19 So, when we first came in in 2022, we saw many,  
20 many cases that got stuck in the system during COVID.  
21 We have worked through that entire caseload. We just  
recently went below 90 young people who have been  
with us for more than a year. That is a tremendous  
improvement for us.

1  
2 One of the most important aspects of Raise the  
3 Age was to allow the young people to remain in  
4 juvenile detention until they turn 21 and we are  
5 seeing tremendous outcomes with that older  
6 population. They're attaining their GED, their  
7 beginning college, we have young people who are  
8 leaving us with up to 16 credits of college and we're  
9 very, very proud of that advance in the system. We  
10 work very hard with CUNY to develop an MOU so that  
11 young people could attend college while they're with  
12 us and we have built out our workforce development  
13 opportunities for young people who are both in high  
14 school, college, and pursuing their GED.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. Chair,  
16 there's like one, two, three, four, five. I'm going  
17 to ask the rest of the questions you wanted me to  
18 ask.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, I'll just do six.  
21 Okay, what construction is ACS completing at Horizon  
Detention Center? Can you describe the scope of the  
project? And then, I'll just ask all the questions,  
then you can just answer them.

1                   The other question is, by how much does this  
2 construction increase the detention centers capacity?  
3 You did talk about it a little bit in your testimony,  
4 so if you have anything to add, please share. If  
5 not, all good. When did this project begin? What is  
6 the timeline for completion? What has been completed  
7 so far and does ACS believe capital costs such as  
8 this project may be eligible for the raise the age  
9 reimbursements that the state seems to be allocating  
to us, finally after many years?

10           STEPHANIE GENDELL: We can start with the last  
11 one and then we'll turn it over to Deputy  
Commissioner Ginsberg. Do you want to do it?

12           MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Sure. As far as we know at  
13 this point, the youth at risk funds will not be  
14 eligible for capital but we are waiting to receive  
15 more information from the state.

16           NANCY GINSBERG: I'll try to cover everything you  
17 asked. The plan for the annex is for 48 additional  
18 beds, 8 additional classrooms, 8 additional medical  
and mental health beds if necessary.

19           Uhm, construction started in 2025. Uhm, we are  
20 looking to complete the exercise platform in the fall  
of this year. That will be three stacked basketball

1 courts that can also be used as a track or a handball  
2 or other activities. Shortly after that is complete,  
3 the work on the foundation for the annex will begin,  
4 which is slated to be complete in early 2029.

5 We are - we right now have not built any  
6 additional capacity that is online currently.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you Deputy  
8 Commissioner, looking forward to touring soon and  
9 thank you so much Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you Deputy Speaker  
11 Nantasha Williams. Uhm, oh yeah, I forgot to add  
12 doctor. So, many titles. Uhm, you know I think even  
13 on the facility, everyone knows how I feel about  
14 this, if we build it, they will come and I'm not  
15 happy about it but I also understand we can't have  
16 young people sleeping in classrooms currently but 48  
17 is a lot to be building out and our hope should be  
18 that we don't need it.

19 Uhm, and so, I just always just have to make sure  
20 I state that for the record because it pains my heart  
21 that we're at a place where this - that we're having  
an increase. Even with Raise the Age, I know people  
like try to blame it for that but like that's not  
really what it is. We should really be thinking

1 about how do we continue to get these numbers down  
2 but I digress.

3 Here is my first question, Raise the Age state  
4 reimbursement. Since the passage of Raise the Age  
5 legislation in 2017, New York State has appropriated  
6 \$1.7 billion to reimburse counties for costs related  
7 to detention of 16 and 17 year olds charged with  
8 crimes in age appropriate facilities. Since 2017,  
9 \$658 million has been distributed, leaving just over  
\$1 billion appropriated unspent.

10 The outlined eligible expenses are broad,  
11 spanning more potential agencies than just ACS. They  
12 allow for a pool localities to submit qualifications,  
13 expenditures dating back to the inception of raise  
14 the age that include juvenile delinquent prevention  
15 services, law enforcement services, transportation  
16 services, including transportation provided by  
17 Sheriff, core operation expenses, adolescent offender  
facilities detention, specialized secure detentions,  
and it goes on.

18 Despite this, the city has never seen a cent of  
19 the money appropriated by the state for Raise the Age  
20 due to Section 54M of State Finance Law. A provision  
21 which states counties must either adhere to a two

1 percent tax cap or submit a waiver to the state  
2 showing financial hardship.

3 First, how was the passage sequentially  
4 implemented for raise the age impacted ACS's budget?

5 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you for that question.  
6 Everything you just said is correct, New York City  
7 has been entirely left out of all of the Raise the  
8 Age funding since Raise the Age came into effect and  
9 we know there are state legislators in Albany right  
10 now fighting to change that. So, we just want to  
11 first say thank you for that.

12 In terms of calculating the budget that we've  
13 lost over this entire period of time, it would  
14 include more than just ACS and we need to work with  
15 the other agencies at OMB to get you that and we can  
16 get back to you with the number.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I think that it's  
18 important that we are looking at that, especially  
19 because we're currently experiencing financial  
20 hardships and so, how do we recoup that? So, I have  
21 some questions on that. Do you have an estimate of  
total cost by ACS? And so, you said you don't have  
that. Have you considered applying for hardship

1  
2 waiver to recoup costs related to Raise the Age? If  
3 not, why and yeah?

4 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I don't think that would be a  
5 decision for ACS to make. I think that uhm, OMB and  
6 the Mayor's Office would need to make a decision like  
7 that.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But you can speak on, do  
9 you think that it's appropriate?

10 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I'm not sure we're the ones to  
11 be able to assess whether or not New York City is  
12 having a financial hardship. ACS, I mean.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I'm going to say it.  
14 We're having a financial hardship, we should be  
15 recouping the money. I know how this goes so I'm  
16 going to say it. Is ACS aware of the requirements of  
17 a waiver might - well, you said you don't want to  
18 answer this.

19 Given the urgency of the closing fiscal gap,  
20 Mayor Mamdani stated the goal of revenue cost  
21 shifting from state to city. Has ACS recently  
22 considered this? You're going to say no OMB should  
23 be doing this and this is not your decision, so I'm  
24 going to answer the question for you.

1  
2           STEPHANIE GENDELL: I will say we are in  
3 conversations with OMB about the cost shifts that  
4 have happened to ACS, which are broader than Raise  
5 the Age and we have been sharing that information.

6           CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Does ACS believe the  
7 Raise the Age reimbursement process should be  
8 considered at the state level? If so, how has the  
9 agency been working with state partners to pursue  
10 this?

11           STEPHANIE GENDELL: Since the passage of Raise  
12 the Age, which a couple of us from this panel were on  
13 the other side advocating for Raise the Age at the  
14 time, have been continuing to advocate. So, Nancy  
15 and I were on the other side at the time. We've been  
16 continuing to advocate for New York City to get its  
17 share. The state does, in our opinion, have a  
18 responsibility to children and youth in New York City  
19 too.

20           CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, I'm sorry, I have to  
21 acknowledge Council Member Cabán, Joseph and Avilés  
have also joined us. Uhm, one of the things that the  
Public Advocate asked me to highlight, which is for  
you guys to talk a little bit about. Can you talk  
about, even with the funding that we are getting from

1  
2 the state this year, how are we ensuring that we are  
3 working with grassroot organizations with staff that  
4 have lived experience to ensure that they're also  
5 being part of the conversation with the money that  
6 has been funded for this year for average youth?

7  
8 STEPHANIE GENDELL: So, I agree with whoever said  
9 that. That was a great question. I can't see who is  
10 behind me. We don't really have a lot of information  
11 at this time about the money, how it can be used  
12 between the state and the city. That's still being  
13 discussed but that's a really good point. We can  
14 bring that back to our colleagues.

15  
16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, uhm, really want to  
17 make sure that we're including organizations who have  
18 not historically been a part of these conversations  
19 but I've been doing this work either way and so, I  
20 wanted to make sure we highlighted that.

21  
22 Uhm, Deputy Commissioner Nancy, I know you had  
23 spoken a little bit about the college credits when  
24 you were talking to Council Member Williams about our  
25 young people. I just wanted to ask how have we  
26 looked at - I know that there was an RFP out before  
27 for activities in the detention centers but you did  
28 speak about the college credits and I know last time

1  
2 we were there, some of the young people complained  
3 that they were taking the same seminar and college  
4 credits over because there wasn't a lot of variety  
5 for students who were seeking to get college credit  
6 and access.

7 So, can you talk a little bit about like what  
8 variety has been offered to them, has that changed?  
9 I know we haven't been there in a couple of months  
10 and wanted to see, has there been any progress  
11 because I know you said folks are graduating with 16  
12 credits, up to 16 credits but when we were there, one  
13 of the young people talked about how they took  
14 freshman seminar three times at that point because  
15 there wasn't a lot of variety.

16 NANCY GINSBERG: So, we had different college  
17 opportunities at the beginning of the last  
18 administration and I think the young person you spoke  
19 to was referencing a period of time before we entered  
20 into the agreement with CUNY. Uhm, we are in year  
21 two of this relationship with CUNY and there has been  
a lot of work both with the MCC that services  
Crossroads and Hostos which services Horizon and  
Hunter, which is providing coordination for this  
project to increase the number of professors who are

1 available to teach classes. And as we see an  
2 increase in the number of professors, we can offer an  
3 increased number of classes. One of our challenges  
4 is finding consistent space to hold these classes and  
5 so, we are holding the classes at different times of  
6 the day in different locations to ensure that we can  
7 provide access to as many students as possible for  
8 these classes. And so, this semester, we have five  
9 options for the young people and we have different  
10 groups participating in those classes and none of the  
11 classes that are being offered this semester have  
12 been offered in the past.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay thank you. I'm sure  
14 the Chair of Higher Education will have more  
15 questions but I just wanted to jump in because I know  
16 you had spoken about it in the first question that  
17 Council Member Williams asked.

18 It looks like Chair Lee has to leave soon, so I  
19 will allow her to ask a few questions.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Sorry, thank you Chair. I'm  
21 trying to hop around to the different hearings today.  
Uhm, thank you and I will also be an advocate along  
with the Chair as well as you guys in terms of the  
Raise the Age because that is something that we had

1  
2 talked about when we went to Albany for Ten Cup day,  
3 so that is something that we will try to continue to  
4 advocate for.

5 Uhm, which goes into more of the budget questions  
6 around foster care, new needs and state cost shifts,  
7 which incorporate some of this.

8 uHM, the preliminary plan includes an additional  
9 \$165.1 million in Fiscal 2026, \$263.1 million in  
10 Fiscal 2027 and \$113 million in Fiscal 2028 and in  
11 the outyears for payments for children in foster  
12 care. And we know that the state increased the  
13 maximum state aid rates a couple of fiscal years ago  
14 but did not include additional funding to - she's  
15 nodding her head, funding to cover the cost of the  
16 increased and the city has been providing additional  
17 funding needed on a year to year and year to date  
18 basis since the rate change.

19 So, with this increase in funding, do you all  
20 feel that the ACS baseline more accurately is  
21 budgeted to fully cover projected foster care costs?

STEPHANIE GENDELL: Yes, that's correct. So, as  
you mentioned, the state had increased the rates for  
foster parents adoption subsidy and can get a  
subsidy, which we supported conceptually but the

1 state has a Block Grant and they didn't increase the  
2 funds in the Block Grant.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and then just for the  
4 record, can you walk us through which types of  
5 expenditures are covered with the funding?

6 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Sure, so the foster care  
7 MSAR cost, it pays for the Administrative rates for  
8 the providers as well as the stipends for the foster  
9 care parents can ship guardians and adoptive parents.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay perfect and how has the  
11 increased maximum state A rates affected ACS's budget  
12 and could you provide figures for how the city's  
13 contribution has grown historically?

14 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Sure, going back to uhm,  
15 FY24, we've had to add and CTL additional  
16 investments. So, we added \$118 million in FY24,  
17 \$138.8 million in 2025, \$215.1 in 2026, as you  
18 mentioned 2027, \$263.1 and then in FY28 and beyond,  
19 \$313 million in CTL.

20 So, all of these investments were due to those  
21 risen rates.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, perfect.

STEPHANIE GENDELL: And just for the record, I  
should have said, this is Deputy Commissioner

1  
2 Margaret Plentikoff, who is the Deputy Commissioner  
3 for Financial Services.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Great, thank you. And given  
5 Mayor Mamdani's concern with cost shifts from the  
6 state to the city, I'm assuming the answer is yes but  
7 have you raised in conversations with the  
8 Administration the MSAR as an area where their city  
9 should push the state to provide additional support?

10 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Yes and there is other child  
11 welfare cost shifts as well.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, actually that was my  
13 next question. Uhm, what are some of those other  
14 cost shifts that you wanted to advocate for?

15 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I'll start with my least  
16 favorite one and then I'll pass it to Deputy  
17 Commissioner Plentikoff for more.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Sure.

19 STEPHANIE GENDELL: But going all the way back to  
20 2008, the state used to pay 65 percent of the  
21 nonfederal share for prevention services and that has  
been reduced to 62 percent every year since annually  
as part of the state budget process. The statute  
actually continues to say 65 percent.

1  
2 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Okay great and then uhm,  
3 the Foster Care Block Grant used to support Close to  
4 Home, which it no longer does and then it also  
5 supported community supported education and that was  
6 also removed from being eligible for the Foster Care  
7 Block Grant.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay.

9 STEPHANIE GENDELL: There actually used to be \$30  
10 million in the budget for Close to Home and now  
11 there's zero from the state.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hmm, and then also if you  
13 could just specific because going down from 65 to 62  
14 percent when you're talking about millions - hundreds  
15 of millions of dollars I'm sure is a lot of funding.  
16 So, what does that 3 percent translate to in terms of  
17 dollars?

18 STEPHANIE GENDELL: We'd have to calculate it. I  
19 know the full budget for prevention is \$372.4 million  
20 but that includes federal, state and city. We'd have  
21 to calculate that but it would be significant  
especially if you go over time.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, perfect and of course  
going back to my uh questions around - I'm glad to  
see that the support line is done by MSWS's because

1  
2 as you know I used to Chair the Health Committee and  
3 now we have our amazing Chair Tiffany Cabán who is  
4 here and so, just wanted to know because one of my  
5 biggest petpeeves was always where do we make sure  
6 that we can catch people you know where they may fall  
7 off the grid so to speak and just wanted to know in  
8 your conversations, has there been any for the  
9 support line, has there been any conversations around  
10 connecting it to 988? And also how to better work  
11 with DOHMH because I mean, 988, we had a whole thing  
12 on that because a lot of folks still don't know what  
13 it is but I would imagine that folks who do know that  
14 are calling may benefit from hearing some of the  
15 services.

16 STEPHANIE GENDELL: That's a very, very important  
17 question. Thank you for asking. I'm going to pass  
18 it to Deputy Commissioner Linares.

19 LUISA LINARES: Good morning.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Good morning.

21 LUISA LINARES: So, we are working with 988. In  
fact all of our programs will be listed in the 988  
website and they will include this report line as the  
contact. So, we will be able to connect families if  
there's a need.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay perfect and just wanted  
3 to emphasize my support for the prevention dollars  
4 because as we know the city and state money and keeps  
5 people healthy and so, I will make sure to emphasize  
6 that as well, so thank you. Thanks Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Back to the  
8 regular scheduled programming. Uhm, at risk youth  
9 money for New York City. The Preliminary Budget  
10 includes \$194.5 million in city funding swaps for  
11 state baseline starting at Fiscal 2026. This is part  
12 of a larger adjustment that shifts a total of \$300  
13 million of city funds to the state across agencies.  
14 Uhm, with the majority of the funding for ACS and the  
15 remainder of the Law Department, the Police  
16 Department, the Mayor Mamdani announced the  
17 investments to Governor Hochul the day before the  
18 release of the Preliminary Budget and according to  
19 the 30 amendment, the proposed state budget in Fiscal  
20 2027. This funding relates to expenses for youth  
21 uhm, and prevention and other youth justice supports.  
Which programming within ACS does this funding swap  
apply to?

STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you for that question.  
We're really interested in the answer too. At this

1  
2 time final determinations for the programming are  
3 still being developed. We are grateful for the state  
4 providing the city with these resources and we will  
5 share more information in the Council once we have  
6 more details.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Given the similarities  
7 between the areas outlined in the 30 day amendment in  
8 the previous Raise the Age Reimbursement Program, is  
9 this ACS - is ACS aware of why the state chose to  
10 fund those programs specifically rather than  
11 modifying the existing reimbursement process for  
12 Raise the Age?

13 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I am not aware. Are you?  
14 We're not aware.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I've heard conflicts -  
16 conflicting reports of whether the state intended to  
17 provide these fundings to the city for just one year  
18 or also for future fiscal years. In the Preliminary  
19 Plan, the additional funding was baselined by the  
20 Administration and ACS understanding that the state  
21 has committed to providing this funding going  
forward. If not, why was this funding swapped  
baselined?

1  
2 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Our understanding is that  
3 this funding will continue in the future.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: From the state?

5 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: From the state, yes. And  
6 actually to your earlier question, we believe that  
7 they changed it to the RTA to the youth at risk to  
8 provide us more flexibility.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, thank you, that's  
10 good to know. Do you expect the city will be able to  
11 use this \$300 million in state funding for the  
12 broader scope of expenses that allow under the  
13 previous discussion reimbursement for Raise the Age  
14 reimbursement programs?

15 STEPHANIE GENDELL: We just don't know yet but  
16 appreciate the questions and why you're asking them  
17 and we will definitely get back to you.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Do you think there's a  
19 scenario where the city could receive \$300 million  
20 risk money and apply for the hardship labor for the  
21 existing Raise the Age program to maximize city  
reimbursement for future, past expenditures?

STEPHANIE GENDELL: In theory we could because  
this is a separate budget allocation from Raise the  
Age.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I believe so too, that's  
3 why I asked. I think both could exist. States  
4 legislators have introduced legislation to establish  
5 a youth justice intervention fund that will provide  
6 \$550 million to community based organizations serving  
7 youth who are at risk for involvement with the system  
8 or have been adjudicated, juvenile delinquent,  
9 juvenile defendants through age 25. What's ACS  
10 position on this legislation?

11 STEPHANIE GENDELL: We are really appreciative of  
12 both the state legislators and the advocates who are  
13 advocating for these proposals that would expand  
14 community based resources. We too as you know  
15 believe very strongly in prevention, which is why we  
16 had invested in Girls Just Us and ACES last year and  
17 we look forward to learning more details.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Has ACS had any discussion  
19 with state partners about this partnership or  
20 proposal?

21 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Not to date.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Does ACS anticipate this  
23 could be allocated to providers in the city? What  
24 funding flows through ACS directly to providers?

1  
2           STEPHANIE GENDELL: There is money that flows  
3 directly from ACS to providers but there are other  
4 ways to get funding to providers too and we don't  
5 know enough about how this proposal would work in  
6 that manner.

7           CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: 1031 youth entered foster  
8 care in the first four months of Fiscal 2026, a 5.2  
9 percent less than the 188. I mean 1,088 who entered  
10 foster care during the first period in Fiscal 2025.  
11 The percentage for children entering foster care who  
12 were placed with relatives also declined, 34.6  
13 percent of children entering foster care were placed  
14 with relatives in the first four months of 2026, a  
15 9.6 percent less than the same period last year. Why  
16 were there less youth placement with relatives and is  
17 ACS exploring any other programs or policies to  
18 increase the number of children in foster care placed  
19 with relatives?  
20

21           STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you. Placing young  
22 children and youth coming into foster care with kin  
23 remains a high priority, top priority for ACS and I'm  
24 going to pass it to Deputy Commissioner Ina Mendez,  
25 Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Services to  
26 share more.

1  
2 INA MENEZ: Thank you Deputy Commissioner Gendell  
3 and good morning. Nice to be here, Chair Stevens.  
4 So, regarding kin, we developed a multiprong approach  
5 because placing children with kin is extremely  
6 important. So, while investigations are underway,  
7 the division of Child Protection shifted some staff,  
8 which are licensed social workers to help uhm staff  
9 that are doing - the Child Protection Specialists  
10 that are doing the investigation look for kin,  
11 engaging parents, speaking to children, other people  
12 connected to the family to find kin. Taking notes,  
13 so we really do prioritize and the shifting of those  
14 particular staff to help. Originally it was just the  
15 CPS worker doing - looking for kin and everything  
16 else.

17 So, the additional licensed social worker helps  
18 that process and we think we've seen some great  
19 improvements. We do notice that some of the kids  
20 coming into care, the recent data shows that they're  
21 a little older, so we don't know if that's impacting.  
We do collaborate with the Division of Family  
Services, Family Services Division. We created a kin  
- a teen pilot program, we're matching our teen

1  
2 prevention providers to support those families so  
3 that the kin feel confident enough.

4 If children are not found at placement and a  
5 child is placed with non-kin, the work doesn't stop  
6 to look for kin. We work very closely with our  
7 foster care providers. They do similar things,  
8 speaking to parents and kin. We recently worked with  
9 uhm, Harvard GPL, Government Policy Lab; I think it's  
10 called and we worked with agencies on a pilot and  
11 we've created some additional documents and materials  
12 to share around best practices, how to support kin,  
13 what would be needed to help them get certified.

14 And so, those are efforts and strategies we have  
15 in place and we're hopeful that that will continue to  
16 support our kin identification recruitment, support  
17 and engagement.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. The Preliminary  
19 plan includes an additional \$300,000 in city funding  
20 in Fiscal 2026 and baselined \$1.1 million starting in  
21 Fiscal 2027.

For ten baselined positions to support child  
program integrity. What program or services does  
this relate to? Why is the additional funding  
required and how is this amount determined? What

1  
2 positions are being added and what are the remaining  
3 responsibilities?

4           STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you for this question.  
5 We're going to pass it to Deputy Commissioner  
6 Elizabeth Wolkimer.

7           ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: I apologize, can you repeat  
8 the question?

9           CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Of course. Uhm, I was  
10 asking what programs or services are related to the  
11 childcare program integrity? Why is this additional  
12 funding required and how was the amount determined  
13 and what positions are being added and what are their  
14 main responsibilities?

15           ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Sure, there are ten  
16 positions being added. The current team is just two  
17 positions, which includes one staffed position, one  
18 vacancy and this team is responsible for overseeing  
19 the use of state and federal funds that support  
20 childcare assistance across ACS, HRA, and some of New  
21 York City Public School seats.

22           So, the staff will be responsible for overseeing  
23 program integrity both in concert with childcare  
24 providers as well as applicants. So, doing random  
25 samples of applications to ensure that we're doing

1  
2 everything we need to do to comply with state and  
3 federal laws, site visits to providers, etc..

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, what's the timeline  
5 for hiring these new positions?

6 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We will be working at that  
7 as quickly as possible and working with OMB to try  
8 and get those lines hired.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, do you have like an  
10 estimate, like in the next couple of months or?

11 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: I don't have an exact  
12 projection.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, what are the positions  
14 currently filled in the Childcare Program Integrity  
15 Unit? Are there any filled?

16 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Yes, right now there are  
17 just two positions for the Childcare Program  
18 Integrity Unit. One is a director position that is  
19 filled. We are currently on track to hire the other  
20 vacancy as well as these new lines that we are very,  
21 very happy to have.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I know you said that it  
was - they would be overseeing like across sections  
but what does that look like working with all those

1  
2 different agencies and will they just be with ACS or  
3 like how will this cross section happen?

4 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: They will just be working  
5 with ACS but we work very closely with regard to the  
6 use of the childcare block grant funds that come to  
7 us from the state, which are a mix of state and  
8 federal funds.

9 So, we work very closely with the Department of  
10 Education already with their eligibility unit. Uhm,  
11 we share many providers as you know and the same is  
12 true for HRA. So, our goal is to make sure that we  
13 are working with the infrastructure at both of those  
14 agencies.

15 So, for example, uhm, when there are childcare  
16 providers serving children with ACS vouchers, they  
17 are very often also serving children that have  
18 childcare assistance through HRA. And so, it makes  
19 sense as the lead agency receiving that block grant  
20 and managing that block grant from the state that we  
21 would be working together so that they are not  
separate and silent mechanisms for working with  
childcare providers that are in fact serving children  
being served across both agencies.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. The state proposed  
3 uhm, Executive Budget included up to \$1.5 billion in  
4 base funding for the city to put towards childcare  
5 vouchers. An increase from the \$1.1 billion  
6 including four each of the past years accountability.  
7 Additionally, the proposed budget included \$475  
8 million in a one time funded allocation, allocated to  
9 New York City's ACS program. What are ACS's current  
10 projections for the funding needed to maintain its  
11 current voucher caseload?

12 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: So, given the Governors  
13 State Executive Budget, our analysis is that we can  
14 continue our current policy which is to recertify the  
15 vast majority of families that are currently  
16 receiving vouchers. So, that is what we are  
17 currently looking to do and we will be working in the  
18 upcoming budget cycles with OMB to assess whether or  
19 not there is need for additional CTL in the budget to  
20 support that.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What gaps remain?

ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Right now, obviously the  
state budget proposal is a proposal but if that were  
to become the adopted state budget, that would allow  
us to continue our current policy. It does not allow

1  
2 us in the immediate term to start moving through the  
3 voucher waitlist, which you mentioned in your opening  
4 but we will continue to look across HRA, New York  
5 City Public Schools and ACS to see when that might be  
6 possible in the future. So, this would allow us to  
7 make sure that those with vouchers, that are in  
8 federally mandated priority categories, which is the  
9 vast majority of families that we serve, would be  
10 able to continue to receive those vouchers so long as  
11 they recertify on time and remain eligible.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How much will be needed to  
13 get the waitlist cleared?

14 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We don't have an exact  
15 projection for that. It depends on a few things.  
16 Uhm, so the children on the waitlist maybe and we  
17 know many are served by other programs. So, they can  
18 be served through DOE seats. Obviously zero through  
19 five year olds. They also can be served with DYCD  
20 afterschool seats. So, we don't have an exact  
21 understanding of what takeup would be, so it's  
difficult for us to know exactly what it would cost.

The other thing is as you would expect, the  
waitlist grows on a regular basis, so it's a bit of a

1  
2 moving target and difficult for us to say exactly  
3 what resources would be needed there.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But don't you think it  
5 would be helpful for us to like, at least have like  
6 scenario one if we needed to all the kids. Scenario  
7 two, if they were in this and they didn't need this  
8 anymore. So that we can get an idea because I think  
9 it's really hard to advocate being a person who does  
10 a lot of the advocating and yelling to not have a  
11 number to be able to say exactly what we need to be  
12 able to move forward.

13 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Yeah absolutely and we can  
14 work on that and keep having conversations about what  
15 some of those scenarios might look like.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I just think that is  
17 so important. I know it's hard and I'm not trying to  
18 dismiss the complexities of people being on the  
19 waitlist and understanding that most people want the  
20 ACS vouchers so they're not leaving the waitlist, so  
21 they're like, I'll just wait it out and I understand  
that but I think that it is important for us to have  
different numbers so like, we could have a target and  
so, that when I am talking and when our colleagues  
are talking and pushing, we could at least have a

1  
2 general number to be able to say hey, this is what  
3 we're looking to get to.

4 So, thank you, so I'll be looking forward to  
5 working with you guys to get that number so we can  
6 continue the fight.

7 Uhm, oh and I see we have Council Member  
8 Gutiérrez who also has joined us, so I'm sure she'll  
9 have questions about childcare vouchers as well.

10 Given the Mayor's recent announcement that a  
11 Chief Saving Officer will be appointed to each  
12 mayoral agency tied to suffice city funding savings  
13 of uhm, \$1.5 percent in Fiscal 2026 and \$2.5 percent  
14 in 2027, I'm very concerned that the potential impact  
15 on ACS Services for New York City children and  
16 families. Are any programs or aspects of the ACS  
17 budget, such as frontline childcare welfare workers  
18 exempt from this requirement? If so, which ones and  
19 could you share the programs and services that we see  
20 reduced - that will be reducing funding and savings  
21 exercises?

22 STEPHANIE GENDELL: So, I can introduce you to  
23 our Chief Savings Officer who is also Margaret  
24 Plentikoff.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You have a lot of jobs  
3 today.

4 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Thank you Chair. Uhm, so  
5 at this point, as you know - as you mentioned \$1.5  
6 percent in FY26, \$2.5 percent in FY27 and out and  
7 those are CTL targets, which we are a revenue heavy  
8 agency, so we generally have to cut more in order to  
9 get to the CTL target.

10 So, we were tasked with finding recurring savings  
11 through efficiencies, program consolidation and  
12 insourcing and uhm, to look at eliminating in  
13 sunseting programs. At this point, I can't share  
14 any specific details with you but I can say that you  
15 know we are looking at opportunities to generate  
16 additional revenue. We are looking at performance  
17 indicators, utilization and we really want to ensure  
18 that we have a minimal impact to services.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: While closing the Fiscal  
20 2027 budget gap remains urgent, uhm, has ACS  
21 anticipated any long term changes that would generate  
22 savings or great efficiencies?

23 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Certainly we are looking at  
24 it at this point. This is due Friday, as you may

1  
2 know so after that point, when it's finalized, we'll  
3 be able to share more details.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We're glad to hear about  
5 the end of the two to one hiring policy but this was  
6 concerning to hear that the agency will only be  
7 permitted to fill half of their current vacancies.  
8 Will ACS be required to eliminate any of its  
9 vacancies? If so, how many and which types of  
10 positions?

11 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: We very much share your  
12 concern and at this point, I can't share any details  
13 but we're working with OMB closely to figure out what  
14 this is going to look like.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, I should just call you  
16 Monday after you finish your plan, got it.

17 Uhm, uh?

18 STEPHANIE GENDELL: You know how to find us.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, I'm aware. At this  
20 time, I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues who  
21 I know who have a number of questions, Council Member  
Cabán. I'll come back for a second round.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you. Thanks for  
being here everybody. I'm going to start with a  
couple of questions related to mental health

1  
2 services. What mental health services does ACS offer  
3 to youth transitioning out of foster care in  
4 particular and then, of those are any of those  
5 services contracted out and which ones if so?

6 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you for that important  
7 question. I'm going to start by passing that over to  
8 Ina Mendez.

9 INA MENDEZ: Hi, good morning. So, when children  
10 are in foster care, as they are approaching  
11 transitioning out. They usually go on a period of  
12 what we call trial discharge. So, whether they were  
13 unified with their parents or let's say they're  
14 transitioning out on their own into independence and  
15 that provides the agency an opportunity to support  
16 the family during this period. We have discharge  
17 grants. We have various things.

18 So, a lot of the service plan that was in place  
19 prior to child discharge continues. So, that would  
20 be uhm, so regarding mental health services, agencies  
21 may use their own internal clinic or they may be  
22 using you know community based mental health  
23 providers.

24 All children once they leave foster care have  
25 Medicaid or Child Family Plus, so a lot of those

1 services can continue and they can continue to  
2 leverage their Medicaid to provide the mental health  
3 services. We, ACS ourselves, do not contract let's  
4 say with mental health providers. The agencies are  
5 charged with that responsibility and they make sure  
6 and then when the children go to final discharge,  
7 that's when the case would close.

8 For older kids, we have Fair Futures and they're  
9 entitled to a coach and the coach can then also  
10 secure services for them.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: So, I want to ask about  
12 specific budget lines and then about gaps. So, for  
13 the services that you just mentioned, what's the  
14 current budget for those services in FY26? The  
15 projected in FY27 and does ACS have a dedicated  
16 personal services budget line for mental health  
17 services particularly for that transition?

18 Uhm, yeah-

19 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I think we would need to  
20 first do some analysis but I think it's cooked into  
21 the rates that we pay our providers and in addition,  
the providers claim to Medicaid and we wouldn't have  
that information.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Okay. Can you talk a  
3 little bit about just any gaps you can identify or  
4 you could use support or partnership with us in  
5 making sure that every single you know young person  
6 in foster care is accessing mental health services?

7 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Our providers are very  
8 focused on that and in addition to support through  
9 family permanency, they can also get services through  
10 prevention families after discharge. I think that  
11 broader than ACS, there is just insufficient  
12 children's mental health services and so, in some  
13 ways, the children we're working with have increased  
14 likelihood of access because they're connected to  
15 providers who are providing these services.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Okay, so it would be fair  
17 to say that overall right, there is - we're not  
18 meeting the need - our capacity is not meeting the  
19 need of young people across the city in terms of  
20 access to like a really strong stable stable  
21 continuum of care for mental healthcare. There is  
some increased access through agency involvement and  
engagement through ACS, fair to say?

1  
2           STEPHANIE GENDELL: I think so. I think a big  
3 part of it is really about state support for mental  
4 health services.

5           COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Okay.

6           INA MENDEZ: I just wanted to add one thing I  
7 should have shared. When children, even when the  
8 case is closed, children are still eligible to  
9 receive mental health care. If they're getting it  
10 from the agency, they're a 29I clinic, which is a  
11 separate clinic the agencies have and they can do  
12 that up to one year.

13           COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Okay. And then I'm going  
14 to shift gears entirely and ask about the detention  
15 facilities. There have been - obviously these  
16 reports around the trends in detention facilities  
17 showing some improvement in terms of the recovery  
18 rate of illegal substances or medication. In FY24 to  
19 the beginning of FY26 but still right, like we have  
20 these reports of for example, last year. An ACS  
21 Youth Development specialist was arrested and charged  
with smuggling contraband into the youth development,  
into Crossroads. There have been at least five other  
incidents similar to this since 2024. So, could you  
talk a little bit about what action is being taken to

1  
2 address the flow of contraband into those facilities  
3 and you know even go into the hiring and trading  
4 process for youth development specialists and how the  
5 practices may have changed over time to account for -

6       STEPHANIE GENDELL: Sure and part of why you're  
7 seeing what you're seeing is because of our increased  
8 efforts in this area, which Deputy Commissioner  
9 Ginsberg will speak more about.

10       NANCY GINGSBERG: Thank you for that question.  
11 We have dedicated tremendous resources to this issue.  
12 Uhm, we have increased our equipment so that we can  
13 detect uhm, contraband before it enters the facility.  
14 We have new scanning equipment at both the front door  
15 and at the back door where young people come in from  
16 court, which has increased greatly. Our recovery of  
17 contraband, we are working closely with DOI, as you  
18 referenced to ensure that we don't have individuals  
19 bringing contraband into the facility.

20       Uhm, we also have improved scanning ability and  
21 search ability. We are working very - we have  
increased our relationship and our staffing with the  
ACS police. We have a specialized search unit that  
can extensively search the facility, both exterior  
and interior to ensure that our - the contraband

1 rates stay low. We are obviously very concerned  
2 about this and are doing everything that we can to  
3 reduce contraband rates. We are working also with  
4 our training unit to ensure that the incoming YDS are  
5 trained in contraband detection and we do in-service  
6 training, booster training for our staff to ensure  
7 that those searches are happening with fidelity.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you. Thank you  
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Before I go to  
11 the next Council Member, I would love for you to talk  
12 about the pilot program so the Chair of Mental Health  
13 could hear. The new pilot program that you guys have  
14 around mental health services that the young people  
15 kind of came up with, so she can kind of understand  
16 the totality of some of that stuff because I know you  
17 didn't mention it but I did want to make sure we got  
18 that on the record and she heard as well.

19 INA MENDEZ: Sure, my apologies. So, we have a  
20 public private partnership and we're working very  
21 closely with a variety of individuals to pull  
together what we're calling sole care and sole care  
is for older youth, geared to older youth currently  
who recognize the need for some type of mental health

1 support but the traditional therapy, maybe they've  
2 done that, they're not interested in continuing. So,  
3 sole care trains the Fair Future coaches to be the  
4 conduit to uhm, connecting young people to  
5 alternative types of mental health services. It  
6 could be boxing. We have hip hop therapy. We have  
7 with Melony Santano, Foster Care Unplugged, which is  
8 like a play type therapy but play for adults, like  
9 you're actually putting on plays and performing  
10 movies.

11 There's music therapy. We're working with an  
12 organization called Art Pharmacy. So, we're in our  
13 pilot stage and we're hopeful that based on the  
14 outcomes of this model, we'll be able to uhm expand.  
15 We have an extension through the end of this calendar  
16 year and so, my hope is that possibly we'll put  
17 forward a new need so we can expand this to all of  
18 our foster care providers.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I just wanted to  
20 highlight that because that was something that the  
21 young people kind of like talked about and I'm real  
big on making sure that we're highlighting what young  
people are saying and the needs of them and that was  
a clear reaction of young people saying like, formal

1 therapy we've been doing for our entire lives. We  
2 want to try something else and ACS responding to that  
3 and listening and being able to uhm, counter that.  
4 So, thank you and I just wanted to get that on  
5 record.

6 Next, uhm, person, Council Member Joseph.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: We were plotting as usual  
8 on behalf of the kids. You know. Thank you Chair.  
9 Good morning to each and every one of you. My first  
10 question, I'm going to deviate a little bit.  
11 Transportation for foster youth, that's something  
12 I've been fighting for for a long time.

13 And if you look at the data, it doesn't look  
14 really good. 55 percent of our youth in foster care  
15 are absent because of transportation once they enter  
16 into care and you know I know this personally.

17 So, how are we going to look at transportation  
18 for foster youth? I know it's a \$3 million  
19 investment that we've been asking for. How do we  
20 plan to address transportation for youth and how  
21 closely are you working with the New York City Public  
Schools Office in foster care to make sure that we  
are alleviating that?

1  
2 WINETTE SAUNDERS: Is it still morning? Good  
3 morning Council Member Joseph.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yes Ma'am.

5 WINETTE SAUNDERS: So, yes so we do work very  
6 closely with the New York City foster care office.  
7 In 2022, early 2023, we launched a foster care  
8 transportation reimbursement agreement, which we did  
9 not have in place before and that outlines how foster  
10 care providers can be reimbursed for the  
11 transportation. And it allows for trips up to ten  
12 days and the hope is that within that period, up to  
13 \$200 and the idea is that within ten days, children  
14 will be assigned to a bus route but that does not  
15 always happen.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That doesn't happen.

17 WINETTE SAUNDERS: Right and so we are now having  
18 additional conversations. So, our finance team,  
19 we've talked internally. We actually have a meeting  
20 with New York City Public Schools this Friday to  
21 figure out how best to kind of expand this  
transportation agreement. There are some challenges.  
What they've shared, so through our conversations, so  
through our conversations with them that you know  
there are these placements and where the school is

1  
2 there's not a clear bus route. And so, how do we  
3 solve that? Because we want the children to get to  
4 school obviously or prioritizing placing with kin.  
5 So, maybe the kin live in a different borough but we  
6 want the kids to go to the school of origin. So,  
7 there are some nuances.

8  
9 So, we have a meeting this Friday. There was a  
10 meeting that uhm, the past Friday, I missed a meeting  
11 with the advocates. So, we are talking to our  
12 stakeholders and partnering with New York City Public  
13 Schools and then we're talking internally how to  
14 identify a - the logistics around what is the  
15 service? Is it a rideshare? Is it some type of  
16 agreement with maybe another type of bus company that  
17 can provide it and then we'll just try to identify  
18 next steps.

19  
20 So, we're aware of the issue, we're just trying  
21 to piecemeal it out and figure out how to best tackle  
it.

22  
23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: It's been an issue since  
24 I was a foster mom. It has been an issue since I  
25 adopted my boys. So, it's been an ongoing issue and  
26 even when I became a Council Member, it was - and  
27 that was why I was so strategic to create that office

1  
2 to make sure that we are providing transportation for  
3 our foster youth right. Not everybody is going to be  
4 like, nope we're going to go the same - you're going  
5 to go the same school that I was teaching at so you  
6 don't have a transportation issue but not every  
7 parent has that. So, we want to make sure that and  
8 the data for our foster youth and absenteeism rate is  
9 too high. It's 55 percent. We need to bring that  
10 down in terms of transportation and the first ten  
11 days when they are placed in care, they should not be  
12 home or somewhere else.

13 So, this is lived experience, not speaking from a  
14 third party. This is lived experience. So, my first  
15 question is around child center staff and support  
16 service new needs. Your preliminary plan includes an  
17 additional \$3 million from mixed city, state, federal  
18 funding in Fiscal 2026. \$4 million in the Fiscal  
19 2027 growing to \$4.2 million by Fiscal 2030 for staff  
20 support services at the Child Center. Additionally,  
21 the funding supports 13 new baseline positions.

Can you tell me what programs or services does  
this relate to?

1  
2           STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you for this important  
3 question. First Deputy Commissioner Saunders will  
4 take it.

5           WINETTE SAUNDERS: Good morning Council Member  
6 Joseph. Thank you so much for that question. It is  
7 of critical importance to us to provide quality and  
8 care for our young people at the Children's Center.  
9 With that being said, the investments that you spoke  
10 of really focus on strengthening our medical, mental  
11 health support, operational capacity and safety and  
12 security of the center.

