

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND
RECREATION

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September 24, 2024
Start: 1:10 p.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm, 14th fl.

B E F O R E: Shekar Krishnan
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr
Robert F. Holden
Linda Lee
Julie Menin
Mercedes Narcisse
Vickie Paladino
Sandra Ung

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

Sue Donoghue
Parks Department Commissioner

Iris Rodriguez-Rosa
Parks Department Deputy Commissioner

Bonnie Williams
Parks Department Chief of Special Operations

Matt Drury
Parks Department Deputy Chief of Citywide
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Aminatu Noah
Mother of Elyjha Chandler

Maryam Shuaib
Malikah

Olga Perez
MVP Lifeguards

Kaitlin Krause
Rising Tide Effect

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet please. Thank
3 you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the New York City
4 Hybrid hearing on the Committee on Parks and
5 Recreation. Please silent all electronic devices at
6 this time. Also, please do not approach the dais.
7 If you have any questions, please raise your hand and
8 one of us Sergeant at Arms will kindly assist you.
9 Thank you very much for your kind cooperation.
10 Chair, we are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
12 Sergeant. [gavel] Good afternoon. My name is Shekar
13 Krishnan, Chair of the City Council's Committee on
14 Parks and Recreation. Today's hearing will revisit
15 an issue which I am sad to say does not only need to
16 be revisited, but addressed in a meaningful way,
17 which is what actions the City of New York is taking
18 that they can implement to prevent drownings at the
19 City's pools and beaches and improve safety overall.
20 There are currently 53 locations with outdoor
21 swimming pools, 17 mini pools, and 12 indoor swimming
22 pools which are located in recreation centers.
23 Outdoor pools are free and open to the public,
24 typically from late June through early September.
25 There are also nine beaches covering 14 miles which

1
2 are open from Memorial Day weekend through the
3 summer, through the Sunday after Labor Day each year
4 with lifeguards on duty daily from 10:00 a.m. 'til
5 6:00 p.m. Millions of people make use of the city's
6 beaches and pools each year and the COVID-19 pandemic
7 highlighted the extent of how crucial our parks,
8 pools and beaches are for New Yorkers like never
9 before. Since the recovery from the pandemic,
10 attendance at pools and beaches have soared, but
11 whether we have enough resources to sufficiently meet
12 the public safety and recreational needs remains a
13 huge open question mark. Over the course of this
14 past summer, seven people tragically died from
15 drownings at our city beaches, which was the highest
16 amount since 2019. On June 21st, two Brooklyn
17 teenagers drowned while swimming at Jacob Riis Park
18 in the Rockaways. On July 5th, two Bronx teenage
19 sisters drowned while swimming at Coney Island Beach.
20 On July 17th, a 26-year-old man was found near a
21 Beach 95th Street in the Rockaways. On July 22nd, a
22 30-year-old man drowned near Beach 96th Street in the
23 Rockaways, and on August 14th, a person drowned at
24 Orchard Beach. The seven drowning deaths this
25 summer, as I mentioned before, are the highest since

1
2 2019. It dropped last year, but now it's crept up
3 again. Seven New Yorkers, seven brothers, sisters,
4 children, neighbors, relatives, seven people killed
5 on our City's beaches. This is a crisis, on that
6 this Administration needs to take far more seriously
7 and use every tool at its disposal, every resource
8 possible to address it. One death is one too many.
9 But the fact that our numbers have crept up to seven,
10 the highest in the last five years, is a reflection
11 of the work that needs to be done by this
12 Administration, and the urgency with which they need
13 to take this crisis. This crisis is urgent and the
14 moment demands far more serious and comprehensive
15 action from city government. Now, drowning remains a
16 serious public health crisis with over 4,500 people
17 drowning each year nationally between 2020 and 2022.
18 It is a leading cause of death for children.
19 However, this is a preventable crisis if we can
20 summon the political will to divert enough resources
21 to education and outreach on swimming and water
22 safety. This is a question of will, not a question
23 of resources. To highlight this, over 40 million
24 adults in the United States do not know how to swim,
25 with one in three African-American adults being

1
2 unable to swim, two in three African-American adults
3 reporting to never have taken a swimming lesson, and
4 three in four Hispanic adults reported never taking a
5 swimming lesson. As well as our Asian-American
6 communities, too, the statistics are high and
7 disparate. It's obvious that communities that have
8 been historically underserved educationally and
9 socioeconomically have the highest risk of water-
10 related injuries and death. In previous hearings and
11 other work conducted by this committee, we have
12 highlighted why this is the case. As these
13 communities simply do not have easy access to pools
14 and swimming instruction and other water recreation.
15 Using a similar metric that is typically used to
16 determine access to open space, 65 percent of
17 Manhattan residents are able to walk to a pool in 15
18 minutes or less, followed by the Bronx with 34
19 percent, Brooklyn with 31 percent, Staten Island with
20 19 percent, and Queens with only 12 percent of its
21 residents able to walk to a pool in 15 minutes or
22 less. In my district that I represent as the Parks
23 Chair of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, not only do we
24 have the least amount of greenspace in all of New
25 York City, we do not have a single public pool in my