13           A large portion of that is focused on chaperones,  
14 just like you mentioned earlier around  
15 transportation. We take very seriously that we want  
16 to make sure that kids maintain their community ties,  
17 so regardless of what school that child went to or  
18 goes to, we take that child to their community  
19 school. So, we are ensuring that we have enough  
20 chaperones to maintain those community ties at school  
21 but also medical appointments, also recreational  
visits, also visits and court.

          So, a lot of that is baked into that. With that  
being said, we also have money that is focused on our

1  
2 medical consultation. We want our nurses and we also  
3 have mental health supports.

4 Right now we have four child psychologists, two  
5 psychiatrists and we want an additional mental health  
6 enhancement there as well.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So, why is the additional  
8 funding required and what was the amount? Do you  
9 have a number?

10 WINETTE SAUNDERS: The amount -

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Determined for this.

12 STEPHANIE GENDELL: The additional amounts were  
13 \$0.2 million.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Were \$0.2, thank you and  
15 what operational costs will this funding cover? What  
16 portion of them relate to the contracted providers?

17 STEPHANIE GENDELL: So, for the children at the  
18 Children's Center, they're not yet with one of the  
19 contracted providers, so this is funding for the most  
20 part for our team. It also does go to Bellevue uhm  
21 for the mental health and the chaperones are  
contracted out.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: It's contracted out,  
okay.

1  
2 WINETTE SAUNDERS: Yeah, this is specifically for  
3 the children who reside at the Children's Center.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. We  
5 needed that on the record.

6 WINETTE SAUNDERS: You're welcome.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So what positions are  
8 being added and what would that responsibility look  
9 like?

10 WINETTE SAUNDERS: Okay so I have the actual  
11 list. So, we have one behavioral health position,  
12 which I spoke of earlier. One Deputy Director of  
13 intake and we have 11 for peace officers.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay and what positions  
15 currently staff at the Children's Center now?

16 WINETTE SAUNDERS: Oh well, that's a long list.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That's a long list.  
18 You'll get back to us. Chair.

19 WINETTE SAUNDERS: No, no, I know them.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You know them, alright.

21 WINETTE SAUNDERS: I do know them.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Alright.

WINETTE SAUNDERS: So, we have nurses. We have  
uhm the doctors that I spoke of that are part of the  
mental health team from Bellevue. We have a

1  
2 childcare staff. We have childcare supervisors. We  
3 have social workers. We have a team of programming  
4 specialists who really focus on the reduction of idle  
5 time and supporting young people and engaging them in  
6 positive activities. We also have temps that assist  
7 us with supervision onsite and the chaperoning as we  
8 spoke of earlier.

9 We also have a transportation team and we also  
10 have peace officers and I think I covered most.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Well, thank you that is.  
12 Now I'm going to head over to our justice - our  
13 Juvenile Justice Staff and support service new need.  
14 We held a hearing not too long ago, a matter of fact,  
15 two hearings I think, Council Member Stevens, Chair  
16 Stevens. We held two hearings around justice  
17 involved youth. How is it looking now? I know it's  
18 overcrowded. Our plan is to bring down the  
19 population. How many of our students are now  
20 receiving full classes and getting their full  
21 services?

22 STEPHANIE GENDELL: So, Deputy Commissioner  
23 Ginsberg, do you want to talk a little bit about  
24 education?

1  
2 NANCY GINSBERG: So, we've set up a split  
3 schedule for the young people so that the high school  
4 students go in the morning and GED students receive  
5 their services between 3 and 6, so that we could  
6 increase the number of young people accessing  
7 services.

8 Generally the GED students, if they are willing  
9 to attend that day, are going - we're seeing very  
10 good retention rates for GED students. Uhm, about 80  
11 percent of the high school students are attending.  
12 Uhm, we have a number of supports that we have put  
13 into place to support these students. So, we have  
14 tutoring that is provided by our partners, providing  
15 workforce development. They also provide tutoring  
16 services. We have recently started an algebra  
17 tutoring service because it is an area that our young  
18 people historically have struggled with -

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Across the city.

20 NANCY GINSBERG: Across the city, correct. So,  
21 we are hoping that we see increased pass rates on the  
22 Regents due to this intervention. The kids are very  
23 excited about it and they have been attending. The  
24 attending rates are very good for that tutoring.

1  
2 We also have uhm working very, very closely with  
3 our Passages Academy partners from New York City  
4 Public Schools. They have increased literacy  
5 supports. Uhm, they are running Saturday school now  
6 for young people to receive their related services,  
7 increased literacy services and Regents prep.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That was going to be my  
9 next question, our students with IEP. That was one  
10 of the population that was not getting none of the  
11 services when we had this hearing here, so I just  
12 wanted to hear our students with IEP's. How are they  
13 getting their related services? Are there make up  
14 times for our students with IEP's?

15 NANCY GINSBERG: So, uhm District 79 has worked  
16 very hard to identify staff outside of Passages  
17 Academy and they come in; there's a separate set of  
18 teachers and providers that come in on Saturdays and  
19 the young people who have related services receive  
20 those related services other than counseling, which  
21 they receive during the week from Passages Academy  
stuff. So, if they have speech or any other type of  
related service that is not provided during the week  
by passages, this additional team is providing those  
services on Saturdays.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I know our Chair will  
3 make a visit soon. So -

4 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Before you move on, can I  
5 just go back to your last question on foster youth.  
6 We have the attendance rates for youth and foster  
7 care ages 5 to 10 at 91 percent and 11 to 15 at 86  
8 percent. I just wanted to clarify that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I was specifically  
10 talking about young people that did not have  
11 transportation. That's the data, if you pull it up  
12 we can see it black and white.

13 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Got it. Okay, thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That's the youth that I  
15 was referring to in terms of transportation.

16 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Got it, thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. The  
18 Preliminary Plan includes an additional \$4.6 million  
19 in city funding and 33 positions in Fiscal 2026 and a  
20 baseline addition of \$8.1 million along with 40  
21 positions, starting in Fiscal 2027 for juvenile  
justice staff and support services. What programs or  
services is this related to?

STEPHANIE GENDELL: I'll start and then Deputy  
Commissioner Ginsberg can add. Uhm, part of the

1  
2 staff is seven additional staff for the new exercise  
3 pavilion, which will be open and we're very excited  
4 about but it's three levels. It needs additional  
5 staff and the rest is for additional security staff  
6 for both facilities.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Your additional funding  
8 requires, what's the amount determined for your  
9 additional? Is it the \$4.6 million or the \$8.1  
10 million, which one?

11 STEPHANIE GENDELL: \$8.1.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. What  
13 operational costs will the funding cover? What  
14 portion of them is related to the contract providers?

15 STEPHANIE GENDELL: So, most of the detention  
16 again is similar to the Children's Center operated  
17 directly by ACS, although we do contract out for  
18 example, for programming, the barbers, the contract  
19 out so that's included in the funding. I don't know  
20 if you want to add.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, and what positions  
are being added to this and what are their main  
responsibilities?

1  
2           STEPHANIE GENDELL: It's mostly security and the  
3 Exercise Pavillion. Uhm, do you want to talk more  
4 about -

5           NANCY GINSBERG: There's some increase for  
6 cleaning.

7           COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And what's the timeline -

8           STEPHANIE GENDELL: Titles -

9           COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Go ahead.

10          STEPHANIE GENDELL: Uhm, it's 16 special officers  
11 for one facility 16 special officers and one sergeant  
12 special officer.

13          COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And what's the timeline  
14 for hiring for these new positions?

15          STEPHANIE GENDELL: As soon as we can.

16          COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: What is it?

17          STEPHANIE GENDELL: We'll be working on that as  
18 soon as we can.

19          COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And you'll let the  
20 Committee know. Thank you. Thank you Chair.

21          CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you Council Member  
22 Joseph. Council Member Gutiérrez.

23          COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you Chair. I  
24 also just want to lend my support to uhm, Chair  
25 Joseph on her advocacy for the transportation for

1  
2 foster youth. She's a wonderful advocate, constantly  
3 reminding the Council to really uplift that. So, I  
4 know you'll be hearing from some advocates today that  
5 also agree with that and I just want to make sure  
6 that I support her and uplift that.

7 I have some questions related to uhm, the  
8 vouchers and I know you touched on it in your  
9 testimony and so did Chair Stevens but I just want to  
10 make sure that we didn't cover it. Were you able  
11 today, this morning to share the amount of children  
12 that are currently on the waitlist?

13 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Sure, it's approximately  
14 \$17,000 but Deputy Commissioner Wolkimer is going to  
15 take your childcare voucher questions.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Excellent, thank you  
17 okay so around \$17,000. Uhm, how many childcare  
18 vouchers has ACS administered to new clients on cash  
19 assistance since the reintroduction of work  
20 requirements?

21 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: ACS doesn't administer cash  
22 assistance to families or doesn't administer  
23 childcare assistance to families on cash assistance.  
24 HRA does that, so they would have those numbers.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: So, you don't have  
3 those numbers?

4 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: No. I have the current  
5 number of children enrolled that are on cash and  
6 using childcare assistance but I don't have -

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: The new numbers?

8 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: The difference based on the  
9 work requirements. As of the end of January, there  
10 were about 29,000 children enrolled in cash  
11 assistance or in childcare assistance that uncashed.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, vouchers with  
13 cash, okay and are you able to - those are the  
14 numbers from January you said?

15 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: End of January.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: End of January, okay  
17 have you seen the growth? Have you seen the rate  
18 grow month to month?

19 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: There has been modest growth  
20 month to month. HRA is still projecting and of  
21 course they will be able to tell you more what's  
behind their projections but still projecting over  
the next months a steeper growth curve but end of  
January was about \$29,000 children and that is up  
from about \$27,000 for example last April.

1 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Wow, okay.

2 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: So, slow growth.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay and do you think  
4 that those numbers pair up with what ACS maybe  
5 projected?

6 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: HRA does those projections  
7 and we are in close communication with them every  
8 month about what those look like but we don't hold  
9 those projections.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Does - and I  
11 think - let me just ask it so that I have it on  
12 record. Does ACS, I know you're in communication  
13 with HRA. Can you share any projection of the  
14 childcare vouchers? The projection of the number of  
15 new cash assistance clients that will provide  
16 childcare vouchers by the time work requirements are  
17 fully reintroduced by this time next year.

18 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: I think they'd have to give  
19 those most recent projections. The last time we  
20 spoke with them though, they do expect it to rise  
21 significantly so tens of thousands more children but  
they should weigh in on the exact projection and rate  
of increase that they expect.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, can you share  
3 what the breakdown of the ages are for children on  
4 the waitlist, the 17,000 or so?

5 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: I don't have that with me  
6 but we can certainly share that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay and do you have a  
8 sense of whether or not some of these children may or  
9 may not still need the vouchers?

10 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We know that uhm, many  
11 children on the waitlist are getting care from DOE or  
12 DYCD afterschool programs. We don't have perfect  
13 information on all of that. The way that the  
14 childcare assistance program works is that if a  
15 family applies, they have an opportunity to seek a  
16 voucher or to be enrolled in contracted care. So, it  
17 may be and is the case that many children that have  
18 applied with the intention of being in a DOE  
19 contracted seat are in one of those seats, however,  
20 those children remain on the waitlist, so that if a  
21 parent, if we reach them on the waitlist at a future  
moment and that parent wants to select a voucher,  
they can.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay and do you - when  
3 did basically you stop allowing or granting vouchers  
4 to families on the waitlist?

5 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We were providing vouchers  
6 to any child or any child of a family that applied  
7 and was found eligible up through May 5th.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Of last year?

9 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Of last year. So, up till  
10 that point, there was no waitlist at all. At that  
11 point and time given where we were on the budget and  
12 where the budget landed in the state process, we  
13 began the waitlist at that time, which has now grown  
14 to about 17,000 children and uhm and we implemented a  
15 policy to recertify the vast majority of families  
16 that are currently receiving vouchers. So, we really  
17 are prioritizing right now continuity of care -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Sustaining families,  
19 yeah and understand the challenges. Uhm, what - do  
20 you have a sense of what your projection would be to  
21 end the waitlist?

ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We don't for a couple of  
reasons. As we just talked about, we don't know  
exactly what takeup would be as we started to move  
through the waitlist because some families have their

1 children in other arrangements and may decide at that  
2 point that a voucher is not necessary.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: But you're not aware  
4 of family to family on that 17,000 who those families  
5 are?

6 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We know some that are  
7 enrolled in DOE care but we don't know the universe  
8 or totality of arrangements that families have made.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: But are you all  
10 working to kind of figure that out in communication  
11 with families? Like what is the way to basically  
12 like update this waiting list so that you have a  
13 sense of -

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, they're going to work  
15 with us to get us a list of different scenarios that  
16 they promised that they're going to work with us to  
17 do different scenarios for a one to have different  
18 ones, whether they're in the childcare and things  
19 like that, so.

20 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We will work on what  
21 projections of different take up from the waitlist  
would be. What I will say though is that families  
have a right to remain on the waitlist, so we would

1  
2 never remove someone from the waitlist just because  
3 they have other -

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: No, no, I'm not  
5 implying that. I just want to make sure I think  
6 there are families on that waitlist that are like  
7 have not been communicating - are not even sure like  
8 kind of where they are on that waitlist. So, I just,  
9 I want to understand the communication with families  
10 once they're made aware that they're on a waitlist.  
11 I understand you guys are trying to figure out you  
12 know, it's possible they are not eligible for an  
13 ECEC. I just want to understand how that  
14 communication is with a family who is on the  
15 waitlist. How often is it? How are you emailing,  
16 calling, texting?

17 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: We're emailing. Uhm, we  
18 have been emailing and mailing about opportunities to  
19 enroll in 3K, PreK. We did that very recently with  
20 3K, PreK enrollments in that cycle closing and about  
21 DYCD openings for after school and so, we are doing  
that on a regular rhythm.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Chair, I just have one  
more question. Thank you. Uhm, and at the  
Subcommittee for Early Childhood Committee Meeting I

1 think earlier this month, we got from both the DOE's  
2 Early Childhood Division and the Office for Childcare  
3 that there is, you know, consistent communication  
4 with ACS, with DOH, with DOB where it's multiple  
5 times a week. Can you just share with me uhm, I  
6 guess how that communication is then being shared to  
7 families? Like does ACS take a role in communicating  
8 these like childcare updates with families? How does  
9 that look like? Is it just a text? I want to make  
10 sure we're not missing folks. I know the  
11 Administration did a ton of outreach, link kiosks,  
12 radio, social media, all that stuff, just kind of  
13 what is the role that ACS plays in that?

12 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Yeah, I mean we do push out  
13 communication to families. Some of our mechanisms  
14 are imperfect because we don't have phone numbers for  
15 everyone. We don't have emails for everyone. That  
16 is really up to whether or not parents have provided  
17 that through their application process.

17 Uhm, but to the extent that we do have that  
18 information, we are pushing out information and if  
19 not, unfortunately, it's old school mailing but we  
20 are trying to reach them in that way.  
21

1  
2 The other thing I'll say is that we are working,  
3 we worked over the past year with funding from the  
4 Robinhood Foundation with a few community based  
5 organizations to be supporting families and  
6 connecting to care and now that we are in a little  
7 bit of a different policy place, we are working with  
8 community based organizations in the Bronx and then  
9 potentially expanding uhm to be working with families  
10 that are recertifying for care and so, in that way,  
11 we are testing ways to get much closer to families,  
12 so using credible CBO's that have a relationship  
13 already with families to either help them recertify  
14 with ACS and make sure that they are not falling away  
15 as you're mentioning and if they no longer remain  
16 eligible for ACS care to try and connect them  
17 somewhere else in the system.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: And then my last  
16 question on that, is there a role that ACS plays in  
17 engaging with families in shelters to assess their  
18 eligibility? I know that the Administration at my  
19 hearing had said, there's a lot of you know they took  
20 responsibility. There's a lot more work to be done  
21 there, so just curious, is ACS involved in that, like  
targeted outreach to families?

1  
2 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: When we were able - uhm,  
3 when we didn't have a waitlist, we were working with  
4 DHS to train staff on childcare eligibility. Now  
5 that families would be applying to get on the  
6 waitlist, we are less proactively asking families to  
7 apply for care because we don't want them to apply  
8 for a voucher and then be waiting. So, we have  
9 stepped back from that role a little bit and are more  
10 focused on making sure that families receiving care  
11 are recertifying.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: But there are  
13 scenarios where there's families in shelters that may  
14 qualify and not need to be on cash assistance,  
15 correct?

16 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: No.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, they're all in  
18 need of the cash assistance voucher?

19 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: So, a family that is  
20 currently receiving a voucher recertifies as unhoused  
21 would absolutely remain eligible in receiving their  
voucher but a family applying new would not be able  
to. They would be on the waitlist.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, great. Thank  
3 you so much and this is great. Send it over  
4 digitally so we can promote. Thank you guys.

5 STEPHANIE GENDELL: We will do that. Thank you.  
6 They just got released from last week or so.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: I mean this is a cute  
8 baby. You guys did it.

9 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Our team will be very proud.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Council Member Felder.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Good morning and thank  
12 you for listening to the questions. You've been  
13 thanking us and telling us that it was a good  
14 question. So far all of the questions we've asked  
15 have been good questions.

16 STEPHANIE GENDELL: This is going to be a big  
17 test then for your question.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: No, it doesn't matter. I  
19 don't want to take any changes. So, thank you for  
20 the thank you in advance.

21 STEPHANIE GENDELL: You're welcome.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah, I have a slew of  
questions that are in no order whatsoever. So, I'm  
sorry I can't you know give you the bunch and wait  
for an answer. So, question number one, in terms of

1  
2 the cases, you know I would say that more than half  
3 of the testimony were related to foster, you know  
4 care so at this point in Family Court, those cases,  
when does Family Court close?

5 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I believe it's 5:00 p.m..

6 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah, I believe so also.  
7 So, I know it's not your responsibility but I just  
8 want to tell you that I've been advocating together  
9 with many of my colleagues. If somebody gets  
10 arrested, they will be processed till 12:00 a.m..  
I'm just - that I know.

11 STEPHANIE GENDELL: On the juvenile side too  
12 right?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah, yeah.

14 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Yeah.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Right, the point that I'm  
16 trying to make is that if in criminal court, they're  
17 open till midnight and in Family Court you have and  
18 again, this is not a case - this is an easy one you  
19 know. It's not your responsibility. I'm just  
20 suggesting that since you've advocated - you advocate  
21 for so many other things you've talked about, so I  
would ask you to advocate for one more thing, which  
is that families that come into Family Court after

1  
2 5:00, that's the end of it. And anyone here knows  
3 that if you want to for example, when I'm in the mood  
4 to do work, you get the most work done you know on a  
5 Sunday morning when there's no calls coming in or  
6 after 5:00 you know. You know when there's nothing  
7 going on. So, not only is it not open after 5:00 you  
8 know, so uh and we've done research and there are  
9 many employees, whether it's judges, whether it's  
10 other employees that are necessary, that would be  
11 very interested in the flex time. You know it would  
12 allow many of them to have another job easily instead  
13 of having to, you know, take a job at night, an extra  
14 job. They would be working, so I'm just asking you  
15 to advocate for that because it seems unconscionable  
16 that a family you know that's waiting around, waiting  
17 around has to wait around another day to get help.  
18 I'm not looking for an answer.

16 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I'm just going to say we  
17 could take that back. We can take back that uhm,  
18 suggestion. We operate 24/7 and I know that there  
19 are a lot of challenges in the you know late shift  
20 and operating our child protection, the Children  
21 Center Detention but we can take that back and look  
at it.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah, I thought you would  
3 just say that's a good question and we will advocate  
4 for that but this is the story of my life. I was  
5 never a good student, so it doesn't matter to me. I  
6 know it's a good thing but take it back and please  
7 whoever it is, if it's not your responsibility, I  
8 would appreciate knowing who it is so that I can  
9 drive them nuts.

10 Okay, second thing I wanted to ask you about is  
11 you mentioned the vocational program and again, this  
12 is an easy one. The - I'm just mentioning you know  
13 again to perhaps advocate to your peers in you know  
14 education. The New York City Public School system  
15 used to have a significant vocational program option.  
16 They still give you know tests and you know they -  
17 okay, yeah -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Go ahead, you can go.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Should I shut up?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: No, no, you can go.  
21 You're doing very good, go ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yes, very well.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Okay, yeah. So, you have  
to give me extra time for the jokes.

1 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I got you. I got you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Okay, yeah, that doesn't  
3 count. The point being is that the city's public  
4 school system has very, very few options and they can  
5 give the same students the tests over and over and  
6 over. They're just never going to do well. I know  
7 personally from experience, a student named Simcha  
8 Felder, that was in the principals office when I was  
9 lucky and not thrown out, all the time and if I had  
10 had that opportunity, I would have done  
11 extraordinarily well. You know, even though my wife  
12 says that I don't know what I'm doing but I know that  
13 you know, it's just obvious. It's very obvious. No  
14 - necessary, it's a good point and you'll take it  
15 back to whoever it is and let me know who it is,  
16 that's all.

17 STEPHANIE GENDELL: I will say I feel like you've  
18 done very well for yourself as both a Council Member  
19 and a former Senator.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: I don't know about that.  
21 All it means is that I really you know fooled a lot  
of people, that's all. Yeah, so that's question  
number two.

1  
2 Question number three is or point number three,  
3 this does have to do with something you mentioned  
4 about Rikers numbers. So, I just will tell you is  
5 that my background for the first ten years is that  
6 I'm a CPA, even though I never liked doing it but  
7 that's something I was able to do.

8 The numbers, you know you can fix numbers anyway  
9 you want or at least I can fix numbers anyway you  
10 want me to, right? The numbers are really the  
11 reduction that you talk about. I'm certainly not  
12 suggesting that anyone is intentionally trying to fix  
13 the numbers. All I would say to you is that whether  
14 it's fortunate or unfortunate, when I speak to the  
15 precincts that are within my you know, my district  
16 and I talk about different issues, a lot of the  
17 arrests or other things that normally for years would  
18 wind up in Rikers, are just not happening, for quite  
19 some time.

20 So, I'm not suggesting that it's not so. All I'm  
21 suggesting is that unfortunately or unfortunately  
there are many you know kids out that are really  
doing things that may be - that would wind them up in  
Rikers and it just it's just not uh, you know the

1  
2 arrests aren't being made. You don't have to comment  
3 on that because there's no way you can.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I'll comment. I'll  
5 just say that if that's the case, then that's a  
6 failure on our part for not having preventative  
7 services and preventing them from being arrested.  
8 So, I'll comment.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Oh, okay. So, if you can  
10 take that back to whoever you have to - yeah, I think  
11 that's -

12 STEPHANIE GENDELL: We also support preventative  
13 services.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah, no, I mean that's  
15 what they said. I mean that's what the cops are  
16 saying you know in the precincts. I'm not suggesting  
17 that you know that it's - I'm not suggesting that the  
18 numbers are entirely full. All I'm saying is that  
19 unfortunately or fortunately that's part of it. And  
20 then, the final - finally, I just wanted to say is  
21 that when you talked originally, you talked about the  
making sure one of the first things about the safety,  
you know with window guards, all of those things and  
educating them, whatever else, it's a wonderful thing  
to educate people but I would say on the whole and

1  
2 again from personal experience, I'm talking about  
3 Simcha Felder, you can educate me all day long. I  
4 probably will not do what you want me to do unless I  
5 have to. So, and today, it seems to me that almost  
6 everybody has a smart phone or access to one, and I  
7 don't think it would be a difficult thing you know in  
8 the recertification for someone to have to - if - do  
9 you have - are there windows in your apartment, which  
10 probably is true. If so, please attach a photo of  
11 the windows with the window guards. You know if you  
12 want to make sure and I agree that the safety is  
13 critical, all I'm suggesting is that sometimes that's  
14 the only way you will get what you want to get and it  
15 is critical because almost every year we  
16 unfortunately you know have cases of somebody getting  
17 hurt.

15           STEPHANIE GENDELL: I hear you. It is incredibly  
16 important that people know - to have window guards  
17 and how to get window guards. At the same time, we  
18 have had a lot of feedback about the childcare  
19 application already being challenging. I don't think  
20 combining the two is necessarily the way to ensure  
21 people are able to apply for childcare timely and  
that they have window guards but your idea of

1  
2 ensuring that where you have a parent somewhere and  
3 they're listening to you, that that's the time to  
4 make sure they know how to do these things or how to  
5 access them. I think that's really important and we  
6 can you know, Deputy Commissioner Wolkimer has a team  
7 focused on that and it's definitely important to us.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Alright, well, that means  
9 the last one was not a good point without you saying  
10 it. And finally -

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Finally okay, you're not  
12 done, okay.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: I wanted to compliment  
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh well thank you. Well,  
16 go ahead. I'll let you keep going on with that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yeah, the first thing I  
18 wanted to say, is that it's a really, I'm speaking  
19 for myself. If I would not be here this morning, I  
20 would not be concerned in any way about the Council,  
21 you know taking care of making sure to protect  
children in the city because the Chair of this  
Committee is someone that does not let anything go by  
that she is you know determined to make sure is taken  
care of except that they have to first of all on the

1  
2 stationary it doesn't look good if I don't have any  
3 committees. So, they had pity and you know they put  
4 me on some Committees. I'm just saying to you that I  
5 have no question that - so, I'm humbled to be able to  
6 be on this Chairs Committee. And then finally, I  
7 just wanted to say is that we - I think we - I want  
8 to thank you for all the work you do.

9 In other words, you come to a hearing and all you  
10 here forget about I'm not thanking you for the  
11 questions, especially with your criticism of my last  
12 point but all I wanted to say clearly is that I think  
13 that you understand that we appreciate even those  
14 people that are going to come and testify later  
15 vociferously upset and angered by something that  
16 you're doing wrong and you might by the way, be doing  
17 something wrong. You might but there is no question  
18 that everyone appreciates the work that you're doing  
19 and uh you know but that's the nature of why you're  
20 here and even as a Council Member and an elected  
21 official, it's very rare, very rare that somebody  
calls or writes and says, "thank you very much. You  
did a great job."

The only thing that I usually get is I gave you  
this case in November and you still didn't do

1  
2 anything with it and thank God, very often I say,  
3 "who did you give it to?" You know and I'll just  
4 say, "it wasn't me." That's all, you know.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, thank you and be sure  
6 to tune in for Council Member Felder second set at  
7 12:00. Uhm, but he's a great addition to the  
8 Committee so thank you for being here.

9 Uhm, I would like to take a moment to shout out  
10 Millennium High School who is here with us, here  
11 looking at government in action. I'm happy you got  
12 to hear some of the jokes from Council Member Felder.  
13 I love that we're clapping at kids. You know we're  
14 not supposed to clap in here but I'm, here -  
15 fortunately I don't like any of the rules. I be  
16 like, clap it up.

17 Alright, so I have just a couple more questions  
18 before we will be wrapping up because we have DYCD  
19 coming in at 12:00. So, the question is around the  
20 indirect costs. Uhm, the Preliminary Plan included  
21 \$10.4 million in city funding, which baselined  
beginning in Fiscal 2026 for the indirect cost rate  
for human service contracts. Why was additional  
funding required? How was this amount determined?

1  
2 And does ACS anticipate additional funding to be  
3 added to the outyears?

4 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Thank you for the question  
5 Chair. So, we added \$10.4 million and this was  
6 actually to replace some one time American Rescue  
7 Plan Act funding, ARPA that had run out as of FY25.  
8 And so, this funding supports indirect cost rates for  
9 human service contracts above the ten percent de  
10 minimis rate.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, the Preliminary Plan  
12 included a reduction of \$1.5 million in city funding  
13 in Fiscal 2026, a \$2.4 million baselined reduction  
14 beginning in 2027 for COLA payments for ACS  
15 contracted providers.

16 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Sure, I'll take that as  
17 well. So, this represents a reduction of \$2.4  
18 million baselined, \$1.6 in FY26. This was just a  
19 technical adjustment. We were overfunded with CTL,  
20 so it's a reduction of our CTL COLA and uhm, this  
21 funding is being shifted to DYCD to cover part of  
their COLA CTL shortfall.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. My questions are all  
23 out of whack now. Uhm, I had a question regarding  
24 uhm, the Raise the Age and around the hardship. Do

1  
2 you guys have an understanding or a working  
3 definition of what the hardship requires for the city  
4 to be in in order to apply for it and do you have an  
5 understanding on why we haven't applied for it in the  
6 past?

7         STEPHANIE GENDELL: We don't know what would  
8 technically constitute hardship. I know there have  
9 been concerns raised in the past about how it would  
10 impact the city's like budget rating to say we're in  
11 financial hardship. Uhm, I don't know if that's  
12 still the case.

13         CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Uhm, we did ask  
14 that, so that's where I was at. So, okay, the  
15 Juvenile Justice PMMR matrix, what total admissions  
16 for detention decreased during the PMMR reporting?  
17 The average daily population in detention increased.  
18 This is due to a larger average length of stay for  
19 detention. ACS reports that many detainee youth in  
20 their care have complex or serious cases requiring an  
21 extended detention. How is ACS meeting the need of  
the population for the complex cases and longer stays  
in detention and what challenges have the  
complexities of these many - uhm of these youth cases  
persist for the agency?

1  
2           STEPHANIE GENDELL: Deputy Commissioner Ginsberg  
3 can share more.

4           CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm.

5           NANCY GINSBERG: So, I'm going to try to answer  
6 what I think you asked. Uhm, because of the increase  
7 in gun violence in the communities, many, many of our  
8 young people are in our custody related to offenses  
9 that are related to gun violence.

10           We are in conversation with each youth part  
11 Judge. We are also in conversation with the  
12 leadership of OCI and OCI has dedicated increased  
13 resources to support the youth part Judges. We have  
14 a law library service that is available for our young  
15 people, provided through Youth Justice Network that  
16 speaks to the young people, identifies their  
17 concerns, either raises those concerns to case  
18 management or to division leadership and may reach  
19 out to the young people's attorneys.

20           We are also in direct contact through our Case  
21 Management Unit and through division leadership to  
the attorneys and to the institutional providers and  
the 18b Panel leadership to ensure that attorneys are  
speaking with their young people, they're visiting,  
sharing discovery, uhm, and are staying on track with

1  
2 the cases so that cases don't last any longer than  
3 they need to.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: My other question is, could  
5 you talk a little bit about the coordination between  
6 you and DOP, especially when young people for -  
7 because I know there are the ones who can do like  
8 supervised release and things like that. How are you  
9 guys working with them also to make sure that those  
10 things are also being utilized?

11 NANCY GINSBERG: So, 99 percent of the young  
12 people in secure detention are facing charges in the  
13 adult system. And so, DOP is less involved in those  
14 cases the way the system is structured. We are  
15 coordinating with the New York City Sheriff because  
16 they administer the electronic monitoring program and  
17 many of our young people have been released on  
18 electronic monitoring and are also attached to  
19 community based ATD or ATI programs that are ordered  
20 by the Youth Part Judges.

21 Uhm, we do work with DOP on the Family Court side  
but the young people who are being prosecuted in the  
Family Court for the most part are in nonsecure  
detention and so, we have had initial conversations

1  
2 with the new Commissioner and we're looking forward  
3 to working with the new Administration.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, what challenges have  
5 these longer length of stays in the detention center  
6 present to the agency and how does ACS ultimately  
7 reduce the population of detention? And how - and I  
8 guess for me, when we're talking about reducing, how  
9 are we looking at this from like multiagencies  
10 working together because obviously, you can't do it  
11 alone and what agencies will you be working together  
12 with to really continue with the plan. I mean, we  
13 all know that I've been yelling about the  
14 decarceration plan so I guess we could talk about  
15 something that stuff and that work around like how do  
16 we get these numbers down?

17 NANCY GINSBERG: Well, we've had initial  
18 conversations with the new Administration at New York  
19 City Public Schools to identify whether or not there  
20 are increased services that can be put into place in  
21 the communities for the young people who are released  
uhm, into the community. Many of the young people  
are long stay. Young people are heading to state  
sentences and we have been working both with OCFS and

1  
2 SUNY OHEP to ensure that our young people can  
3 continue the programming that they started with us.

4 OCFS has supported transferring the young people  
5 who are sentenced quicker than they were when we  
6 first came in, so we don't have young people  
7 languishing between their sentence date and their  
8 transfer to OCFS facilities.

9 We really can't control our front door but we are  
10 working very hard to increase services in the  
11 communities and have been working, talking  
12 extensively with community partners about how to  
13 increase services for young people in the community.  
14 We're also looking at our Close to Home continuum to  
15 see what services are necessary to put into place for  
16 those young people so that they can reintegrate into  
17 the community successfully.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no definitely and  
19 dividing means this isn't just on ACS. I think this  
20 is that's why I said a multiagency thing, where we  
21 need to be talking about how are we all working  
together to get them down and that's from DYCD, the  
DOE, to DOP. We all need to be working together to  
like really think about how do we not get them to get  
there, right? And so, you guys are only in charge of

1 housing them once they've done some things and so,  
2 you know by all means, this is everyone's all hands  
3 on deck.

4 I just have a couple more questions. Uhm, ACS  
5 administered a need based childcare vouchers to  
6 approximately 109,000 children ages 0 to 13 and up  
7 from the ages of 19 for those with special needs.  
8 This is a vital service and one very important to the  
9 Council. In January 2025, the Trump Administration  
10 moved to freeze the Childcare and Development Block  
11 Grant in several states including Minnesota and New  
12 York.

13 New York Attorney Letitia James substantially  
14 secured a temporary restraining order blocking the  
15 implementation of the funding freeze. Given that ACS  
16 heavily relies on the Federal Childcare and  
17 Development Block Grant to provide these childcare  
18 vouchers, what steps is the agency taking to respond  
19 to those federal threats and how does ACS - how would  
20 ACS be affected should the federal government freeze  
21 on the childcare development block grants for New  
York to take hold?

STEPHANIE GENDELL: Well, first I'll just say  
this gives us an opportunity to publicly thank the

1  
2 Attorney General Letitia James, which we have not had  
3 the chance to do but on this and many other issues,  
4 she's been an incredible partner and ally. And so,  
5 thank you Letitia wherever you are today for doing  
6 this for us but you are correct, that did happen.

7 At this time there is no impact, thanks to the  
8 Attorney General and the Court.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But are we taking any steps  
10 to think about how we plan if something like that did  
11 happen? Have you guys, I mean obviously, because it  
12 didn't happen we're saved but it can happen again at  
13 any moment.

14 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Right, it happened to five  
15 democratic states that appear to have been targeted  
16 by the Administration, by the federal administration.  
17 It's a substantial amount of federal funding. Uhm,  
18 you know, I don't know what - it would be a real  
19 problem.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Can you talk about what  
21 that problem would be a little bit?

STEPHANIE GENDELL: A lot of money.

ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Yeah, I mean I don't think  
we can say exactly. As you know, we don't receive  
federal funding directly. It goes to the state. The

1 state is leading the lawsuit in conjunction with the  
2 other states impacted. Uhm, so we don't have an  
3 exact answer.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Approximately how much of  
5 your budget would it be that would be devastated by  
6 this?

7 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: It depends a bit on the year  
8 how much of the funding we receive is federal versus  
9 state but Margaret, I don't know if you - is that the  
limit to our knowledge?

10 MARGARET PLENTIKOFF: Sure, I mean this year  
11 we're projected to uhm need \$1.39 billion in our  
12 budget from the feds for our childcare voucher.

13 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Though I want to - just to  
14 be clear, some of that is state funding. So, the  
15 amount that is federal, we are a bit blind to given  
16 that the state combines them and flows them through  
to us.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The City Council  
18 Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education held an  
19 oversight hearing on the path of universal childcare.  
20 At the hearing, the Mayor's Office of Childcare  
21 testified on their goals and their vision related to

1 universal childcare as one of their coordinated  
2 agencies including ACS.

3 What does ACS see as part of - the part it plays  
4 in the path to universal childcare?

5 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Well, I think first and  
6 foremost as you know and mentioned earlier, the  
7 childcare voucher system that we run is really  
8 critical to a lot of the low income families. And  
9 so, this Administration has been committed to that  
continuity of care that we talked about.

10 In addition, we are in very close contact with  
11 our sister agencies and with the Mayor's Office of  
12 Childcare to talk about what the universal rollout  
13 looks like and how we can be thinking about one  
14 consolidated system that works for families and I  
15 think we've got a long way to go to make sure that  
16 families are not on their own trying to navigate the  
different pieces but that we are working in  
conjunction.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I think that has been  
18 my biggest frustration around this talk around  
19 universal childcare and we haven't done a real  
20 assessment of where we are and then how do we get  
there to have a unified system and so, it's been

1 really frustrating for me to just kind of not hear  
2 that coordination. Like it seems like it's an  
3 afterthought where it's like that's where we should  
4 have started. It puts us in a better place, so I'm  
5 happy to hear that that is a plan that is down the  
6 line but it's no way that we should ever be starting  
7 from just making an announcement and not doing a full  
8 assessment to unify systems and make it flow a lot  
9 better.

10 What has ACS been - uhm, has ACS been in  
11 coordination with the Mayor's Office of Childcare and  
12 how often do you guys meet? Has ACS been in  
13 coordination with the Department of Education? Uhm,  
14 yeah, we'll leave it there.

15 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Yes, we're in contact and  
16 coordination with both. We have regular and ongoing  
17 scheduled meetings. I meet with the Mayor's Office  
18 of Childcare biweekly but in defecto, I meet with  
19 them much more often than that because we are  
20 managing issues that are coming up around how all the  
21 funding streams work together, how the system will  
work together to your point around planning.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, so I know some  
providers do this but does ACS believe some families

1  
2 currently on a waitlist may be eligible for DOE Early  
3 Childhood Education seats and has ACS worked to  
4 communicate this at all either to the families or  
5 DOE?

6 But I know sometimes some of the providers if  
7 they have children that they move over to seats that  
8 free up that they kind of do and shout out to those  
9 providers because we know that's not easy but I know  
10 that they do it because that's what's needed but does  
11 ACS do any of that coordination as well?

12 ELIZABETH WOLKIMER: Yeah, providers are  
13 definitely doing it and that's wonderful. Uhm, yes,  
14 we have been reaching out to families on a regular  
15 basis to make them aware for younger children up to  
16 five that there are DOE seats available. We did a  
17 big push as the 3K, PreK enrollment was closing. The  
18 ranking was closing. We will continue to do that on  
19 a regular basis though, that families who are on the  
20 waitlist are aware of where seats are available.  
21 Similarly, we are coordinating with our colleagues at  
DYCD to make sure that for school aged children that  
are on the waitlist, families are aware that there  
are vacant after school programs as well where they  
might find care.

1  
2           Additionally, I will just reiterate that families  
3 that have applied for and received care through New  
4 York City Public Schools in many cases are on the  
5 waitlist because again, if that child gets older -  
6 not if the child gets older, when the child gets  
7 older and ages out for example of an extended Pre K  
8 seat, they may then be seeking a voucher. So,  
9 necessarily they are on our waitlist so we can make  
10 sure that when we reach them, they have the  
11 opportunity to have some choice there.

10           CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, thank you. With  
11 that, we - I don't have any more questions unless you  
12 guys have something else you would like to share with  
13 us before you leave. Thank you once again and happy  
14 Women's History Month and the panel full of ladies.  
15 Thank you guys, appreciate you and we will take a  
16 quick recess and then we'll have DYCD.

15           RECESS [133:31-134:15]

16           SERGEANT AT ARMS: Folks, folks, if we could take  
17 the conversation outside the Chambers. Outside the  
18 Chambers. [134:21-134:45] Please take the  
19 conversations outside the Chambers. Take the  
20 conversation outside the Chambers.

20           RECESS [134:49-153:06]

1                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS:  Alright, I think I'm ready.  
2  
3                   Do they have to do something?

4                   COMMITTEE COUNSEL:  I can tell the Sergeants.

5                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS:  Yeah.  I just go?  I'm  
6                   ready to go?  No, they said I'm ready to go.  Okay,  
7                   great.

8                   COMMITTEE COUNSEL:  Okay.

9                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS:  Good afternoon and welcome  
10                  back to our second half of Fiscal 2026 Preliminary  
11                  Budget Hearing with the Department of Youth and  
12                  Community Development.  I am Council Member Althea  
13                  Stevens, Chair of Children and Youth.  I want to  
14                  first acknowledge the new DYCD Commissioner, Sandra  
15                  Escamilla.

16                  SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS:  Yeah.

17                  CHAIRPERSON STEVENS:  Alright great, that's my  
18                  new friend guys.  Who we'll be hearing from today  
19                  along with Chief Financial Officer Nevita Bailey and  
20                  First Deputy Commissioner Alan Cheng.  DYCD's budget  
21                  hearing will be followed by the public testimony  
22                  scheduled for about 2:30 and thank you all for  
23                  joining us today.

24                  This afternoon, we will be discussing the  
25                  Department's Preliminary Financial Plan, which

1 includes a budget of \$1.6 billion for Fiscal 2027.  
2 This funding included \$68.4 million in personal  
3 services to support a headcount of 715 positions.  
4 The majority of the budget is comprised of Other Than  
5 Personal Services at \$1.6 billion. This Fiscal 2027  
6 Preliminary Budget is \$119.4 million greater than the  
7 Fiscal 2026 Adopted Budget. The plan includes  
8 additional funding for the cost of living funding  
9 adjustment, human services COLA, \$19.3 million in  
10 Fiscal 2026, \$30 million in Fiscal 2027, and \$30.6  
11 million in the outer years and a federal funded grant  
12 of \$1.5 million in Fiscal 2026 to support the Violent  
13 Prevention Monitor Services at Rikers Island.

14 Additionally, including a full restoration of  
15 \$19.6 million funding for the Summer Rising Program,  
16 which we will discuss. This funding will extend the  
17 program hours for the middle school students across  
18 all school districts. Uhm, words were spoken and  
19 voices were heard. The PEGs restorations were the  
20 one shot in Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Plan and it was  
21 painful to go through the process each year.

The Fiscal 2027 Plan has provided baselined  
funding for Summer Rising, however, I do want to talk  
about the matrix used to determine the baselined

1 funding for the Summer Rising program and look  
2 forward to discussing it today.

3 It is essential that the Summer Rising program  
4 meets the needs of family and income communities that  
5 are dependent on the free summer program and is just  
6 essential to look more closely at the beacons and  
7 cornerstone centers to see how we can include and  
8 fund the Summer Rising services.

9 Everybody knows I'm here to completely revamp  
10 Summer Rising because I think that they have a lot of  
11 challenges.

12 Another area of concern to me is the Homeless  
13 Runaway Youth program. Yes, the Administration  
14 provided baseline funding of \$6 million that was  
15 included in the FY 2025 November plans, however, the  
16 current bed rate is averaging at \$50,000 per bed,  
17 which providers are saying is not enough to provide  
18 adequate services to the community.

19 They are asking for 70,000 per bed.  
20 Additionally, RHY is also operating with a slate of  
21 contracts and no rate increases. So, I hope this  
Administration will prioritize this in Fiscal 2027  
budget so we can meet the needs of the community.

1  
2 The Council will continue to collaborate on  
3 programs for the youth and make funding a priority.  
4 The city should prioritize investments in DYCD  
5 programs that provide leadership, social and economic  
6 workforce development tools for young people. The  
7 youth of today are not the future, they are the  
8 current. They are the current entrepreneurs and  
9 change makers. It is essential that the budget that  
10 we adopt this year is transparent, accountable and  
11 reflective to the priorities and interests of Council  
12 and people we represent.

13 I look forward to an active engagement with the  
14 Administration over the next few months ahead to  
15 ensure that the Fiscal 2027 Adopted Budget meets the  
16 goal of the Council and the people we represent. I  
17 would like to recognize the members who are currently  
18 here. Council Member Felder and Deputy Speaker,  
19 Council Member Williams, then I will turn it over to  
20 somebody to swear them in. Okay, that would be  
21 Elizabeth, okay.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now hear testimony  
19 from the Administration. Before we begin, I will  
20 administer the affirmation. Panelists, please raise  
21 your right hand. I will read the affirmation once

1 and then call on each of you individually to respond.  
2 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
3 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to  
4 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

5 Thank you, you may begin.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Wait, let's swear all these  
7 people now because they're going to come up here.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand.  
9 Yes, yes, yes, great. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

12 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: Good afternoon Chair  
13 Stevens and Members of the Children and Youth  
14 Committee. I am Commissioner Sandra Escamilla-Davis  
15 and I am joined by Chief Financial Officer Nevita  
16 Bailey, First Deputy Commissioner Alan Cheng, and  
17 other DYCD staff who will be ready to answer your  
18 questions.

19 Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the  
20 Department's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget. I  
21 come to this role as a proud Social Worker with 25  
years of experience in human service, most recently  
as Executive Vice President of Children's Aid. My  
work is focused on supporting youth from cradle

1 through career and college by building cross sector  
2 partnership with schools, community organizations,  
3 government and philanthropy to ensure young people  
4 and their families have the resources they need to  
5 thrive.

6 What I've learned throughout my career is that  
7 youth development and community development are  
8 deeply intertwined. The more we invest in young  
9 people and help build their skills, knowledge and  
10 resilience, the more they contribute to their  
11 communities in innovative ways and emerge as leaders  
12 and to your point, Chair Stevens, change makers. And  
13 when we build communities that offer resources,  
14 stability and support, we create the conditions that  
15 allow young people to thrive. In that way,  
16 investment in youth and investment in communities  
17 reinforce one another and strengthen the city as a  
18 whole.

19 Since assuming this role, I have had the  
20 privilege of meeting with staff across the agency and  
21 I have been truly inspired by the dedication and  
expertise that defines DYCD. The agency has  
accomplished a great deal for youth, families, and  
communities across New York City and as DYCD has

1  
2 grown significantly in the number of contracts and  
3 programs we manage, our infrastructure has not always  
4 expanded at the same pace. Yet staff continue to  
5 deliver with commitment and ingenuity. As we respond  
6 to the evolving needs of the city, I am assessing how  
7 our infrastructure, staffing and processes can best  
8 support our teams, our providers and ultimately the  
9 young people in communities we serve, building on the  
10 strong foundation to reach even greater impact.

11 To support this work, my assessment focuses on  
12 three interconnected areas. First, our operational  
13 backbone, including fiscal management, procurement,  
14 contracting, legal and payment systems to better  
15 understand how resources move through the agency and  
16 how we can support providers better in delivering  
17 reliable services.

18 Second, programmatic capacity; examining the  
19 structures, resources and guidance within divisions  
20 to identify strengths in areas where additional  
21 support could strengthen program delivery.

And the third, performance and evaluation,  
assessing how DYCD tracks outcomes and measures  
impact so that public investment achieve their  
intended results and inform continuous improvement.

1  
2 In parallel, I am conducting listening tours with  
3 providers to gather their perspective. These  
4 conversations focus on two areas; operational  
5 insights into how procurement, contracting and  
6 payments affect ability to deliver services and  
7 programmatic insights into how programs are working  
8 on the ground including innovations and support youth  
9 and families in equitable, safe, and effective ways.

10 By strengthening our internal capacity and  
11 drawing on the expertise of our provider partners, we  
12 can position DYCD to deliver the highest level and  
13 advance Mayor Mamdani's vision of a more equitable,  
14 affordable, safer, and healthier New York City for  
15 all New Yorkers.

16 I also see this work as happening in close  
17 partnership with colleagues across city government,  
18 including OMB, MOCS and New York City Public Schools,  
19 as well as the Department of Probation, to the  
20 Department of Health, ACS, so that together we can  
21 better align our resources and expand our impact in  
communities that we serve.

The Preliminary Budget demonstrates Mayor  
Mamdani's commitment to our work and despite the

1 city's budget challenges, our Preliminary Budget does  
2 not include any cut to core programming.

3 At the same time, however, we are working with  
4 OMB and City Hall in accordance with Executive Order  
5 12 to identify savings in the current and outer  
6 fiscal years.

7 The budget stands at a \$1.6 billion compared to a  
8 \$1.2 billion in Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget, \$1.5  
9 billion or about 92 percent is city tax levy funds,  
10 \$98.1 in federal funds, \$18.4 million state funding  
and \$5.2 in interest city funds.

11 These resources support a wide range of  
12 investments across the agency's portfolio and will  
13 not be an exhaustive list. I want to highlight  
14 several key initiatives that reflect how these funds  
15 strengthen services for young people, families, and  
the communities across the city. The first is  
16 COMPASS request for proposal.

17 DYCD recently issued the largest after school RFP  
18 in New York City history for COMPASS K-8 programs and  
19 we received 1,488 proposals that we reviewed and  
20 evaluated. The Fiscal 2027 budget includes \$447  
21 million to support this significant expansion and  
having come from the nonprofit sector, I know this is

1  
2 welcomed news for our providers. This RFP stabilizes  
3 contracts and includes increased rates, while  
4 updating the program model and expanding services for  
5 elementary school students.

6 The expansion includes 20,000 additional seats  
7 with 5,000 seats open this past fall, 10,000 planned  
8 for Fall 2026, and 5,000 more to be allocated for  
9 Fall 2027. It also strengthens the model by  
10 providing additional support for center based  
11 programs, refining personnel roles, including support  
12 for youth with disabilities and a stronger focus on  
13 students emotional health and enhancing program  
14 content requirements.

15 The next program is Summer Rising. The Summer  
16 Rising 2026 application portal opened on March 3rd  
17 and will close on March 27th. Families are expected  
18 to receive enrollment information on April 21st.  
19 DYCD and New York City Public Schools will continue  
20 to strengthen and expand summer enrichment  
21 opportunities, including field trips and career  
exploration.

Runaway homeless youth bed expansion. We  
appreciate the support of Chair Stevens and the

1  
2 Committee for funding an additional 100 beds for  
3 unhoused young adults. Thank you so much for that.

4 Four sites have opened so far, providing a total  
5 of 50 beds. The remaining sites require additional  
6 work to receive certification from the State Office  
7 of Children and Family Services and are expected to  
8 open before the end of the Fiscal Year.

9 This past Saturday, we completed the annual New  
10 York City Youth count to collect data on unhoused  
11 youth and young adults. These data will help inform  
12 the city's planning policies and serve to better meet  
13 the needs of young people.

14 Summer Youth Employment Mayor Mamdani officially  
15 launched the SYEP program on January 20th. The  
16 earliest application in the program's history. In a  
17 social media video, the Mayor encouraged young people  
18 to apply and the program is currently on pace to  
19 receive more applications than last year, once again  
20 setting another record.

21 During the February school break, DYCD also  
hosted SYEP Five Day a Week, Five Boroughs tour to  
promote the program and connect with young people  
across the city.

1  
2 Providers partner with New York City Housing  
3 Authority and Cornerstone Community Center using  
4 digital vans to help youth complete their  
5 applications. Funded at \$24 million, SYEP will serve  
6 more than 100,000 youth this summer and this year,  
7 we're expanding career ready programs to 260 schools,  
8 up from 230 schools in 2025 and continuing high  
9 school credit and Career CUNY Reach so more students  
10 can earn high school or college credit.

11 And we're prioritizing NYCHA residents, youth  
12 living in six priority precincts and young people  
13 facing barriers to employment. To strengthen support  
14 for young youth with disabilities, we recently hosted  
15 a rethinking disability panel with the Mayor's Office  
16 of People with Disabilities, New York City Public  
17 Schools and nonprofit partners and we're providing  
18 training and resources to helping providers design  
19 more inclusive and recruitment employers.

20 We also are continuing initiatives piloted in  
21 previous years, including SYEP Pride in partnership  
with the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice,  
and the New York City Commission on Human Rights,  
which will offer providers and development for  
participants.

1                   Community Resource for Employment and Development  
2 Program, also known as CRED NYC. Last year, DYCD  
3 launched the CRED program initiative to expand  
4 workforce opportunities across New York City. CRED  
5 serves New Yorkers ages 18 to 40 who are justice  
6 involved from communities disproportionately impacted  
7 by crime and violence. The program provides up to 24  
8 weeks of work readiness and occupational skills in  
9 high demand sectors, along with paid internships, job  
10 placements and wrap-around services. Funded at \$38.5  
11 million in Fiscal 2027, the program is expanding to  
12 serve 1,000 participants. Early results are  
13 promising with more than 200 industry recognized  
14 credentials earned and participants placed in  
15 internships and jobs with employers including  
16 Michelin recognized restaurants, the MTA, Con Edison,  
17 the Department of Education, and construction and  
18 healthcare organizations across the city.

19                   CRED has also helped some justice involved  
20 participants stabilize their lives, avoid deeper  
21 involvement and legal systems through workforce  
engagement and strong provider support.

                  And last but not least, Fatherhood Expansion.  
DYCD increased investment in fatherhood programs to

1  
2 \$9 million, doubling the number of participants  
3 served each year from 1,500 to 3,000. In addition to  
4 expanding program slots, the funding allows providers  
5 to both serve noncustodial and custodial fathers  
6 across borough range of income levels.

7 As part of this expansion, 14 providers were  
8 selected for 17 contracts and the new program began  
9 on January 1, 2026. Thank you again for this  
10 opportunity to discuss the Fiscal 2027 Preliminary  
11 Budget. We look forward to answering your questions.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I'm going to  
13 pass it to Deputy Speaker Nantasha Williams to ask  
14 some questions. I know she has to leave shortly.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you Chair and  
16 uhm, shoutouts to my dad who is joining us today.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hi dad. How are you doing?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Uhm, okay, so the  
19 questions that I have are around federal funding.  
20 The Prelim Plan included \$1.5 million in federal  
21 funding in Fiscal 2026 for the Byrne Grant Fund. Has  
there been any change in the amount of federal Byrne  
Grant funding that supports the services? What is  
the total funding for this increase? Uhm, and then  
I'll just ask you all the questions.

1  
2 The next question is, has DYCD seen any impact on  
3 federal funding typically received to support its  
4 programs? And the last question is, is any of the  
5 federal funding in your budget at risk of being cut?  
6 If so, please explain. And I wanted to also thank  
7 you as well for attending the Youth Justice convening  
8 that we did. We really appreciated having your  
9 agency there. It really strengthened the  
10 conversation because you all are the experts, so  
11 thank you so much.

12 NEVITA BAILEY: Good morning. Hi, nice to see  
13 you. So, I'll kind of go through your quick  
14 questions and then you can do any follow-ups that  
15 need be. And so, for the Byrne Grant, a Byrne Grant  
16 is no new funding. Essentially there's a rollover  
17 for prior years. It's a three year grant and so,  
18 they were unable to spend it down and so in FY26 it's  
19 being rolled over and the services there support  
20 services in Rikers Island. And so, that is the Byrne  
21 Grant and it's the last year of that grant. And then  
the second piece regarding federal grant, we are  
really grateful that the City of New York invests so  
much money in youth and communities and so our budget  
as a result is over 90 percent tax levy. We have a

1  
2 small federal part in our budget. So, for our  
3 federal budget, we haven't received any reductions or  
4 any notifications of any reductions and so, at this  
5 time, we don't anticipate any impact to our services.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. No other  
7 questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Alright let's get into it.  
9 Those are all the questions. It's a lot. I told you  
10 guys, I hope you're ready.

11 DYCD's Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget is \$1.63  
12 billion, which is \$85.4 million or 5 percent more  
13 than the fiscal 2026 budget of \$1.55 billion and  
14 \$119.5 billion or 8 percent more than its fiscal 2026  
15 Adopted Budget of \$1.51 billion. What is the metrics  
16 if any are used to determine the funding levels for  
17 each DYCD program and which programs have been  
18 substantially increased or decreased in funding  
19 levels and why?

20 NEVITA BAILEY: Good morning Chair Stevens and  
21 so, when it comes to procurements, it's a whole host  
of reasons about how money is allocated in the and  
where it's going to different communities. And so,  
as you know a number of our procurements are outdated  
and so we may not have additional funding. So, how

1 we allocate that is dependent upon the funding  
2 levels. I think prior to any procurement, we  
3 determine the costs. What do we want to get done?  
4 What are the services? What are we trying to do and  
5 how do we support and fund it? We need to know how  
6 the programs are operating, what communities, how are  
7 they allocated throughout the city? And so, there's  
8 needs assessments that are conducted. We have  
9 stakeholder engagement meetings. We try to identify  
10 what's the best approach to take and then we kind of  
11 identify where do we have existing resources in the  
12 agency and how to best align them going forward.

13 And so, there are a number of things that are  
14 being done. If they're existing services, we often  
15 look at performance of that particular program and  
16 determine what is the best way to allocate resources  
17 if that program or those services are no longer  
18 needed there. So, how do we maximize services?

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: DYCD's Preliminary Budget  
20 includes a new need and other adjustment for cost of  
21 living increases funding, COLA adjustments. Did DYCD  
submit any new needs that were not included in the  
preliminary plan? If so, what were those requests

1  
2 and were they not being included and have any impact  
3 on the operations?

4 NEVITA BAILEY: Well, we are grateful that in the  
5 Jan plan, the Mayor baselined the restoration of the  
6 Summer Rising initiative. As you know, it was a year  
7 to year restoration and so, we are grateful for that.  
8 That was one of our key asks.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I don't know if I'm  
10 grateful for it, but.

11 NEVITA BAILEY: Well, we can speak to - I think  
12 we are grateful for the continued investment in  
13 summer services.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, we're grateful for  
15 that.

16 NEVITA BAILEY: And so, we're grateful for that,  
17 that the city continues to invest in summer services  
18 and so, we're grateful that it's baselined. We  
19 believe that will help operations, just not for our  
20 staff but provider staff and families, that they have  
21 a better understanding of what's coming every summer.  
And so, that was one of our key asks for the new  
need. And so, we got that and we'll continue to have  
conversations with OMB as we identify areas.

1  
2 As you know, the Commissioner just started and  
3 so, she is currently doing her assessment in the  
4 organization and I think that post her assessment,  
5 we'll have other conversations about what are the  
6 additional needs in our organization. And at that  
7 point, we'll continue to have conversations with OMB.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely. I am very  
9 grateful that we don't have to be on the steps  
10 yelling out that for every year but I do think  
11 especially with a new Commissioner and a new  
12 Administration, we have an opportunity to really  
13 reimagine what the summer could look like and how do  
14 we take the feedback from parents and young people to  
15 make it more holistic of what they're requesting and  
16 not what we've done to kind of get us out of COVID  
17 and like how do we reimagine for what's moving  
18 forward.

19 And you know, my big push has always been to be  
20 more like camp and go back and having DYCD kind of  
21 lead these efforts. Uhm so my next question, will  
22 the COLA increase included in the Preliminary Plan  
23 have an impact on the existing budget?

24 NEVITA BAILEY: Are you referencing the COLA  
25 increase? You said COVID.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm, I'm sorry yes,  
3 COLA.

4 NEVITA BAILEY: Uhm, the COLA increase was  
5 essentially a technical adjustment. It is about  
6 essentially funding the agency for the COLA  
7 initiative that was rolled out a few years ago. And  
8 so, the agency implemented those in those providers'  
9 budgets and so, it's just a technical adjustment.  
10 It's funding an initiative that the city already  
11 implemented.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, providers have been  
13 requesting an additional three percent to be added to  
14 the COLA. Was any additional funding out of the  
15 Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Plan?

16 NEVITA BAILEY: We were just implementing COLA as  
17 described over city policy, so it's compounded every  
18 year and if there are baselined funds added to  
19 providers budget, we work with OMB to make  
20 adjustments to that providers contract to reflect the  
21 increase in services levels to ensure that the COLA  
22 levels are reflected.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Was COLA fractured into the  
24 new comprehensive afterschool uhm system, COMPASS  
25 RFPs?

1                   NEVITA BAILEY: Yes.

2                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: They were already - great.  
3 The preliminary budget included a restoration of  
4 \$19.6 billion in Fiscal 2027 for the outer years,  
5 restoration of Summer Rising PEGs. What is the total  
6 budget for the Summer Rising program?

7                   NEVITA BAILEY: The Summer Rising budget is, I  
8 just pulled it up, I think it's \$145. I'll just ask  
9 my staff, one second just to confirm.

10                  CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm.

11                  NEVITA BAILEY: \$149.

12                  CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: \$149, thank you. Does the  
13 baseline funding allow additional programming for  
14 middle school students beyond extended hours of the  
15 extended hours in Friday services?

16                  NEVITA BAILEY: Current funding is just storing  
17 baselined funding. So, we restored back the Friday  
18 hours and extended hours.

19                  CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, uhm, I mean that's  
20 really good to hear but I think specifically for me  
21 in the middle school area is where I really want us  
to be thinking, especially because we're seeing such  
an increase in those numbers rising in the detention  
center and you know, we'll be talking about SYEP as

1 well. Even in that space, I've always been a very  
2 strong advocate that that 750 stipend isn't what the  
3 kids want and really thinking like how we're kind of  
4 leaving those middle school students out of - out of  
5 this conversation because we're seeing those are the  
6 numbers who are picking up the guns in the community.  
7 And so, we really have to really think about how do  
8 we target and have programming that is really getting  
9 at the root of what these kids need and want and what  
10 they request. And so, definitely as we are  
11 reimagining and thinking about what summer should  
12 look like, I think we need to have a real focus on  
13 strong lens looked - taking a look at middle school  
14 students.

13 With the current change in Fiscal 2026  
14 Preliminary Plan, does the agency have any adequate  
15 resources to meet all the needs of their programmatic  
16 needs?

16 NEVITA BAILEY: Well we are in ongoing  
17 conversations with OMB as the Commissioner mentioned.  
18 She's currently doing an assessment to determine the  
19 infrastructure of the organization for the services  
20 that we have. We are grateful for the additional  
21 headcount that was provided in the most recent

1  
2 November plan. We got a headcount of social for the  
3 COMPASS and discretionary portfolios and so, that is  
4 the first start of the investment and the  
5 infrastructure for our agency and we will continue to  
6 hire those staff. And so, as the Commissioner  
7 continues her assessment and review, at that point,  
8 we'll decide what's needed and then we'll reengage  
9 OMB as needed.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm very happy to hear that  
9 an assessment is being done and don't worry, I will  
10 be following up, so I won't bother you guys anymore  
11 about this stuff because I know you're going to keep  
12 saying, she is doing an assessment. I know she told  
13 me.

13 But we will continue to have these conversations  
14 as that is coming as she is doing her assessments.  
15 We're going to move on to talk a little bit about  
16 state funding. Governor Hochul's 2026 initiative  
17 announces \$1.5 billion for New York City - supports  
18 for New York City, which include \$300 million for  
19 youth programming. Has the agency had conversations  
20 with OMG on program funding and how much will be  
21 allocated to DYCD? We just asked this question to  
ACS as well. They said they didn't have any

1  
2 information yet. Are you going to say the same  
3 thing?

4 NEVITA BAILEY: I am but it's our agency. I  
5 think if we have it, I think again, the Fiscal Year  
6 is coming up and so, there are some operational  
7 implications. We welcome any additional funding to  
8 support people in the city but only to know and think  
9 it through and so, we're not ready to speak on that.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, they said the same  
11 thing too, so that's the beautiful thing. I have  
12 both of you, so I know the answers. Uhm, yeah, I  
13 definitely would love for us to start those  
14 conversations about what that looks like because it  
15 has been allocated and we want to make sure that we  
16 have an adequate plan moving forward.

17 Does the agency feel there is a gap in state  
18 funding, especially as it relates to uhm, learning  
19 through Expanded Arts Leap after school initiative?  
20 How does state funding - how much is state funding  
21 does the agency receive from Leap programs and how  
many providers in a high need district provide after  
school services for the Leap program?

NEVITA BAILEY: Well, we are grateful that we  
have not had any changes in our state funding.

1  
2 Actually we've had an increase in FY26. That's when  
3 you provided this support to my agency. We do not  
4 have Leap funding in our agency, so there's been no  
5 implication for Leap for DYCD.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uh huh great. Uhm, so to  
7 talk a little bit about the report card, which I know  
8 I'm working extensively with with Council to look at  
9 the metrics that were used into have a better  
10 assessment and so, I know we're going to be working  
11 on setting up a meeting with DYCD to talk to you guys  
12 to get your feedback and all the things because  
13 honestly, I do want the report card to be able to be  
14 used by anybody that picks it up and I think  
15 specifically for me because I have such an intimate  
16 knowledge of this because I was a provider for so  
17 long, I want anybody to be able to read and I think  
18 some of it was kind of it was kind of misleading but  
19 uhm, all that to say, the final report graded DYCD a  
20 D, with the highest being a scope of B in the  
21 workforce development. So, I just want us to discuss  
some of that.

The report card indicated that DYCD did not have  
an updated agency specific plan that currently  
outlined the long term goals and deliverables. This

1  
2 type of reporting will allow clarity on the agency's  
3 part internally and publicly.

4 As the new Commissioner, have you had the  
5 opportunity to access the reporting and strategize  
6 what the goals and deliverables of DYCD will look  
7 like moving forward?

8 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: Yes, I have done an  
9 initial read of the report card and I do think that  
10 it is necessary for undermine leadership for us to  
11 have long term goals and deliverables for which we  
12 could be accountable and transparent to. And I think  
13 the one thing I'm really excited about is that you  
14 know the vision of Mayor Mamdani is clear, right and  
15 we are well positioned to implement that position for  
16 a more equitable, affordable, safer, and healthier  
17 New York City.

18 My question is, and the assessment that I'm doing  
19 is about how do we get there? What are our  
20 strategies to do that? So, uhm, I need to have  
21 greater insights about whether we have the  
infrastructures and the right programs in order to be  
able to deliver on that. But also, I would say that  
that transparency is not only going to retain staff  
and recruit staff, it's also going to foster greater

1 confidence in our providers and that's something that  
2 I'm seeking to do.

3 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Do you feel as though a  
4 fully transparent long term goal of DYCD would help  
5 in attracting good talent, both internally and  
6 externally with providers?

7 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: Yeah, absolutely. If  
8 people know where they're going and how to get there,  
9 they're going to be excited because who wouldn't be  
10 excited to contribute to this great city, especially  
11 making a difference, not only at the point of service  
12 but in the ecosystem that supports children, youth  
13 and families and again, I think it's going to help  
14 with our retention of staff and also to foster a  
15 better relationship with our providers.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I mean, even some of  
17 the - one of the things that I really want to see and  
18 work with Council what we're going to be working on,  
19 to make it so - I say this all the time that you guys  
20 are the providers and then also are doing the  
21 supports on the other end and it gets kind of hard.  
And so, I think that the report card could be a good  
way to have some more unanimous feedback from  
providers. And so, really wanting to make sure that

1 we're developing that space because it is really hard  
2 for a provider to call and say, "hey I need help with  
3 this." And then you also are my funder and I know,  
4 it's like, "no, we want to help." And we know you  
5 want to help but sometimes it's hard. I can say that  
6 for myself. I remember being like, I want to call my  
7 program manager to tell them that I'm struggling with  
8 this or you know I'm struggling and we had this  
9 incident. So, how do we have some of that dialogue  
10 taken away? And so, that's really some of my  
11 thoughts and vision around like how do we use this  
12 report card in a more meaningful way for providers to  
13 give feedback, not only to you but also how do we  
14 improve the work that we're doing?

15 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: I love that insight,  
16 Chair Stevens and as you were talking, I kept  
17 thinking about how important it is to differentiate  
18 those supports because not every single provider is  
19 needing the same from us. And so, my goal is to  
20 figure out whether it be a small provider or a larger  
21 provider, a medium size provider, it's the whole  
ecosystem that creates the type of impact that we  
want. And so, us being able to adopt and be

1 responsive to the range of providers we have is  
2 something that I'm looking forward to lean into.

3 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah and I know especially  
4 even with the RFP that came out, we had a whole host  
5 of new people coming in and so, I think we're going  
6 to be seeing a whole set of new problems or issues  
7 that arise that women think of because they are going  
8 to just have challenges that are just new.

9 And so again like, I think the report card is  
10 going to be a great place for us to develop to kind  
11 of have those conversations with one another and  
12 something that I'm working with the Council to  
13 highlight and do, and we'll be working with you guys  
14 too, so don't worry I'll be reaching out. I mean, I  
15 always do. I speak to you guys all the time.

16 Alright, the report card highlighted the DYCD  
17 operation as a contracting agency in the MRI could -  
18 metrics that include the timelines and registration  
19 and payments and RFP cycles of the contract for each  
20 program to reflect the agencies corp. Does the  
21 agency track this type of data and is this something  
that could be implemented? What is the timeline for  
implementation? And what type of metrics would be

1  
2 beneficial for tracking the contract process and  
3 monitoring the timeline, execution of contracts?

4 ALAN CHENG: Thanks Chair Stevens for that  
5 question and uhm, yes absolutely, DYCD is basically a  
6 contracting agency and we are held accountable by a  
7 lot of different stakeholders, the Council but more  
8 importantly our providers, City Hall as well. There  
9 are central metrics that are being captured for all  
10 health and human services agencies by the Mayor's  
11 Office of Contract Services. And so, we are part of  
12 that and we do obviously track this internally as  
13 well. We are pleased to be a part of the city's  
14 timely registration initiative over the last few  
15 years and also, very proud that last year, despite  
16 having over 500 contract actions in that initiative,  
17 we were able to get 95 percent of them over to the  
18 Comptroller's Office before June, by July 1st.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The data report finding  
20 indicates the agency struggle with keeping up with  
21 the demand for accessing key programs and services  
such as after school workforce pathways and homeless  
youth support due to system contents. Have you been  
uhm, - have there been recent system updates that  
could manage higher demand? How would DYCD implement

1  
2 the changes to factor the system constraints and how  
3 does DYCD manage communication and transparency to  
4 providers? And are DYCD digital platforms managed  
5 internally or externally and are they adequately  
6 staffed to accommodate that demand?

6 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: Thank you for that.  
7 Thank you for that question Chair Stevens. I wanted  
8 to separate this idea of the access to the platform  
9 or the technical aspect to it and the high demand and  
10 I think this question is asking about the access on  
11 the technical side. And so we have DCYD Connect as a  
12 central management system for all programs and it's  
13 designed to be scalable and responsive. And so, I'm  
14 going to be looking into whether we have made the  
15 right adaptations and so that it could be more user  
16 friendly and whether providers are finding that it is  
17 the portal to what they need to get.

16 The issue of demand is something that we're  
17 consistently bringing up because there is a finite  
18 number of resources but we want to make sure that the  
19 system is able to loop in folks where we do have  
20 programs.

20 And in terms about our communication and  
21 transparency to providers, we are regularly engaged

1  
2 with our providers through program management,  
3 through technical assistance, through direct  
4 outreach. We support them through resources, like  
5 our budget help desk and ongoing coordination and  
6 contracting and invoicing questions but Chair  
7 Stevens, you brought up a really good question - a  
8 good point that I want to really bring back to my  
9 team and this is the idea of how can they see us both  
10 as a contracting agency and a capacity builder. And  
11 so, we've got to find ways to reconcile that so that  
12 in fact, we can have earnest conversations with the  
13 providers and then make adaptations based on that  
14 honest feedback.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no definitely again,  
16 like I think that it's one of the things where it's  
17 always just been challenging because like, of course,  
18 everyone at DYCD means well but like it's really hard  
19 to have those tough conversations, even on your end  
20 right? When you have to have conversations with the  
21 provider because it's not easy either, and so, I  
22 think we do need to think about what those systems  
23 look like.

24 The report that - founded DYCD funded programs  
25 particularly after school, workforce development and

1 RHY services do not have significant capacity to meet  
2 city needs. Long waitlists and limited seat  
3 availability prevents many eligible youth and  
4 families from accessing services, especially in high  
5 needs neighborhoods. The report finding included  
6 undermining the limited wages, comprehensive uhm,  
7 comprehensives and human services. Is it safe to say  
8 that NYCD's COMPASS RFP is addressing those concerns?  
9 Are those plans being set forth to address the other  
10 outdated contracts that do not account for the  
11 increased cost associated with the daily services  
12 provided by community based organizations for  
13 programs such as RHY, Beacons and Cornerstones?

14 NEVITA BAILEY: Thank you for that question. I  
15 can't tell you, I keep trying to take off my provider  
16 hat but -

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I know it's hard. How do  
18 you think I feel when I'm sitting up here, like.

19 NEVITA BAILEY: I am elated about the COMPASS  
20 procurement process and I'm really proud of the way  
21 that DYCD handled everything from the concept paper  
to the review and really being able to include  
feedback in the RFP that increased rates that  
stabilized the contracts that looked at the model and

1 really made some adjustments based on the feedback  
2 and our hope is to do that with great intention in  
3 the same uhm collaboration with our providers with  
4 other contracts like the Beacons, like the  
5 Cornerstones, like HRY. And part of what I'm trying  
6 to do with my team is we're trying to prioritize how  
7 we do it and when we do but we're also doing that in  
8 partnership with OMB to make sure that there's  
9 resources for long term sustainability.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But listen I -

10 NEVITA BAILEY: The COMPASS RFP is a step in the  
11 right direction.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Listen, everybody knows I  
13 was yelling from the rooftops about getting this RFP  
14 out and I was happy that we got it. I wasn't happy  
15 when it happened because the poor team; someone had  
16 to yell about it because I'm surprised to see them  
17 still sitting here smiling because I wouldn't have  
18 been smiling but they did a really good job with the  
19 timeframe which was super crunched to make it all  
20 happen. And so, you know, kudos and shoutout to you  
21 guys because I think I was more pissed than they were  
about it coming solely because I just knew the amount  
of work and time and effort that it was going to put

1  
2 in and how they were going to have to give up nights  
3 and weekends and holidays and give up time with their  
4 families to get it done and of course, they were  
5 going to do it but honestly, there was really no need  
6 to do it when we could have released that RFP a lot  
7 earlier. That would have given them much more  
8 sufficient time and listen, you all know I'm going to  
9 be giving out a lot of praises here, so take it you  
10 know. You know what I'm saying? I wanted to make  
11 sure it was on the record.

12 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: We'll take it. We'll  
13 take it and thank you for your partnership on that  
14 and you know as a former provider, both of us, we  
15 know that we want contracts that reflect the real  
16 cost of delivering services and supporting the  
17 workforce that carries our work every day.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I have a whole host  
19 of questions about the RFP, so I'll get to those  
20 shortly. The report found that DYCD programs  
21 particularly - I'll hold on to that one, sorry.

Contract payments were frequently late, sometimes  
a year or more after services delivered unpredictable  
and lack of regular schedule, cash flow and created  
cash flow issues for CBO's. What is the process of

1  
2 issuing payments to CBO's and how long does it  
3 typically take to fully execute and what is the  
4 percentage of CBO's that are new within this fiscal  
year?

5 NEVITA BAILEY: Hi.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Welcome back.

7 NEVITA BAILEY: Yes, I'm back, there's a lot of  
8 questions, I'm going to try to get through them. If  
9 I miss any, feel free to follow up. So, when it  
10 comes to how providers you see funding, at the  
11 beginning of every fiscal year, if a contract is  
12 registered, DYCD initiates in advance to the  
13 provider. In the last fiscal year, we initiated an  
14 advance of 50 percent in general for the entire  
15 portfolio outside of discretionary. And for our  
16 Summer Rising providers, we initiated and enhanced-  
17 advanced to address the fact that they were going to  
receive additional funding associated with Summer  
Rising that's not included in their baseline  
contract.

18 So, that's what we did at the beginning of the  
19 year.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I have a question. Even  
21 with the Summer Rising, how many agencies were able

1  
2 to get that additional advance, because I remember my  
3 phone was blowing up all summer about folks who  
4 weren't able to access the advance.

5 NEVITA BAILEY: I'm not sure because that seems  
6 to - we initiate those advances prior to the start of  
7 the fiscal year and so, they hit those budgets in the  
8 fiscal year and then we updated all of the provider  
9 budgets that receive Summer Rising, at least 90  
10 percent of them by October. Now, there may have been  
11 some providers where an amendment was needed because  
12 we exhausted the allowance that was existing in their  
13 contract.

14 That may have caused an addition to delay in  
15 access to funds but due to the allowance clause that  
16 exists in the contracts, if there is additional  
17 funding associated with Summer Rising, we release  
18 those funding no later than October 1st of this last  
19 calendar year.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm sure providers are  
21 going to come and tell me that they had a different  
22 story.

23 NEVITA BAILEY: That's fine.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But at the end of the  
25 during the public testimony, so uhm, we definitely

1  
2 should like cross reference that because I know that  
3 for a fact that I got calls myself and I'm positive  
4 they're going to come in during the public testimony  
5 and say that they didn't, so we should definitely  
6 cross reference that so we can like, not have that  
happen again this year.

7 NEVITA BAILEY: Of course and then I want to just  
8 elaborate also that in order for a provider to get  
9 reimbursed, they would also have to submit a line  
10 item budget on their POCR. And so, we saw that in  
11 this last calendar year, given that we gave out  
12 advances, typically as you all know that you would  
13 typically not get an advance unless you allocated  
14 your budget first and then get an advance, ensure  
15 that when you're reimbursed, we know where to  
16 allocate it. To aid with cash flow, initiated that  
17 before and so providers received that funding but in  
18 turn, a significant portion of our portfolio did not  
19 submit POCR as they allocated their funding to their  
budgets. As a result, if you submit an invoice on  
those budgets, we can't reimburse it because there's  
not enough funding that's allocated on a line item.

20 And so, I think the education and learning around  
21 Passport has to be continuous so that providers fully

1  
2 understand what is needed to make sure that they can  
3 be reimbursed. We had over 400 budgets for FY25 not  
4 submitted. We have over 1,000 budgets for FY26 not  
5 submitted, however, we gave out advances.

6 And so, it's important that the sector, to ensure  
7 that they maintain cash flow, submit their POCR's  
8 timely to make sure that funding is allocated to  
9 their appropriate line item, so that when they submit  
10 invoices timely as well, that we can reimburse them  
11 but we are doing our work.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVEN: Well, what I'm going to say  
13 is you all need to send me the list so when they call  
14 me, I could check the list to see if they did it so  
15 that I'm not calling you all because that was  
16 information I didn't even know.

17 Next question, is the payment process automatic?  
18 If there was - if there is little to no change and  
19 the CBO who provided program services, why is there a  
20 delay in the contract payment?

21 NEVITA BAILEY: Sure, every year we allocate  
22 funding to our contract and so, if a contract is  
23 registered, a provider submits the allocations every  
24 year. You could have turnover in staff, changes in  
25 rent, changes in the allocations of your budget.

1  
2 So, every year, a provider of their contract is  
3 registered or not, must submit a line item budget  
4 allocating how the resources will be done.

5 Post out, we'll submit the - we'll post the  
6 invoice submission and we'll reimburse you. I think  
7 the challenge that you had this year is that given  
8 the transition into passport, we are having some  
9 challenges with budgets being allocated to the  
10 appropriate line item. That in itself will prevent  
11 the ability to have an invoice submitted and getting  
12 reimbursed. And so, I think again, the ongoing  
13 continued education about the transition to a new  
14 system and how to ensure that funding gets  
15 reimbursed.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How many organizations did  
17 not receive payment? Do you have a number?

18 NEVITA BAILEY: I don't know off hand but what I  
19 can tell you is that if a contract was registered, we  
20 initiate an advance. And so, what we try to do is to  
21 make sure that if at least to start services, there  
are funds on hand so you could start. Again, if the  
contract is registered. We can only do it if a  
contract is registered.

1  
2 And so, we try to initiate in advance to give the  
3 provider some time to then submit their PLCR that is  
4 allocating the funds to the appropriate line items,  
5 get that approved and once that's done, you can start  
6 getting reimbursed for your invoices.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Are you concerned about  
8 COMPASS starting because it starts - when it is  
9 starting? In August right and all these new programs  
10 and because I feel a little concerned.

11 NEVITA BAILEY: I think there's all hands on  
12 deck. COMPASS initiative is the largest our agency  
13 has had and so, everyone is paying attention and we  
14 are looking ahead. We know that there will be some  
15 overlap with the existing portfolio. We are looking  
16 at that. We are looking at that. We're looking at  
17 contract start times. We're looking at what's needed  
18 and what resources are needed to ensure that we're  
19 able to do this and then we know that the city has  
20 additional resources available to make sure that if  
21 there are any immediate or emergency cash flow needs,  
we know what to do to step in to see what we can do  
to at least give that bridge.

SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: I also want to add that  
we are going to be working in close partnership with

1  
2 our providers because they are experts in this. Many  
3 of them have been doing this so we're going to lean  
4 into what's needed now and myself and my team have  
5 been watching this regularly on a weekly basis.  
6 We're meeting to look at all of the tasks that need  
7 to be completed in order to be able to make timely  
8 registrations and we're working closely with MOCS and  
9 OMB as well.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm sure but I'm still  
11 concerned. CBO's reported that they have minimum  
12 room to negotiate scope of work before signing  
13 contracts and few options to negotiate or adjust  
14 terms once the contract is activated. Can the agency  
15 please respond to reports of that finding?

16 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: I'm going to defer to  
17 expand on your question.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Did we swear you in  
19 already?

20 UNIDENTIFIED: No.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand.  
Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
nothing but the truth before this Committee and  
respond honestly to Council Member questions?

1  
2 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, I do. Good afternoon, could  
3 you repeat the question please?

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, my question was - the  
5 CBO's reported they have minimum room to negotiate  
6 scopes of work before signing contracts and few  
7 options to renegotiate or adjust terms once the  
8 contract is active. Can the agency respond to the  
9 report findings?

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Okay, so there are two types of  
11 contracts that DYCD works with. We work with the  
12 designated City Council contracts. Those contracts  
13 have the scope pretty much already determined by the  
14 Council. We work closely with our partners to ensure  
15 that they are aligned in submitting their contract  
16 documents and then we also work to make sure that we  
17 give them some time and we also work to give them  
18 some time to negotiate and discuss any changes that  
19 may happen between the Council and DYCD. I just want  
20 to clarify that.

21 As far as our RFP contracts that are awarded  
through the RFP process, those scopes are pretty much  
determined already in the scope of work that's in the  
RFP.