1
2 entire council district. Further, although there are
3 64 Parks locations that contain pools, there are 18
4 council districts like my own that currently have no
5 pools. This includes areas like lower Manhattan,
6 South Brooklyn, and most of Queens. Clearly, we can-
7 - we must do better with focusing our resources on
8 where we can build more pools. The continued
9 lifeguard shortage, of course, remains problematic.
10 The Parks Department has historically assigned around
11 1,400 lifeguards to beaches and pools throughout the
12 City by July 4th. However, during the 2022 beach and
13 pool season, the Parks Department only hired 778
14 lifeguards by July. In other words, about half of
15 where we needed to be. In 2023 there were only 480
16 lifeguards to start the season in May. This past
17 season, about 900 were able to be hired. Yes,
18 improvement, but still far off from fully staffing
19 our pools and beaches. Pools and beaches did remain
20 open. However, as a result of the shortage, the
21 Parks Department had to adjust areas of beaches that
22 could remain open to swimming during the summer. And
23 to its credit, the Parks Department has recognized
24 the problem and reacted by raising lifeguard pay
25 rates from 2022 through this year. It has also

1 engaged in numerous efforts to start the recruitment
2 process earlier and adjust the training and testing
3 regimen in efforts to increase the number of
4 potential applicants. These are conversations the
5 commissioner and I have had directly, but the
6 shortage persists and has obviously impacted public
7 safety. And for a mayor who claims to care deeply
8 about public safety as a quality of life, the fact
9 that we cannot staff our pools and beaches, that we
10 are losing teenagers to the waters every year, makes
11 his words ring hollow. And yes, there is a national
12 lifeguard shortage. No one denies that. That is not
13 an excuse for inaction. That is a reason to get
14 creative, far more ambitious about the measures we
15 can take in the confines of the crisis to do all we
16 can as a city to create, hire, train and keep
17 lifeguards, and also create a pipeline for them.
18 It's crucial that we recognize the work that
19 lifeguards perform day-in and day-out. Despite the
20 incidents that occurred this summer, lifeguards amok
21 countless saves and are the primary reason why there
22 aren't even more emergencies at our beaches and
23 pools. No doubt their work is heroic, and part of
24 our purpose here today is to highlight how heroic
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1 lifeguards are and how necessary they are to have a
2 sufficient number of them to prevent the loss of life
3 and injury. Earlier this year when we held another
4 hearing on this very same topic, I discussed a five-
5 point plan of action where the City could intervene
6 and act to dramatically improve water safety. First,
7 the City should expand the hours and seasons for
8 pools and beaches. To be safe in the water, New
9 Yorkers need to be exposed to the water. Outdoor
10 public pools and beaches should be open to families
11 when weather allows on a schedule that accommodates
12 working parents and their children. The bill I've
13 sponsored, Intro 275, which the committee heard back
14 in March, mandates that operating hours should be
15 from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and the bathing season
16 should run from mid-May to mid-October. This will
17 add four hours each day and seven weeks each season,
18 effectively doubling the time that New Yorkers can
19 use outdoor pools and beaches. We simply need to
20 extend the hours that lifeguards are available to
21 maintain safety at the beaches, and this bill does
22 exactly that. When it is hot, people will attempt to
23 swim, and short of finding physical barriers to close
24 beaches, which no one wants, we need more personnel
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1 to keep watch over beachgoers, simply put. We have
2 to be realistic about this. Because of climate
3 change, it is getting warmer earlier in the year, and
4 it is staying 'til later in the year, including
5 today. And the reality is, when it stays warmer for
6 longer during the year and into the evening, New
7 Yorkers will swim. They will want to swim. For many
8 parents for whom the beaches are a refuge, because
9 they don't have access to a pool, and the communities
10 are hot, and the streets are hot. Going to the
11 beaches are a way to get themselves and their
12 children to cool off. And I'm sure we'll hear that
13 there aren't enough lifeguards to actually implement
14 this bill, but notice the cyclical patterns, circular
15 reasoning that we're engaging in as a city if that's
16 how we approach it. We need more. We need our pools
17 and beaches open longer, but we can't do it because
18 they don't have enough lifeguards to do so. That
19 kind of thinking has to change. This is a public
20 health and a public safety crisis. Next, the
21 Department of Education should create a Junior
22 Lifeguard Corps. The lifeguard shortage doesn't just
23 put families at risk of drowning when they cool off
24 in public waters. It also forces closures, further
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1 depriving New Yorkers of access. A pre-considered
2 bill I sponsored which we're examining today will
3 require Parks and the Department of Education to
4 determine how best to launch a Junior Lifeguard Corps
5 using students, school pools, and city or nonprofit
6 staff to provide training to city students who will
7 be able to satisfy physical education requirements,
8 work towards a rewarding career and spend their
9 summers saving lives. The fact of the matter is our
10 youth want to lifeguard. They want to learn how to
11 swim. They want a summer job, and if we're going to
12 address the lifeguard crisis, a meaningful way to do
13 so is to create a pipeline from children in school
14 that can be trained, that can learn not only how to
15 swim, but how to lifeguard, and become our future
16 lifeguards. I have seen this in action recently when
17 I was at Rising Tides graduation ceremony for NYCHA
18 students who learning and train now in water safety.
19 that is our future, and if we are going to address
20 this crisis in a meaningful way, then we've got to
21 work with the organizations on the ground that are
22 doing this work every day, that are teaching our
23 children how to swim, and create a pipeline of
24 lifeguards and talent to be able to address this
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1 crisis. They are our future lifeguards. They are
2 our future. Third, we must expand free swim for all
3 programs to more New Yorkers. One in four New York
4 City children does not know how to swim. They will
5 grow up to be adults who are afraid of the water.
6 The Parks Department and the Department of Education
7 should work with nonprofits to ensure universal
8 access to free swim instruction for second graders.
9 The City should also invest in a significant
10 expansion of free swim programs for adults. This is
11 especially crucial since these programs are
12 potentially slated for cuts in the Administration's
13 proposed budget, and private funding was needed to be
14 raised to create new swim programs as a bulwark
15 against what would be a terrible hit to public water
16 safety programs. And again, just like with our bill,
17 to create a pipeline of lifeguards, our Junior
18 Lifeguard Corps, where City Hall won't act, we in the
19 City Council will do so. If the response is that
20 legislation that was passed to teach all second
21 graders how to swim-- Council Member Julie Menin. If
22 the Administration won't implement it because they
23 don't have the funds to do, then we in the City
24 Council show them what's possible. Both Council
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1
2 Member Menin and I work together with the Gray
3 Foundation and a network of swim organizations,
4 Asphalt Green, the YMCA, Common Point to create a \$1
5 million pilot teaching second graders in
6 neighborhoods, in highest need neighborhoods across
7 the city, how to swim. And when we didn't have pools
8 like in my own district to implement that program, we
9 worked with the school to open up their pool to the
10 community to teach second graders how to swim, a
11 class that was in high-demand all summer and into the
12 fall. Where City Hall will not act, we in the City
13 Council will do so and show what is possible.

14 Fourth, we must build more pools. More than two-
15 thirds of New Yorkers do not have access to a public
16 pool nearby. We cannot ensure that New Yorkers are
17 safe in the water if they cannot access pools. We
18 must build more pools in every borough, prioritizing
19 the communities that lack them. Lastly, the City
20 should create an atlas of aquatics programs.

21 Aquatics programs can only help New Yorkers if we
22 know where, when, and how to find them. This is a
23 very real scenario. I've heard from numerous
24 parents, myself included, that to go find classes to
25 teach children how to swim is extraordinarily

1 difficult, where they are, what time they're being
2 offered, and not just Parks Department programs that
3 are often oversubscribed, understandably so, but all
4 the programs that nonprofit are offering throughout
5 the City. We need a one-stop place where we can find
6 these programs and enroll our children. That's what
7 this bill does. The other pre-considered bill we're
8 hearing today that I'm sponsoring will require the
9 Parks Department to create a public, searchable, web-
10 based map listing both public pools, as well as
11 programs available at each site. I also want to call
12 attention to Resolution 469 which I've also
13 sponsored. This resolution would recognize May 15th
14 as International Water Safety Day which brings
15 awareness to the epidemic of drowning and educates
16 children and adults about how they can become safer
17 in, on and around the water. When we held our
18 hearing in March, it was my hope that some of the
19 solutions raised at the hearing would have been well
20 on their way to being implemented by now. Sadly,
21 this has not been the case, and we saw the tragic
22 results of that inaction taking place on our beaches
23 throughout the summer with the deaths of seven New
24 Yorkers. It is why we on the City Council have
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1 prioritized water safety where City Hall has failed
2 to act. It is why Speaker Adams and Majority Whip
3 Selvena Brooks-Powers' district last week a number of
4 Council Members, the Speaker and I held a press
5 conference joined by families of victims who were
6 lost in the waters, calling attention to this crisis
7 at Rockaway Beach and in anticipation of today's
8 hearing. Because everything that we can do from
9 legislation to public attention to pilot programs,
10 even finding private funding to do so, to today's
11 hearing, we in the City Council with Speaker Adams
12 leadership will take every step that we can. We'll
13 take every measure we can to address this crisis. We
14 are committed to doing so, and we would hope that we
15 would have a partner in City Hall that felt the same.
16 Now is the time to ensure that next summer and all
17 future summers are not a repeat of what happened this
18 past summer. We must address the crisis on our
19 city's beaches. We can do no less, and it is long
20 past time that we find a better, more effective, and
21 more comprehensive way to do so. New Yorkers are
22 depending on us. I look forward to discussing
23 further these issues today and welcome all who have
24 come to testify. Thank you. I'd like to now
25

1 recognize the members who are here with us today. we
2 have in-person Council Member Holden, Council Member
3 Narcisse, Council Member Ung, Council Member Carr,
4 and on virtual we have Council Member Cabán and
5 virtual as well, Council Member Narcisse and Council
6 Member Ung. I will now request our Committee Counsel
7 swear in our panel of witnesses from the Parks
8 Department.
9

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

11 Would representatives of the Parks Department please
12 raise your right hand if you're able? Do you affirm
13 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
14 the truth in your testimony before this committee and
15 to respond honestly to Council Member questions?
16 Thank you. Please begin when you're ready. Thank
17 you.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Good afternoon,
19 Chair Krishnan, members of the Parks Committee and
20 other members of the City Council. I'm Sue Donoghue,
21 Commissioner of New York City Parks. I'm pleased to
22 be joined today by members of our senior staff,
23 including our first Deputy Commissioner Iris
24 Rodriguez-Rosa, Bonnie Williams, our Chief of Special
25 Programs, and Matt Drury, our Chief of Citywide