1                   So, excuse me, so that information. So, after  
2 the contracts are awarded, we do have CBO  
3 orientations. We do meet with the providers. We do  
4 discuss the scope of the RFP as it was outlined and  
5 then have some time to negotiate and discuss with  
6 them the overall plan for the individual agencies.

7                   So, I hope that that answered your question.

8                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Somewhat.

9                   UNIDENTIFIED: That's okay.

10                  CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I have more questions but  
11 uhm, Council Member Lee says she has a question she  
12 needs to ask.

13                  COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Oh, yeah, no, first of all,  
14 I just wanted to echo Chair Stevens. I love the line  
15 of questioning around contracts because this is  
16 something that she and I talk about all the time as  
17 being former providers.

18                  And so, thank you so much for answering and just  
19 being here today with us. Uhm, just wanted to switch  
20 gears and forgive me if this was asked already if I  
21 missed this part but just on the preliminary budget  
changes in DYCD's \$1.6 billion Fiscal 2027 Budget in  
the Preliminary Plan is \$119.5 million or 8 percent  
more than its Fiscal FY26 Adopted Budget of \$1.5.

1  
2 And the largest change impacting the budget in this  
3 plan is the COMPASS RFP, which we were just talking  
4 about, rate funding increase of \$300.7 million. And  
5 we kind of sort of discussed this already but on  
6 track - is it on track scheduled to be completed?

7  
8 NEVITA BAILEY: Are you referencing the COMPASS  
9 RFP?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yes.

11  
12 NEVITA BAILEY: We are working feverishly to make  
13 sure that we meet the deadlines associated.

14  
15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right, so hopefully what is  
16 it August, is when they start?

17  
18 NEVITA BAILEY: Yeah.

19  
20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, uhm and it's  
21 definitely taking time to get to this place. There's  
a lot of changes advocates have requested including  
the rate services training, qualifications,  
programming, providers etc.. Can you tell us briefly  
about how the new RFP meets the current needs of the  
community? And again, forgive me if this was already  
discussed and if it was, let me know.

NEVITA BAILEY: We're going to have our Associate  
Commissioner Daniel Guillen come up and say more to  
the COMPASS model.

1 DANIEL GUILLEN: Good afternoon.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Good afternoon.

3 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, there were a number of  
4 changes to the model uhm that was reflected in the  
5 RFP. What we looked at was through the stakeholder  
6 engagement, through the concept paper, the response,  
7 aside from the funding rate change, we added a social  
8 emotional curriculum as part of the component uh as  
9 well as a career connected activities for grades K-8.  
10 We wanted to ensure that that was an experience that  
11 all young people - we've been piloting that through  
12 the middle school component throughout Summer Rising  
13 and uh, we wanted to make sure that we kept the  
14 holistic model that we've kept for the number of  
15 years through this program.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, great. Uhm, and then  
15 just moving really quickly to the Chief Savings  
16 Officer. What type of target was the CSO given by  
17 OMB? Was it the same percentage?

17 NEVITA BAILEY: That is correct, yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: So, the \$1.5 and then the  
19 \$2.5 for FY27 right?

20 NEVITA BAILEY: That's correct.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and where has the  
3 agency found the savings? I know the report is  
4 coming this week and how will it impact the city's -  
5 the agencies programs and performances?

6 NEVITA BAILEY: So, we are continuing to review  
7 our agency's budget to identify savings. Our goal is  
8 to try to minimize or have no impact on services as  
9 the Mayor has directed. And so, we're looking under  
10 every cushion and seat to see where we can find any  
11 savings that we can find and we're hopeful that we  
12 will. Uhm, and meet the target by this week.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, perfect and definitely  
14 want to emphasize we definitely want to make sure  
15 that the services are not cut. So, if there's  
16 challenges there obviously to let us know that as  
17 well. And when is the agency - it's submitting the  
18 proposal to OMB Friday, correct?

19 NEVITA BAILEY: That's correct.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, perfect. Thank you.  
21 Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Uhm, I'm going  
to let Council Member Joseph go because I'm about to  
talk about Summer Rising and she has a whole host of  
questions for Summer Rising because uhm, I just can't

1  
2 anymore but I guess my question just to kind of frame  
3 it is to just thinking about uhm, how are we going to  
4 move forward, use the feedback from young people and  
5 families to kind of start reshaping what Summer  
6 Rising could be? I know we have a new Commissioner  
7 and she is doing her own evaluations but would love  
8 to just hear your thoughts on like how are you going  
9 to be moving forward to like reshape it? Because I  
10 know like some of my bigger issues and since you're  
11 new, I don't think you heard all of them before.

12 So I'll just go for a few of just thinking about  
13 how are we you know, really taking the feedback from  
14 young people, especially middle school students who  
15 said that they did not want to sit in a classroom all  
16 day and they wanted it to be there Fridays, which was  
17 why when we cut Fridays that was crazy for me  
18 thinking about uhm, when you only have the  
19 flexibility to go on trips on Friday? That really  
20 makes it crazy for the city because we have issues  
21 with buses. So, all of the kids that's in camp,  
90,000 children, 100,000 kids can't be on the subway  
on a Friday. And so, like how do we really start to  
look at this program and reshape it so that it can be  
not only just fun but inclusive of learning and

1 showing all of the different components of not just  
2 sitting in a classroom from 8-12 to say that that's  
3 the only way young people could learn. And so, I  
4 would love to just hear your thoughts about how like  
5 what and how will we use this summer to kind of  
6 evaluate and move into a place that really honors the  
7 work of the youth educators who is doing this work  
8 and bringing their expertise and not just kind of  
9 having this theory that only teachers can teach young  
10 people.

10 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: I'm going to start off -

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You got to push the button.

12 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: Yeah sorry. I'm going  
13 to start off and then I'm going to pass it over to  
14 folks who are running the program and have a more  
15 specific answer but I can tell you that there has  
16 been a range of feedback that we have gotten from  
17 people loving Summer Rising and for people who have  
18 not liked Summer Rising. But at the core, I think  
19 there is a continued commitment for us to make sure  
20 that young people are learning and developing  
21 throughout the school year. And then that could be  
done and achieved through a range of mediums, right?  
And I think - I love what you were saying earlier

1  
2 Chair Stevens that it met the moment for COVID and we  
3 have to adapt. And so, some of the preliminary feed  
4 that we've gotten is exactly that. That what does  
5 learning look like outside of the classroom? And so,  
6 you're going to hear from Daniel who is going to  
7 speak a little bit about how we've included career  
8 exploration. How we've increased trips.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I heard about those  
10 already.

11 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: In order to be able to  
12 do that but my charge right now is to stand up some  
13 models right in the next few months that we can  
14 implement and test out because the truth is also that  
15 the data is showing that young people who have 20  
16 days or more in Summer Rising are gaining  
17 academically and in social emotional. So, we want to  
18 hold onto that. So, we don't want to throw out the  
19 baby with the bath water but we do want to make  
20 adaptations based on what we're hearing about how  
21 learning should happen for young people, specifically  
in the summer. So, my hope is to set up again some  
pilots and to test some things out so that next year,  
we can have a kind of a variety of options for us to  
choose from.

1                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely.

2                   SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: That are resourced and  
3 sustainable. I said that for Nevada.

4                   DANIEL GUILLEN: Good afternoon Chair. We have  
5 been part of this conversation for a number of years  
6 and I think what's valuable here is that we've  
7 listened to your feedback and year to year we've  
8 strived to make continuous quality improvements  
9 through this process. Year one of Summer Rising is  
10 not year five of Summer Rising. It is adamantly  
11 clear, the demand is still there. Families still  
12 want services and we want holistic services and I'm  
13 including we, as the parent as well. And we look  
14 forward to ongoing conversations on how we can make  
15 this model better. Because the reality is, a  
16 centralized support system that thinks about the  
17 whole child is vital to the summer and we want to  
18 ensure that with all the learnings and all the things  
19 that we've gained experience on from the CBO's onto  
20 the families and to the work that we do in  
21 collaboration with Public Schools continues that.

                  CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely, I mean again,  
I've said this so many times. I think that there's a  
lot of things that we can pull from Summer Rising

1 that like went well. Like one of the things like  
2 being able to serve students with disabilities.  
3 That's something that we've been able to really do  
4 and now that we can do that, like how do we multiply  
5 that? We want to see that. We want to see - you  
6 know I remember working before Summer Rising where  
7 every school had to be closed. Clearly that wasn't  
8 the case, where now we know that the schools can be  
9 open. So, I think that there's a lot of things here  
10 that we've learned and we've obviously changed but I  
11 think that we still have a lot of growing to do but  
12 I'm going to shut up and pass it over to Council  
13 Member Joseph because I gave her a whole bunch of  
14 questions and so, there you go. And she has her own  
15 feedback because we've been tag teaming this for the  
16 last four years.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah, we have been tag  
16 teaming and we have seen lots of improvements right  
17 from when I started as an educator in the classroom,  
18 the first year they kicked off Summer Rising, I had  
19 just won my primary. I was leaving teaching and  
20 going to become a Council Member and I opened the  
21 first one with then Mayor de Blasio and then  
Chancellor Porter but we've seen a lot of changes and

1 we've asked for a lot and you guys have stepped up.  
2 So, we want to publicly say thank you especially for  
3 me with the foster youth.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Especially for me with  
6 the foster youth. With the foster youth being  
7 included, that was so personal for me and our  
8 students in temporary housing, that was also very  
9 personal to me as being an educator on the other  
side.

10 However, there has been issues when we talked  
11 about attendance. So, my questions will be at along  
12 the line of assessment. How do we move forward? How  
13 do we tweak and make it better? Adding the social  
14 emotional learning was something we were pushing for  
15 a very long time to make it not just the standalone  
16 social, emotional learning but part of the  
17 curriculum. Right that it's embedded in the  
18 curriculum. That it's not a standalone. It's  
19 throughout the whole day, to provide that support.  
20 So, I'm always wearing that educator hat. Forever an  
21 educator hat on to make sure those things are also  
implemented.

1  
2 So, in 2027 we know we restored it and that was  
3 one thing. Once we saw those cuts, Council - Chair  
4 Stevens and I, we were in the streets yelling because  
5 we knew that the population that was targeted is some  
6 of our most vulnerable students who will - we don't  
7 want them where they don't want to be.

8 That was it. So, that restoration was good. So,  
9 what metric was used - I'm going to go back. The  
10 PMMR indicated a fourth month actual of \$113,376  
11 youth K-8 attending the program, compared to \$115,048  
12 for the same time prior year. That's about 1,672  
13 youth or 1.5 percent less than the prior year.  
14 What's happening in that area? Where are these kids?  
15 What are we doing to find them or are there other  
16 programs? Do you track them when they're not in the  
17 system? You know how you track your students when  
18 they leave. Are you tracking them?

19 DANIEL GUILLEN: Yeah, so thank you for the  
20 question. So, one thing that makes Summer uniquely  
21 different from afterschool, that is not a mandated  
program and I think a key feature and something that  
we need to discuss in the future about what  
utilization really means and most importantly, what  
that means for families because we put access first

1  
2 and ensuring that we can get to the most amount of  
3 families that have the opportunity to take advantage  
4 of this great program.

5 Uhm, what we have noticed is this, right? Uhm  
6 restorations like this are generally informed by  
7 participation levels, program utilization and  
8 feedback from families in schools and providers about  
9 the importance of the extended programming.

10 Summer Rising continues to be a critical support  
11 for working families and this restoration really  
12 reflects that continued demand for the resources. We  
13 really want to make sure that at an earlier point in  
14 time that this service was restored because it does  
15 impact ongoing recruitment efforts and stability for  
16 young people. So, ensuring early on that this money  
17 was available is a huge win for all of us in this  
18 sector.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And retention too. So, I  
20 talked about retention, how do you get the families  
21 through the door and we keep them there? What makes  
the family, such a huge number of families drop off  
in the program and how do we get them back, and how  
often do you look at the students that are on the

1  
2 waitlist that you could rapidly fill in that spot  
3 when students leave the program?

4 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, what's made this revamped  
5 version of Summer Rising is this centralized process  
6 where you have an active waitlist and you're looking  
7 at this waitlist by the young people that are  
8 applying, where they're coming from, if there are  
9 participants that have been a part of the year long  
10 services. So, there's a real targeted approach.  
11 Another thing is that it's really getting families to  
12 participate in those parent orientations. It's  
13 making those connections. On the ground, right,  
14 what's valuable is that there is that program  
15 director that meets that family. That they're  
16 learning about the services, what's offered and then  
17 that engagement throughout you know the application  
18 release, the selection and that communication all the  
19 way to the start of the program.

20 If there's some real concerns about their ability  
21 to attend, then you have that waitlist, right? That  
targeted approach and now, you can now build  
retention with a new family that's just as interested  
and has been waiting all this time.

1  
2 And with this model, what's been amazing is that  
3 there's families that have never gotten a chance to  
4 get in the door that now do this portal in My  
5 Schools.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I hear that a lot from -  
7 especially from my district that families who have  
8 applied, have never gotten in or if they're on a  
9 waitlist they never hear from anyone, so we want to  
10 make sure this model is also doing outreach in real  
11 time as you're looking at the attendance and looking  
12 at the whole program and say, hey, we have this  
13 amount of seats open here, there. How do we turn  
14 around rapidly for those on the waitlist? How many  
15 of the young people were elementary students and how  
16 many of them were middle school students that  
17 attended Summer Rising?

18 DANIEL GUILLEN: We can follow up with that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. That  
20 would be helpful then, you can also look at your data  
21 and make your assessments.

22 Summer Rising continues to be a well-known  
23 program and numbers did exceed your targeted 100,000  
24 month, a four month actual. What program changes  
25 have you made to attract middle school students? We

1  
2 know that's a population where they zero in on a lot  
3 to make sure they're doing something for the summer  
4 and something fun.

5 DANIEL GUILLEN: Well, first and foremost, it's  
6 ensuring that those hours are available, right? If a  
7 young person feels safe, that they can stay beyond  
8 4:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and that Fridays  
9 offer a full day of opportunities. A key component  
10 in that expansion of that career connective exploring  
11 futures component because young people at that age,  
12 they're already thinking about the next wave right,  
13 workforce, becoming an SYEP participant. And this  
14 component that now we streamline across COMPASS from  
15 K-8 starts that conversation right and it actually  
16 contextualizes it. They have an opportunity to have  
17 in person experiences, go to visit the [INAUDIBLE  
18 216:16] labs right? Go to visit all of these  
19 different businesses, industries even in their  
20 neighborhoods and having that - sparking that  
21 conversation, that curiosity at the age of you know  
12 and up, i think is ideal because it's the pathway  
that we want to ensure young people go towards and  
they have some agency on the planning, so it gives

1  
2 them a little push and idea that it's not just about  
3 being in the classroom but learning beyond.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And once you're done with  
5 this programming, are you talking to young people to  
6 see feedback, surveys? I think you should also talk  
7 to them because my kid went to - he wouldn't miss a  
8 day and I kept on telling Chair Stevens, we got to go  
9 see this program. He didn't want to miss a day. He  
10 went every single day and the days - like, make my  
11 doctors appointments on another day mom. I don't  
12 want to miss another day and there was an academic  
13 component to it and he was a middle school student.  
14 So, we should be capturing that data from young  
15 people to find out, what is it that's capturing your  
16 attention? If it's the financial literacy, the  
17 career connectedness, if it's leaving the building,  
18 or that support that you probably provide through the  
19 social emotional learning. I think their voices are  
20 not used enough in making decisions for them but not  
21 with them.

18 Uhm, what program was launched in 2020- what's  
19 the average attendance for elementary and middle  
20 school attendees?  
21

1  
2 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, attendance in Summer Rising  
3 like I mentioned, is voluntary and it does vary by  
4 age group and elementary students typically attend  
5 more consistently, averaging several days per week  
6 across a seven week program. And middle school  
7 attendance is more valuable reflecting older  
8 students' schedules and preference. And we can  
9 provide the updated averages.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah, that would be great  
11 and I know Chair Stevens touched upon this. Our  
12 students with disabilities, providing transportation  
13 to students with disabilities that want to stay  
14 longer, how is that going?

15 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, that is something that we're  
16 working constantly with New York City Public Schools,  
17 it does require a lot of coordination centrally and  
18 at the site level. So, it is vital that folks  
19 understand like there are some advances that we've  
20 made but we continue to strive to improve.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yes, our students with  
disabilities don't just want to come for the  
academics. They also want to have fun too.

DANIEL GUILLEN: Agreed.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: They definitely want to  
3 leave the building and be like their peers, right?  
4 So, I think that's something that should be looked at  
5 with New York City Public Schools. How do we  
6 implement it? How do we make it sustainable for our  
7 young people that want to come to it in the summer  
8 time, to be in those buildings? I know they email me  
9 all day and I email you all day when they can't get  
10 into those buildings.

11 So, Chair Stevens, was that enough or should I  
12 add some more? No, I'm good. Thank you so much.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, uhm so I'm going to  
14 jump into Beacon's and Cornerstones and have some  
15 questions around that. Uhm, these are one of those  
16 programs that I think that I think are totally being  
17 underutilized and not getting enough attention and  
18 really great programs.

19 The Beacon Community Centers are showing an  
20 increase in participation. The PMMR indicates that  
21 the the first four months of Fiscal 2026 beacon  
programs serve 37,851 youth and 7,394 adults, a 10  
percent increase in the number of youth served and a  
6 percent increase in the number of adults served  
when compared to some periods, the same period in

1  
2 2025. This is partially due to the additional hours  
3 in programs for the Summer Safety Plan. The Beacon  
4 participants have increased but there has not been a  
5 change in contract rates that remain stagnant for  
6 more than 10 years. Is the agency considering a new  
7 RFP that would address the needs of the Beacons in  
8 Cornerstone Community Centers?

9 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: Chair Stevens, DYCD is  
10 continuing to currently look at the cost for it to be  
11 good in a Cornerstone model. We recognize that there  
12 are outdated procurements and we are currently  
13 looking at the program model, thinking about how we  
14 want to move going forward and what are the costs to  
15 do it. So, we are currently in that process.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And what does that process  
17 consist of?

18 NEVITA BAILEY: It consists of stakeholder  
19 engagement, whether it be inclusive of you or others.  
20 Think about what is the model going to be? What are  
21 we doing? What have we done? What is evaluation  
saying? How do we approach it going forward? What  
funds do we have and what funds do we need? And so,  
it's a pretty comprehensive process and we're  
currently in the midst of it.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Do you have a timeline of  
3 when a concept paper will be out?

4 NEVITA BAILEY: No because as always you know  
5 that given that we are multiple years outside of a  
6 procurement, we anticipate there will be additional  
7 funding needed. And so, once we finalize the amount,  
8 while being in conversation with OMB about what's  
9 needed.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Just know this will be my  
11 continuing ongoing fight to make sure that before I  
12 leave the Cornerstones and Beacons get an RFP because  
13 they need it and deserve it.

14 What is the budget for a Beacon Community Center?

15 NEVITA BAILEY: Beacon budget for FY26 was \$69  
16 million. In FY27, it's 67 and you asked for  
17 Cornerstone, the total budget?

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I didn't but you can give  
19 it to me.

20 NEVITA BAILEY: For Cornerstone?

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, you can go for it.

NEVITA BAILEY: Okay, total Cornerstone budget  
for 2026 is \$69 million, in 2027 it's \$68 million.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, how many centers are  
3 in each borough and what borough has the highest  
4 program attendance?

5 NEVITA BAILEY: I'm going to defer to our  
6 Assistant Commissioner Wanda Ascherl who will speak  
7 more into the program performance and day to day  
8 operations.

9 WANDA ASCHERL: Sure, good afternoon. Uhm, we  
10 current - our largest - the borough with the most  
11 Beacon programs is Brooklyn. We have 32 in Brooklyn  
12 and then we have 25 in Queens. Bronx is 16,  
13 Manhattan is 15, and Staten Island is 4.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Poor Staten Island.

15 WANDA ASCHERL: Just given the number of sites  
16 equals the number of participants that are enrolled.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That's interesting,  
18 especially in the Bronx where we have so much high  
19 need, us being at 16. That's an interesting number.  
20 Hmm, so that must mean when we get the new RFP, we'll  
21 have more sites in the Bronx. That's what I'm  
hearing. I don't know if anybody else heard that.  
What are the current hours of operation for Beacon  
Community Centers?

1  
2 WANDA ASCHERL: We currently, our programs  
3 operate a minimum of 42 hours. Uhm, over six days,  
4 so Monday through Friday plus one weekend day and  
5 then, and it's usually in the afternoons, evenings,  
6 school holidays and uhm, during the week, they start  
7 at the end of school day, so whenever the school day  
8 ends, that's when we start.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The PMMR indicates that  
10 Cornerstone programs for NYCHA residents enrolled  
11 11,856 Summer Youth participants in the first four  
12 months and a 16 percent increase over the same period  
13 in Fiscal 2025. There is an increase in overall  
14 participation, a community anti-poverty program in  
15 the first four months of Fiscal 2026 and 11 percent  
16 when compared to the same period in Fiscal 2025. Has  
17 the agency visited the Cornerstones to address those  
18 - has the agency visited uhm, Cornerstones to address  
19 those needs? If so, what are some of the outcomes  
20 from those visits?

21 WANDA ASCHERL: So, we have a team that goes out  
and does inspections. They conduct multiple visits  
throughout the year but beyond the visits, they also  
do a lot of coaching. So, you'll find my team will  
go out there, do PD. Uhm, looking at the data, we

1  
2 look at data to inform practice and any changes that  
3 the program needs to make. Uhm, we also - depending  
4 on what the area is, we also bring in our TA  
5 partners, capacity building if needed and then we  
6 also expose them to uhm various partnership  
7 opportunities and services that are being offered  
8 through our strategic partnership team. So,  
9 oftentimes, they take advantage of a lot of those  
10 opportunities.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: To provide a safe space for  
12 community members and youth to spend time,  
13 Cornerstones are required to open and staff  
14 programming for more hours than they were originally  
15 produced. How have providers been compensated for  
16 the additional staffing needs?

17 WANDA ASCHERL: Providers are contracted for the  
18 additional service hours and their budgets are  
19 amended accordingly for the extra hours.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, they can amend it?

21 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Cornerstone providers are  
often caught between DYCD and NYCHA when requesting  
facility repairs leading to long delays. Does DYCD  
have a plan to make this process easier and more

1 efficient? If so, uhm why has this not been  
2 prioritized?

3 WANDA ASCHERL: DYCD is taking a proactive and  
4 coordinated approach to improving physical conditions  
5 at our centers. We launched a centralized ticketing  
6 system a few - maybe two years ago, where providers  
7 submit their tickets. We have a team on our end that  
8 conducts visits. As soon as we get a ticket, we  
9 assess the situation and we contract it out with  
10 external vendors to go out to the site and assess the  
situation and have a timeline to resolve.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And this was two years ago?

12 WANDA ASCHERL: About two years ago, yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, I know it's new because  
14 it wasn't there when I was there, so that's good to  
15 hear. Beyond the physical impact on programming and  
16 space, delays, repairs also impacted program budgets.  
17 Cornerstone providers share that they have received  
18 violations and been fined by New York City Department  
19 of Health and the Fire Department for issues they  
20 have already reported to DYCD or other NYCHA - or  
21 NYCHA. Those violations are based on health safety  
regulations to keep participants and staff safe.  
However, inspections by DOH and FDNY do not include

1  
2 communication with DYCD or NYCHA including a review  
3 open for tickets from providers requesting facility  
4 repairs. These result in Cornerstone providers  
5 assuming responsibility for all violations associated  
6 with the fine even if they've been actively trying to  
7 solve the issues with the city agencies. Why are  
8 Cornerstone providers required to pay fines  
9 associated with facility repairs?

10 WANDA ASCHERL: Uh, CBO's work closely with our  
11 team to notify us if there's a violation whether it's  
12 FDNY or DOHMH. We have a very close working  
13 relationship with the Department of Health, so that  
14 if let's say we need to triage on the back end, we  
15 try to provide support on that perspective. Part of  
16 the reason why the violation hits the provider is  
17 because they're stack licensed. So, as a stack  
18 license holder, they are the ones in violation of  
19 whatever the findings are. But we do work closely  
20 and DYCD is working on strengthening the  
21 documentation and improving the uhm, improving the  
repair tracking system and working closely with NYCHA  
as needed depending on the severity of the situation.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I think it's just  
unfortunate, especially like obviously everyone wants

1 folks to be safe but it is true, you know obviously  
2 it is a stack license and is the provider but  
3 especially when you don't have control over spacing,  
4 uhm, it gets really hard and you feel pretty  
5 powerless when you are putting in a request and  
6 things aren't moving and then you are then stuck  
7 paying the fine. So, uhm - uhm Cornerstone providers  
8 that have shared that they have gone through rental  
9 assistant demolition program RAD and permanent  
10 affordability commitments together PACT,  
11 conversations about the repairs to improve the  
12 facility. There is push back from developers for any  
13 repair post construction despite language outlined in  
14 community agreement. What role does DYCD play in  
15 negotiating between providers and developers doing  
16 the RAD PACT process and what role does DYCD play  
17 after the RAD PACT conversations are complete? And  
18 how does DYCD support providers in ensuring  
19 developers are not - are compliant with facility  
20 repairs?

18 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes, that's a good question. Our  
19 role is more of an advisory role. And so, when these  
20 issues come up, we have a new team, NYCHA PACT RAD  
21 team and so, we work closely with them when we have

1  
2 to triage and address any issues around  
3 communication, partnerships on the ground. So, we  
4 try to navigate those. I'm not - Chair Stevens, I'm  
5 not familiar with any developers pushing back but  
6 definitely welcome like any specifics and we can help  
7 triage. I'm not as familiar with any developers  
8 pushing back currently that I know of.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, we'll get that to you  
10 because if it's here, that means somebody said it.  
11 So, I mean, this is happening. We don't just make  
12 these up but we'll definitely get back to you and I  
13 guess for me is - I've always been curious about even  
14 - what role are you guys playing when it's all being  
15 negotiated beforehand right? And so, even out on the  
16 backend, what role do you play when they're  
17 negotiating with the developers when they're  
18 transitioning to RAD or PACT? Are you guys a part of  
19 the conversation or is NYCHA the one taking the lead?  
20 Are you guys coming in after?

21 WANDA ASCHERL: NYCHA usually takes the lead for  
sure. That's the starting point. Oftentimes the  
developments that are being converted to RAD PACT,  
they prioritize the apartments. That's their  
priority.

1                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Obviously hmm, hmm.

2                   WANDA ASCHERL: And then they have like a snippet  
3 for centers and then they start engaging the CBO on  
4 the ground. Uhm, we have a standing bimonthly I  
5 think, yeah, I think it's monthly, a standing monthly  
6 meeting where we check in on anything that's being  
7 converted. We have a list of sites that have been  
8 converted. We have upcoming -

9                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Could you share that list  
10 with us please, the Committee?

11                   WANDA ASCHERL: Yeah.

12                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Not today, if  
13 you don't have it, you could just submit it.

14                   WANDA ASCHERL: I know. I have to write myself a  
15 note.

16                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Don't worry, Andrea already  
17 wrote it down. Uhm, New York City - NYCHA Summer  
18 program at seven days a week from 6-10 with limited  
19 staff, although required. What is the number of open  
20 positions for the Cornerstones? Is there a delay in  
21 the hiring process? If so, why and what is the  
retention rate?

                  WANDA ASCHERL: Cornerstones are funded to  
operate a full summer program beginning at 8 a.m.

1 through evening. They adhere to the SEC ratios.  
2 Staffing human services programs has been a challenge  
3 particularly during COVID but we've seen some  
4 improvement. Staff retention rates may vary by CBO  
5 provider but we're not aware of any systematic  
6 delays.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Can you guys hear me?

8 ALAN CHENG: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. You can't hear me  
10 through the mic? You guys hear me through the mic?  
11 It's so crazy because I can hear through this so  
12 that's why I can't hear. Okay, hold on. I can hear  
13 here so we can hear on Zoom. Hello? Does that sound  
14 better?

15 No, it's okay, I can do both, it's double time.  
16 Uhm, I don't think I heard your answer because - so  
17 we're asking about the retention rate uhm, of the  
18 cornerstone for staff.

19 WANDA ASCHERL: So, uhm, staff retention rates  
20 vary by CBO but we're not aware of any systematic  
21 delays at this time.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Currently Cornerstone rates  
the group leaders at \$20 per hour and \$17.50 per hour  
for other staff. What are the plans to increase

1 those rates or is there any plan to increase those  
2 rates?

3 WANDA ASCHERL: So as we are looking across the  
4 agency's portfolio, we are reviewing a number of  
5 programs and contracts including Beacon, Cornerstone,  
6 and others to understand where updates and  
7 procurements need to be prioritized. Uhm, the goal  
8 is obviously to move forward in a thoughtful way that  
9 reflects provider input, coordination, along the  
10 lines of what the Commissioner shared earlier.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And the model for the  
12 Cornerstone is still the one time full time person  
13 and everyone else part time. Is that still the  
14 structure of the program?

15 WANDA ASCHERL: You have a full time -

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Director.

17 WANDA ASCHERL: Director. You have custodial  
18 personnel.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But the only full time  
20 person is still the Director, correct?

21 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That was the question,  
thank you. And why is that? Because you know, I  
know everybody knows my history by now but it takes a

1  
2 lot to run a Cornerstone a lot and so, we don't think  
3 that they need additional full time staff to kind of  
4 support the capacity and also to prevent the burnout,  
5 especially during the summer when they're supposed to  
6 be open seven days a week and late night and -

7 WANDA ASCHERL: Yeah, they definitely stagger the  
8 staff to try and make sure that it's always, there  
9 was a supervisor on site, however, that is one of the  
10 things that we are looking at as we think about you  
11 know program models in an RFP.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, yeah, when the new RFP  
13 comes out, yeah. Let's talk about it. Let's talk it  
14 into existence because I think that that's something  
15 we definitely need to look at, especially around like  
16 just quality of care and like burnout when we're  
17 thinking about staff and I ran a cornerstone. I was  
18 there all the time. I did not have a life because  
19 even if I had staff there, I'm like, the building is  
20 opening, I got to come and so, I think that we got to  
21 really think about quality of life and burnout for  
22 staff and making sure that we're able to retain  
23 quality staff.

24 Alright, we're going to move onto COMPASS. The  
25 anticipated contract terms for COMPASS is to be for

1  
2 the six years and one month from August 1, 2026 to  
3 August 31, 2032 with no option for renewal. Is DYCD  
4 working with MOCS to implement a process in  
5 preparation for pending awards and contract  
6 negotiations?

7  
8 NEVITA BAILEY: I'll respond, if we go further,  
9 I'll call ACCO(SP?) back up here but we are working  
10 diligently with MOCS in every oversight to see what  
11 we can do to make sure we land this on time so that  
12 providers get registered and get their funds.

13  
14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is there a contingency plan  
15 if we don't land this on time?

16  
17 NEVITA BAILEY: I think that if we don't get it  
18 on time, we'll utilize every resource he has, whether  
19 it be existing contracts or loans. And so, we want  
20 to make this happen. I think that you know we've all  
21 been fighting for this, the sector has been fighting  
and so, we're finally here and we want to make sure  
that we make it happen so that people get their funds  
and we serve more families.

22  
23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, I know you guys are  
24 working really hard and this has been like all hands  
25 on deck situation but it is a tall task and a lot to  
do and a lot to roll out and so you know please

1  
2 continue to let us know how we can support with this  
3 rollout. There were Council awarded funding after  
4 school providers that were not in previous COMPASS  
5 RFP's. Are they included in this new COMPASS RFP?

6 NEVITA BAILEY: This is an open procurement so  
7 every provider was open to apply if they were  
8 interested.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I hope you guys pick  
10 them up because we ain't picking them up this time.  
11 Like, could you all pick them up please? Thanks.  
12 They've been on our budget for awhile now. What is  
13 the response rate for the providers submissions to  
14 the new COMPASS RFP?

15 NEVITA BAILEY: I will refer to our ACCO to speak  
16 more to the existing RFP but I want to speak that  
17 it's still open so we cannot, you know, speak too  
18 much to it but I'm going to defer to her for the  
19 additional technical question.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You just come to the other  
21 side, why you keep going back? Your seats over here.  
22 They keep working these one seats.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Welcome back.

24 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Can you repeat the  
25 question again please?

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, what is the response  
3 rate for the providers submission for the new COMPASS  
4 RFP and the next question is, what is the number of  
5 new providers versus existing provider submission to  
6 date?

7 UNIDENTIFIED: Well, the RFP is currently in the  
8 active status. We have received over 1,400  
9 proposals. Uhm, and as far as new providers rate, as  
10 submissions at this point, it was 45 percent  
11 submissions for the school base and 50 percent  
12 submissions for center based RFP of new providers.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: During the September 18th  
14 after school COMPASS oversight, the agency recognized  
15 how communities have changed since the last RFP.  
16 What with that knowledge is DYCD taking a look at all  
17 the outstanding RFP to address the changes, not only  
18 in the missed communities or geographical gaps but  
19 also the necessary financial changes to accommodate  
20 the providers?

21 UNIDENTIFIED: I'll jump in. So, I think for  
every procurement, really we have a racial equity  
process. We look at existing resources agencywide  
and from there we decide how we allocate them.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How many of the 5,000 seats  
3 for school year 2026 have been filled to date? What  
4 are the school districts occupying the highest number  
5 of seats and which are the least seats? Is there a  
6 waitlist?

7 NEVITA BAILEY: Are you referencing COMPASS?

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, COMPASS and so I think  
9 we're gonna - yeah he's back. That's why I said just  
10 move over there. I don't know why you all keep  
11 moving. I don't know why it's three empty seats.  
12 I'm just saying, I don't know. We're almost done  
13 with COMPASS, so you don't have to come but Darryl,  
14 you could just start making your way soon and Susan,  
15 RHY is coming up. I know who is coming.

16 DANIEL GUILLEN: I'm sorry Chair, can you repeat  
17 the question again?

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, where was - now I'm  
19 stressed out. I don't know what question since I  
20 started moving. Oh, how many of the 5,000 seats for  
21 the school year 2026 have been filled to date and  
what are the school districts occupying the highest  
number of seats and which are the least seats and is  
there a waitlist?

1  
2 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, we are excited to say that  
3 all of the schools are fully enrolled, 5,000 seats.  
4 There are 40 schools across the five boroughs. We  
5 can provide a breakout by school district and by  
6 borough with those numbers as well, and we know on  
7 the ground we'll have to follow up on the waitlist  
8 numbers but fully enrolled programs across the board.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How many positions will be  
10 added to support the additional COMPASS elementary  
11 seats and what are those positions?

12 ALAN CHENG: I will take that question. So, we  
13 were given an additional headcount of about 54 new  
14 positions to support the COMPASS expansion.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How many of the 5,000 seats  
16 have been provided for special needs students and  
17 have any additional accommodations been given to  
18 providers?

19 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, we'll have to follow up with  
20 you on the breakout on the number of special needs  
21 youth but we do coordinate with Public Schools on any  
student that is enrolled in our program that will  
need any additional assistance.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. There wasn't  
designated seats specifically for students with

1 disabilities in this RFP? Like, there wasn't because  
2 I know there's a different price per point for our  
3 students with disabilities.

4 DANIEL GUILLEN: Price per participant, it's a  
5 set number.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, we don't have it  
7 distinguished between uhm students with disabilities  
8 and uhm, general ed students?

9 DANIEL GUILLEN: No.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, that's interesting  
11 hmm, dually noted. Uhm, the Fiscal 2027 Preliminary  
12 Plan shows a decrease of 42 full time positions for  
13 the COMPASS program for the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary  
14 Plan, which is - why is there such a significant  
15 difference in headcount from prior preliminary plans?  
16 And with an overall headcount reduction of six, has  
17 the headcount been realigned to better support the  
18 needs of the agency?

19 ALAN CHENG: So, as the Commissioner had shared,  
20 we are currently reassessing where we allocate all of  
21 our staff, especially the headcount that was given  
but the support went to COMPASS because of the  
expansion, which is why most of those heads went  
there.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, uhm, I'm going to  
3 pass it over to Council Member Gutiérrez. You have a  
4 question? Okay, great.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you Chair, thank  
6 you all so much. I just had a couple of questions  
7 uhm, regarding sorry, let me just pull it up, my  
8 apologies. In my district, we have services called  
9 the Wick Against Violence, and that's a collaboration  
10 in part with DYCD and MOCJ in some instances and they  
11 do wonderful work with uhm, covering Bushwick Houses,  
12 which was the previous Administration, two  
13 Administrations ago, uhm one of the map sites and  
14 Lincoln as well and they actually do a ton of work  
15 all over. So, I just wanted to check about the  
16 support to I guess, there's two programs under the  
17 Wick Against Violence. Again, it's Bushwick Houses,  
18 Lincoln Houses, Highland Houses. I think they even  
19 cover a number of other developments in Brooklyn, as  
20 well as in Queens and I know that there has been  
21 appetite from the community on wanting to reinforce,  
not just the crisis management system that it  
operates under but also the Public Safety Coalition.  
Would you be able to speak to the funding for the  
Public Safety Coalition? Is there any interest in

1  
2 wanting to adequately fund it or just more  
3 proportionate funding to that of the Crisis  
4 Management System? Again, these are all like, this  
5 is a program that really takes into account more  
6 holistic practices, uhm more community qualifiers,  
7 local passers. It's a whole you know from the ground  
8 up initiative and so, in my district, it works. The  
9 numbers are telling, which is great right? Crime is  
10 down, violent crimes are down. Uhm, young people are  
11 getting mental health services, young people are  
12 getting all sorts of career readiness training, which  
13 is awesome. So, that's really my main question  
14 because I know the Public Safety Coalition is not  
15 necessarily funded citywide but curious to see in  
16 those areas where it's working, would love for you  
17 all to highlight it and if there's any appetite to  
18 fully fund it to really bring it up to the same level  
19 so they can continue to do this work and do more of  
20 it.

17 DARRYL RATTRAY: Council Member Gutiérrez. Thank  
18 you for that question and it gives us an opportunity  
19 to -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: I thought you didn't  
21 know my name. I was like, it's right here.

1 DARRYL RATTRAY: Sure, like I can't see.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, you need glasses  
3 too friend. What's going on? Don't be shy. Look  
4 at, look at all the cool girls up here with glasses.

5 DARRYL RATTRAY: You're right. I will probably  
6 be cooler with glasses.

7 Uhm, our public safety coalition. So, we have  
8 two actually in that public safety coalition  
9 predicate that was in the RFP. Uhm, 67th Precinct  
10 Clergy Council, the God Squad Council Member Joseph.  
11 Uhm, and the other of course is Southside United, the  
12 Wick and Bushwick and they do an amazing job. Uhm -

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Amazing.

14 DARRYL RATTRAY: Two vastly different approaches.  
15 The Clergy Council is activating clergy within that  
16 precinct and within the neighborhood and they  
17 activate their response to incidents and they're  
18 proactive. The Wick in Bushwick is actually a scaled  
19 down version of a cure violence side if you will.  
20 That's part of the approach that they do.

21 In the cure violence in this work, of course we  
have the Cure Violence model that flows through that  
work as well. At times, we fund full catchments. In  
some cases, we fund half catchments. In the case of

1 the Wick, it is more of a hybrid of a half catchment.  
2 They're doing an amazing job as you know out there.  
3 I think when it comes to the increase in funding, we  
4 need to look at the state of player things, the  
5 RFP's, future RFP's and future funded.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, so we don't  
7 know. Okay but I'm glad - I'm encouraged to hear  
8 your take on it. It is really a valuable program and  
9 I mean the community has really felt like they've  
10 seen results like day to night. Bushwick houses had  
11 a record number of violent crimes. In 2015-2017, the  
12 MAP program came - the city selected Southside United  
13 and that work has really been wonderful and as the  
14 member representing that district to see young people  
15 involved in problem solving. To see young people  
16 involved in community activism, I think because of  
17 this crucial funding has been just beautiful and I  
18 would love to help. Would love to have you come  
19 Commissioner. I know you're doing - listening  
20 towards insight visits but it's really a wonderful  
21 thing led by really hard working people that are so  
committed, so, so committed and so of course, I'm  
always going to go to bat for them so they can get

1  
2 more money to do this work. So, I would love to keep  
3 the conversation going. Thank you Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Council Member Joseph.  
5 Welcome back.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. I was just on  
7 a commercial break. I'm back now. Welcome. Thank  
8 you for the work that God Squad does in my district.  
9 It's so important, especially at the point where I  
10 lost a young person who was one of my students and it  
11 was God Squad that came and stood with me in the  
12 moment when I got the call from the mom. And what's  
13 sad about it is the fact that it was a mistake in  
14 identity. He was 16. He was my fourth grade  
15 student. I raised them to go to graduation, not to a  
16 funeral. So, when they came and stood with me as a  
17 mom one, as a forever educator, it meant a lot.

18 So, the work that they do in the 67th precinct is  
19 meaningful work and that's why we support them so  
20 much. And Pastor Streker(SP?) was complaining about  
21 a tree I planted in front of the office. So, I told  
him, we're going to pray together about that.