1
2 Legislative Affairs. New York City Parks has long
3 been committed to improving New Yorkers quality of
4 life through aquatic recreation, promoting health,
5 fitness, and safety awareness at all of our beaches
6 and pools. Our public beaches and pools are an
7 essential part of summertime in New York City and
8 have become more critical than ever in providing
9 relief from the heat as climate change brings us
10 ever-increasing temperatures. I am so proud of our
11 Parks staff, lifeguards, filter plant operators,
12 maintenance workers, Parks Enforcement Patrol, and
13 everyone in between who worked hard every day this
14 summer to keep our pools and beaches open, clean, and
15 safe for the enjoyment of New Yorkers and visitors
16 alike. In addition to 148 miles of waterfront park
17 land, our agency maintains over 14 miles of public
18 beachfront, eight separate beaches located at various
19 points along New York City's shoreline, and 53
20 outdoor pools, all of which are open to the public
21 every summer for swimming and other recreational
22 activities completely for free. I'm pleased to
23 announce that we recently completed our 2024 summer
24 beach and pool season, during which 7.4 million New
25 Yorkers came out to enjoy our incredible beaches, and

1
2 over one million New Yorkers visited our outdoor
3 pools. As we testified before this committee earlier
4 this year, New York City Parks has been working
5 tirelessly to increase the number of lifeguards
6 serving our city and those efforts have already
7 produced real results for New Yorkers. Today, we're
8 thrilled to share that our lifeguard corps grew
9 significantly over last year with 930 lifeguards in
10 our ranks at the season's peak, nearly a 10 percent
11 increase in the number of lifeguards protecting
12 visitor at our city's pools and beaches. Thanks to
13 our intensive efforts this past fall and winter, we
14 were able to increase the number of new lifeguard
15 recruits by 46 percent by expanding testing and
16 training sites, partnering with sister agencies like
17 DOE to hold qualifying exams at their sites, allowing
18 more flexibility for vision [sic] exam [sic]
19 locations, and other process improvements. We're all
20 so very proud of the work we did in the off-season to
21 successfully renegotiate the lifeguard union contract
22 with District Council 37 for the first time in 40
23 years which resulted in process improvements such as
24 modified swim time requirements for lifeguards
25 serving at shallow water pools. Additionally, we

1 secured an increased baseline hourly wage of \$22 for
2 our seasonal lifeguards, and a \$1,000 retention
3 bonus, all of which greatly aided our recruitment
4 efforts. But our efforts to keep New Yorkers safe
5 didn't end there. In the midst of extreme weather
6 conditions, Parks implemented a new safety protocol
7 during heat waves which allowed beach lifeguards
8 alongside our Parks Enforcement Patrol to provide
9 additional support in responding to emergencies past
10 the end of swimming hours each day. As we know all
11 too well, water safety and swim instruction saves
12 lives. Accidental drowning is the second-leading
13 cause of unintentional injury-related death among
14 children under the age of 14 with a disproportionate
15 impact on Black and Brown youth which is why we were
16 thrilled to be able to bring back our popular Learn
17 to Swim program back to our outdoor pools this summer
18 which served 3,000 children citywide through free
19 classes offered in every borough for tots and
20 children age one-and-a-half to 17. This was in
21 addition to the summer swim instruction and aquatic
22 exercise programming provided to over 1,500 children,
23 adults, and seniors at our indoor recreation center
24 pools. Our Urban Park Rangers conducted tabling at
25

1
2 our beaches around the city with information provided
3 in multiple languages promoting ocean safety and
4 informing the public about the dangers of rip
5 currents and over 530 attendees at New York City
6 Park's youth summer camps received valuable exposure
7 to swim instruction and water safety awareness
8 programming. in an effort to serve New Yorkers of
9 all ages, this summer we were able to bring back our
10 popular Senior Splash program for the first time
11 since the start of the pandemic. The program which
12 served more than 900 seniors this summer offered free
13 water aerobics classes for seniors at outdoor pools
14 across the city, helping older adults to improve
15 their fitness and socialize in a relaxing and
16 enjoyable setting. This Administration believes it's
17 critical for New Yorkers to have equitable access to
18 beautiful and safe swimming spaces during the hot
19 summer months, and we're committed to investing in
20 building and repairing our pools and related
21 facilities. Most notably, this summer we were very
22 pleased to reopen one of the jewels of our park
23 system, Astoria pool in Queens following a
24 transformative renovation. This historic pool, which
25 is the City's oldest and largest at nearly 90 years

1 old and over a full acre in size, underwent a full-
2 scale renovation, representing a \$19 million
3 investment in this beloved community amenity. We
4 reconstructed the pool shell, installed new
5 filtration recirculation and treatment systems, and
6 upgraded other elements to improve pool operations
7 and provide a more enjoyable experience for pool
8 visitors. Joined by Mayor Adams at the reopening
9 ceremony for that classic facility at the start of
10 the summer, we were thrilled to announce Let's Swim
11 NYC, a capital investment totaling more than a
12 billion dollars over five years to build, improve and
13 protect New York City's public pools. This funding
14 marks the city's largest sustained investment in
15 swimming infrastructure since the 1970s. Through
16 this effort, the City is directing necessary funding
17 towards 39 pools, including the construction of two
18 brand new indoor pools and full renovation of three
19 additional pools. This historic investment is
20 expanding recreational water access throughout the
21 five boroughs, helping more New Yorkers learn water
22 safety skills that save lives. Of course, there's
23 always more work to be done which is why were so
24 thrilled and appreciate when Governor Hochul
25

1 announced the results of the State's NYS Swims
2 funding initiative last month, through which the City
3 was awarded over \$46 million which will allow for the
4 full renovation of four existing city pool facilities
5 and the construction of a brand new aquatic center to
6 serve the Arverne and Edgemere communities in Queens.
7 We're grateful for governor Hochul's generous support
8 and look forward to working with the state to deliver
9 those projects for New Yorkers. Looking ahead,
10 keeping our beachgoers safe will continue to be our
11 top priority, and our incredible lifeguards will
12 continue to be a core component of our beach and pool
13 operations. We're already hard at work preparing for
14 this 2025 summer season, and we'll continue to
15 explore every avenue to recruit and retain even more
16 qualified lifeguards, including increasing
17 opportunities for potential lifeguards to test and
18 qualify. However, the reality is that the entire
19 nation is still facing a very challenging environment
20 for lifeguard hiring. We would like to ask the
21 Council and other advocates to please continue
22 helping us to get the word out to potential
23 lifeguards regarding this fun and rewarding seasonal
24 employment opportunity. Given the strong ties and
25

1 relationships that you've all built over time in your
2 local communities, we would love to see every Council
3 Member and every elected official recruiting 10 or
4 more potential lifeguards to come out and take the
5 qualifying swim test for the 2025 season which will
6 begin later this year. Specific to the legislation
7 being formally heard today, we are in the process of
8 reviewing the bills and look forward to discussing
9 them further with the Council and our colleagues in
10 the Administration. We'd like to thank the Council
11 for their support for our city's parks and open
12 spaces and for their partnership in educating New
13 Yorkers about the importance of water safety. If
14 there are any questions, we'd be happy to answer
15 those at this time.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
18 Commissioner, First Deputy Commissioner, the whole
19 Parks team who's here. We appreciate your work and
20 dedication every day to the issues affecting our park
21 system including our pools and beaches. And I also
22 want to recognize before we go any further that
23 Council Member Paladino has joined us virtually.
24 I've got some questions before turning it over to my
25 colleagues. The first one is-- I have to ask

1
2 honestly, you know. There's no doubt that the Parks
3 Department is doing all it can with the resources it
4 has and the lack of resources from a Mayor who
5 campaigned on increasing the Parks budget is a huge
6 contributor to this problem, and there's no doubt
7 that the workers, the lifeguards as I mentioned
8 before, are heroic and are working hard every day to
9 save lives, but I want to read a-- the headline of a
10 press release that both City Hall and the Parks
11 Department put out yesterday. It is, as you
12 mentioned Commissioner, "The Adams Administration
13 Celebrates Success Beach and Pool Season, Honors
14 Heroic Public Safety Workers Who Saved New Yorkers
15 from Drowning." Now, I know there there's a lot of
16 work to be done to be able to increase our lifeguard
17 corps to protect our pools and beaches, but one thing
18 that I find striking is the lack of recognition of
19 this gravity of the crisis that we face. When we saw
20 drownings this summer, the Mayor made flippant
21 comments about children not swimming-- or youth not
22 swimming after hours, and to see a press release put
23 out that celebrates a successful pool and beach
24 season and calls it a successful pool and beach
25 season, but we suffered the highest number of

1 drowning deaths this summer since before COVID, and
2 we are still at two-thirds adequate lifeguard
3 staffing. How does this Administration define
4 success?
5

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,
7 Councilman, for that question, and we did put out
8 that press release yesterday, and we do feel with
9 having served over seven million New Yorkers at our
10 beaches and over one million at our pools, and what
11 you referenced, and we so agree that heroic work of
12 our lifeguards-- dozens of saves in a very, very
13 busy, challenging environment, we do want to
14 recognize the good work of our staff in serving over
15 eight million New Yorkers in the summer, and
16 providing an incredible outlet for relief from the
17 heat and recognize our lifeguards, our Parks
18 Enforcement Patrol staff, our filter pool oper--
19 filter plant operators, all the different elements
20 that have to come together to manage a park system
21 and a pool and beach system of that magnitude, we
22 absolutely feel it's critical-- and to recognize the
23 incredible work that was done. We have 45 percent
24 increase in new recruits into the system; 70 percent
25 of those were between the ages of 16 and 18. The

1 word is getting out. We think that investment of \$22
2 pay an hour is really critical. We have seen things
3 coming together to provide for increases in the
4 number of lifeguards, the number of new recruits, and
5 us being able to serve New Yorkers.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I understand and
8 appreciate that as I said before, too. There's no
9 doubt the work of lifeguards is heroic, but that's
10 just one half of the equation. The other half is the
11 extraordinary loss of life on our beaches, and that
12 lack of swim access, the lack of water safety
13 education, and I can't understand why the Mayor and
14 City Hall and this Administration cannot recognize
15 the gravity of the crisis that we face and call it
16 what it is, which is a water safety crisis in the
17 City. And it just strikes me as very off-putting to
18 celebrate a season when we are facing such a urgent
19 situation on our beaches with the gravest
20 consequences that we've seen, as I mentioned, since
21 before the pandemic. And I think the only way to
22 really address this issue is to begin by first
23 recognizing the gravity and the seriousness of the
24 crisis. So, one of my questions, as we mentioned
25 this before, Commissioner, is how many lifeguards in