So, uhm, I want to talk about headcount in the  
2027 Preliminary Budget. DYCD supports 715 full time  
positions, an increase of 74 positions from Fiscal

1  
2 2026 Adopted Budget. The Department Fiscal 2026  
3 January actual headcount is 616. With the increased  
4 headcount of 74 since the adopted budget, what is the  
5 projected timeline for filling the positions?

6 ALAN CHENG: Thank you for that question and uhm,  
7 we are pleased that we got to that headcount in the  
8 November plan and we started recruiting and hiring  
9 them. In fact, we filled about a dozen of those.  
10 The rest of them, a lot of them, most of them are  
11 posted on the website, the city's website and we're  
12 actively recruiting. Many of those, as I mentioned  
13 earlier, are to support the COMPASS expansion. So,  
14 our goal is to get them filled this spring so that  
15 they are ready, up and running for August.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Beautiful, thank you for  
17 that. Uhm, does the increased headcount of 74  
18 represent permanent full time positions?

19 ALAN CHENG: Yes, these are all full time.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Full time. What is the  
21 agency's current vacancy rate?

ALAN CHENG: So, it's a bit of - it's overstated  
a little bit only because of this addition of the  
headcount. So, it's currently at 15 percent with the  
new headcount.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: What are the open  
3 positions for each of the programs that you have?

4 ALAN CHENG: So, they are very - uh they expand  
5 the variety of the need for the agency. A lot of  
6 them in our fiscal shop to support some of the  
7 payments, the budget reviews for contracting and  
8 obviously a lot of direct program management.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Do you have a timeline to  
10 staff up to make sure those positions, those key  
11 positions are filled?

12 ALAN CHENG: So, we've started filling a lot of  
13 the support functions because the contracting and the  
14 budget reviews are going to start up very soon and  
15 then program positions following.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. What agency  
17 asked to reduce the current vacancy in the  
18 preliminary plan.

19 ALAN CHENG: Yes, we know that there is a central  
20 request from all agencies to reduce headcount.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So, what are the specific  
parameters of the headcount reduction if any?

ALAN CHENG: We're still working with OMB to  
figure out what the specific impact and details will  
be for our agency.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Will that impact the  
3 services that you provide?

4 ALAN CHENG: We are advocating for it to be  
5 mitigated so that we don't uh falter on delivering  
6 what we are supposed to be doing.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: What challenges are the  
8 agencies facing in hiring new candidates? I know  
9 that's something that we hear from agencies a lot.  
10 Are you doing outreach? Where are you doing the  
11 outreach? Is it grassroot? Do other agencies -  
12 where?

13 ALAN CHENG: The biggest challenge as you are  
14 probably aware was the two for one, which was  
15 recently lifted. So, we are seeing - you know we've  
16 always seen a lot of candidates apply for our  
17 positions. It was just kind of like the two for one  
18 that held us back from making those offers.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And how long does it take  
20 if someone applies for a position within your agency?  
21 How long does it take from applying to hiring?

ALAN CHENG: It varies depending on the uhm I  
guess the complexity of the position and the number  
of people who are applying for those positions but I  
would say usually about a month.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: About a month, 30 days.  
3 That's good. In the Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Plan,  
4 the Administration had lifted the two to one that you  
5 mentioned earlier. What course of action is the  
6 agency taking to fill positions now that the rules  
are no longer applied?

7 ALAN CHENG: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Sure, I said, uhm the two  
9 to one you talked about that model being lifted. For  
10 one of the every two vacant positions, what course of  
11 action is the agency taking to fill positions now  
that the rules no longer apply, your two to one?

12 ALAN CHENG: So, we are working closely with OMB  
13 on that and I think that what helps is if we invite  
14 them invite candidates, that's what speeds up the  
process.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And I had a quick follow  
16 up for Summer Rising. I know. I just wanted to know  
17 real quick. In working with students with  
18 disabilities, is there any interagency connections or  
19 any interagency work that you guys do? Because one  
20 of the biggest things I know Chair Stevens and I talk  
21 about is the fact that agencies don't talk to each

1  
2 other, which I think they should start talking to  
3 each other.

4 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, that is a great question.  
5 I'm actually excited to talk about the work we've  
6 been doing with New York City Public Schools over the  
7 past couple of years with their uh Office of  
8 Disability. I'm going to just say the acronym DIO.  
9 We've changed the names a couple of times. What's  
10 been amazing is that like I said before, year to year  
11 there's been massive improvements in not just the  
12 engagement with CBO's but really thoughtful on  
13 trainings. So, there has been opportunities for  
14 asynchronous and in person trainings have been  
15 offered in collaboration with DYCD and New York City  
16 Public Schools.

17 We've also implemented accommodation plans for a  
18 young person that gives an opportunity for a CBO and  
19 the teacher to have real time understanding of the  
20 actual young person's needs. You know, it is  
21 important to share that with an IEP, that's  
information that can't be shared to a CBO and that  
becomes a significant challenge and through this  
accommodation plan, it really speaks to how we can  
address the young persons needs and ensure that there

1  
2 are services if needed for a young person into the  
3 afternoon hours.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I know at one point, you  
5 guys had a waiver on the IEP. Is that being shared  
6 at least with a PARA that can then relate to service  
7 to the child.

8 DANIEL GUILLEN: Yeah, so for those that are able  
9 legally to have access to the IEP, that is something  
10 that is provisioned to those selected folks but that  
11 accommodation plan is truly what is a document that  
12 can be of support for the CBO because really the CBO  
13 working in the afternoon is a key component because  
14 as we mentioned before, we want to make sure that all  
15 young people take full advantage of the program.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay wonderful, thank you  
17 so much.

18 DANIEL GUILLEN: No problem.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, I'm back. Uhm, at an  
20 oversight hearing with the Subcommittee on Early  
21 Childhood Education, the Deputy Chancellor spoke  
about a pilot program called School Day Plus,  
extending 3K to afterschool hours from 5-6. Have  
there been any conversations with DOE on what this  
could look like if there was after school for our

1  
2 younger 3K students and has the agency began  
3 accessing the cost for providers?

4 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: I mean, I think that's a  
5 great opportunity. It's something that I'm going to  
6 be speaking with the Chancellor about because this  
7 idea of a continuous care service through early  
8 childhood through post-secondary is something that  
9 we're eager to do under my leadership.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Advocates are concerned  
11 that two schools in the higher need school district  
12 30 and PS 171 and PS 76 in Queens have an economic  
13 need indicator of 93 percent and due to the Leaps  
14 reconstructing did not receive additional seats for  
15 universal after school programs. Has this agency  
16 been aware of those school districts' concerns? Can  
17 the agency explain the process of determining who  
18 received the additional seats?

19 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, thank you for the question  
20 and as you know, since we're in the middle of the act  
21 of procurement and a war process so there are limits  
22 what we can about specific schools at this stage.  
23 But what we can share is that this procurement was  
24 designed to target investments within specific  
25 geographic areas to strengthen continuity of

1  
2 programming and expand services in communities with  
3 great needs.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What measures has the HD  
5 taken to address the mental health and social  
6 emotional learning as SCL programs in the RFP? What  
7 are the qualifications for SCL programs and what type  
8 of trainings will be provided? I know we spent a lot  
9 of time talking about this during our RFP process.

10 DANIEL GUILLEN: Yup, so you know supporting  
11 young people's mental health and social emotional  
12 development is a critical part of the model itself  
13 and we incorporated feedback from CBOs and  
14 stakeholders that strengthen these programmatic  
15 elements. So, this is inclusive of clarifying the  
16 mental health requirements, making social emotional  
17 learning a required content area within the program  
18 design itself.

19 And the RFP also aligns the qualification and  
20 professional development expectations with the New  
21 York State SAC requirements, an inclusive training  
that supports youth with development and social  
emotional learning.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How is the agency measuring  
3 the success of the programs? How will they be  
4 measuring that?

5 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, success is measured by  
6 whether additional seats are directed to the highest  
7 need schools and whether you know the number of high  
8 need schools without free after school option  
9 decreases and whether enrollment and attendance  
10 patterns demonstrate that families are accessing the  
11 new seats.

12 So, we also review provider readiness, program  
13 quality indicators, and feedback from school leaders  
14 and families.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How uhm, how many CBO  
16 provider services and training for their attendees  
17 and what is the budget for middle school Career  
18 Readiness program?

19 DANIEL GUILLEN: Could you repeat that first  
20 part?

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, the first question, I'm  
sorry. I'm starting to merge questions because we  
ran out of time. Sorry about that.

DANIEL GUILLEN: Yeah, I know.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How many CBOs providers  
3 have training uhm, been training - trainings for  
4 their attendees? How many service providers have  
5 been giving trainings for their attendees?

6 DANIEL GUILLEN: So, since we are in the  
7 procurement stage, it's a little bit challenging to  
8 identify like the you and the existing providers that  
9 would be providing these trainings but it is the  
10 expectation that all providers will be doing support  
11 from these areas.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm. The new COMPASS  
13 RFP, the rates for SONIC middle school program were  
14 set at \$3,900 uhm only a \$700 difference from the  
15 \$3,200 rates set ten years ago. Does DYCD have a  
16 model budget that can show the matrix using to making  
17 this decision on how providers will make sure that  
18 those rates work with the mandated program  
19 requirements?

20 NEVITA BAILEY: I think we expand on that. I  
21 think that when it comes to the model budget, that's  
dependent upon the CBO but we can have conversations  
about how that is done, about how the costs are  
determined.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I mean, I have some  
3 legislation that I've been trying to push around  
4 like, I feel like when we put out these RFP's, we  
5 should be doing a model budget so programs could see  
6 what our thinking is behind it because sometimes  
7 these numbers just don't match and it's like, how are  
8 we supposed to do this and so, I think some providers  
9 would appreciate if we could like get an idea of what  
10 you're thinking around like salaries and things like  
11 that of like how they're supposed to make it work.

12 NEVITA BAILEY: We can take that into  
13 consideration for future procurements.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah and not just this -  
15 and I've been doing this - I've been talking about  
16 this for all of them and you know I've been getting a  
17 lot of push back on it but I'm going to start pushing  
18 that legislation again.

19 Uhm, has there been any additional discussion  
20 about bringing back COMPASS Explorers program?

21 NEVITA BAILEY: Well, we have limited resources  
right now Chair Stevens and so.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Not for the babies.

NEVITA BAILEY: I think we have experienced in  
fatherhood in literacy and COMPASS and so, the city

1  
2 is continuing to invest. I'm not sure if we will  
3 have the funding to restore the COMPASS Explorer  
4 program.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I will say this. If  
6 we invest in our kids on the front end, we don't have  
7 to invest in them on the back end and Explorers is  
8 one of those programs that we invest, making an  
9 investment so we don't have to put young people in  
10 detention and again, because those numbers are rising  
11 and it's very costly when kids are in detention. I  
12 think that actually if we're thinking about savings,  
13 we should be providing all the programs, so that  
14 they're not ending up in detention. So, I will  
15 continue to be on my one woman crusade to make sure  
16 we have programming for these young people.

17 I'm going to move into Advance and Earn. Uhm, is  
18 that Val? Is she coming? Is she coming over here?  
19 Don't worry Susan, you're coming up, so HRY is coming  
20 up, don't worry. I don't know why you all keep using  
21 these seats. There's three seats over here. They  
don't like you, Nevita. I don't know what's going on  
with you over there but you must be the mean one or  
something.

1  
2 What is the total budget in Fiscal 2027 for the  
3 Advance Earn learning program?

4 NEVITA BAILEY: Sure, so I'll take that for you  
5 Valerie. Uhm, Advance and Earn program, just give me  
6 one second, I can give you the budget. Advance and  
7 Earn budget in FY26 is \$22 million, in FY27 \$22  
8 million annually.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What are the number of  
10 providers in the Advance and Earn program?

11 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Thank you for that question.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hello.

13 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Nice to see you.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Did we swear you in?

15 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Hmm?

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Did we swear you in?

17 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, great.

19 VALERIE MULLIGAN: And thank you for getting to  
20 workforce development. So, the Advance and Earn  
21 program has five community based organizations who  
collectively run seven distinct programs. There's  
three programs in the Bronx and then one program in  
each other borough.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Has the agency seen an  
3 increase or decrease in the number of young adults  
4 attending the Advance and Earn program and what do  
5 those numbers look like?

6 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yes, we have. I know in the  
7 past we've discussed about how challenging it is to  
8 recruit the OSOW population. We have seen that  
9 number increase. This year we're fully enrolled in  
10 the Advance and Earn program. We have over 1,300  
11 young people who are - our first cohort was in  
12 September. That cohort completed. It was fully  
13 enrolled and then we just started our second cohort,  
14 also fully enrolled and we are excited. We were able  
15 to receive additional resources from ACS, so, we've  
16 expanded the Doors program to be able to serve  
17 referrals who come from ACS. And so, we've been able  
18 to increase that number even more.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. uhm, which boroughs  
20 and districts have the highest attendance rates for  
21 the Advance and Earn?

22 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Alright, so I have it right  
23 here because my team was texting it to me in live  
24 time. The Bronx is 34 percent of our participants,

1  
2 Brooklyn 23 percent, Queens 20 percent, Manhattan 14  
3 percent and Staten Island 9 percent.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Alright, we're going  
5 to go onto Work, Learn and Grow. What is the current  
6 enrollment in Work, Learn and Grow program?

7 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Great so Work, Learn, and Grow  
8 currently has 6,500 young people enrolled with 55  
9 SYEP providers and then an additional 1,190 young  
10 people enrolled through our Learn and Earn providers.  
11 So, we are well over our target goal of 7,000 young  
12 people a year.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What is the current budget  
14 for the program and is it significant? What is the  
15 current budget for the program and what is the  
16 differences?

17 NEVITA BAILEY: Baseline budget for Work, Learn  
18 and Grow was \$30 million.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, what is the  
20 recruitment process for Work, Learn and Grow programs  
21 and how many youth applied for the program in Fiscal  
22 2026?

23 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Sure, so Work, Learn, and Grow  
24 is a direct recruitment program, meaning that our  
25 providers both in the SYEP and Learn and Earn

1 portfolio are identifying young people who  
2 participated in Summer Youth Employment Program. So,  
3 we do this in a couple of ways. We do it through our  
4 Career Ready SYEP model where the providers work  
5 directly with schools that they're partnered with to  
6 identify young people. We do it through our Special  
7 Initiatives Career Ready Program, which as you know  
8 is our emerging leaders in our NYCHA contracts where  
9 our providers are working with their partners in  
10 those spaces to identify young people and then every  
11 young person who enrolled in Learn and Earn, which is  
12 OEO funded in School Youth Program has an opportunity  
13 to participate.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hold on a second. In 2025,  
15 the annual report of 100,000 SYEP reserved for Summer  
16 2026, that included partnership with the city  
17 agencies and CBOs. How many city agencies  
18 participated in the program and how many CBOs  
19 participated in the program?

20 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Sorry, the question was how  
21 many city agencies and how many?

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: CBOs.

VALERIE MULLIGAN: CBOs, so we fund 65 community  
based organizations in the SYEP program but our goal

1 is to have placements in every single city agency. I  
2 can get you the report of how many young people are  
3 placed at each agency.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, that would be very  
5 helpful because that was some of the - I actually did  
6 a bill to support to make sure that uhm, that age  
7 city agencies were actually participating in SYEP  
8 because we found when I came that a lot agencies were  
9 not participating to my surprise.

10 Uhm, so the next question. Does the agency have  
11 a plan to target for SYEP and what does the number  
12 look like?

13 VALERIE MULLIGAN: I don't know why I'm having so  
14 much of a hard time hearing. Can you hear?

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Listen, no, I don't have  
16 both mics. Is that better?

17 VALERIE MULLIGAN: I'll do my best.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, I said, does the  
19 agency have plans to grow the target SYEP program and  
20 what does the number look like if they do?

21 VALERIE MULLIGAN: So, you're talking - does the  
agency have a plan to expand SYEP?

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah.

1  
2 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yes, okay. So, we're about to  
3 approach our 5th summer, reaching 100,000 young  
4 people. That is our goal for the summer. We're  
5 really proud of it. Uhm, as you know the largest  
6 youth employment program in the country and I think  
7 it's something New York City should be really proud  
8 of.

9 Uhm, we do have a really high number of  
10 applications. You know last year's application  
11 number closed at 209,000 and so, we know that there  
12 are young people who apply to the program and don't  
13 get in and in a world of limited resources, we think  
14 really hard about how we maximize the resources we do  
15 have to reach as many of the young people as  
16 possible. So, not only targeting in the ways of like  
17 in NYCHA, in our Emerging Leaders program, but also  
18 thinking about how young people who aren't fully  
19 engaged in the program, if they don't show up are we  
20 able to use those resources to bring another young  
21 person off of the waitlist so that we can really make  
sure we're reaching as many as possible.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, and with all that  
20 being said, uhm, my concern is right now, when we're  
21 looking at youth unemployment rates, we're at 13.2

1 percent and Black Youth specifically are at 23.8  
2 percent and those numbers are really astonishing and  
3 also, we have to understand why Black youth are not  
4 being employed throughout the city.

5 And so, thinking about how are we using those  
6 numbers to really target these populations and to  
7 ensure that they have employment. I mean, my  
8 suggestion is one, we need full year programming  
9 around employment. That's my goal but how are we  
10 even using the programs that we have like Earn and  
11 Learn and SYEP and Work, Learn and Grow to kind of  
12 address these numbers that are showing that young  
13 people are having a hard time finding employment.  
14 And even how are we looking at this 23 percent of  
15 Black youth not having employment?

16 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yeah, that's a great question  
17 and it's something we think about all the time. You  
18 know that through all of our workforce programs, we  
19 have been moving to be as intentional about  
20 recruitment as possible. I do want to share that in  
21 SYEP, 37 percent of our participants are Black and 30  
percent are Hispanic, so I think we do do a really  
good job of doing outreach and these are numbers  
we've seen grow year over year as we're increasing

1  
2 our investments in the special priority populations  
3 and we would have some learn numbers in any one of  
4 our workforce programs and I think there's more we  
5 can keep doing there. So, I agree with you.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I think we have to  
7 definitely be targeted in making sure that we're  
8 constantly looking at those numbers to monitor it and  
9 think about it. Has the agency started conversations  
10 with CBOs and city agencies and other potential  
11 partners in starting our year around employment  
12 program for youth? If so, what would that program  
13 look like if you've had those conversations?

14 Listen, I'm always about dreaming big and if  
15 we're not planning for it, then it ain't going to  
16 happen.

17 VALERIE MULLIGAN: I think we share the same  
18 dream and I think we have it. I think Work, Learn  
19 and Grow is a really impactful and successful model  
20 and I think uh what we want to look at is how we can  
21 leverage the things that we've learned from Work,  
Learn and Grow. Like, the way that we've been able  
to leverage resources from public schools and CUNY to  
expand the offerings within that program in an  
efficient way, which has allowed us to continue to

1  
2 scale and add quality at the same time and I think  
3 that's the place to look because i think that  
4 pipeline of SYEP to Work, Learn and Grow has been  
5 really effective and is something we can continue to  
6 build off of.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Why is there a disconnect  
8 in the number of applications and the number of youth  
9 with jobs? So, there's such a disconnect in how high  
10 the numbers are for the applications or having in the  
11 jobs that they have. Can you talk a little bit about  
12 that and like, what are doing to kind of look at  
13 that?

14 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yeah, uhm, it's a great  
15 question. I think - I think a couple of things. I  
16 think uhm for me personally, it means that the  
17 program has been really successful because we've seen  
18 the number of applications grow exponentially year  
19 over year and of course there is an element of need  
20 that is behind that but there is also an element of  
21 word of mouth and I see this as young people telling  
their friends that if you need a job or a place to go  
over the summer, that SYEP is that place.

So, I'm really proud of that number because I  
think we've done a really good job making SYEP a

1  
2 popular program for young people and it's where they  
3 come. At the same time, I think we all sit with that  
4 really big application number and wonder how are we  
5 ever going to reach the need. I don't think the need  
6 is the full application number. Every year, we have  
7 to make multiple offers in order to fill each slot,  
8 right? But I do know that there are young people who  
9 aren't going to get into the program and so we are  
10 constantly - it's something I've already started  
11 talking to our Commissioner about how we're going to  
12 think about meeting that need.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: DYCD testified that they  
12 uhm, that they have two SYEP evaluations at the  
13 middle of the program and one at the end. What  
14 information does the survey provide? Like, what did  
15 it provide for you guys?

15 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yes, so we implement two  
16 surveys throughout the SYEP program. One towards the  
17 beginning of the program and one at the end of the  
18 program. The one at the beginning of the program,  
19 assesses a young person's experience enrolling in the  
20 program, their orientation experience, their  
21 experience with Hats and Ladders, which is our like  
preemployment curriculum. That's where our financial

1  
2 literacy curriculum is and then at the end of the  
3 program, we're assessing, were you satisfied with the  
4 program? Did you have a good summer? Did you meet a  
5 mentor? Did you meet an adult that you learned  
6 something from? It's a really substantial, lots of  
7 questions. We do it in partnership with our  
8 evaluation team here. And, I will say, my team takes  
9 those surveys really seriously because of their  
10 direct feedback from young people.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is this survey provided to  
12 all folks who attend SYEP or is it like limited to  
13 like a select number? And has the agency - and how  
14 does the agency take uhm that feedback and use that  
15 to continue to roll out and shape the programs?

16 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yeah, uh so the survey is  
17 offered - any young person who participates in the  
18 program is able to take this survey. We do a big  
19 email blast. We remind them. We ask our providers  
20 to reach out to their young people. So, we really  
21 try to get as many responses to the survey as  
possible, and we do take their feedback really  
seriously. I can give you one direct example. Uhm,  
we had heard year over year that one of the concerns  
with the younger youth model is that it was very

1 virtual and we started to see in the data and in  
2 responses from young people that they wanted more in  
3 person, out of their house activity. And so, this  
4 year, we have moved to require that 50 percent of  
5 those programs will be in person as a direct response  
6 to what we were seeing in that survey data.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And especially with the  
8 middle school, did they also talk about the 700,000  
9 stipend that they don't like? Was that some of their  
10 feedback as well?

11 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Uhm, look, I think we believe  
12 in that model as a concept right? We do think that  
13 it's really uhm, it is as a program policy, it makes  
14 a lot of sense that a young person's first experience  
15 isn't good. Like a 14 year old shouldn't have the  
16 same experience as a 24 year old. And so, we believe  
17 in the model. We, you know believe it or not, have  
18 really high satisfaction rates with that model. I  
19 think 95 percent of the participants who responded,  
20 who are younger youth participants, said that we were  
21 satisfied or very satisfied.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: With the \$700?

VALERIE MULLIGAN: With the program overall.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, no I was talking about  
3 the \$700. That's the thing that I'm trying ot -

4 VALERIE MULLIGAN: I hear you.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Come on.

6 VALERIE MULLIGAN: The \$700 is a part of their  
7 overall experience right? And so if you just take a  
8 step back and think about how a young person is  
9 telling us, DYCD, whether they enjoyed the program or  
10 not, we're getting really positive feedback and we  
11 have way more than enough applications to fill those  
12 slots, so it's not like we have a lack of young  
13 people filling those slots.

14 With that said, we are always looking at the  
15 models really closely and talking to our partners at  
16 OMB about where we see areas for improvement.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, let's start with the  
18 \$700. Let's see an area of improvement there because  
19 I think we can laugh about it but we know that a  
20 young person who's 14, 15, how vulnerable they are  
21 and when we uhm offer them \$700 and then other folks  
can offer them \$1,000, they're going to take that and  
I think that that is important and that brings me to  
the next question.

1  
2 Last year, we had a huge scandal around debit  
3 cards and those young people were vulnerable and they  
4 sold it because guess what, if I offered you a \$1,000  
5 for your card and you only gave me \$700, I'm like,  
6 here you go. So, that is a place where we can see in  
7 real time that it is not enough. And so, they can  
8 say they're satisfied with the program but clearly  
9 it's not enough.

10 And so, what are we doing to make sure that - to  
11 ensure that that doesn't happen this year and like  
12 what are next steps? Just to also secure the safety  
13 of young people.

14 VALERIE MULLIGAN: Yeah, look, obviously we were  
15 extremely concerned and if I can even say devastated  
16 about what happened last summer and we moved  
17 immediately. Our priority was first and foremost to  
18 protect the participants and then also to protect the  
19 integrity of the program, which we hold really dear.

20 And so, after we got through the initial kind of  
21 crisis of last summer, we started looking really  
22 closely at all of our policies and procedures. That  
23 summer, we made many referrals to DOI and NYPD and we  
24 have been following all of their guidance but we also  
25 worked with our payroll vendor to assess all of the

1 controls in place to better understand what they are  
2 doing to work with the banks to make sure that  
3 they've put all of the controls that are necessary in  
4 place and you know from my team, our responsibility  
5 at DYCD is also to ensure that we're monitoring our  
6 providers and putting policies in place that they are  
7 able to follow and that we're issuing corrective  
8 action plans where we see any vulnerabilities caused  
9 by our providers. And so, we've been working with  
10 our team at DYCD to implement that. Every safe  
11 measure that we can to protect the program this year.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Uhm, I do know  
13 that last summer, you guys acted very swiftly and was  
14 trying to mitigate the entirety. So, but you know I  
15 always want us to be thinking about how do we prevent  
16 things moving forward because we just don't want that  
17 to happen again. And that is it for you, so thank  
18 you so much.

19 We're going to be talking about HRY, so I'm  
20 assuming Susan will be coming up. Oh, it's not you  
21 anymore. Oh, look at that. Look at this.

WANDA ASCHERL: They're throwing me out there.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, for Fiscal 2027  
Preliminary Plan did not include additional funding

1  
2 for RHY programming. Has DYCD had conversations with  
3 OMB to fund and rightsize those programs?

4 NEVITA BAILEY: Chair Stevens, we're always in  
5 conversations with OMB about rightsizing programs.  
6 Uhm, as you know, we're in a Fiscal crisis and we're  
7 trying to figure out how we can identify savings.  
8 So, we'll continue to have conversations but we're  
9 not there yet.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The Administration provided  
11 baseline funding for \$6 million in FY26 Preliminary  
12 Budget for 100 beds for homeless young adults, ages  
13 21 and 24 at the rate of 49,000 to 50,000 per bed.  
14 The additional beds were a win, so thank you.

15 However, providers are advocating for the rate of  
16 70K per bed to ensure that providers - to provide -  
17 for providers to offer the needed level of services  
18 for RHY requirements. Has the agency had a  
19 conversation with providers for additional funding to  
20 support the ask for 70K per bed?

21 NEVITA BAILEY: We're still working with OMB. I  
think that when it comes to procurement, we have to  
wait for the new RFP and that's why we used the rates  
that we did for those existing 100 beds because they

1  
2 are in the existing contracts that those providers  
3 had.

4 As we transition into the new procurement for HRY  
5 and we determine the cost, we will try to see how we  
6 can increase that rate.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I think that is  
8 really important and listen, no one was loud about  
9 those beds then me and so, you know, I don't want to  
10 take away from the win because I remember our last  
11 OMB Director was like, Althea, every time I give you  
12 something, you come back with a new ask. But, I do  
13 but you know I think we have to make sure that we're  
14 working with providers so that they can provide  
15 quality service as well.

16 What is the current RHY budget and when was the  
17 last budget increase with the expansion of this \$6  
18 million per Fiscal Year?

19 NEVITA BAILEY: Well, all contracts receive  
20 additional funding for ICI and COLA. So, the city  
21 has been making small incremental changes to  
22 providers' baselined funding for a number of years.  
23 Regarding the RHY portfolio, we have not done any  
24 substantial increases to it because we haven't done

1  
2 any new procurements but currently the baseline  
3 budget for the portfolio is about \$63 million.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Can the agency update us on  
5 the status of 100 beds distributed. Where were they  
6 distributed geographically and how many if any have  
7 all been occupied?

8 NEVITA BAILEY: I'm going to defer to Associate  
9 Commissioner Wanda Ascherl.

10 WANDA ASCHERL: Good afternoon. Look at the  
11 time. Uhm, okay, so yes, we allocated 100 beds  
12 across 7 sites. We actually issued a survey to  
13 gather provider interests and we had about one, two,  
14 three, four, five, six - five providers that  
15 responded but again, we were able to allocate 100  
16 beds at 7 sites. 50 of them have already - are  
17 operational. 50 of the beds are already operational  
18 at 4 locations and then, the other 50 are in varying  
19 stages of coming online including OCFS  
20 certifications. Uhm, having the space uhm checked to  
21 make sure that it's safe and then just working with  
the various landlords to make sure that it's  
something that's reasonable for the provider.

And then you asked me about where. Uhm, most of  
the new beds were allocated to Manhattan, Staten

1  
2 Island, and Brooklyn. Uhm, based on the provider  
3 feedback but overall, there are a total of 264 beds  
4 in the Bronx and 293 beds in Manhattan. Those are  
5 the two -

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But that's not for older  
7 youth right? You're just talking about the beds in  
8 general?

9 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes, hmm, hmm.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Could you break it down by  
11 older youth and younger youth?

12 WANDA ASCHERL: Yup, I can. Hmm, hmm. I can  
13 share that. I think uhm, I can share it by crises or  
14 maybe can I share it afterwards?

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. So, I know advocates  
16 are advocating for \$22.1 million from the state  
17 funding for RHY. Uhm if the state does not provide  
18 additional funding will the agency evaluate ways of  
19 providing additional supports for RHY? Especially  
20 for like housing navigators, case managing, uhm, and  
21 if we don't get this from the state, like what are we  
going to do?

NEVITA BAILEY: So, the city has been providing  
additional resources for the RHY portfolio annually  
with the housing navigator, so the financial uhm,

1 support for those providers. So, we'll continue to  
2 assess at the end of every fiscal year and try to put  
3 that finding for the program area.

4 Each year as we identify additional resources in  
5 the agency and our program team identifies the needs  
6 in that area, we give one time increases to that  
7 portfolio to address what the cost there and we did  
8 that during the asylum crisis and as the program team  
9 continues to inform us of issues that they're  
10 encountering, we try to identify funds in the agency,  
11 whether it may be due to increased funding from the  
12 state that comes in and we're able to utilize it for  
13 the portfolio. But when we identify funds in the  
14 program and identify the issues, we try to find ways  
15 to increase the funding for those contracts to  
16 address it.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What type of reporting does  
18 this agency receive from drop in centers and human  
19 services organization shelters and how often?  
20 Reporting, what type of reporting?

21 NEVITA BAILEY: We can get back to you on that.

WANDA ASCHERL: Yeah, okay. Say that again?  
DYCD connect has been how we collect that  
information.

1 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How often?

2 WANDA ASCHERL: Uhm, oh they enter the attendance  
3 regularly and then we have uhm -

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is that the only form of  
5 reporting?

6 WANDA ASCHERL: Currently, yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is that attendance?

8 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What type of reports does  
10 uhm, what is the percentage of young people that have  
11 moved to permanent housing from DYCD out of their  
12 youth shelters?

13 WANDA ASCHERL: Uhm, I don't - okay, we have to  
14 get back to you on that one.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What does the collaboration  
16 look like with other agencies for young adults who  
17 are transitioning into permanent housing?

18 WANDA ASCHERL: So we - the peer navigators, are  
19 really good at kind of like helping a young person  
20 navigate housing and so, that's been working and then  
21 we've been working closely with NYCHA as well as  
looking at vouchers and Section 8 to try and get  
people, young people placed.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The peer navigators, that's  
not in the budget?

3 WANDA ASCHERL: The peer navigator - well, the  
4 peer navigators is not baselined.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I know, that's why I just  
6 said it.

7 WANDA ASCHERL: I know, I know but currently, the  
peer navigators -

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm just happy that you  
9 said that it's working and it's necessary and it's  
10 not in the budget, so let's continue to highlight  
11 that it is necessary and we want it, so you know.

12 Uhm, I'm going to move on to Saturday Night  
Lights.

13 WANDA ASCHERL: That's me by the way.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That's you?

15 WANDA ASCHERL: Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, look at that. Is that  
17 you? Well, alright well you know I've tortured them  
18 enough for four years, so I guess. This is another  
19 program that I do not like and I'm very vocal about  
it. Uhm, and I don't like it not because of theory  
20 but because it doesn't make sense at this point.  
21

1  
2 Does DYCD annual report list an expansion of the  
3 40 new sites of Saturday Night Lights in 2022? How  
4 many sites have been added within the last Fiscal  
Year and where are they located?

5 WANDA ASCHERL: We activated - currently we have  
6 142 sites. Uhm, of which five of the new uh new  
7 sites for the fiscal year - they're in various  
8 stages. I can tell you right now where they're  
located. Uhm, thank you Darryl for this.

9 Uhm, we have in the Bronx, Common Point 42nd  
10 Precinct, we have Brooklyn, the 67th Precinct, East  
11 Flatbush Village is the provider. We have the 46th  
12 Precinct uhm the State Park Bronx, Kevin Shaw Jr.  
Foundation.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, you don't need to  
14 list all of them. I asked like how many and where  
15 are they located, so they're like the breakdown -  
16 because we'll be here a long time and you can send  
over the complete list.

17 WANDA ASCHERL: Alright, alright, alright,  
18 alright, uhm, we have two in the Bronx, one in  
19 Brooklyn, and one in Staten Island.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, there's only been five  
21 additional programs that were added this year?

1 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Has the agency performed  
3 their due diligence to see why the Saturday Night,  
4 like how are you evaluating this program and what  
5 does that look like?

6 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes, so in the Summer of 2024,  
7 uhm, we implemented an exploratory evaluation. We  
8 contracted with a vendor policy study associates and  
9 they gathered feedback from stakeholders, including  
10 to talk about program design, talking about the  
11 benefits to youth and communities, relationships  
12 between young people and NYPD and then we also did  
13 focus groups with SNL leaders. They did site visits  
14 and youth -

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, what did you get back  
16 from this feedback?

17 WANDA ASCHERL: So, some of the feedback was: do  
18 young people feel safe? Uhm, it's a community  
19 resource.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That's what the kids said?

21 WANDA ASCHERL: Well, it was a survey and yeah.  
That was some of the feedback and we can share the  
whole report.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, please and I would  
3 also love to know the kids that gave this feedback.

4 Uhm, does the agency know how often, oh wait a  
5 minute. Has the agency looked into other influencers  
6 to be a part of the program and impose to have a  
7 positive environment and does the agency know how  
8 much overtime was utilized for this program? Uhm,  
9 and I believe they're asking regarding NYPD, how much  
10 overtime was used to support this program.

11 WANDA ASCHERL: I'm not - I don't think - I don't  
12 know the answer to the NYPD overtime but as far as  
13 influencers, uhm, we've in the past, we've worked  
14 with the Mets, the Brooklyn Mets, Yankees, Major  
15 League Baseball, New York Liberty and citywide SNL  
16 activations throughout the year and including in the  
17 summer and they provide uhm, skills and drills,  
18 clinics, and tickets to the games.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Has there been any updates  
20 providing program activities available for those  
21 students with disabilities?

WANDA ASCHERL: So, what I will say is that our  
programs are dedicated to working with youth who have  
various types of disabilities. The goal is to make  
reasonable accommodations that ensure every

1 participant can fully engage in activities. We do  
2 know Chair Stevens, the PS 274, the New American  
3 Academy at Roberto Clemente is a wheelchair bound  
4 basketball program. So, that's like the one that  
5 we've seen.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I know, it's my District.

7 WANDA ASCHERL: Oh.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Alright, I'm going to talk  
9 about adult literacy. Uhm, and then after that we're  
going to go into ONS and CRED.

10 WANDA ASCHERL: That's Darryl by the way.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I know. I figured. He  
must be doing something.

12 So, adult literacy, what is the total uh, what is  
13 the total adult literacy funding added to the  
14 preliminary budget in 2027?

15 Welcome Bobbit, very nice to see you.

16 MIKE BOBBIT: Good to see you.

17 WANDA ASCHERL: So, I'll take the budget question  
Chair Stevens.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

19 WANDA ASCHERL: So, the budget for adult literacy  
20 in FY 27 is \$14.5 million. There is a reduction in  
funding, so in FY26, it is \$28 million and the

1  
2 reduction of funding is primarily associated with the  
3 Council funding that we did during the adopted  
4 budget.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is the funding for DYCD  
6 RFP, uhm, adult literacy contracts added to the  
7 budget through Fiscal 2029?

8 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes, prior to the release of RFP,  
9 we had to have the funding baselined in and then post  
10 that typically during the adopt plan, we would add  
11 additional slots, depending upon how the funding is  
12 awarded.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What is the total current  
14 Fiscal 2026 funding for all adult literacy programs,  
15 DYCD and discretionary funding?

16 WANDA ASCHERL: Total funding in FY26 is \$28  
17 million.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, the New York City  
19 Coalition for adult literacy presented a proposal  
20 with DYCD leadership in last November of calling on  
21 the Mamdani Administration Fiscal 2027 to invest \$20  
million in New York City's adult education funding  
stream. Education for integrity and equality, would  
that - that would provide new seats and unfiltered  
across the adult - I mean of English Language basic

1 education and digital literacy in the high school  
2 equivalency in civics education classes for  
3 immigrants and New Yorkers, new New Yorkers  
4 regardless of their immigrations status. This  
5 investment will be in addition to the \$12 million,  
6 including Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget to continue  
7 to fund DYCD RFP contracted literacy programs. Has  
8 DYCD advocated for this inclusion of the new funding  
9 stream in the new - with the new administration or  
with OMB?

10 MIKE BOBBIT: Thank you Chair for the question  
11 and for recognizing DYCD. DYCD welcomes additional  
12 funding to support adult literacy programs and of  
13 course thanks to the Council for your longstanding  
14 interest and support of it and we're still reviewing  
15 the NYCCAL proposal. We thank NYCCAL and the LAC for  
taking the time to create the proposal.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But did you advocate for it  
17 or because I know you said thank you.

18 MIKE BOBBIT: As was pointed out earlier, the  
19 Commissioner has been here for three weeks, so among  
20 the things that she is assessing, we'll be looking at  
21 the NYCCAL proposal.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay great. Those are our  
3 friends, so let's make sure we look very closely at  
4 that.

5 What measures has DYCD taken to ensure all  
6 protections of individual levels data of student  
7 access, accessing adult literacy uhm are being taken?

8 MIKE BOBBIT: We take participant data and  
9 privacy concerns very seriously and we follow all  
10 city regulations and policies for safeguarding that  
11 data.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, alright, we're going  
13 to move on to ONS. Thank you. Again, I don't know  
14 why everybody just keeps sitting in this one. I just  
15 don't understand. There's three empty seats. It  
16 just makes me crazy. That seat must be high.

17 Alright, Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget headcount  
18 is 49 positions for this program ONS, a vacancy of 21  
19 compared to the Fiscal 2026, January actual of 28.  
20 Why is there a vacancy of 21 in this headcount for  
21 ONS?

ALAN CHENG: Sorry, let me just correct it.  
It's- I believe the 21 is not a vacancy, it's a  
variance from the 49.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

1  
2 ALAN CHENG: The 21 uhm, is I believe the direct  
3 program staff, 22, our direct program staff and then  
4 the rest are housed in different parts of the agency  
5 supporting the contracting, the budgets and all the  
6 other stuff.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is the ONS program fully  
8 operational with a significant headcount?

9 DARRYL RATTRAY: Chair Stevens, on the  
10 programmatic side, yes the headcount is meeting the  
11 need. As you know, we are covering program  
12 oversight, maintaining regular contact with  
13 providers, providing the supports and technical  
14 assistance on route in the streets and on the ground  
15 alongside providers, helping to coordinate where  
16 needed.

17 And a huge thank you to you Chair Stevens and to  
18 your entire team who activated a few ago doing the  
19 teen takeovers at - we activated it in the Bronx and  
20 in Brooklyn. So, I appreciate you and your team.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, they definitely were  
trying to come to my district but I guessed the rain  
stopped them, so you know.

DARRYL RATTRAY: Luckily.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, what open positions do  
3 you have in ONS currently?

4 DARRYL RATTRAY: So, we have two positions in the  
5 programmatic side of ONS. It's the assistant  
6 director for a CMS and then we have one initiative  
7 manager position, which is the equivalent of a  
8 program manager if you will.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How many agencies are DYCD  
10 collaborating on for the Cure Violence program?

11 DARRYL RATTRAY: As part of the crisis management  
12 system, we have 18 organizations that also implement  
13 that cure violence approach.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: A recent report on the  
15 Department of Community Safety mirrors the ONS  
16 program. Is this uhm rebranding of ONS? If so, will  
17 there be changes to implementation and would the  
18 program remain under DYCD?