1
2 total ended up being hired during the 2024 beach
3 season, and what is the breakdown of lifeguards in
4 beaches versus pools?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you
6 for the question, Council Member, and I want to
7 address the first part of what you said. As I said
8 in my testimony, the Parks Department in the City
9 takes public safety and water safety extremely
10 seriously, and the loss of life is devastating for us
11 at Parks and for all New Yorkers. And as a mother of
12 three children, I would never ever not take the
13 gravity of the situation very seriously. It's
14 devastating for all of us in this room and for all
15 New Yorkers. We're recognize that. We also feel
16 that it's a really important opportunity to talk
17 about water safety to emphasize not swimming after
18 hours when there are not lifeguards on duty. That's
19 why we went out-- we did an ethnic media roundtable.
20 We did so much in terms of signage and our social
21 media to really emphasize the importance of only
22 swimming when lifeguards are on duty. It's dangerous
23 to do otherwise. That's why we work hard to make
24 sure people understand our red flags, people
25 understand what the beach hours are, because we don't

1 want people swimming when it's not safe. We don't
2 want people swimming when there are not lifeguards on
3 duty. To address your question, this year we
4 increased the number of lifeguards to 930, and that's
5 409 beach lifeguards and 521 pool lifeguards.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You know,
8 Commissioner, I want to address that comment, and I
9 do appreciate the measure that we're taking, but what
10 I'm hearing a lot from the Administration is what
11 people shouldn't be doing. Don't swim after hours.
12 Don't go in the water past the red flags. I heard
13 from one New Yorker who's a parent of a youth that
14 passed away and drowned, that it would be helpful if
15 the red flags actually had signage and print on them
16 explaining what they mean. I'm hearing a lot even
17 from the Mayor about don't-- make sure that we don't
18 go out after hours, but there's the reality that New
19 Yorkers are going to swim later in the day and later
20 in the season given the realities of climate change.
21 And what I'm not hearing enough of is not what New
22 Yorkers should not be doing, but what can we do as
23 city government to protect New Yorkers, and that's
24 not-- and I agree there's a component of this which
25 is water safety education, no doubt, and a component

1
2 of water safety education is, of course, making sure
3 to swim and letting parents know-- be vigilant about
4 your children going in the water after hours. But
5 there seems to be a disconnect between the array of
6 solutions that are needed beyond reprimanding New
7 Yorkers not to go after hours, and finding ways that
8 we can affirmatively address this crisis, and I think
9 we in the City Council would like to see more of
10 those solutions from City Hall, as we're proposing
11 our own legislation.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,
13 Council Member. I just wanted to note our red flags
14 do have on the signage indication, international
15 symbol of not swimming. They're not just plain red
16 flags. They have a symbol on them to not swim. And
17 also I apologize if I didn't make it clear in my
18 testimony, we're not only increasing recruitment, but
19 also the one billion dollar investment in Let's Swim
20 NYC is really about expanding access to pools, two
21 new pools being created, and then investments in 39
22 pools. So we are being proactive both on the
23 recruitment side and in the pool infrastructure side,
24 absolutely.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is the--
3 what's written on the flags, is that actual writing,
4 or is it just the picture itself?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's an
6 internationally recognized sign for no swimming.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, I-- and that's
8 good that there's international recognized signs, but
9 the reality is that oftentimes, you know, what we may
10 think on a policy level makes sense may not always
11 translate onto reality for New Yorkers, especially
12 many who don't know how to swim are in the water, and
13 so I'm reporting what I'm hearing from New Yorkers.
14 I know as a lawyer, too, we can have all the laws in
15 the world and all the regulations, but if they don't
16 make sense, they're not accessible to New Yorkers or
17 anyone on the ground, then the laws aren't going to
18 have intended effect or be worth more than the paper
19 they're written on. So, one thing I think about is
20 looking at different ways to explore making clear
21 where there are territories are to swim and not swim,
22 but also we're hearing from New Yorkers that this is
23 the kind of communication they want from Parks. And
24 there may be things that are done by the Parks
25 Department already to address it, but the fact of the

1 matter is there's too much of a focus on where not to
2 swim, what hours not to swim during, and again, the
3 hours right now, the timeframe is just not the
4 reality of where New Yorkers are on this issue,
5 because of how warm it is outside. And I just urge,
6 again, City Hall, the Mayor, this Administration to
7 one, put funding in the Parks Department budget to
8 address this issue. I think you all need funding,
9 absolutely, to address it, and it's a problem when
10 we're battling cuts to the Parks Department every
11 year, and we have to be honest about what that means.
12 And two, finding ways even with the resources we have
13 to come up with more creative measures than simply
14 telling New Yorkers don't go in the water after
15 hours, don't go into water when the lifeguard isn't
16 on duty. Part of what we have to anticipate is these
17 foreseeable things that will happen. You know, it's-
18 - as I think about it in the law, in products
19 liability law, you look at foreseeable misuses of a
20 product, and you protect against those foreseeable
21 misuses. It is foreseeable that people will swim
22 outside of hours. It is foreseeable that people may
23 end up swimming past the red flags, even if there's
24 communication on it, too, and we've got to figure out
25