19 WANDA ASCHERL: We're still assessing that in  
20 partnership with City Hall.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I want to go on the  
record for saying I think that we have moved this  
program around so much, they are our home and I think  
that especially with new agencies coming online, it  
often comes a little out of bumps and they need to be

1  
2 there until things are worked out fully because they  
3 have had a lot of transition and I think that that  
4 has been some of the issue with them. So, I am going  
5 to continue to advocate as that is being flushed out  
6 and thought about, that they are safe with the DYCD  
7 family until it's time to pass off but I really want  
8 us to make sure that we think about what that  
9 transition looks like, because they have had a lot of  
10 transition and I honestly do not feel like it's fair  
11 to those organizations and those people who are doing  
12 the work to have to keep reimagining their work  
13 because they are under new leadership.

14 It's not fair to them, so I just need to go on  
15 record for saying that. So, I'm going to move on to  
16 the CRED program. CRED?

17 NEVITA BAILEY: CRED.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: ALright, CRED. What  
19 percentage of the CRED program supports previously  
20 incarcerated individuals?

21 Oh, you're back. Listen, there's been a lot of  
changes. I don't know who is doing what these days.  
You guys are trying to trick me. What is going on?  
I need an org chart after this.

1  
2 WANDA ASCHERL: No, but this one is mine. This  
3 one sits really solidly in the DYCD Workforce  
4 Development team because uhm, yeah, we've applied  
5 that kind of DYCD framework to this program. But I  
6 do need you to repeat the question because I didn't  
7 hear it.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I know, next time we have  
9 to get you a little thing because I can't hear  
10 either, that's why I have this. What percentage of  
11 CRED programs support previous incarcerated  
12 individuals?

13 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes, so we have had a few cohorts  
14 go through the CRED program right now. The latest  
15 data is that about 30 percent report having been  
16 arrested before.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, does DYCD partner  
18 with city agencies such as DOC, DOP, MOCJ, or  
19 district attorneys? If so, what is the capacity do  
20 you work with them in those other agencies?

21 WANDA ASCHERL: Absolutely. This program was  
always intended to operate in close collaboration  
with all of those that you named. So, we work with  
DOC, with MOCJ, with our CMS, ONS team and their CMS  
network with the Department of VEteran Services and

1  
2 this is everything from my team directly partnering  
3 with our colleagues at those city agencies to share  
4 information about the program and receive direct  
5 referrals. But it's also about training our  
6 providers in the CRED program, who many of them have  
7 their own longstanding relationships with DOC, with  
8 DOP, with all these agencies that you named and are  
9 doing direct partnership to.

10 And so, we have been supporting all of those  
11 efforts, both taking direct recruitment ourselves and  
12 helping our providers make those connections on the  
13 ground.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What metrics are being used  
15 to measure success for the CRED program?

16 WANDA ASCHERL: Yes, love this question. So, of  
17 course we track enrollment, attendance, engagement,  
18 uhm, how many of the participants are doing an  
19 internship and how many hours they're doing but in  
20 CRED, we're also looking really closely at how many  
21 of our participants are obtaining a credential  
through the program and then we are building out our  
capacity to be able to track how many are placed in  
full time employment, on subsidized full time

1  
2 employment, which is the ultimate goal of the program  
3 after they exit the program.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, this is one of those  
5 programs that I know was like talked about a lot and  
6 had a lot of hype around it from our former  
7 commissioner who was really excited about this. And  
8 so, I will make sure that we continue to monitor this  
9 and see how we can continue to collaborate.

10 And with that, how was it? Did I behave?

11 SANDRA ESCAMILLA-DAVIS: You were great.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Alright, I told her, she  
13 was very nervous and I told her I was going to be  
14 very nice for her first hearing and I think I did  
15 that right? I didn't go too - look, even Susan is  
16 clapping and she never claps. So, I know I was nice.

17 Alright, so with that, I have no more questions  
18 for you guys unless you want to share something.

19 Okay, amazing, thank you guys for being here with  
20 us today.

21 PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I will now be moving into  
public testimony. [298:44-301:17]

Alright, I will now open the floor for public  
testimony. Before we begin, I remind members of the

1 public that this is a formal government proceeding  
2 and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As  
3 such, members of the public shall remain silent at  
4 all times. The witness table is reserved for people  
5 who wish to testify. No video recordings or  
6 photography is allowed from the witness table.  
7 Further, members of the public may not present audio  
8 or video recordings as testimony but may submit  
9 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant of  
Arms for conclusion of the hearing.

10 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please  
11 fill out the appearance card with the Sergeant of  
12 Arms and wait for your name to be called. Once your  
13 name is recognized, you will have two minutes to  
14 speak on today's hearing topic, which is the  
15 Preliminary Budget for 2027 Fiscal Year. If you have  
16 written testimony or additional testimony you may  
wish to submit for the recording - for the record.

17 Please provide a copy of the testimony to the  
18 Sergeant at Arms. If you also email written  
19 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72  
20 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings  
21 will not be accepted.

1  
2 When you hear your name, please come to the  
3 witness panel for the first panel. I just want to  
4 remind everybody, we have a lot of people here to  
5 testify and so, I will be very strict with time but  
6 however, you know my rule, young people if they're in  
7 the room, I will be allowing them to speak first.  
8 They will not be timed, so do not feel a type of way  
9 if a young person goes over because what is this?  
10 The Committee on Children and Youth and we will be  
11 supporting the young people but everybody else, you  
12 get two minutes and I will be serious in holding  
13 time, really seriously today.

14 So, thank you because we have an event and so,  
15 want to get through and hear everyone. So, Elizabeth  
16 will call the first panel. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, for the first panel,  
18 we're going to call Kate Connolly, Hizam Wahib - oh,  
19 we have two slips, Sasha Kouptsova, Chanel Staggers.

20 Is that it?

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You can call more people  
up.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yeah, yeah, uhm, I'm also  
going to call Sebastian Vante, and Gregory Brender.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Gregory is coming. You  
3 guys can begin. No rush. You have time. Whoever  
4 can begin.

5 SEBASTIAN VANTE: Good afternoon and thank you  
6 for the opportunity to testify and for your continual  
7 commitment to supporting runaway and homeless youth  
8 across New York City. My name is Sebastian Vante and  
9 I serve as the Associate Vice President of the Street  
10 Work Project at Safe Horizon where we work everyday  
11 with young people navigating homelessness,  
12 trafficking, family rejection and deep systemic  
13 barriers.

14 Safe Horizon envisions a world where safety is a  
15 universal human right and we all share a collective  
16 responsibility to protect and uphold it.

17 The young people we serve are resilient and full  
18 of potential but the system is meant to support them  
19 and must be adequately resourced to meet the moment.

20 I will be submitting my full written testimony  
21 but want to emphasize a few points today. First, we  
urge the Council to restore and expand initiative  
funding that organizations like Safe Horizon rely on.  
We are seeking enhancements to the initiative to  
combat sexual assault, which supports our child

1  
2 advocacy centers and support for persons involved in  
3 the sex trade initiative, which supports street work.

4 We are also requesting continued funding through  
5 the LGBTQIA+ youth support and services initiative,  
6 as well as speakers initiative funding that supports  
7 our work with undocumented and migrant youth seeking  
8 our support.

9 We were disheartened to see cuts to RHY budget  
10 and the Mayor's Preliminary Budget but we are now  
11 hearing that those cuts won't be happening. That is  
12 good news but I will take this time to say the final  
13 budget must include the following: First, we urge  
14 the Admin to increase RHY bed rates, so they  
15 accurately reflect the true cost of operating these  
16 programs in New York City.

17 Second, we urge the city to release the RHY, RFP.  
18 Providers and young people alike need stability.  
19 Delays in procurement create uncertainty for  
20 programs.

21 Third, we ask the Admin to baseline \$1.6 million  
for peer navigators and \$1.6 million for housing  
navigators.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

1                   SEBASTIAN VANTE: These roles have proven  
2 essential to young people finding stability.  
3

4                   Fourth, we must increase the number of beds  
5 available for both young adults, age 21-25.

6                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Time. Told you. We got a  
7 lot to get through, sorry. Sebastian, you know we'll  
8 talk later.

9                   CHANEL STAFFERS: Good morning Chair Stevens and  
10 the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for  
11 the opportunity to testify today. My name is Chanel  
12 Staffers, I am a 25 year old senior at City College  
13 and also a Harlem Native. I became connected to  
14 Anthos Home program as a participant two and a half  
15 years ago and have been a member of the Anthos Home  
16 Speakers Bureau for the past six months.

17                   Today, I'd like to speak on how we can support  
18 young adults aging out of foster care to live and  
19 thrive independently. As I was aging out of foster  
20 care, I began college in January 2020 at 20 years  
21 old, right before COVID to study political science.  
I enrolled into the dorm so I can access stable  
housing and move and to move out of my group home.

I was only 22 years old when I moved into my  
campus dorm and well, when I moved out of my campus

1  
2 dorm, I moved into an off campus apartment that my  
3 scholarship was offering. Unfortunately, I  
4 experienced a dysfunctional and hostile housing  
5 environment and in this situation, I cannot reside  
6 there no more. My initial goal was to finish college  
7 before I got my own apartment but my academics was  
8 interrupted due to my age and since I exhausted all  
9 of my other options, I didn't have any other choice  
10 but to transition and live independently.

11 I reached out to my resources at ACS who helped  
12 me to obtain my housing voucher. Even before I got  
13 my voucher, I looked for months on my own, emailing  
14 brokers, calling landlords, searching street easily  
15 and was not able to find anything.

16 As soon as I mentioned my voucher, I was ghosted  
17 and I was connected with Anthos Home through ACS.  
18 Luckily Athos' home came in a very transitional  
19 moment and gave me actionable steps for what to do  
20 and it felt more reliable than trying to do it  
21 myself. One Anthos Home was the home finder, the  
barriers were removed. I filled out the paperwork  
and got my apartment quickly and was - got approved  
for my second apartment and moved in quickly.

1                   With Anthos Home, I found my apartment and moved  
2                   in two months compared to the months I was searching  
3                   before. I broke out of the repetitive process. It  
4                   was all quicker with more support. The housing  
5                   navigation services were essential. So,  
6                   unfortunately my story is not unique in the City of  
7                   New York. Hundreds of young adults age out of foster  
8                   care every year without long-term stability. Funding  
9                   for specialized support like Housing Navigators  
10                  through Anthos Home, enhances stability for young  
11                  adults in transition.

12                 Since September 2023, Anthos Home -

13                 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

14                 CHANEL STAFFERS: Over 150 youth who aged out of  
15                 foster care, including myself into stable homes.

16                 There is also opportunities for low cost [INAUDIBLE  
17                 309:11] that will ease the burden on young adults  
18                 navigating independently for the first time. Thank  
19                 you for the opportunity to speak.

20                 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. You were  
21                 reading really fast. We appreciate that.

                  CHANEL STAFFERS: You said two minutes.

                  SASHA KOUPTSOVA: Good afternoon Chair Stevens  
                  and the Committee on the Children and Youth. Thank

1  
2 you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is  
3 Sasha Kouptsova and I'm an aftercare specialist at  
4 Anthos Home. We help New Yorkers with housing  
5 vouchers move out of shelter and into permanent  
6 housing as quickly as possible.

7 We are a member of the Family Homelessness  
8 Coalition, Homeless Service United and the Homes, and  
9 the Homes Can't Wait Coalition. Today, I'd like to  
10 speak about how we can address the student and youth  
11 homelessness crisis.

12 Last year, more than 150,000 students experienced  
13 homelessness and 67 percent of students in shelters  
14 were chronically absent. While housing vouchers are  
15 a proven solution to homelessness, they are  
16 dramatically underutilized. The State Comptroller  
17 estimated that only 21 percent of households with  
18 shopping letters get their vouchers approved.

19 Challenges compound for young adults without  
20 support systems and parents managing their children's  
21 needs while living in shelter.

At Anthos Home, we not only see the devastating  
impact of housing instability but also how targeted  
housing assistance can make an enormous difference.  
Our program shows how filling in the gaps in voucher

1  
2 processes eliminates the road blocks youth in family  
3 space. Since September 2023, we've moved more than  
4 1,000 New Yorkers into homes, including over 430  
5 children and 155 youth aging out of foster care and  
6 maintained 100 percent stability?

7 We request funding for a school based housing  
8 pilot that would bring our model to a group of high  
9 need public schools and move all voucher eligible  
10 students and their families out of shelter and into  
11 homes.

12 By pairing NYCPS's communication pathways with  
13 Anthos Homes housing navigation expertise, the pilot  
14 will address a root cause of chronic absenteeism and  
15 student wellbeing housing instability, while reducing  
16 associated costs like busing.

17 There are also opportunities for low-cost process  
18 changes that would ease the burden on youth and  
19 families including streamlining the City FHEPS voucher  
20 package and guaranteeing initial shelter placements  
21 near a child's school.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

19 KATE CONNOLLY: Good afternoon Chair Stevens. My  
20 name is Kate Connolly and I'm a Senior Policy Analyst  
21

1  
2 for United Neighborhood Houses, which represents  
3 Settlement Houses across the state.

4 I want to highlight a few issues today. First,  
5 we ask that the city, both baseline Promise NYC and  
6 increase funding to \$50 million. The success of the  
7 program has driven significant demand and waitlists  
8 for programs across the city have grown and although  
9 we're excited by new investments in childcare across  
10 the state, we want to also emphasize the importance  
11 of this particular model and the care and attention  
12 it gives to the exact families that are mostly to  
13 fall through the cracks of traditional programs.

14 An additional investment would allow the program  
15 to serve more families and expand to additional  
16 providers.

17 Second, we ask that the City Council continue its  
18 investment in adult literacy programming.  
19 Discretionary funding currently sustains more than 60  
20 programs and for some of these programs, it's the  
21 sole funding source for sustaining them. We really  
urge that City Council renew this funding to make  
sure these programs can continue after June.

Third, I want to bring up something that I know  
you brought up today earlier, which is a cornerstone

1 model. As mentioned during your questioning,  
2 cornerstone programs face significant challenges due  
3 to failing NYCHA infrastructure, including the  
4 levying of fines from DOH and FDNY. We're not  
5 anti-inspections. We appreciate that they're based  
6 on regulations that keep participants and staff safe  
7 but there is insufficient communication between the  
8 inspecting agencies and DYCD and NYCHA.

9 Uhm, we really encourage and we think the city  
10 must commit to covering the cost of DOH and FDNY  
11 violation fines for cornerstone community centers,  
12 especially when this issue has already been  
13 communicated to DYCD or NYCHA, so it doesn't come out  
14 of program budgets.

15 And finally, after school with the awards for the  
16 recent COMPASS RFP coming soon, we urge DYCD and MOCS  
17 to properly prepare for this massive undertaking. We  
18 urge the city to review the number of Fiscal Staff at  
19 DYCD and secure funding or additional staff to  
20 prevent a contracting bottleneck. We heard about  
21 some of this today and it sounds great but we want to  
make sure there's plenty of oversight. And then I  
also just want to say I was very excited as I think  
you were to hear the new Commissioner that she'll be

1  
2 looking at alternative models for Summer Rising. We  
3 have a report on this and are happy to share more  
4 with the rest of the Committee. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

5 HIZAM WAHIB: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
6 member of the Committee on Children and Youth. My  
7 name is Hizam Wahib and I'm the Assistant Executive  
8 Director at the Arab American Family Support Center,  
9 also known as AAFSC. Each year, AAFSC serves roughly  
10 20,000 New Yorkers and our staff speaks more than 20  
11 languages. Over 70 percent of our clients were born  
12 outside the United States, many of whom in  
13 historically underserved communities. Our work  
14 focuses on helping families stabilize during  
15 challenging times and build the support they need to  
16 thrive.

15 Today, I want to highlight three initiatives that  
16 are critical to supporting immigrant children and  
17 youth and families across New York City. First,  
18 AAFSC is proud to be a recipient of city's first  
19 readers funding through this initiative. We operate  
20 our caregiver, child bonding circle, accessible  
21 parenting program for caregivers and children ages  
0-3 offered in Arabic and Bangla.

1                   The caregivers we serve are primarily low income  
2 Arab and South Asian women, many of whom face  
3 barriers such as limited formal education,  
4 unemployment, and social isolation.

5                   Also critical to our community is our young adult  
6 youth program serving immigrant and refugee youth,  
7 ages 10-24. At a time when many young people in our  
8 communities face immigration related trauma, rising  
9 hate incidents and the impact of local conflicts,  
10 this program provides a safe space for academic  
11 support, mentorships, civic engagement and mental  
12 health resources.

13                   In 2025 alone, the program served 220 young  
14 people. Finally, through our Adult Literacy Forward,  
15 AAFC provides free adult literacy classes for  
16 immigrant and refugee learners across the five  
17 boroughs and the current climate of height and  
18 anti-immigrant enforcement, these programs also serve  
19 as a trusted space where immigrants can access  
20 services, resources and support without fear.

21                   To continue meeting the growing demand, we  
respectfully request \$10 million for the city's First  
Readers Initiative, 70,000 in -

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

1 HIZAM WAHIB: In discretionary funding for AFSC  
2 caregiving uh, caregiver child bonding circle.

3 100,000 for the -

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Time, thank you.

5 HIZAM WAHIB: Thank you.

6 GREGORY BRENDER: Thank you Chair Stevens for  
7 convening this hearing and for the opportunity to  
8 testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I'm here on  
9 behalf of the Daycare Council of New York. We are  
10 the membership organization of early care and  
11 education providers in New York City and we're  
12 working towards a future where all children have  
13 access to high quality early childhood education and  
14 providers and their workforces have the tools and  
15 resources they need to deliver it.

16 I want to just touch on a few points about early  
17 childhood education in the Prelim Budget. First,  
18 around the Childcare Assistance program, over 10,000  
19 families remain on waitlists for childcare vouchers  
20 through the Administration for Children Services.

21 This leaves many families who are working  
families but struggling to afford childcare, unable  
to access vouchers. Thanks to this Council's push  
last year, there was an increased investment and

1  
2 we're thrilled that there's also an increased  
3 investment from Governor Hochul in her Executive  
4 Budget. However, from what we've been told at  
5 previous hearings, this will only be enough to  
6 maintain care for those families who are currently  
7 receiving vouchers. It will not clear the waitlist.

8 Therefore, we urge the city to both provide  
9 additional funding to support moving families off of  
10 the voucher waiting list and into care and to  
11 immediately connect some families who are on the  
12 waitlist with opportunities to access extended day,  
13 extended year programs in DOE contracted community  
14 based organizations.

15 I also wanted to uhm, echo what Kate was talking  
16 about Promise NYC. This remains a crucial program  
17 and something that provides a service that really is  
18 not available even with some of the expansions to  
19 many families who would not be able to access  
20 childcare assistance under current conditions.

21 We urge the increased investment to \$50 million  
to renew and enhance Promise NYC to both serve more  
families and increase the number of providers who are  
offering access.

1  
2 Finally, in my ten seconds, I'll just go to say  
3 that in the rest of our testimony, we have some  
4 recommendations on how to better support the Early  
5 Childhood workforce.

6 In every setting, whether it is in homebased or a  
7 community based setting -

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

9 GREGORY BRENDER: Work force is underpaid and  
10 underappreciated and the city must take action to  
11 ensure that the staff, whether it's teacher, staff,  
12 directors or home based providers get the help they  
13 deserve.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

15 GREGORY BRENDER: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I don't have any questions  
17 for this panel. Thank you for your time.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next panel, we're going to  
19 call Lisbeth Delgado, Josiah Martinez, Susan Graves  
20 and Ilana Amaro, Sarah Cauperberg and Micharez  
21 Amanzar.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You can get started.

19 MICHEREZ AMANZAR: Hello, oh- Hi, my name is  
20 Micharez Amanzar. I'm the Youth Build Program

1  
2 Manager at Northern Manhattan Improvement  
3 Corporation, short for NMIC.

4 Uhm, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the Youth  
5 Build Program, which is a high school equivalency and  
6 uhm employment readiness training for young adults  
7 ages 17-24 in New York City. Uhm, who support, well,  
8 we support young adults who are out of school and out  
9 of work.

10 We would like to thank uhm, City Council Members  
11 for their previous support and respectively request  
12 the renewal of our Fiscal Year '25, \$350,000 Youth  
13 Build allocation for Fiscal Year '27.

14 I'm honestly going to let my students lead the  
15 way and share their experience, their impact and why  
16 this is important, so.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Great, so go ahead -

18 JOSIAH MARTINEZ: Good afternoon everyone. My  
19 name is Josiah Martinez. I truly appreciate the  
20 opportunity to be here and share part of my journey  
21 with you. I joined Youth Build during a time when I  
knew I needed something different for my life. I  
wanted more structure, more purpose and a clear  
direction for my future. I was ready to grow but I  
also knew I couldn't do it alone.

1  
2 I needed an environment that would challenge me,  
3 support me and hold me accountable. When I made the  
4 decision to join Youth Build, I was looking to gain  
5 practical skills and work toward real goals. What I  
6 didn't realize at the time was how much it would  
7 shape me as a person. The program pushed me to step  
8 outside of my comfort zone. It taught me discipline,  
9 showing up on time, staying consistent and putting in  
10 effort even on days when motivation wasn't there.

11 Something that I've done during this cohort was  
12 obtaining my GED. I competed in the Soapbox Speech  
13 competition, which I am still competing in, received  
14 two certifications, such as customer service and  
15 Microsoft certification.

16 Also, I volunteered for a food pantry at NMIC and  
17 even dressed up as Santa for families served there  
18 around Christmas time. One of the most powerful  
19 parts of this experience has been the sense of  
20 community. Being surrounded by people who are  
21 striving to improve their lives creates a different  
kind of energy. You start to push yourself harder  
because you see others doing the same. You learn the  
value of teamwork, communication and supporting one  
another.

1  
2 Youth Build has influenced my mindset in a major  
3 way. I've gained confidence in my abilities,  
4 strengthened my work ethic, and learned to see  
5 challenges as opportunities for growth instead of  
6 setbacks. I now approach my goals with more focus  
7 and determination. I believe in my potential in a  
8 way that I may not have before. I'm incredibly  
9 grateful for this experience. For the mentors and  
10 peers who supported me and for the lessons that will  
11 stay with me long after the program.

12 Youth Build hasn't just prepared me for a job,  
13 it's helped me prepare for life. Thank you for  
14 giving me a chance to share my story.

15 JADA GLOVER: Good afternoon. My name is Jada  
16 Glover. Thank you Committee. I am a current student  
17 at NMIC Youth Build. Before NMIC, I had no  
18 structure. Now that I have worked with NMIC, I have  
19 seen drastic changes in me personally.

20 Youth Build is a great program for the youth and  
21 I encourage you all to keep funding the program, so  
that I can continue to grow and others too.

LISABETH DELGADO: Good afternoon Committee. My  
name is Lisabeth Delgado. I am a current student at  
Youth Build. My goals are getting my diploma and

1  
2 going to college and Youth Build has helped me with a  
3 lot of my daily struggles. One is being - one is  
4 having social anxiety and the main goal that you  
5 know, Ms. A has tried with me was getting me out of  
6 my comfort zone. It has helped me throughout my  
7 whole struggle with that.

8 Another is, giving me motivation to finish school  
9 and they just keep pushing me to be a better version  
10 of myself on a daily, so.

11 ILANA AMARO: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
12 Ilana Amaro and I am a current student at Youth Build  
13 and I just want to share my experience and it's been  
14 an amazing program so far. I've been able to  
15 understand uhm certain life goals that I've been  
16 wanting to achieve and they've been helping me out  
17 with that, so I really hope that you guys are able to  
18 keep funding the program because it's really good for  
19 the youth.

20 SARAH CAUPERBERG: Hello, I'll close out briefly.  
21 My name is Sarah, I'm a Master's, a Social Work  
Intern with Youth Build NMIC. I have had the  
opportunity to work with a number of these  
exceptional youth joining us today. Through their  
paths and some have experienced in foster care, are

1  
2 facing housing instability, overcoming mental health  
3 issues, and all meeting complex financial and  
4 caregiving demands but with small class sizes, case  
5 management, consistent check-ins, access to  
6 counseling and social emotional learning. Youth  
7 Build is holistic, where it offers a space where  
8 young people can bring their full selves to the  
9 table. The support to process and navigate  
10 challenges, the community to push them out of their  
11 comfort zones and provide reassurance in the autonomy  
12 for candidates to decide what they want to work on  
13 and work towards.

14 So, I won't take up too much of your time but I  
15 just - we ask for your continued support in  
16 recognition of the type of uhm support that this time  
17 of work can bring in young people's lives. Thank  
18 you.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much. Well,  
20 I'm a huge supporter of Youth Build and thank you  
21 guys for joining us today and I hope that wasn't too  
much for your guys. Appreciate you. I have no  
questions for this panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: For the next panel, we're  
going to call Isabella Perez, Leanna Ellison(SP?),

1  
2 Kiana Braveboy, Bennett Kov(SP?), Melena  
3 Benmergy(SP?) and Jonah Billy and Jasmine Reed  
4 Cordero(SP?).

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, so those folks aren't  
6 here. We're going to call some more folks then.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, can you give me a  
8 minute?

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, they're not here. So,  
10 let's add more for this panel.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. Uhm, Kaveh Safehouy,  
12 Sophia Shi, Ira Yankwitt, Teresa Alk.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You have to press the  
14 button.

15 So, sorry.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, you're totally fine.

17 KIANA BRAVEBOY: Good afternoon members of the  
18 Committee. My name is Kiana Braveboy and I am a  
19 proud member of the Lower East Side. Thank you for  
20 allowing me to speak about my opportunities while I  
21 was there.

When I first started out at Girls Club, I was  
very timid, introverted, nervous and I didn't go out  
much. I kept to myself most of the time and I was in  
my Senior year of 8th Grade. So, I have come a long

1 way since then. During the summer of Girls Club is  
2 when I began to open up more. More of the staff  
3 members began noticing me, which is something that  
4 never really happened. I got more opportunities and  
5 chances to speak out. They were interested in what I  
6 actually had to say and that made me really happy  
7 because when growing up, not many people listened to  
8 little girls like me because at the end of the day,  
9 they saw us as little girls. Girls Club really  
changed that for me.

10 With funding cuts and due to - with funding cuts,  
11 they have to limit their programs and they are not  
12 able to support as much - to support us as females as  
13 much as they want to support us, which hurts because  
14 uhm, if there is no support for Girls Club, I fear  
15 that there won't be as many girls and growing women  
16 like me to speak up and have fun and enjoy  
themselves.

17 The less and less I'm able to go to Girls Club, I  
18 think the more and more I feel myself going back into  
19 that shell. I want everybody to have a chance, more  
20 girls, to have a chance to have a chance to have that  
safe space to allow themselves to open up and be free

1  
2 and just unleash themselves in the best and most  
3 positive way possible.

4 Uhm, I - we are requesting a \$50,000 funding  
5 enhancement per Stars, as an organization to  
6 strengthen staffing systems and as well as  
7 operational infrastructure needed in Girls Club,  
8 which would also increase from \$100,000 to \$150,000  
9 for the Stars, in addition to \$125,000 for New Girls  
10 City.

11 There are several stories that are not just me  
12 but every girl around the world and I really hope  
13 that you consider this. Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much for being  
15 on this panel. You did great.

16 IRA YANKWITT: Good afternoon Chair Stevens. My  
17 name is Ira Yankwitt and I'm the Executive Director  
18 of the Literacy Assistance Center. I'm also a proud  
19 member of the New York City Coalition for Adult  
20 Literacy.

21 Currently, there is approximately \$103.5 million  
in federal, state, and city funding for adult  
literacy education in New York City. Over \$24  
million of this funding comes from the Federal  
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title 2.

1  
2 The Trump Administration had called for the complete  
3 elimination of this funding in the FY26 Federal  
4 budget and may do so again in FY27. In the meantime,  
5 the Trump Administration is seeking to exclude  
6 students from federally funded adult literacy  
7 classes, based solely on their immigration status.

8 Approximately \$1.7 million of the 2.2 million  
9 adults in need of Adult Literacy Services in New York  
10 City are immigrants. As are over 75 percent of  
11 current adult literacy students. Such restrictions  
12 could have a devastating effect on our immigrant  
13 communities. In response, and as you noted earlier,  
14 NYCCAL is calling on the Mayor to invest \$20 million  
15 in a new city adult education funding stream,  
16 education for integration and equity, that would  
17 provide new seats and unfettered access to English  
18 language, basic education, digital literacy, high  
19 school equivalency and civics education classes for  
20 immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.

21 This investment would be in addition to the \$12  
million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to  
continue to fund DYCD RFP contracted adult literacy  
programs.

1  
2 NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to  
3 increase Council discretionary funding for adult  
4 literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million  
5 and to consolidate the two current Council  
6 discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under  
7 Adult Literacy Forward.

8 City Council discretionary adult literacy funding  
9 has become vital to the 63 CBOs, CUNY Colleges and  
10 library programs that receive it. Increasing the  
11 funding by \$3.5 million would enable these programs  
12 and potentially others to serve a thousand more  
13 adults in need. Thank you very much for the  
14 opportunity to testify.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you for being under  
16 two minutes.

17 KAVEY SAEHOUY: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
18 members of the Committee. My name is Kaveh Safehouy.  
19 I'm the Executive Director of Lismeth Center for  
20 Adult. A founder of literacy partners and a proud  
21 member of the New York Coalition for Adult Literacy.

As the Council continues to focus on literacy  
reform, I want to emphasize that New York City's  
literacy crisis is a two generational one. The focus  
on children is critically important and necessary but

1  
2 if we want to truly address literacy gaps across the  
3 city, we also have to invest in the parents and  
4 caregivers raising those children.

5 Right now more than 2.2 million adults in New  
6 York City have limited English proficiency or don't  
7 have a high school diploma and only two to three  
8 percent of those families are being served right now.  
9 That's why we are joining and calling for the Mamdani  
10 Administration to invest \$20 million in a new city  
11 adult education funding stream. Education for  
12 integration and equity that Ira spoke about and you  
13 had mentioned previously. Uhm and I just want to  
14 share a quick story that one of our students in our  
15 class has asked to share.

16 When adults build their literacy, English  
17 Language and advocacy skills, the benefits don't stop  
18 with them. Those skills strengthen their families,  
19 improve child outcomes, and help build healthier more  
20 connected communities. I want to highlight two  
21 generational impacts with a story of one of our  
students Yusnia(SP?) who asked us to share her  
experience in spaces where decisions are made that  
affect families like hers.

1  
2 Yusina was detained in a routine immigration  
3 status appointment and separated from her husband and  
4 child who has autism spectrum disorder for five days.  
5 She told us, in the detention center, everything was  
6 in English and everyone spoke English. I became the  
7 translator for the friends I had made from other  
8 countries who were also detained. Helping them  
9 communicate their basic needs because they didn't  
10 know how to speak for things in English, even  
11 sometimes as simple as water.

12 With a little English I learned in these classes,  
13 I was able to help them get the necessities they  
14 needed. That experience gave me the confidence to  
15 speak without fear, not only to advocate for myself  
16 but also for others who had no way to communicate.

17 That confidence and those skills were built in  
18 part in the free parent focus ESL classes and she  
19 felt English was one of the determining factors that  
20 allowed for her release.

21 Yusnia's story is a reminder that we invest in  
adult literacy. We're also investing in children, in  
family stability -

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

1  
2 KAVEY SAEHOUY: In the strength of our  
3 communities. Thanks for your attention. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

5 SOPHIA SHI: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
6 members of the Committee. My name is Sophia Shi and  
7 I am a Program Coordinator here - uh, sorry, at  
8 Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York  
9 Inc., KCS. As a nonprofit organization, it has been  
10 providing a multitude of services to underserved  
11 communities across New York City for over 53 years.  
12 In addition KCS is also a proud member of the - of  
13 NYCCAL.

14 At KCS, we have seen first hand the importance  
15 and positive impact of adult literacy classes in our  
16 community. Recently, I spoke of a student who had  
17 been attending our ESL classes for over a year. Her  
18 initial goals were to improve her vocabulary and grow  
19 more confident in speaking with her community  
20 members. She is now pursuing a career in translation  
21 with hopes to travel around the country.

We've continuously seen students go above and  
beyond during initial close, whether it's in their  
careers, education or personal aspirations. Our  
adult literacy services have expanded over the years

1  
2 to meet increasing demand, however, like others, our  
3 resources are limited.

4 NYCCAL is calling on the City Council to increase  
5 Council discretionary funding for adult literacy  
6 education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to  
7 consolidate to two current Council discretionary  
8 initiatives for adult literacy and - under adult  
9 literacy forward. Our City Council discretionary  
10 adult literacy funding is indispensable for over 60  
11 programs and their communities across New York City.

12 As the demand for adult literacy rises, current  
13 funding leaves thousands of New Yorkers in need. An  
14 additional \$3.5 million in funding would help these  
15 programs reach the gap.

16 It is crucial to demonstrate to our community  
17 members that their interests have not been ignored by  
18 increasing funding for these essential programs.  
19 Thank you for your attention and consideration.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

21 TERESA ALK: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
members of the Committee. My name is Teresa Alk and  
I'm the Director of Education at KCS. As my  
colleagues here have just mentioned, KCS is a proud  
member of NYCCAL.

1  
2 For over 20 years, KCS has provided adult  
3 literacy classes through city funding. Each year,  
4 the steady increase in both our student body and the  
5 number of classes offered stands as a testament to  
6 the success of our ESOL program and the ongoing need  
7 for adult literacy services in our communities.

8 To best accommodate our students' busy schedules,  
9 we operate in person and virtual classes Monday  
10 through Saturday with flexible morning, afternoon,  
11 and evening classes. The impact of these classes can  
12 not be overstated. Our students are driven by a  
13 desire to engage deeply with their communities and  
14 neighborhoods, communicate effectively with family  
15 members, advocate for their children, particularly  
16 within the education system, ensuring they can stand  
17 up for their rights as parents, foster independence,  
18 reducing their reliance on others for daily tasks,  
19 give back the volunteering and civic participation.

20 Your continuous support has been the catalyst for  
21 these transformations allowing our students to lead  
truly empowered lives. And as everyone has  
mentioned, we are asking for the similar increases  
for NYCCAL. City Council, discretionary, adult  
literacy funding is vital not only to KCS and the

1 communities we serve but to over 60 programs across  
2 New York City, consolidating all City Council Adult  
3 Literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy  
4 Forward would streamline the system. I have seen  
5 first hand the transformative impact of adult  
6 literacy education on our communities. It is time to  
7 show our students we have their backs, not just with  
8 words but with a necessary increase in funding.  
9 Thank you for your attention.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I don't have  
11 any questions for this panel. Thank you for your  
12 time. Next panel please.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Gerald Kimbrough, Eddie Van,  
14 Gregory Ellis, Jeanette Bokanegra (SP?), Alex  
15 Griffeth (SP?), Messiah Ramkisson.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You could start.

17 MESSIAH RAMKISSOON: Good afternoon Chair  
18 Stevens. My name is Messiah Ramkisson and I serve  
19 as a Deputy Executive Director of Youth Justice  
20 Network, formerly known as Friends of Allen Academy.  
21 Our citywide youth advocacy model serves as the  
bridge between young people returning home to  
marginalized communities within the five boroughs of

1  
2 New York City and their respective needs to support  
3 healthier lives and sustainable pathways.

4 The thesis of my message focuses on the  
5 importance of accessibility as it relates to  
6 intervention and resources and the needed investment  
7 to support such infrastructure within the  
8 neighborhoods our young people call home. Our work  
9 at Youth Justice Network prioritizes proximity and  
10 tangibility as two critical components to eradicate  
11 cycles of recidivism but most importantly providing  
12 doorways to opportunities that can empower healthier  
13 outcomes.

14 In 2016, we created a system of aftercare called  
15 the Youth Reentry Network, which was catalyzed by our  
16 youth advocacy model. This network ensured that  
17 every young person entering the doors with new  
18 admissions within Rikers was attached to a youth  
19 advocate from the first day of incarceration to the  
20 day of release, inclusive of but not limited to  
21 outcomes around housing and employment, education and  
mental health. The youth plans created with young  
people and their advocates during detention were  
actualized immediately upon discharge. We learned

1 that young people are more responsive to a model  
2 built on trust, rather than one built on mandate.

3 In partnership with the Mayor's Office of  
4 Criminal Justice and the Department of Corrections,  
5 we implemented this initiative within four facilities  
6 on Rikers where teams and young adults of all genders  
7 were housed. Our services also followed our  
8 adolescents who were transferred to ACS custody post  
9 Raise the Age. However, due to an unexpected yet  
10 impactful COVID budget cuts, we were coerced into a  
11 70 percent layover of staff.

12 I must also add that due to the pandemic, the  
13 jail shut their doors to all service providers  
14 removing this lifeline of support from our young  
15 people. We knew this was the worst time for youth  
16 coming from inequitable conditions in communities to  
17 be disconnected from the urgent support systems that  
18 ensure their wellness.

19 This is when we created shifting gears -

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

21 MESSIAH RAMKISSOON: A mobile resource center  
which strives into a different borough each day of  
the week. We've seen an impact with this bus with  
over 65 percent enrollment in all five boroughs and

1 young people having accessibility with the resources  
2 meeting them on the blocks of the neighborhood.

3 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

4 MESSIAH RAMKISSOON: Thank you.

5 GREGORY Ellis: Good afternoon Council. My name  
6 is Gregory Ellis. I'm a Youth Development  
7 Coordinator for Youth Represent and today, I was  
8 asked to speak here. And my biggest thing was asking  
9 myself if we're serious about this work. How do we  
10 keep our young people safe and reduce gun violence in  
11 these neighborhoods?

12 I've been doing this work for over ten years now  
13 and I run across a lot of programs that are not being  
14 funded, such as Youth Represent. We are not being  
15 funded by the city and we advocate for bills. We are  
16 also trying to help these youth with SEL, which is  
17 Social Emotional Learning and we do programs every  
18 night with these youth. We give them a safe place to  
19 stay and talk and have their fun there but at the  
20 same time, these nonprofits in our organizations is  
21 not being funded by the city.

So, we are asking to be funded by the city.  
Thank you.

1                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Thank you for  
2 being under two minutes.

3                   GERALD KIMBROUGH: Good afternoon Chair Stevens  
4 and essential members of the Committee on Children  
5 and Youth. My name is Gerald Kimbrough, I'm an  
6 Associate Director of Community Safety at Bronx  
7 Community Justice Center, which is part of the Center  
8 for Justice Innovation.

9                   The Bronx Community Justice Center is one of the  
10 center's 35 project sites and serves as a hub for the  
11 public safety youth opportunities and neighborhood  
12 investment in the South Bronx. Through violence  
13 prevention, youth development and workforce  
14 initiatives, we tackle - excuse me, we tackle root  
15 causes of violence while expanding opportunities for  
16 young people and their families. We are asking for  
17 an investment to help scale our programming, so that  
18 the Bronx can have a fully scaled community justice  
19 center.

20                   Further, the center also operates Save our  
21 Streets, which is SOS. The crime management system  
in the South Bronx, Crown Heights, and Bedford  
Stuessant. Also, through the Rise program, we also  
address the intimate partnership in violence and gun

1 violence by helping young people build healthy  
2 relationships and solutions. Uhm, thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Look at this  
4 panel. Appreciate it.

5 ALEX GRIFFITH: Alright, thank you. Thank you  
6 Speaker Menin. Chair Stevens and members of the  
7 Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity  
8 to testify today. My name is Alex Griffith and I'm  
9 the Senior Director of Programs in core partnerships  
at Exalt Youth.

10 Exalt serves our court involved youth ages 15-19  
11 year around. Many of the young people that we work  
12 with are chronically disengaged from school, over  
13 aged and unaccredited. And in some cases, reading at  
14 the fourth grade reading level. These are young  
people who too often have been written off.

15 At Exalt, we take a different approach through a  
16 model that combines skill building classes, paid  
17 internships earning \$18 to \$20 an hour, and a strong  
18 alumni network. We help young people build the  
19 skills, confidence and the real world experience they  
need to move forward in life.

20 And the results are clear Committee. 95 percent  
21 of Exalt alumni do not recidivate. 98 percent are on

1 track to graduate by the age of 20 and 100 percent of  
2 our graduates leave Exalt more employable and ready  
3 for the world of work.

4 These outcomes represent real savings and for our  
5 city and state. The estimated annual cost to  
6 incarcerate a young person as we know, 266,000 to as  
7 high as 892,000 per year. By comparison, Exalt's  
8 model is 18 to 60 times as expensive. While  
9 producing far better outcomes for young people in our  
10 communities. Exalt is also a proud member of the ATI  
11 Coalition in the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice  
ATI portfolio.

12 Alongside our partners across the city, we are  
13 urging the Administration to restore and expand  
14 funding for ATI and reentry services at MOCJ by \$24.6  
15 million above the preliminary budget. The ATI and  
16 Reentry Coalition is also requesting an additional  
\$2.4 million from the City Council to support uh,  
these initiatives.

17 Finally, Exalt is happy to serve as a resource to  
18 the Council and city agencies as we work together to  
19 expand opportunity to young people across New York  
20 City. Thank you for your leadership and your  
21 commitment to young people in New York City.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I was giggling  
3 because uhm, I used to work with Gerald Kimbrough for  
4 a lot of lot of years and he called me Chair Stevens.  
5 So, now I want to address him as Chair Stevens moving  
6 forward. I wanted to say that for the record but  
7 thank you guys for being here today and I appreciate  
8 all the work that you are doing. Thank you.

9 PANEL: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: For the next panel, we're  
11 going to call Amanda McCarthy, Yessenia Serra, Derek  
12 Carter, Lakeraj Gangadin, and Rebeca Chennalier.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You can get started.

14 YESSENIA SERRA: Good afternoon, my name is  
15 Yessenia Serra and I'm the Adult Literacy Intake and  
16 Data Coordinator at Make the Road New York.

17 Make the Road is the largest grassroots immigrant  
18 organization in the state serving 30,000 immigrant  
19 and working class New Yorkers a year. The majority  
20 of them are in New York City. Based at our centers,  
21 in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island, we support New  
Yorkers to resolve immigration legal issues by  
landlord harassment when back stolen wages, access  
healthcare, improve their English, express themselves  
through youth arts programs and more.

1  
2 Thank you Chair Stevens and the City Council for  
3 your support of our legal health adult education and  
4 art services and thank you to DYCD for partnering  
5 with us.

6 Make the Road's English and civics classes  
7 support adult immigrants to navigate everyday life  
8 and achieve their goals by obtaining better jobs,  
9 gaining work authorization and citizenship.  
10 Enforcing workplace rights and helping their children  
11 in school, these New Yorkers need the city's support  
12 more than ever, especially given the federal  
13 administration's attacks and the dramatic cuts it has  
14 threatened to funding that the city relies on for  
15 adult literacy.

16 We request that the Council renew \$449,637 for  
17 Make the Road Under the Adult Literacy Forward  
18 initiative to expand the initiative to \$18 million  
19 and consolidate all Council discretionary funding  
20 under Adult Literacy Forward. Funds from Adult  
21 Literacy Forward enhance our English and citizenship  
classes for adults with integrated Know Your Rights  
education to empower community members to navigate  
daily life with confidence and security.

1  
2 This is in addition to NYCCAL's call for a new  
3 \$20 million adult ed funding stream, education for  
4 integration and equity to expand access. Thank you  
5 for your time.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

7 LAKERAJ GANGADIN: Good afternoon and thank you  
8 for giving me the chance to speak. My name is  
9 Lakeraj. I am here to share how Forestdale Strong  
10 part uhm - Strong Fathers Program changed my life and  
11 family. Before I came to Forestdale, I was angry,  
12 frustrated and lost. I did not have custody or  
13 visitation with my child. I did not know who to turn  
14 to.

15 The court and friends recommended the Strong  
16 Father's Program and I joined even though I didn't  
17 want to be there at first. I thought nothing could  
18 help my situation. As I engaged with the program, my  
19 class facilitator helped me shift how I looked at  
20 everything, teaching me to focus on the positives and  
21 seeing things from my daughter and her mothers point  
of view. My father and specialist pushed me to  
challenge my old ways of thinking and put my child's  
need first, not my anger or frustration. One of the

1  
2 biggest changes for me was learning how to co-parent  
3 with another parent that didn't want to engage.

4 Before I would argue and push, it only made  
5 things worse. Once I started listening and  
6 responding to my partners concerns instead of  
7 reacting out of anger, everything calmed down. My  
8 daughter was more at peace. My partner was more at  
9 peace, and communication finally improved. My  
10 relationship with my daughter is completely different  
11 now. At one point, she was calling me uncle instead  
12 of dad. It was hurtful but through the program, I  
13 learned to understand instead of getting angry, uhm,  
14 sorry - over time, our bond grew and today, she calls  
15 me dad.

16 That alone tells me how powerful this program is.  
17 This is why the program like Strong Fathers and  
18 Strong Mothers need continued funding. They help  
19 parents who are struggling with real issues, mental  
20 health communications and staying connected to their  
21 child.

I even referred friends to the program because of  
how much it helped me. There were moments where I  
wanted to give up but the program stood by my side

1 supporting me and helped me become the best version  
2 of myself.

3 Thank you for listening to me.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

5 AMANDA MCCARTHY: Good afternoon Chair Stevens  
6 and members of the Committee on Children and Youth.  
7 My name is Amanda - oh, it's not on? Oh sorry.

8 Hi my name is Amanda McCarthy. I am the Senior  
9 Director and Youth Policy Lead at CASES. At CASES,  
10 we believe that too many futures are cut short by  
11 unnecessary incarceration. Last year, we served over  
12 12,000 New Yorkers including 741 young people.

13 Our programs prevent young people from  
14 experiencing the trauma of incarceration and support  
15 their personal goals for education, employment,  
16 health, housing, and promote mental wellbeing through  
17 clinical and case management services.

18 Access to community based programs is critical to  
19 divert young people from entering or furthering their  
20 involvement in the criminal legal system. The Fiscal  
21 Year '27 budget must support the planned expansion of  
our ACES program with ACS investing \$10.1 million for  
persistent compassionate outreach and engagement for  
those most at risk of court involvement or violence.

1  
2 ACES works to divert young men, especially those  
3 that are disconnected from school, community and  
4 employment opportunities from the criminal legal  
5 system. Through persistent outreach intensive  
6 mentorship and meeting participants in material  
7 immediate needs, are credible messenger staff build  
8 trust in meaningful relationships with participants.  
9 With this strong foundation, participants share goals  
10 and actively engage in their own development.

11 Uhm, they participate in paid employment  
12 services, pursue high school equivalency courses and  
13 engage in work readiness. 86 percent of all  
14 participants successfully avoid rearrest. Expanding  
15 ACES to serve more young people in the Bronx, Central  
16 Harlem and Brooklyn comes at a critical time.  
17 Funding does not meet demand and more young people  
18 are becoming caught up in the criminal justice system  
19 and detained in juvenile justice facilities. ACES  
20 programs have proven that today's young people need  
21 targeted persistent and compassionate support, not  
detention or isolation from family or the community.

We encourage the Council to invest further into  
community-based programs that involve youth by  
doubling the funding for the Council's Court Involved

1  
2 Youth Mental Health Initiative. This initiative  
3 supports mental health services for 3,000 young  
4 people.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

6 AMANDA MCCARTHY: And uhm, we appreciate the  
7 city's commitment to helping New Yorkers avoid  
8 incarceration. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

10 DEREK CARTER: Thank you Chair and members of the  
11 Children and Youth Committee for the opportunity to  
12 speak today on behalf of Forestdale Incorporated.  
13 For more than 172 years, Forestdale has dealt with  
14 Queens families during their most challenging  
15 moments, ensuring that children grow up safe,  
16 supported and surrounded by the people who love them.

17 Today, the message I bring is simple and urgent.  
18 Prevention works and wraparound support keeps  
19 families together. Across Queens, parents are  
20 navigating enormous pressures, economic instability,  
21 housing insecurity, trauma, and limited access to  
22 mental healthcare. These stressors don't just drain  
23 households, they increase the risk of child welfare  
24 involvement.

1  
2 But when families receive the right support  
3 early, crises can be prevented, long before they  
4 reach the point of separation. Forestdale Strong  
5 Mothers and Strong Fathers programs are two of the  
6 most effective prevention tools in our borough.

7 Together they reach nearly 600 parents and up to  
8 1,000 children each year. These programs rebuild  
9 attachments, strengthen parenting skills and  
10 stabilize families experiencing conflict, domestic  
11 violence or emotional distress. The results are  
12 powerful. In Fiscal Year '24 and '25 fathers in our  
13 program saw a dramatic increase in engagement and  
14 financial support for their children and mothers  
15 reported improved emotional stability, safer home  
16 environments, and stronger bonds with their infants  
17 and toddlers. These are everyday victories that keep  
18 children safe at home. Our broader family  
19 strengthening services show the same pattern, 95, 97  
20 percent of children in our prevention programs remain  
21 safely with their parents. 94 to 95 percent of  
children in foster care achieve strong willed-beings  
outcomes. These members tell a clear story. When we  
invest in prevention and wrap around supports,  
families stay intact and children thrive.

1  
2 Parents consistently tell us they want to  
3 succeed. They simply need community rounded  
4 culturally responsive practical support delivered in  
5 their neighborhood schools, shelters, and online.

6 Forestdale is committed to meeting them where  
7 they are.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

9 DEREK CARTER: To continue this work, we  
10 respectfully request the Council continue investment  
11 in our parenting program including \$200,000 for the  
12 discretionary funding that sustains and expands these  
13 services. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

15 REBECCA CHENNALIER: Good afternoon. I'm Rebecca  
16 Chennalier, Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society.  
17 Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of  
18 the Community Justice Unit. An essential piece of  
19 the Crisis Management System that has worked  
20 tirelessly to address the systemic issues of gun  
21 violence, gang related harm and public safety in the  
most underserved communities throughout New York  
City. The need for sustained and restored funding  
for CJU is not a financial matter. It is an  
investment in the future and safety of the city, a

1 commitment to upholding justice, effective gun  
2 violence prevention and an essential step in  
3 maintaining the trust and care of the communities we  
4 serve. CJU is more than a legal service provider,  
5 it's a vital force in the fight for restorative  
6 justice within the Crisis Management System. CJU  
7 supports and uplifts marginalized communities by  
8 providing crucial legal services to high risk youth,  
9 families and community members. CJU's legal services  
10 are foundational to the success of violence  
11 interruption and preventative strategies. It  
12 provides community members with access to legal  
13 resources they need addressing the longstanding  
14 barriers to justice that have disproportionately  
15 impacted them.

16 As CMS expands to over 40 sites across 31  
17 neighborhoods, the demands for CJU's legal services  
18 grow. The ongoing \$1.5 million cut in funding to CJU  
19 equals 56 percent reduction of services to the most  
20 vulnerable populations of New York City. It's  
21 devastatingly impacted legal services providing and  
is having a direct adverse impact on our ability to  
sustain prior service levels. It disrupts essential  
services, not limited but including our legal

1  
2 clinics, Know Your Right and community events and  
3 sends a message that our most vulnerable communities  
4 are not a priority.

5 It undermines the very framework of the crisis  
6 management system. Data from the New York City  
7 Council data team supports and demonstrates the  
8 tangible success of the cure violence model with an  
9 18.1 reduction in shooting in the first year and  
10 sustained reduction in subsequent years. Community  
11 based organizations within the CMS consistently  
12 emphasize CJU's legal services as indispensable in  
13 their work to prevent violence and promote public  
14 safety.

15 In closing, restoring the funding to the  
16 community justice unit is not just about maintaining  
17 a service. It's about reaffirming our commitment to  
18 access legal services -

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

20 REBECCA CHENNALIER: To the most high risk  
21 committee. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you to this panel,  
uh.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: For the next panel, I'm going  
to call Jahad Hayle, Expanded Schools, Caitlyn

1  
2 Passaretti, Galloway, Joshua Castillo, Trenton Price,  
3 May Depierro.

4 GALLOWAY: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
5 Members of the Children and Youth Committee. Thank  
6 you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is  
7 Galloway. I'm here to represent the Ali Forney  
8 Center, which is the largest provider of housing and  
9 services for LGBTQ runaway and homeless youth in this  
10 country. Every day our staff and partner providers  
11 across the city meet young people who have nowhere  
12 safe to sleep. Many have been rejected by their  
13 families, pushing out foster care placements or  
14 forced to leave unsafe homes. The runaway and  
15 homeless youth system is often the last safety net  
16 providing services that keep youth from entering in  
17 the adult shelter system and out of street  
18 homelessness. Yet the system remains severely  
19 underfunded.

20 First, we want to urge the Council to increase  
21 the RHY bed rate to accurately reflect the true cost  
of operating beds. Thank you Chair Stevens for  
mentioning that earlier. So, providers can be asked  
to do more with what they have instead of less of



1 vouchers. Thank you so much for my time today and I  
2 truly appreciate all the ways that you show up Chair  
3 Stevens and the Committee as a whole.

4 JAHAD HAYLE: Thank you Chair Stevens and the  
5 Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity  
6 to testify here today. My name is Jahad Hayle, I'm  
7 Director of External Affairs at Expand Ed Schools.  
8 Expand Ed Schools is dedicated to ensuring that all  
9 young people in New York City have access to  
10 enriching programs that affirm their identities,  
11 teach them valuable skills, and spark new  
possibilities in and out of the school day.

12 We are a youth serving intermediary that supports  
13 direct service community based organizations across  
14 the five boroughs, cultivating partnerships between  
15 schools, and communities to deliver high quality  
16 programs. For more than 20 years, we've invested  
17 City Council funds into the CBOs to provide  
18 essential afterschool services, professional  
development, and support for site directors across  
the five boroughs.

19 In FY 25 alone, we funded programs in 39 Council  
20 Districts, supporting approximately 5,800 students,  
21 731 educators and 96 CBOs. Since our inception, we

1  
2 have served more than 1.6 million public school  
3 students, the vast majority of them young people of  
4 color living in low income communities.

5 I would like to thank the Council, this  
6 Committee, Chair Stevens, and DYCD for the \$4 million  
7 investment at the school enrichment last year. We  
8 are proud of what we were able to do with this  
9 partnership with the Council through \$4 million at  
10 the School Enrichment Citywide Initiative awarded in  
11 FY26.

12 Our subgrants help our program, strengthen  
13 staffing, serve more students and boost program  
14 quality but to meet this pivotal moment, we need to  
15 scale and we request additional funding. Our FY27  
16 request is for \$6 million. These additional funds  
17 will allow Expand Ed to expand at the school slots  
18 through K-12 students, improve program quality, and  
19 reach communities with continued gaps.

20 We welcome the chance to partner with each  
21 Council Member to identify schools in your districts  
most in need of support. Thank you again for all you  
do for children and families across the city. I look  
forward to continuing this partnership.

1  
2 CAITLYN PASSARETTI: Hello, thank you Chair  
3 Stevens and the Children and Youth Committee for  
4 hosting this hearing. My name is Caitlyn Passaretti.  
5 I'm the Senior Policy Associate with the Citizens  
6 Committee for Children of New York. My testimony  
7 will address the needs of runaway and homeless youth,  
8 alternatives to incarceration, afterschool and  
9 childcare vouchers.

10 The runaway and homeless youth system needs more  
11 support. We're seeing bed vacancy rates are  
12 consistently less than one percent across the city  
13 every night. We need the city to increase the rates  
14 for providers which have not been updated since at  
15 least 2017 to \$70,000 per bed. This investment will  
16 provide safe, temporary housing per youth who  
17 otherwise would be without a stable option.

18 We also urge you to restore and baseline the \$1.6  
19 million for the housing specialists. Having a  
20 trusted support person to offer advice, resources,  
21 and answers for young people experiencing  
homelessness is invaluable. Thank you for your  
questions to DYCD on that today.

In partnership with the New York City Youth  
Justice Coalition, we are also calling on the city to

1  
2 restore and invest in programs with proven results to  
3 support young people with justice involvement or at  
4 an increased chance of justice involvement. We urge  
5 specifically the city to restore the \$5 million for  
6 the Next Steps program, which supports youth with  
7 mentorship and support. Please see my written  
8 testimony for all the programs we would like to see  
9 restored.

10 CCC urges the city to also release the new  
11 COMPASS awards from the 2025 RFP process. These  
12 awards will allow providers to adequately plan  
13 programming and service provision. Additionally, we  
14 urge city leaders to remain committed to the  
15 expansion of after school by ensuring that the  
16 workforce has the necessary support they need to meet  
17 the needs of young people, including enhanced rates  
18 and cost escalators.

19 Finally, I want to uplift an urgent need to  
20 invest in the City's Childcare Assistance program.  
21 Although Governor Hochul's Executive Budget includes  
increased investments for CCAP, including \$475  
million and a one-time funding for New York City.  
This funding will be insufficient to eliminate the  
waitlist currently facing approximately \$16,000

1 children and families. We need to address this as  
2 fast as we can to ensure that this waitlist does not  
3 continue. Thank you so much for the opportunity to  
4 provide testimony.

5 Alright, good afternoon members of the Council  
6 and Chair Stevens. My name is Joshua Castillo and  
7 I'm the Youth Services Coordinator with Vision  
8 Services for the blind and visually impaired. A  
9 nonprofit that has served New Yorkers who are blind  
or have low vision for nearly 100 years.

10 Visions provides rehabilitation services, youth  
11 development programs, assisted technology training,  
12 and independence building services for thousands of  
13 children, adults, and older New Yorkers across the  
five boroughs and Long Island.

14 I'm here to urge you to increase funding for  
15 afterschool and out of school youth services in New  
16 York City, specifically for youth who are blind,  
17 visually impaired and often living with additional  
disabilities.

18 As a former employee of the New York City  
19 Department of Education, I have seen first hand what  
20 happens inside the classroom. Teachers are  
21 dedicated, related service providers work tirelessly,

1 and schools are doing the best they can with the time  
2 and resources they have.

3 But the reality is this, the school day is  
4 focused on academic standards. A typical school day  
5 is assigned to meet academic benchmarks. It is not  
6 structured to fully address the complex layered needs  
7 of students who must simultaneously master academics,  
8 adaptive technology or additional mobility,  
9 independent living skills, social communication and  
10 career readiness.

11 A visually impaired student may need to learn how  
12 to navigate public transportation safely. They may  
13 need intensive instruction and assistive technology,  
14 just to complete homework. They may need structured  
15 opportunities to build social confidence in a world  
16 that is not often not the sign with them in mind.

17 That's where an organization like Visions plays a  
18 critical role. Through the school and out of school  
19 programming, we provide young people with hands-on  
20 training and mobility, assistive technology,  
21 independent living skills and career exploration. We  
help students practice the real life skills that  
allow them to travel independently, prepare meals,  
manage finances and advocate for accommodations.

1 Vision rehab services such as assistive  
2 technology instruction and independent living skills,  
3 must be recognized as essential educational supports.

4 Alright, increased funding for afterschool and  
5 out of school services is not a charity. It is a  
6 workforce development. It is community safety, it is  
7 public health. It is a commitment to ensure that  
8 disability does not determine destiny. I  
9 respectfully ask this Council to prioritize expanded  
10 funding for afterschool and out of school programming  
and to support policies that ensure Vision -

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

12 CAITLYN PASSARETTI: Rehabilitation Services, are  
13 fully integrated into the educational supports  
14 available to students with visual impairments. Thank  
you.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

16 TRENTON PRICE: Thank you Chair Stevens and  
17 members of the Committee on Children and Youth. I am  
18 Trenton Price, Executive Director of the Salvadori  
Center.

19 At Salvadori, we provide steam education  
20 services, that stem plus the A for Arts in  
21 Architecture, in our case to schools, afterschool

1 sites and NYCHA community centers across the five  
2 boroughs, focusing on the built environment. We are  
3 a partner of Expand Ed, our collaborator across the  
4 table.

5 For context last year, Salvadori taught over  
6 12,000 students in 178 different sites. We are  
7 grateful to have the support of the Council through  
8 multiple CASA and digital inclusion literacy grants,  
9 as well as afterschool enrichment and the Speakers  
10 initiative at numerous NYCHA sites across the city.

11 As a long time partner of NYCHA for almost two  
12 decades, we see first hand the need for robust, out  
13 of time - out of school time programming for children  
14 and youth.

15 In our programs, young people clamor for the  
16 opportunity to build and work together and design  
17 challenges that will impact their communities. These  
18 real life challenges engage their brains. They  
19 foster collaboration and they make connections to  
20 career pathways that the students may not have  
21 considered.

With so many pressing priorities for residents of  
NYCHA, we know that programming for children and  
youth can sometimes feel like less of a priority but

1  
2 to the contrary, investing in pathways for children  
3 and youth is one of the most critical things we can  
4 do to support our success and the success of future  
5 generations.

6 I want to thank the Council for their investment  
7 in the futures of our youth and encourage you to  
8 continue to deepen that support of out of school time  
9 programming for young people in NYCHA and shelters  
10 who need it most.

11 Please continue to support Salvadori's Speaker  
12 Initiative Funding request to ensure those out of  
13 school time opportunities are available for our most  
14 vulnerable children and youth.

15 Moreover, we ask the Council to expand the  
16 Digital Inclusion and Literacy Initiative Funding,  
17 which has been flat for a number of years despite the  
18 growing need from youth in school. Thank you.

19 MAY DEPIERRO: Thank you for the opportunity to  
20 speak with you today. My name is May Depierro and I  
21 am a Policy Associate Advocates for Children of New  
22 York.

23 We are asking the city to invest \$3 million to  
24 provide interim transportation for students in foster  
25 care, awaiting for bus service to begin.

1  
2 When a student is placed in foster care, they are  
3 already facing countless disruptions, uncertainty and  
4 trauma. They should not also have to worry about  
5 whether they can stay in the school where their  
6 teachers and classmates already know their name or  
7 how they will get to that school.

8 The city has a legal obligation to provide  
9 transportation to students in foster care, so they  
10 can stay at their original school. However, it can  
11 take weeks or even months for New York City Public  
12 Schools to arrange bus service.

13 The city does offer prepaid rideshare when there  
14 is no bus available but only after students have  
15 already waited at least ten school days. Even once  
16 it's offered rideshare is not always feasible. As an  
17 adult must accompany the student, a task that is  
18 often impossible for foster parents with jobs or  
19 other children in the home who attend schools in  
20 totally different communities.

21 Consequently, many students in foster care miss  
school or are forced to transfer schools even though  
it's not in their best interest to do so. In fact,  
last school year, 55 percent of students in foster  
care were chronically absent. Meaning they miss at

1  
2 least one out of every ten school days and one in  
3 five transferred schools at least once during the  
4 school year. There are solutions from contracting  
5 with car services already operating in New York City  
6 that use spotted drivers and don't require additional  
7 chaperones, using ACS vehicles that include escorts  
8 but these of course require resources.

9 The city must do more to ensure that students in  
10 foster care have uninterrupted access to school at a  
11 critical moment in their lives and invest \$3 million  
12 to provide interim transportation for students in  
13 foster care awaiting bus service.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I don't have  
15 any questions for this panel. Thank you for your  
16 time.

17 PANEL: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to call this  
19 panel again Jonee Billy, Barnett Kaur, Kiana  
20 Braveboy, Malina Bear Jui (SP?).

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, oh wait, you already  
went already. You don't have to go again. Uh? No,  
we're just so pressed for time, so since you already  
went, I'm sorry already but we loved your testimony.  
So sorry, we are really pressed for time. We're

1 trying to get out of here. There's an event in here  
2 afterwards so, that is why it is like a marathon, so  
3 that is what's happening.

4 You can start.

5 MITA MANVERGY: Good afternoon [SPEAKING IN  
6 SPANISH 372:01-372:03] Chair Stevens and the members  
7 of the New York City Council. Thank you for the  
8 opportunity to speak today about programs that change  
9 the lives of young people like me. My name is Mita  
10 Manvergy(SP?). I'm a first generation American and  
11 I've been a part of Figure Skating in Harlem for  
12 three years and I serve as the Chair of the 2026  
13 Student Executive Board.

14 One of the most important things I have learned  
15 in this program is how to be confident. If you had  
16 asked me three years ago, whether I thought I would  
17 be standing here in front of all of you today, I  
18 wouldn't have believed you but that's the power of  
19 Figure Skating in Harlem and the power you have to  
20 invest in young people like me.

21 Figure Skating in Harlem has positively impacted  
the lives of more than 1,500 alumni for nearly 30  
years and let me tell you what impact looks like in  
my own life.

1  
2 I have been accepted to Sarah Lawrence College,  
3 known for its strong liberal arts education and to  
4 the University of Manchester to study law, which is  
5 one of the top universities in the world. FSH  
6 provided a teacher at our academic center who helped  
7 me rewrite my college essay. My school did not have  
8 the resources to support me.

9 If it weren't for FSH, I probably wouldn't have  
10 gone into these schools because I lacked the support  
11 and guidance I needed. Programs like this matter  
12 because they give young girls the opportunity and to  
13 be a part of something special and to belong to a  
14 strong sisterhood. They provide experiences and  
15 resources where our schools and cities fall short.  
16 Because of support like this, I've decided to step  
17 into the world of politics and I really hope to be a  
18 Supreme Court Justice or a Senator.

19 I'm standing here today because this program  
20 invested in me. Today, as a part of Figure Skating  
21 in Harlem and Star CGI, I respectfully ask the New  
York City Council to restore Star CGI funding to \$1.4  
million and if possible to increase it to \$2 million.  
So organizations like Figure Skating in Harlem can  
support young people across New York City.

1 Thank you for your time.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

3 JONEE BILLY: Good afternoon Chair Stevens,  
4 Esteemed Committee Members. My name is Jonee Billy  
5 and I'm here in a dual role serving as a Senior  
6 Director of Strategic Partnerships and External  
7 Affairs at PowerPlay, as well as the Strategic Lead  
8 for Star CGI. Thank you for your leadership and  
9 ongoing support of youth serving organizations across  
the city.

10 Over the past 28 years, Powerplay has helped  
11 thousands of girls access sports and leadership  
12 development programs, giving them the confidence and  
13 skills to see themselves as leaders in their  
communities.

14 Star CGI over the past 12 years has built a  
15 network of women led, girls serving organizations  
16 that share best practices, strengthen systems and  
17 work together to deliver measurable impact for girls  
across the city. Here's the reality we face.

18 Nonprofits are being asked to do more than ever,  
19 meeting higher expectations, compliance requirements  
20 and growing community needs without the resources or  
21 capacity to match those demands. Supporting core

1  
2 infrastructure is no longer optional. It is  
3 essential if we want to continue delivering high  
4 quality programs responsibly.

5 With that in mind, we are requesting a \$50,000  
6 funding enhancement per partner organization to  
7 strengthen staffing, systems and operational  
8 infrastructure. This would increase the initiative's  
9 total budget from \$1.4 million to \$1.9 million with  
10 PowerPlay's share increasing from \$500,000 to  
11 \$550,000.

12 This request is focused on capacity building, not  
13 expanding programs. Demand for our services  
14 continues to grow but administrative, operational and  
15 staffing resources have not. Without this support,  
16 deepening services further, which stretch our  
17 resources and compromise long term impact. This  
18 request reflects a simple truth, expectations have  
19 increased but capacity has not. By supporting  
20 capacity building, the City Council can help  
21 stabilize essential community organizations, protect  
the quality of services for girls and families and  
strengthen the nonprofit sector, so it can continue  
meeting the growing needs of the city. Thank you for  
your time.

1 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

2 BARNEET KAUR: Hello, my name is Barneet Kaur and  
3 I'm a student here with the Sadie Nash Leadership  
4 Project. Thank you for giving me the chance to speak  
5 today about how important nonprofits are for  
6 supporting young girls and gender expansive youth and  
7 why it is so important that they receive more  
8 funding.

9 I've personally seen how nonprofits can make a  
10 real life difference. For example, working alongside  
11 young women and community programs has shown me how  
12 nonprofits create safe spaces that spark real change  
13 and inspire people to speak up.

14 It has also pushed me to get more involved myself  
15 and use my voice to stand up for what is right. I  
16 encourage you to consider increasing funding to youth  
17 serving nonprofits such as the Sadie Nash Leadership  
18 Program and Stars Citywide Girls Initiative.

19 When we invest in programs for young people, we  
20 are investing for the futures of our communities,  
21 nonprofits like the Sadie Nash Leadership Project  
create safe spaces, provide mentorship and connect  
youth to resources that help us grow as leaders.  
With more funding, these programs can reach even more

1 young people and continue making a real impact.

2 Thank you for listening and supporting youth in our  
3 communities.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much. We'll  
5 call the next panel.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Piyali Basak, Aatha Mehta,  
7 Mark Papish, Nila Natarajan. Is there someone else?

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Two more panels?

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Two more, yeah.

10 MARK PAPISH: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
11 members of the Committee. My name is Mark Papish and  
12 I'm the Supervisor of Government and Community  
13 Affairs at the Center for Family Representation.  
14 Today, I will be testifying alongside the other  
15 family defense providers in support of our Right to  
16 Family Advocacy Initiative that helps fund our  
17 increasingly critical and early defense and state  
18 central register advocacy.

19 I say increasingly critical for good reason. ACS  
20 has filed fewer Article 10 cases in the past year  
21 with more investigations going down the CARES track.  
CARES has been advertised as a less harmful approach  
to family policing investigations, due to the ability  
for families to avoid court by voluntarily engaging

1  
2 in the investigation process and complying with ACS  
3 directives.

4 Yet, we can tell you that our clients' experience  
5 at CARES has been caring and due to the threat of a  
6 formal investigation, it's certainly not voluntary.  
7 The reality of the situation is that once a family is  
8 on - is the subject of an FPS investigation, their  
9 entire future as a family is subject to the whims of  
10 the ACS caseworker that seemingly prioritizes  
11 compliance over helping families.

12 Clients are assigned Council when an Article 10  
13 case is filed but not before. Before from a filing,  
14 there is a fact finding phase. While city law  
15 requires the parents are now made aware of the  
16 availability of legal services. LS providers are not  
17 put into direct contact with families facing  
18 investigation. Furthermore, we've been told directly  
19 that families don't trust the information provided to  
20 them by ACS.

21 Because they believe that any information shared  
with ACS associated providers could be used against  
them in court filings, in future court filings or  
investigations.

1  
2 This is an issue that we can only solve with more  
3 robust education on families rights when facing ACS  
4 involvement. Each of our offices run robust early  
5 defense practices dedicated to helping families  
6 navigate these surveillance processes. Our teams  
7 work with families to identify what they need to  
8 avoid separation, while also helping to educate them  
9 about their rights in the hope that our current  
10 clients will not also be future clients.

11 When clients have access to our early defense  
12 services, we see success rates ranging from 85 to 90  
13 percent in avoiding court. When clients using our ED  
14 services do proceed to court, we see a success rate  
15 of 79 to 91 percent across providers in avoiding the  
16 foster care system.

17 When faced with the fact that over 99 percent of  
18 ACS investigations proceed without a warrant, it  
19 could not be more important that ED advocacy be  
20 available to every family that needs it. We thank  
21 the Council for funding this critical work and we  
look forward to partnering with all members  
interested in building a new future where this work  
is not nearly as necessary as it is now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

1  
2 KEITH BAURMAN: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
3 members of the Committee. My name is Keith Baurman  
4 and I am the Legal Director of the Family Defense  
5 Practice at the Bronx Defenders.

6 The funding we seek today for the Family Advocacy  
7 initiative provides much needed and otherwise  
8 unfunded legal representation for parents in OCFS  
9 hearings. Legal representation for parents in these  
10 hearings correct one of the most unfair and harmful  
11 consequences of an ACS investigation. At the  
12 conclusion of each investigation, ACS and only ACS  
13 decides whether the report against a parent will be  
14 indicated. If ACS indicates a report, the parents  
15 name is placed on the State Central Register as a  
16 person who has maltreated a child and the  
17 consequences are enormous.

18 A parents name could remain on the registry for  
19 years and during that time, parents can be barred  
20 from entire categories of employment. It can also  
21 bar parents from getting custody of their children  
and it can bar relatives from becoming caregivers,  
forcing children who could stay with family into the  
foster system to live with strangers.

1  
2 Clearing your name often requires an evidentiary  
3 hearing. Now, ACS is always represented by Council  
4 while parents often must face the agency alone. This  
5 is also a matter of racial justice. In New York  
6 City, Black, and Latinx children account for 83  
7 percent of all SCR reports and a choking 86 percent  
8 of indicated cases involved families of color. This  
9 is exactly why representation matters. With the  
10 funding through this initiative, our offices have  
11 successfully amended and sealed records in 93 to 97  
12 percent of hearings that we handle.

13 For many parents, this representation is the  
14 difference between being shut out of employment, and  
15 being able to clear their name and support their  
16 families. Thank you.

17 NILA NATARAJAN: Good afternoon, my name is Nila  
18 Natarajan and I'm the Director of Family Defense  
19 Policy at Brooklyn Defender Services. Thank you  
20 Chair Stevens and to the Committee for your ongoing  
21 commitment to the right to family advocacy project.  
As you have heard from both of my colleagues, our  
work plays an indispensable role in supporting  
families under investigation by ACS. We've reduced  
the harms of confusing and traumatic investigations,

1  
2 inform families of and protect their rights and  
3 assist families to clear their records to have every  
4 opportunity to secure employment and financially  
5 provide for their families. Over the past seven  
6 years, our work has successfully prevented thousands  
7 of families from being prosecuted in family court and  
8 from suffering the immense trauma of family  
9 separation as well as reducing the consequences of  
10 investigations.

11 Although the Council has recognized the  
12 importance of this work for our cities' most  
13 marginalized families, the program's funding has  
14 remained flat since 2019. As you are well aware in  
15 that time, the cost of operating in New York City has  
16 increased dramatically due to record high inflation  
17 and increasing healthcare costs.

18 Indeed in the face of rising costs and salaries,  
19 rent, utilities, supplies and benefits, seven years  
20 without any increase in funding amounts to a funding  
21 cut. Flat funding prevents us from offering  
competitive salaries that keep pace with the city's  
rising cost of living, leading to a higher turnover  
of experienced employees. The lawyers, social

1 workers, and support staff that families rely on to  
2 provide high quality advocacy.

3 During that same time, there's also been a  
4 growing movement to ensure families are aware of  
5 their right to counsel and the City Council passed  
6 Local Law 29 requiring ACS to provide our contact  
7 information to parents under investigation increasing  
8 the demand for our support. And we are dedicated to  
9 meet that need and that is why we are here today  
10 asking the Council to fully fund the Right to Family  
11 Advocacy Project with a \$3.4 million allocation for  
12 Fiscal Year '27.

13 This \$3.4 million allocation is a critical  
14 investment in family stability. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

16 CALI VASIC: Good afternoon, my name is Cali  
17 Vasic(SP?) and I'm the Managing Director of the  
18 Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem.

19 ACS's own data shows that they separate Black and  
20 Brown children from their parents and place families  
21 - children in foster care systems at rates hugely  
disproportionate to their presence in the total  
population of New York City's children.

1  
2 In the current system of mandated reporting, well  
3 meaning but ill informed service providers make  
4 reports creating a stop and frisk dynamic that allows  
5 ACS to conduct intrusive investigations. The vast  
6 majority of which are unfounded. And to coerce  
7 families into so-called voluntary surveillance  
8 programs like CARES, so that any evidence of the  
9 system actually prevents or reduces harm to children.

10 What harms children is being separated from their  
11 families. What harms children is entering the foster  
12 care system for any amount of time, which guarantees  
13 higher delinquency rates, lower lifetime earnings and  
14 increased likelihood of criminal legal system  
15 involvement as a young person and as an adult.

16 The vast majority of families do not need ACS  
17 involvement. They need direct material support to  
18 improve the conditions of their lives.

19 Just as our public defender colleagues in the  
20 criminal court serve as an essential counter balance  
21 to the massive power of the criminal legal system, we  
provide essential representation and due process  
protections as public defenders.

Funding from the City Council has facilitated our  
essential work as my colleagues have said, to

1  
2 mitigate the harms of the foster system but we  
3 believe there are additional steps that we can  
4 collectively take to further support New York  
5 families.

6 City Council should prioritize providing material  
7 support to New York City's most vulnerable families,  
8 over funding more family policing. One important  
9 initiative could be a - that could be accomplished is  
10 the Office of Family Wellbeing. A hub for parent  
11 support that was conceived by New York City parents  
12 in partnership with the Mayor's Office.

13 This office would represent a new approach to  
14 supporting New York City families, one that meets  
15 them in their communities in response to their actual  
16 needs.

17 This city's most vulnerable families deserve  
18 access to resources that is dependent on - that is  
19 not dependent on prosecution in court and also  
20 attorneys whose work is resource as government  
21 agencies who represent ACS. We urge the Council to  
22 support this - uhm, support the Office of Family  
23 Wellbeing.

24 AASTHA MEHTA: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
25 members of the Children and Youth Committee. My name

1  
2 is Aastha Mehta and I am testifying on behalf of  
3 Common Justice, a New York Citywide organization that  
4 operates an alternative to incarceration program for  
5 serious violence and provides community based  
6 services for young people impacted by violence and  
7 the criminal legal system.

8 We work in Brookly, the Bronx and Manhattan with  
9 young people facing significant prison sentences for  
10 violent crimes, as well as the survivors of those  
11 crimes. With the consent of the person harmed, these  
12 cases are diverted into a restorative justice process  
13 that center survivors need while requiring the  
14 responsible party to take meaningful accountability.  
15 Participants complete an intensive 12 to 15 month  
16 program that includes violence intervention,  
17 restorative justice dialogue education and employment  
18 support and ongoing supervision. Our outcomes remain  
19 strong, only eight percent of responsible parties  
20 engaged in the program have been terminated for new  
21 crimes. A 2022 study by DCJS found that since  
solidifying our model in 2012, only one graduate had  
been convicted of a new violent felony.

Most of our work focuses on young people,  
particularly young men of color from neighborhoods

1  
2 most impacted by violence and disinvestment. We work  
3 with young people ages 16 to 28 who have been  
4 involved in serious harm, as well as young survivors  
5 of violence who too often go under recognized and  
6 under served by traditional victim service systems.

7 Young men of color are among those most likely to  
8 experience violent victimization yet they are  
9 significantly under represented among those who  
10 receive victim services and support.

11 We believe that young people most impacted by  
12 violence should have a meaningful role in shaping the  
13 policies and solutions that affect their lives.

14 Through an initiative such as our civil  
15 engagement cohort, common justice engages young  
16 people including survivors and graduates in  
17 opportunities to learn about policy advocacy, sharing  
18 their experience and participate in conversations  
19 about public safety and justice reform.

20 Investing in young people means creating real  
21 opportunities for them to thrive in the communities  
they call home, ensuring access to housing stability,  
education support, mentorship, healing resources and  
pathways to economic mobility.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

1 AASTHA MEHTA: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you to this panel.  
3 Appreciate your services. We'll be calling our next  
4 panel.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: For the next panel, I'm going  
6 to call Joe Titus, oh Trenton Price - I believe you  
7 already testified, Adelo Ramirez, Aaron Sanders,  
8 Stephanie Skaff.

9 JOE TITUS: Good afternoon Chair Stevens and  
10 members of the Committee on Children and Youth.  
11 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My  
12 name is Joe Titus and I'm the CEO of Hive Class, a  
13 whole child wellness platform that works with schools  
14 and youth programs to support students' physical  
15 health, mental wellbeing and social development. New  
16 York City's young people are facing real challenges  
17 today. Educators and families continue to report  
18 rising concerns around youth mental health, social  
19 isolation and students ability to build healthy  
20 relationships with peers. These issues directly  
21 affect students' engagement in school and their long  
term academic success.

Research consistently shows that students who  
feel connected to their school community have better

1  
2 academic outcomes, stronger attendance and better  
3 mental health.

4 Programs that build communication skills,  
5 teamwork and emotional resilience serve as an  
6 important form of preventive mental health support  
7 for young people. At the same time, many students  
8 are still not receiving the physical activity they  
9 need during the school day. According to the  
10 Department of Education's most recent Local Law 102  
11 Physical Education Report, between 13 and 20 percent  
12 of students, depending on the borough, are still not  
13 receiving the required amount of PE instruction.

14 In Manhattan alone, more than one in five  
15 students are missing the required PE. As schools  
16 continue to face challenges with space, staffing and  
17 scheduling, it is becoming increasingly difficult to  
18 deliver consistent physical education during the  
19 school day. That is why the city's investment in the  
20 Department of Youth and Community Development and the  
21 OST COMPASS program is so important. After school  
programs provide something students cannot always get  
during the school day, time and space to build  
relationships, collaborate with peers, and develop  
confidence in themselves.

1  
2 As the continued - as the city continues  
3 expanding its investment in OST COMPASS, we encourage  
4 the Council to ensure that after school providers  
5 have access to high quality -

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

7 JOE TITUS: Programming that supports physical  
8 activity, wellness and social development. Thank you  
9 again for your leadership and your commitment to the  
10 New York City's youth.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

12 ADELO RAMIREZ: Thank you Chair and members of  
13 the Committee. My name is Adelo Ramirez. I've  
14 handed each of you my proposal for integrating  
15 financial literacy into middle and high school math  
16 class. New York City needs money, that's clear but I  
17 agree with Council Member Wong, raising property  
18 taxes is not the solution. Cutting unnecessary  
19 spending is. The real solution is prevention and  
20 prevention starts with financial literacy because  
21 there is no salary big enough if we don't know how to  
manage money.

When we teach financial skills throughout middle  
and high schools, we build habits early. By the time  
students reach adulthood, they are prepared for the

1 real world. Right now, they're financially  
2 illiterate and they have no idea why their parents  
3 are stressed when we say we don't have enough money.  
4 Taxing billionaires is not the solution either. We  
5 should be working with them, learning from them.  
6 They should be role models for our youth. And so,  
7 they don't grow up dependent on government support.  
8 I want to personally thank former Mayor Michael  
9 Bloomberg not because he gave me money but because in  
10 2011 his administration's SPA program reached out to  
11 me and I told them I needed to learn financials  
12 because I had a business with no financial structure.  
13 Within a week, they sent me to Lehman College in the  
14 Bronx. Mrs. Lurtis Martinez, taught me financials in  
15 Excel and that changed my life. That moment is the  
16 reason I became a financial author, creating a  
17 workbook for real life spending habits.