1
2 what solutions we're going to do to address it beyond
3 simply repeating that they have to be swimming when a
4 lifeguard's on duty or during those hours. On that
5 note, what did the budget allocate for maintaining
6 Parks Department beaches and pools this year? What
7 was our total Parks Department budget? How much went
8 towards beaches and pools?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
10 question, Council Member. Just to add to what you
11 said, we completely agree and that's why this summer
12 we had our great Urban Park Rangers tabling at
13 beaches in the Rockaways and in Coney Island handing
14 out materials, printed materials. You know, the core
15 part of what the Urban Park Rangers do is educate and
16 inform, and so they were there tabling to let people
17 know and New Yorkers know about the dangers of the
18 water, specifically around rip currents and rip
19 tides. We made flyers available in multiple
20 languages. So a whole host-- and also had our, you
21 know, Parks Enforcement Patrol out and on the beaches
22 until nine o'clock after hours, a whole host of
23 things that were done to help amplify that messaging
24 around being safe and educating New Yorkers. In
25 terms of our budget, we do not breakdown our budget

1
2 by specific amenities. So, we don't have a breakdown
3 of, you know, pools versus beaches, but we look to
4 spread our budget equitably across all five boroughs.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so this
6 summer, when it became clear that too many drownings
7 and incidents were occurring at the beaches, aside
8 from the distribution of material, you know, around
9 the beaches, what other steps were taken by the Parks
10 Department and the Administration to create a safer
11 environment at the beaches?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, and thank
13 you for that question. So there were a whole host of
14 things that we did, including as I mentioned-- so we
15 had Parks Enforcement Patrol are out on the beaches
16 after hours until 9:00 p.m. on ATVs patrolling the
17 beaches, helping to tell people not to be in the
18 water. We had incredible collaboration with our
19 sister agencies at FDNY, NYPD, Office of Emergency
20 Management flying drones from nine o'clock in the
21 morning until nine o'clock at night. It just helps
22 extend our reach, the further eyes on the beaches
23 helping to inform us both of wildlife in the water,
24 and then also looking for situations that could be
25 dangerous, helping to identify when there's a lost

1 child, a whole number of things along that huge 14-
2 mile stretch of beaches. Just another great way that
3 we're able to help coordinate and communicate and to
4 enhance beach safety. And then another important
5 thing that we did, recognizing the challenges that we
6 saw with so many heat emergencies, we actually
7 implemented a new protocol at our beaches during heat
8 emergencies whereby our lifeguards would be available
9 in their shacks, one hour after the beach closed.
10 So, not in lifeguard chairs. We didn't want to give
11 the impression that we wanted people in the water,
12 but we did want to do what we could to help expand
13 water safety during that period of time when we knew
14 it's hot weather, people would be on the beaches
15 later. So we made lifeguards available in their
16 location, so that in the event of an emergency they
17 could run out, they could be helpful working in
18 coordination with our Parks Enforcement Patrol
19 Offices, FDNY, PD, all the different eyes around the
20 beaches. We did extend our lifeguards to 8:00 p.m.
21 during heat emergency situations.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: With my bill, we
24 extend to 8:00 p.m. for a much longer season, too.
25 So that's what were' looking to. I do want to ask

1 though, Commissioner, on that point in particular,
2 how many-- these are the same PEP officers, for
3 example, that are out on the beaches that are also
4 patrolling our parks across the city, right?
5

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Right.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: How many PEP
8 officers do we have in Department of Parks and
9 Recreation?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That number is
11 250-- 260.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I was going to
13 say 300, but 260.

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So close enough.
16 But 260 PEP officers in our parks and across 14 miles
17 of beaches, and I understand that was the work that
18 was done to make up for the fact there were no
19 lifeguards on duty, but it's not simply possible for-
20 - with the Parks Department budget the way it is,
21 with the PEP officer corps the way it is to patrol 14
22 miles of beaches with 260 PEP officers who are also
23 responsible for all of our New York City Parks, too.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: And I just have
25 to add, Council Member, thank you to Matt. That core

1
2 of 260 is supplemented by an additional 250 seasonal
3 CSAs.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. and
5 aside from trying to increase the number of
6 lifeguards, letting New Yorkers know where they can
7 and can't swim, what ideas, what affirmative ideas
8 have been pursued by this Administration to ensure
9 that a summer like the one we just had does not occur
10 again in terms of the loss of life at beaches?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
12 question. So, as I said in my testimony, we are
13 already preparing for the 2025 season. We're already
14 starting to think about recruitment, already starting
15 to plan for the qualifying test [sic], already
16 looking at how we're going to be communicating and
17 bringing in more young people. As I said in my
18 testimony, we're also tasking the Council to help us
19 with new recruits. We're hoping that the Council will
20 each send us two new recruits to our qualifying. We
21 know that it's critical, that connection between
22 having enough lifeguards to man our pools and
23 beaches. We're doing everything in our power to
24 increase that. We also, as I said in my testimony,
25 we're moving forward on number of projects to enhance

1
2 our both existing facilities. Thirty-nine pools will
3 have enhancements to infrastructure. We're building
4 two new pools at Shirley Chisolm and at Roy Wilkins
5 Park and then we were thrilled with the New York
6 Swims funding from governor Hochul and additional \$46
7 million dollar investment in pools across the City.
8 So a huge amount of money and investment in enhancing
9 our swim infrastructure, and then a real focus on
10 enhancing our recruitment. We've seen gains each
11 year and we expect that to continue.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I also want to
13 recognize that Council Members Lee and Menin have
14 also joined us, and before turning it over for some
15 questions from my colleagues, I do want to ask a
16 couple more questions which were-- how many pools
17 under the Parks Department-- public pools under the
18 Parks Department jurisdiction are currently open to
19 the public? How many are in rec centers versus other
20 types of pools?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
22 question. So, we have 53 outdoor pools, and 50 of
23 the 53 were open for summer 2024. The ones that were
24 closed during the summer were Tompkins Square which
25 just received funding through this Governor Hochul