18 Once I implemented financial systems in my  
19 business, I found my why. Why did God send me to  
20 this world for? I realized how important this  
21 knowledge is and I asked myself why schools never  
taught me this instead.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

1  
2 ADELO RAMIREZ: Of learning formulas I'd never  
3 used. I am also going to reach out to Opera to  
4 encourage her to implement my book into her South  
5 African School. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

7 Thank you Chair Stevens and the Committee on  
8 Children and Youth for holding this hearing and  
9 giving us an opportunity to testify. My name is  
10 Stephanie Skaff and I am the Executive Director of  
11 Playground NYC. An organization dedicated to  
12 transforming the city through play. We support  
13 children's self directed play at our adventure  
14 playground, the Yard, located on Governor's Island.  
15 And through school and community based programs in  
16 neighborhoods throughout the city.

17 We're here today because children's play is  
18 central to a good childhood and we believe that  
19 opportunities for self-directed play where children  
20 guide their own experiences and make their own  
21 choices are too few in our city. Public schools are  
often lacking an open space or play, making recess  
unavailable or unrealistic for many children.  
Traffic has made neighborhood play too dangerous.

1  
2 Traditional playgrounds and open space are plentiful  
3 in some neighborhoods and nonexistent in others.

4 Children's mental health is affected by the lack  
5 of opportunities to slow down and play freely. We  
6 believe and we see it first hand through our programs  
7 at the Yard and in the public school system, which  
8 serves around 11,000 children each year that when  
9 children have the opportunity to play freely with  
10 minimal adult intervention, they have joyful,  
11 imaginative, surprising, and challenging experiences  
12 that shape how they learn, how they feel about  
13 themselves, and how they socialize with others.

14 To quote an elementary school student in one of  
15 our recess programs in the South Bronx after his  
16 first outdoor recess. That was epic. Uhm, as an  
17 organization, we're trying to ensure that children's  
18 play is treated as a right rather than a privilege.

19 As an uncompromising and essential aspect of a  
20 healthy childhood. The Committee on Children and  
21 Youth could support this work by advocating for  
22 improvements in recess environments for public school  
23 children. Encouraging school yards to remain open to  
24 the public in the evenings and on the weekends.

25 Supporting open streets as a way for children to play

1  
2 safely in their neighborhoods and investing in  
3 resources that educate the public about the value of  
4 play. Together, we could give New York City's  
5 children opportunities for amazing play every day.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

8 AARON SANDERS: Thank you Chair Stevens for  
9 convening this preliminary hearing and for the  
10 opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Aaron  
11 Sanders and I am the Deputy Director of Government  
12 and Community Relations at Grand Street Settlement.  
13 Grand Street is a 110 year old multiservice  
14 settlement house and we serve over 18,000 New Yorkers  
15 with vital early childhood, youth and older adult  
16 programs. Grand Streets Youth programs encourage  
17 young people to follow their passions and guide them  
18 to become civically engaged, and successful citizens.

19 Our youth program supports nearly 7,000 youth  
20 with high quality programs. Today, we're asking the  
21 city to strengthen and preserve the youth  
programmings and commit to funding. Specifically  
we're asking for the following: Restoring and  
baselining \$31 million for DOEs Learning to work  
program and ensuring that future FY27 after school

1  
2 contracts and cost of living adjustments and cost  
3 escalators over the life of a contract. To ensure a  
4 stable afterschool system, and that afterschool staff  
are paid fairly.

5 Funding from DYCD supports many of our youth  
6 education programs at Grand Street. We offer  
7 afterschool programming as a part of the COMPASS  
8 network. 3,000 hours of hands-on learning and  
9 experience for afterschool youth are provided through  
10 Grand Street and we averaged a 70 percent team  
11 participation rate at our 13 cornerstone programs,  
which either meets or exceeds enrollment goals.

12 In addition to our partnership with DYCD and  
13 NYCHA, at our cornerstones, we offer out of school  
14 learning opportunities for youth through our  
community partnerships.

15 As a member of the International Clubhouse  
16 Network, we provide science, technology, engineering  
17 and arts, mathematics, commonly referred to as Steam  
18 Opportunities for Youth at the Best Buy Team Tech  
19 Center. Our maker spaces for teams approximately uh  
20 ages 13 to 19 to explore potential careers and the  
21 Steam sector.

1  
2 Last fall, Grand Street's Best Buy Team Tech  
3 Center member, was selected to custom design cleats  
4 for Chicago's Bear quarterback Caleb Williams.

5 The decisions made today in this hearing will  
6 immediately impact working families and we thank you  
7 Chair Stevens for your leadership on the issue.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much. Thank  
9 you to this panel.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our last in person panel will  
11 be Samina Gariyeva, Debra Sue Lorenzen, Emma McKhann,  
12 and Ponny White.

13 Thank you Chair Stevens. My name is Debra Sue  
14 Lorenzen and I am the Director of Youth and Education  
15 for St. Nick's Alliance. A settlement house and lead  
16 youth service provider in North Brooklyn.

17 At St. Nick's Alliance and our affiliate school  
18 settlement association, nearly 8,000 children, youth  
19 and adults benefit from DYCD funding. We are  
20 grateful that the FY27 Preliminary Budget has  
21 restored funding for summer programming. Yet Summer  
Risings operational challenges continue and a variety  
of Summer Program models other than Summer Rising are  
desired.

1  
2 Further, the Sonic RFP's proposed price per  
3 participant rate is inadequate to properly fund 12  
4 month contracts or their requirements. The Sonic  
5 price per participant should be \$7,682 per  
6 participant with summer. Staff are hired year  
7 around, not for ten months and the contract needs to  
8 reflect this reality.

9 St Nick's Alliance operates the Summer  
10 Cornerstone Community Center. Cornerstone programs  
11 face many challenges, including a ten year old  
12 contract that is now grossly underfunded. But they  
13 also have serious issues. For example, at Summer  
14 Community Center in the last couple of years, we  
15 faced a collapsed ceiling, sewage coming - raw sewage  
16 coming up from the floor, broken fire systems,  
17 malfunctioning doors, flooding, HVAC issues and  
18 etc., etc.,

19 We need NYCHA and DYCD to work together better to  
20 resolve these issues and to not fine us for the  
21 issues that they have failed to resolve. And lastly,  
we also want to request that the City Council invest  
\$18 million for adult literacy services that sustain  
programs not eligible for funding under DYCD's Adult  
Literacy RFP. Thank you.

1                   PONNY WHITE: Good evening - oh sorry.

2                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You have to press the  
3 button.

4                   PONNY WHITE: Good evening Chair Stevens. Thank  
5 you for the opportunity to testify before you today  
6 on the critical need for continued and enhanced  
7 funding for programs that support children and youth  
8 across our city. My name is Ponny White and I am the  
9 Senior Prevention Coordinator at the New York City  
10 Alliance Against Sexual Assault and I oversee the  
11 Project DOT program. Project DOT is a youth focused  
12 sexual violence prevention and leadership program  
13 developed by the New York City Alliance.

14                   Our mission is to prevent sexual violence and  
15 reduce the harm it causes through education  
16 prevention programming and the pursuit of legal and  
17 policy change. Project DOT is a key pillar of this  
18 mission and is funded by the City Council through the  
19 Young Women's initiative. We are currently asking  
20 for an enhancement from our \$100,000 budget to  
21 \$125,000 to expand our program's reach. Project DOT  
is designed to address the unique challenges faced by  
young people from gender, racial and ethnically  
marginalized communities in New York City.

1  
2 Launched in 2014, DOT has served as a vital  
3 resource for young people who often face systemic  
4 barriers to access comprehensive sexual violence  
5 prevention, education, and leadership opportunities.  
6 In the past year, we served over 200 young people,  
7 some of the youth we serve were first generation.  
8 Some youth were young people who had been a part of  
9 the carceral system, LGBTQIA+ youth, and so on.

10 At Project DOT, through culturally responsive  
11 programming, we empower young people to take active  
12 roles in preventing violence in their schools lives,  
13 in their communities, and in their personal lives,  
14 while developing leadership skills that prepare them  
15 for their future.

16 So, uhm, currently Project DOT is funded as I  
17 shared, at \$100,000 to the Young Women's Initiative.  
18 We're hoping that this expansion will help us  
19 increase funding to allow us to serve more young  
20 people across all five boroughs by expanding  
21 partnership with community based organizations in  
schools, enhance our curriculum to address emerging  
needs including digital safety, healthy relationships  
and consent education and provide stipends for youth  
participants, ensuring accessibility for those who

1  
2 might not otherwise be able to engage in leadership  
3 development opportunities. And I'm joined by one of  
4 our young people who is a part of our current Young  
5 Women's Initiative Cohort, so I'd like for her to  
6 share more about her experience.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

8 SAMINA GARIYEVA: Dear Council Member, thank you  
9 for the opportunity to testify before you. My name  
10 is Samina Gariyeva and I am a sophomore at Newtown  
11 High School and a participant of Project DOT, Young  
12 Women's Initiative Cohort. I joined Project DOT this  
13 year after first hearing about the program through my  
14 school. I joined at Project DOT because I care about  
15 preventing sexual abuse and assault. Growing up, I  
16 was often told harmful ideas about relationships as  
17 early as elementary school.

18 I remember hearing adults say, if he beats you,  
19 that means that he loves you. I want to challenge  
20 these harmful ideas and be part of creating change.  
21 Hearing the type of narrative and beliefs from older  
generations often reinforced harmful stereotypes that  
blame reasons for the abuse that they experienced.  
In silence, young people like myself from speaking  
out against sexual violence. So far, Project DOT has



1 context of today's hostile world. The funding we  
2 receive is imperative to the development and growth  
3 of the Black girls and gender expansive youth of  
4 color we serve across New York City.

5 We request continued support from the City  
6 Council for our Fiscal Year '27 youth programming so  
7 that GGE may continue to address the needs of young  
8 people across all five boroughs during this critical  
9 period.

10 In the face of a severe budget deficit, we  
11 launched the alliance on gender equity or AGE and are  
12 requesting \$300,000 in the form of a new City Council  
13 initiative to sustain our work. AGE is a youth-led  
14 space for political education, civic engagement,  
15 leadership development and community building.

16 In November 2025, we held a townhall with over 70  
17 young people from all five boroughs. We heard from  
18 them in six priority areas with issues coming up that  
19 are of direct interest to this Committee,  
20 specifically a demand for more youth advisory boards  
21 and representation in government. AGE turned those  
grievances and recommendations into a list of demands  
and created the school girls demand campaign launched  
this month.

1  
2 With that \$300,000 to support the AGE initiative,  
3 we hope to continue equipping youth to fight for a  
4 New York City that is resilient against harmful  
5 national forces working against them.

6 We are also requesting \$350,000 towards our Young  
7 Women's Advisory Council program funding by - funded  
8 by Young Women's Leadership Development Initiative  
9 for Political Education Empowerment, \$200,000 towards  
10 our Sisters and Strength Survivor program funded by  
11 the Domestic Violence and Empowerment initiative to  
12 support young survivors, \$100,000 towards the sports  
13 training and role models for success initiative to  
14 promote the physical, mental, social, and emotional  
15 wellbeing of youth ages 12 to 24 and \$250,000 in ATI  
16 funding to continue our youth organizing work  
17 surrounding racial disparities and disciplinary  
18 actions and school policies and promotion of  
19 restorative and healing justice measures and  
20 alternatives to incarceration.

21 We hope you consider supporting us in these  
endeavors. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. Now  
we're going to transition over to Zoom testimony.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I got to read the thing?  
3 Thank you to everyone who came to share your thoughts  
4 and experiences today. If there is anyone left in  
5 the chambers who wishes to speak but not had yet been  
6 called and had the opportunity please raise your hand  
7 and fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant of  
8 Arms in the back and we'll get you on.

9 Seeing no one, we will shift to Zoom testimony.  
10 When your name is called, please wait until a member  
11 of our team unmutes you and the Sergeant of Arms will  
12 indicate to you when to start. We will start with  
13 the first person.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chloe Harris. You may begin  
15 when the Sergeant starts your clock.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

17 AARON CULVER: Hello everyone my name is Aaron  
18 Culver, I'm an 11th grade student at City at School.  
19 I'm speaking to share my experience with a member of  
20 New York City at New York Edge Advocate school family  
21 to tell you why New York Edge has been an  
indispensable partner.

I have participated at New York Edge Beacon  
program where I have learned to improve my

1  
2 communication skills and my integrity is important to  
3 working in the community.

4 New York Edge has helped me learn accountability,  
5 strength, and time management, honesty and curiosity.  
6 The staff [NOISE INTERRUPTION 409:19]. I go  
7 everywhere no matter who I am. Afterschool programs  
8 such as New York Edge help us find passions, build  
9 confidence and make memories that stay with us  
10 forever. They also help parents who work late, know  
11 that their kids are safe in a positive place instead  
12 of home alone or out late at night or out on the  
13 streets at night.

14 Investing in New York Edge helps students like me  
15 continue to grow and pass on our knowledge onto the  
16 next generation. Please increase funding for the New  
17 York Edge in the upcoming city budget. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uhm, the folks testifying on  
19 behalf of New York Edge, you all are listed under the  
20 same name. So, I'm going to read off the folks who  
21 registered, so Akila Ben(SP?) if you could raise your  
hand so that way the uhm - someone from our staff  
could uh know who to unmute. If you could raise your  
hand on Zoom that would be great.

1                   No, she's not here. Okay, Bernice Gacoono(SP?)  
2 if you could raise your hand. Aaron Culver.

3                   SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

4                   UNIDENTIFIED: Hi, Aaron was just unmuted. He  
5 just spoke.

6                   COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good to know. Okay, Destiny  
7 Celestine. Is she online and can she raise her hand?

8                   Okay, she's raising her hand.

9                   DESTINY CELESTINE: Okay, I'm here.

10                  COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin when the  
Sergeant starts your clock.

11                  SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12                  DESTINY CELESTINE: Okay. My name is Destiny and  
13 I am a 7th grade student at Intermediate School. I  
14 am writing to share my experience with New York Edge  
15 and explain why this program is an indispensable  
16 partner to my school and a lifeline for our  
community.

17                  New York Edge provides much more than an extra  
18 curricular, sports and arts. It offers enriching  
19 programming that allows students to feel safe, stay  
20 motivated and discover their potential. The program  
21 such as every aspect of our school life, through core  
components such as stem, education, social emotional

1 learning, visual performing arts, sports and wellness  
2 and college and career readiness.

3 Through more participation in the beacon and  
4 summer programs, I have learned that I matter, am  
5 seen, heard, and have found various outlets to  
6 express myself.

7 Since joining, I have met new people, created  
8 music with the MPA program, have public records,  
9 performed at NYU before Jane Theater with Steph  
10 Africa and auditioned for the Garden of Dreams  
11 showcase.

12 This has helped me to gain confidence in public  
13 speaking, practice building and leadership skills.  
14 Through the Girls Lead Mentorship program, I have  
15 also gained essential life skills, including  
16 financial literacy and money management.

17 Most importantly, dance has allowed me to express  
18 my emotions and appreciate my own hard work. The  
19 staff had become an important part of my life,  
20 encouraging me to excel in both and out of the  
21 classroom.

After school programs do more than keep - after  
school programs do more than keep students busy.  
They help us find our passions and build lasting

1  
2 confidence. They also help provide working parents  
3 with the piece of mind that their children are safe,  
4 in a positive environment.

5 Investing in New York Edge is an investment in  
6 students like me. As the future of this city, the  
7 support we receive now shapes who we become. I  
8 respectfully ask that you increase funding for our  
9 New York Edge in the upcoming city budget. Thank you  
10 for your time and support.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Elijah Batson,  
12 can you please raise your hand so the Sergeant can -  
13 so someone from our staff can unmute you?

14 ELIJAH BATSON: My name is Elijah - can we start?

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yeah, yeah, you may begin.

16 ELIJAH BATSON: Okay, my name is Elijah Batson  
17 and I am a 5th grade student at PS96Q. I am writing  
18 to share my experience as a member of the New York  
19 Edge afterschool family and to explain why New York  
20 Edge is an indispensable partner to my school.

21 New York Edge afterschool programming is not just  
sports and arts activities. It's enriching and  
encouraging programming that gives students like me a  
place to feel safe, stay motivated, and discover what  
we're capable of.

1  
2 It is also more than just a school partner.  
3 It's- it is a lifeline for our community. It's  
4 programming and staff provide us with support that  
5 touches every part of our school lives. Core  
6 components of New York Edge programming include Stem,  
7 social emotional learning and leadership, visual and  
8 performing arts, sports, health and wellness,  
9 homework help and summer horizon.

10 I have participated in New York Edge's  
11 afterschool and summer rising programs for a few  
12 years, where I learned to keep trying even when  
13 something feels hard. It also helped me make new  
14 friends and feel more confident speaking up in class.  
15 I used to be shy but now I raise my hand more because  
16 my after school teachers always encourage me and tell  
17 me I can do it. The staff at New York Edge have  
18 become an important part of my life, always pushing  
19 me to excel in school and beyond.

20 After school programs- programs just don't keep  
21 kids busy, programs like New York Edge help us find  
our passions, build confidence and make memories that  
stay with us forever. They also help parents -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
Your time has expired.

1 ELIJAH BATSON: Oh, thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm sorry.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Will the remaining folks  
4 testifying on behalf of New York Edge who are  
5 registered under the name Elijah Batson, if you could  
6 all raise your hand and then someone from our staff  
7 will unmute you one at a time so that you can all  
8 speak for two minutes.

9 So, if you haven't spoken yet and you're here on  
10 behalf of New York Edge, please raise your hand using  
11 Zoom, using the Zoom raise hand function and someone  
12 from our staff will unmute you when it's your turn.

13 Hello, thank you. I - can I start?

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

15 Okay, thank you. I am here today to ask that you  
16 prioritize New York Edges Fiscal Year '27 citywide  
17 funding request.

18 New York Edge is the city's oldest and largest  
19 provider of afterschool and summer programming,  
20 serving almost 33,000 students in 134 schools across  
21 the city, including four beacon centers and 21  
community schools. We run programs in 37 of the 51  
council districts. This year, we are seeking \$1.5  
million under the Council's Afterschool Enrichment

1 Initiative and \$250,000 under the Social and  
2 Emotional Support Students initiative. For over  
3 three decades, the New York City Council has been a  
4 vital partner in helping us fulfill our mission.

5 Through the years, Council's citywide funding has  
6 enabled us to enrich and expand existing programming  
7 and to develop and implement unique and engaging  
8 programs.

9 Since 2020, we have tripled in size and have  
10 significantly increased the number of students  
11 served. Our Council citywide funding however, has  
12 remained flat at \$1 million. New York Edge and  
13 students and families are extremely grateful for the  
14 Council's past support. The time has come however,  
15 where increased funding is vitally needed. Council  
16 discretionary conflicts are not eligible for COLA  
17 increases. This is making it increasingly difficult  
18 for New York Edge to attract and maintain quality  
19 staff and to continue to offer the wide array of stem  
20 SEL, visual and performing arts, sports, health and  
21 wellness and college and career readiness programs  
that we are known for.

Increased funding will enable us to keep  
providing throughout the city with edge they need to

1  
2 succeed. Your support and advocacy on our behalf is  
3 requested. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next person testifying on  
5 behalf of New York Edge, if you could raise -

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

7 PRECILLA: My name is Precilla and I am a 7th  
8 grade student at Intermediate School IS1NI. I am  
9 ready to advocate for New York Edge and explain why  
10 this program is an important partner to our school  
11 and community. New York Edge provides enriching  
12 programming and ensures students have a safe  
13 environment to stay motivated and discover their  
14 potential. The program offers comprehensive support  
15 through core components such as Stem, education,  
16 social emotional learning, visual arts and - visual  
17 and art- visual and performing arts, sports and  
18 wellness and college and career readiness.

19 Through my partici- through my participation in  
20 New York Edge and Beacon Summer Rising program, I had  
21 the opportunity to explore art and athletics. I  
became captain of the volleyball team, co-captain of  
the cheer team and a member of the dance assemble.  
The new generation - these operations - opportunities  
are not offered there on the regular school day.

1  
2 Furthermore, the math tutoring - I received  
3 significantly improved my algebra grades and overall  
4 self confidence. The supportive staff at Beacon  
5 consistently encourage me to improve and not - and  
6 knowing they cared truly mattered to me. Beyond  
7 student engagement, these programs offer working  
8 parents peace of mind by providing a simply positive  
9 environment for -

10 Investing in New York Edges is a direct  
11 investment in the young people who represent the  
12 future of the city. I respectfully request that you  
13 increase funding for New York Edge in the upcoming  
14 city budget. Thank you for your time and for your  
15 continued support of New York students.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Will the next  
17 person testifying on behalf of New York Edge please  
18 raise their hand and you'll be unmuted.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

20 CADAN MORGAN: Good evening. My name is Cadan  
21 Morgan and I attend the Brooklyn Green School. I  
have been at New York Edge for one year but it's  
starting to grow on me and I love New York Edge more  
every single day because the activities are  
interesting and more investing. The experiment is

1  
2 immersive and the staff are respectful. I believe  
3 you should fund this program to provide new  
4 opportunities and experiences for kids like me.

5 The staff at New York Edge have helped me to  
6 control my emotions and improve my social  
7 interactions, skills that will - skills that will  
8 stay with me into adulthood. The staff at New York  
9 Edge have become more an important part of my life,  
10 encouraging me to excel in school and beyond.

11 Afterschool programs don't just keep kids busy.  
12 Programs such as New York Edge help us to find our  
13 passions, build confidence, and make memories that  
14 stay with us forever. They also find parents who  
15 work late that their kids are in a safe place.

16 Positive places instead of home alone or just out  
17 on the streets. I know funding isn't always easy but  
18 investing in New York Edge means investing in  
19 students like me. We are the future of the city and  
20 the support we get now will shape the kind of people  
21 we become. Please increase funding in New York Edge  
in an upcoming city budget. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your  
testimony. Will the next person testifying on behalf

2 of New York Edge, please raise their hand using the  
3 Zoom raise hand function.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: And you may begin.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We can't hear you darling,  
6 your connection isn't good.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

8 Hi, my name is Brittney - I'm [CANNOT HEAR AUDIO  
9 423:10-424:06]

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hi darling, we really can't  
11 hear you. You are going in and out. Your service  
12 isn't connected. Like, I can't hear you at all.

13 We're going to go to someone else and we'll come  
14 back to you so you can work on your sound okay.

15 Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Will the remaining person  
17 testifying on behalf of New York Edge raise their  
18 hand using the Zoom raise hand function and someone  
19 from our staff will unmute you.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, seeing no hands, we're  
going to move to Dr. Sophine Charles. You may begin  
when the Sergeant starts your clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

1  
2 DR. SOPHINE CHARLES: Good afternoon Chair  
3 Stevens and Committee. Thank you for the opportunity  
4 to testify at this budget hearing. I am Dr. Sophine  
5 Charles, Associate Executive Director at the Council  
6 of Family and Childcare Agencies. We represent more  
7 than 100 child welfare programs across the state, all  
8 of the foster care agencies in New York City. I  
9 present a few budget priorities.

10 One is workforce. New York City contracted  
11 agencies continue to face significant challenges on  
12 staff turnover, lack of pay parity for an  
13 undercompensated workforce. Nonprofits cannot  
14 operate programs without adequate staffing. We ask  
15 the Council to continue funding at 3 percent COLA in  
16 the FY27 budget. We ask the Council to pass wage  
17 equity legislation, Intro. 452 of 2026, which would  
18 align nonprofit government human service job titles  
19 and raise salaries for nonprofit workers.

20 We uhm, I'm sorry, procurement and contracts is  
21 another uh issue and we appreciate the Council's \$5  
billion investment in advance payments. Uhm, we  
sorry - this was a nice temporary fix, unfortunately  
during the recruitment phase, advances- providers  
were plunged back into deficit and cash flow problems

1  
2 remain. The city remains behind in paying for these  
3 services and we ask the Council to reform New York  
4 City's procurement system, urging the Council to  
5 expedite all overdue contract payments on the  
6 community based prevention side. The successful  
7 reduction in foster care payments in New York City is  
8 primarily -

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
10 Time has expired.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we have Sierra Kraft.  
12 You may begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 SIERRA KRAFT: Hi, good afternoon Chair Stevens  
15 and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the  
16 opportunity to testify. My name is Sierra Kraft and  
17 I'm the Executive Director of the I CARE Coalition.  
18 A network of legal service providers dedicated to  
19 offering free legal representation to immigrant  
20 children and youth facing deportation in New York  
21 City.

Every year, roughly 5,000 unaccompanied immigrant  
children arrive in New York and are forced to  
navigate one of the most complex legal systems in our  
country, often without a lawyer. Last year, the

1 Council made a critical investment in legal services  
2 for immigrant youth and that investment has already  
3 been life changing.

4 It has allowed providers to expand capacity,  
5 reduce our shared waitlists and reach more young  
6 people who would otherwise have been forced to face  
7 court during one of the most vulnerable moments of  
8 their lives. The conditions are rapidly worsening  
9 and they're being treated as enforcement priorities  
10 by this administration. Children's cases are getting  
11 fast tracked, even when they don't have an attorney.

12 They're being asked to defend themselves in  
13 proceedings so complex that even trained lawyers  
14 struggle to navigate them and at the same time, we're  
15 seeing youth apprehended within our communities and  
16 sponsors and guardians are increasingly afraid to  
17 come forward for fear of detention or deportation  
18 themselves.

19 We recently encountered a 14 year old girl who  
20 was picked up in Texas and transported away from her  
21 family to a shelter in Brooklyn. She had already  
appeared in immigration court five times without a  
lawyer. At her third hearing, the judge took  
pleadings directly from her and told her if she did

1 not apply for legal relief, she would be deported.  
2 No child should ever be placed in that position and  
3 when children have a lawyer, they're chances of  
4 securing protection rise to nearly 90 percent.

5 So, today, I CARE respectfully requests the  
6 Council to sustain and expand two critical  
7 initiatives. The Unaccompanied Minors and Families  
8 initiative, which supports eight organizations  
9 serving more than 2,000 children and families with  
10 direct representation and coordinated services and  
11 the special immigrant juvenile status initiatives,  
12 which was new last year but helps youth who have  
13 experienced parental -

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
15 Time has expired.

16 SIERRA KRAFT: And abandonment. Thank you so  
17 much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Peter Basica, you  
19 may now - you may give your testimony when the  
20 Sergeant starts your clock.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

PETER BASICA: Good afternoon Chair and members  
of the Committee. My name is Pete Basica. I am the  
Founder and Chairman of 360 Smarter Care. Our

1  
2 current mental health system is built on providing  
3 services to our youth when they begin to show signs  
4 that they are troubled.

5 It is too little, too late for too many. CDC  
6 data shows that 40 percent of the students report  
7 persistent depression, sadness or hopelessness and 20  
8 percent have exhibited suicidal ideation. Children  
9 in foster care are at even greater risk for  
10 attachment disorder and PTSD.

11 This is common knowledge for professionals in  
12 this space and I'm sure to members of this Committee.  
13 The shortages of qualified professionals to help our  
14 youth create long wait times. Unfortunately the need  
15 for these services is growing faster than we produced  
16 more qualified mental health professionals. The  
17 solution is prevention through behavioral education.  
18 Assigning more work to teachers who are already  
19 overwhelmed is not a solution.

20 New York must invest in preventative behavioral,  
21 emotional and mental health education delivered  
through scalable digital tools that reach our youth  
early, consistently, across every school and  
community.

1  
2 The 360 Smarter Self program is a digital  
3 prevention platform that helps young people develop  
4 the resilience and mental strength necessary to  
5 navigate our complex society.

6 Smarter Self can support New York's youth,  
7 evenings, weekends, and the 180 days a year they are  
8 not in school. As you consider the fiscal year 2027  
9 budget, I urge you to consider the need to  
10 immediately begin with education and prevention in  
11 addition to the efforts that come unfortunately all  
12 too often too little, too late. Thank you for your  
13 time.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
15 Kevin McEwen, you may begin when the Sergeant starts  
16 your clock.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 KEVIN MCEWEN: Good afternoon Chair and Members of  
19 the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is  
20 Kevin McEwen and I am the Executive Director of the  
21 Kofago Institute. Thank you for the opportunity to  
testify today. Support of our 2027 funding requests  
and the children and youth that we serve in New York  
City.

1  
2 Kofago Institute uses arts and culture as tools  
3 for youth development education, identity building  
4 and opportunity. Our work is especially important to  
5 young people in communities that are under-resourced  
6 and too often overlooked. One of our most important  
7 initiatives called Kofago Taraji is our Summer Youth  
8 Employment program and through the program, young  
9 people receive paid opportunities to build workforce  
10 skills, leadership, confidence and cultural knowledge  
11 through the arts. Kofago Taraji is more than a  
12 summer job, it is an investment into the future of  
13 our youth.

14 We also support K-12 programming across New York  
15 City and host the Kofago conference and the Cultural  
16 Rise, a dance conference which creates meaningful  
17 opportunities for youth, families, educators, and  
18 communities to engage in learning mentorship,  
19 performance and cultural exchange.

20 We have submitted requests for support because  
21 the need is urgent and the demand continues to grow.  
Our children and youth deserve programs that affirm  
who they are and expand what they believe is  
possible.

1  
2 We respectfully ask the Committee to support the  
3 Kofago Institutes 2027 request. Thank you for your  
4 time and consideration.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
6 Next, we'll turn to Allison Hollihan. You may begin  
7 when the Sergeant starts your clock.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 ALLISON HOLLIHAN: Hi, my name is Allison  
10 Hollihan and I am the Director of the New York  
11 Initiative for children of incarcerated parents at  
12 the Osborne Association. I want to give a big shout  
13 out to all of the young people who just testified  
14 today. I am here to talk about the needs of the one  
15 of 14 children who have experienced parental  
16 incarceration.

17 First, New York City must safeguard children when  
18 a parent is arrested. We are grateful to receive  
19 Council funding in the past to implement the 2019  
20 Safeguarding Children of a Parent, Parents Law and  
21 we've trained 9,000 of the 34,000 uniformed officers  
and requested funding from the Council to continue  
this work and to also train DOC personnel to minimize  
stress for children visiting Rikers and safeguarding

1  
2 them when their caregiver is arrested when they are  
3 visiting their parent.

4 We urge the Council to introduce a bill requiring  
5 NYPD to collect data on the number of children  
6 present during an arrest to ensure targeted community  
7 resources are available for these children and to  
8 safeguard children when planning for and executing  
9 warrants. The city must prevent the criminalization  
10 of children speaking with their incarcerated parents.  
11 DOC contracts with Secures who collects data during  
12 phone calls and sells it to law enforcement customers  
13 nationwide.

14 Passing the ECHOES Act Intro. 96 will protect  
15 children from being surveilled and criminalized for  
16 simply talking on the phone with their parent who is  
17 incarcerated on Rikers. We urge city agencies,  
18 especially ACS, to collect data on how many children  
19 experience the arrest or incarceration of a parent to  
20 inform service delivery, resources allocation and  
21 cross systems collaboration.

We ask for children of incarcerated parents to be  
considered as a priority population for Summer Youth  
Employment program for the one in five high school  
students experiencing parental incarceration. The

1  
2 Interagency Coordinating Council on Youth should  
3 create a working group focused on youth with  
4 incarcerated parents to improve the effectiveness of  
5 youth serving agencies to meet their unique needs.

6 Finally, it is critical for the Council to  
7 monitor the implementation of Local Law 40 passed  
8 last year requiring DOC to have child friendly  
9 visiting spaces, reduce visit wait times for children  
10 and train DOC personnel on how to minimize stress for  
11 child visitors.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your testimony  
13 time has expired.

14 ALLISON HOLLIHAN: In these areas. Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
16 Now, we'll turn to Nicole Carta. You may begin when  
17 the Sergeant starts your clock.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 NICOLE CARTA: Good afternoon. My name is Nicole  
20 Carta with Healing New York. Thank you Chair Stevens  
21 and the Committee for the opportunity to testify  
today.

Founded in 1875, is the New York Society for the  
prevention of cruelty to children. Healing New York  
is the nation's first child protection agency.

1 Today, our work focuses on two core areas, clinical  
2 services and prevention. Our clinical services  
3 include trauma recovery for children who have  
4 experienced child abuse and neglect. Using evidence  
5 based therapy, our bilingual clinicians helped  
6 children address anxiety, depression, fear and post  
7 traumatic stress disorder. We are a referral partner  
8 of ACS, the city's foster care agencies and other  
9 child serving organizations.

10 Children could receive in person and virtual  
11 therapeutic care at no cost for as long as they need  
12 to recover. We also provide therapeutic supervised  
13 visitation for families referred by the court system.  
14 These visits include coaching and therapy groups for  
15 both visiting and custodial parents to help families  
16 heal.

17 We are one of only two providers of therapeutic  
18 supervised visitation in the city and the only one  
19 that offers it free of charge to families. This  
20 year, we opened our family healing center with an  
21 emergency cash assistance program for urgent needs  
like utility bills and groceries. We're also working  
with a coalition of partners to help connect our  
families to broader social services when needed. Our

1 approach ensures we are addressing the whole picture  
2 of need to help families stabilize.

3 Last year, we served clients in 39 Council  
4 Districts, almost all of whom are low income and come  
5 predominantly from Black and Latinx communities.

6 Our second program, the trailing - the Training  
7 Institute focuses on prevention. We educate  
8 children, caregivers and professionals about sexual  
9 abuse and online sexual exportation.

10 Our school based programs fulfill the annual  
11 requirement under New York State's Aaron's Law. We  
12 also train parents and caregivers on how to talk with  
13 children on these difficult topics and support  
14 professionals in identifying, reporting and  
15 preventing abuse and recognizing and managing their  
16 own secondary trauma. Last year, we had school  
17 trainings in 21 Council districts.

18 We currently have a waitlist for our programs,  
19 Council funding would allow Healing New York to hire  
20 additional therapists -

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
Time has expired.

NICOLE CARTA: Thank you.

1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sitan Sako, you may begin  
3 when the Sergeant starts your clock.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 SITAN SAKO: Okay, uh, okay, good afternoon Chair  
6 and members of the Committee. My name is Sitan Sako,  
7 Entrepreneur and Founder currently developing  
8 initiatives through TBS Charity Incorporated and TBS  
9 Youth Rise Housing Development Funding Corporation.  
10 Through these initiatives, I am working to build  
11 programs focused on youth mentorship, academic  
12 support, workforce training, entrepreneurship and  
13 family support services.

14 I am here today to advocate for stronger  
15 preventative services that help families remain  
16 together before crises occur. Uh, in many cases  
17 families enter the child welfare system not because  
18 they lack love for their children but because they  
19 lack access to support systems that help families  
20 remain stable.

21 I encourage the city to expand preventative  
services such as At Home Nanny Support Vouchers for  
Families in Crisis, Emergency Drop-In Childcare  
Centers, not like the Children's Center because  
that's like a gel for children. Uhm, afterschool

1  
2 program with academic support and mentorship,  
3 parenting education and family counseling services,  
4 access to forensic evaluations in serious child  
5 welfare cases.

6 I also respectfully ask the City Council to  
7 consider funding TBS Charity Incorporated, so we can  
8 help deliver these services and support families in  
9 our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to  
10 testify and uhm, yeah, that's it.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Now, we'll turn  
12 to Annie Minguez. You may begin when the Sergeant  
13 starts your clock.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 ANNIE MINGUEZ: Thank you Chair Stevens and  
16 members of the Children and Youth Committee. My name  
17 is Annie Minguez, I am the Vice President of  
18 Government and Community Relations at Good Shepherd  
19 Services and we heard so much today. I just wanted  
20 to highlight a few things on the crisis management  
21 system. I want to elevate that we need to restore  
\$1.5 million PEG and an additional \$1.5 million for  
Legal - Legal Aid Society to be able to support the  
community justice unit and the growing community

1 violence intervention programs that exist in our  
2 city.

3 On the runaway homeless youth, I was actually  
4 really uhm, glad that DYCD recognized the importance  
5 of both peer navigators and housing navigators to  
6 ensure that young people who are in the Runaway and  
7 Homeless Youth Network are able to get out and into  
8 permanent housing. We look forward to hearing more  
9 about the increased bed rates as we wait for an RFP  
10 that reflects the true cost of wanting beds and we  
11 also want to elevate that we need to support older  
12 youth.

13 So, we want to see an increase from the 100 beds  
14 for older youth ages 21 to 24. I will submit written  
15 testimony with much more information. Thank you for  
16 the time.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
18 Benjamin Tocker, you may begin when the Sergeant  
19 starts your clock.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 BENJAMIN TOCKER: Good afternoon. Thank you  
Chair Stevens and the Committee on Children and Youth  
for the opportunity to testify today. My name is

1 Benjamin Tocker and I am here on behalf of my  
2 colleagues at Graham Wyndham.

3 Graham has been providing support and services to  
4 children and families for 220 years and we're deeply  
5 committed to supporting our families and the needs of  
6 their school aged children.

7 So, I'm here today to talk about how important it  
8 is for students to have reliable school  
9 transportation starting as soon as they're placed in  
10 foster care or as soon as they switch placements.  
11 For students in care, being able to stay at their  
12 home school can be one of the only sources of  
13 stability during a very difficult and traumatic time  
14 for them.

15 State and Federal law recognizes the importance  
16 of this stability and they require New York City  
17 Public School Districts to provide transportation.  
18 However, this transportation can often take weeks or  
19 months to be arranged. There are a few examples  
20 demonstrating why the city must provide interim  
21 transportation for these students who are in foster  
care and awaiting bus services. We have foster  
parents who are facing repercussions at work because  
they are escorting students to and from school.

1  
2 There are agency staff who are kept from doing other  
3 more important work because they're spending up to  
4 four hours or more every day securing the  
5 transportation for these students. And students,  
6 although they have rideshare provided for them, they  
7 are only able to use it when there is a chaperone and  
8 so, if they do not have a chaperone, they're unable  
9 to access the rideshare.

10 So, some of the solutions that we're advocating  
11 for are that the city could contract the  
12 transportation providers who are already using vetted  
13 drivers and who do not require chaperones such as Kid  
14 Car, which is operating in New York City currently.  
15 Using ACS or other city owned vehicles that include  
16 escorts, which is done for students at the Children  
17 Center. Creating dedicated interim transportation  
18 services for these students. Hiring chaperone aids  
19 to accompany the students or at the very least,  
20 reimbursing the parents or the staff or the  
21 chaperones who are currently setting up to fill the  
gap and we respectfully ask that the city does more  
to support these students in foster care by investing  
\$3 million to provide interim transportation  
services.

1  
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
3 Time has expired.

4 BENJAMIN TOCKER: Thank you very much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
6 Alex Stein, you may begin when the Sergeant starts  
7 your clock.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 ALEX STEIN: I would like to say I notice a lot  
10 of uhm the people in this meeting are African  
11 American, Black and you'll notice none of them are  
12 Muslim because Muslims do not neglect our children.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Please make sure you stay  
14 on topic.

15 ALEX STEIN: We like to marry them. So, the  
16 social services of the budget, going to all of these  
17 African Americans. I know you like abortion so much,  
18 why don't you create some sort of abortion incentive  
19 so these kids don't have to go to prison or go to  
20 jail. You can see their trained when it comes to the  
21 race of these kids and I feel so bad but it seems  
like you guys, if you like to kill babies in the  
womb, why don't you do that to these babies so they  
don't have to grow up with their parents -

1                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Please stay on topic.

2 Thank you.

3                   ALEX STEIN: What I'm saying, the budget, I don't  
4 know why my tax dollars have to go. I have Islam  
5 family. We have multiple kids. Why does my tax  
6 money have to go to these kids with their parents and  
7 their baby mommas having so many babies with no baby  
8 dad support? I don't understand. New York City,  
9 Mamdani, they don't - they don't neglect the kids.  
10 Yes, they marry the kids but they don't neglect them.  
11 So, that's-

12                   CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Please stay on topic around  
13 the budget hearing today.

14                   ALEX STEIN: What I'm talking about is why is our  
15 budget being allocated for that. We should have -  
16 these kids - none of these kids are doing real -. I  
17 don't see no budget that teaches kids to support  
18 [INAUDIBLE 445:01]. You need to put a mask over some  
19 of these kids. They should be covering their face.  
20 It's wrong. It's disgusting. A lot of -

21                   SERGEANT AT ARMS: Ten seconds.

                  ALEX STEIN: And I voted for Mamdani, so that we  
could help brotherhood and I just see you helping a  
lot of Black children and I like Black children but -

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

377

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
Your time has expired.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Seeing no one else on Zoom.  
I'll turn it over to the Chair to close out the  
hearing.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I adjourn this meeting.  
Thank you. [GAVEL]

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21

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 April 18, 2026