1 funding which we're thrilled about, Tony Dapolito,
2 and then Harlem Meer, as I think you've seen is
3 actively in construction, and we're looking forward
4 to that opening next year. We have 12 indoor pools,
5 Olympic and intermediate. Eight of the 12 were open
6 for summer 2024, and we had four that were closed.
7 In the Bronx, St. Mary's was closed. In Brooklyn,
8 Brownsville was closed due to an ongoing restoration
9 project, but we're thrilled that we announced funding
10 that is going to completely renovate that pool, and
11 in Manhattan we have two pools that are closed,
12 Hansborough and Tony Dapolito.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. So, in
15 summary again-- sorry. How many are open versus
16 closed, and outdoor and indoor?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: 53 outdoor pools,
18 50 of the 53 were open for summer 24, and of our
19 indoor pools, eight of the-- we have 12 indoor pools,
20 eight of the 12 were open for summer 2024.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Eight of the 12
22 indoor pools, got it. Thank you. I also want to
23 recognize that we have been joined by Ms. Aminatu
24 Noah. Amina is the mother of Elyjha Chandler who
25 with his friend, Christopher Perkins, both were the

1 first drowning victims of this summer. They were
2 with us at our hearing-- at our press conference last
3 week, and Amina, I want you to know as we spoke about
4 then, too, that we-- to honor Elyjha, to honor all
5 who have lost their lives at our beaches both this
6 summer and in the past, we must do everything we can
7 as a city to make sure no child, no New Yorker ever
8 again loses their lives in our waters. And my last
9 couple questions for now are-- Commissioner, can you
10 just-- so you mentioned before the Parks Department
11 doesn't break down the budget by what's allocated
12 towards beaches and pools, right? It's just an
13 overall budget? Can you please get us that
14 information of-- I think it's important to see
15 exactly, you know, how many-- of the budget that we
16 have, how much is being allocated towards this
17 effort. So, if you don't have that information, we'd
18 appreciate if you can send it over to us.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'd be happy to
21 follow up, and also we can break down the number of
22 staffing [inaudible] each of those locations.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, that would
24 be great. I now want to turn it over-- I'm going to
25 take a break. I'll turn it over a bit to my

1
2 colleagues to ask questions. First up is Council
3 Member Holden.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair.
5 Sorry, I had to step out for a few minutes, but-- and
6 maybe this question was asked. Of the seven people
7 that drowned this year, were lifeguards on duty in
8 any of them?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,
10 Council Member Holden, for the question. Five who
11 drowned were on New York City beaches and I believe
12 only one was during lifeguard hours.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, only one
14 drowned during-- when there was a lifeguard on duty.

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Do you know the
17 circumstances of that one?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do not have the
19 specifics. That would be-- the Department of Health
20 is looking into the specifics on that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And the hours
22 that when they drowned was that-- obviously, it was
23 after a lifeguard was on duty. At night, was it--

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: [interposing] Yes,
25 in the evening, yeah.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, this is what
3 the Chair was saying about extending the hours,
4 especially in very warm weather. I know-- and you
5 didn't get the budget you deserved, first of all, and
6 the Mayor did promise that he was going to give us
7 one percent in his campaign and he didn't do it, and
8 that has repercussions, and this is one of them. This
9 is a problem that we're facing. My district has no
10 pools. We fund swim instruction, but it's not
11 enough. It's very-- you know, again, you can only
12 reach very few amount of your constituents. Have you
13 explored-- and again, I'm sorry if the Chair asked
14 this question when I was out. Have you explored sort
15 of like swim teaching pools where they're much
16 smaller, less expensive, but we can get the job done
17 by reaching a number of constituents?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
19 question, Council Member. We have-- I mean, our rec
20 centers are-- you know, provide opportunities for
21 swim teaching. In fact, for-- when people come in
22 for the qualifying test, one of the things that we
23 did for those who passed the qualifier test, we
24 offered free membership for six months to people to
25 train. So in order to then-- if they pass the

1
2 qualifying test, then they go into training. We
3 offered free membership to our rec centers in order
4 for people to enhance their skills. We have a swim
5 improvement program that we offered at our rec
6 centers, also to help individuals to be able to pass
7 the rigorous lifeguard test. So, yes, it's something
8 we think a lot about, is how do we expand access to
9 swim training.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, rec-- there's
11 a lot of rec centers without pools. I'm just saying,
12 within those rec centers have you priced out-- like,
13 let's say a proposal of 50 of them having, you know,
14 these smaller pools for training, for swim training?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Do you mean
16 adding new pools?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Adding, adding to
18 them, like a capital project. What would it cost? I
19 mean, I don't think it would cost the price of a
20 large pool, but it would-- you know, what would it
21 cost to really train our-- especially our young
22 children. I think the ages of one and a half to
23 three, prime age-- you know, that's where you should
24 train every child. My daughter does that. She pays
25 for it, but she thinks that's very, very important

1
2 that her kids get that training. So, if we could
3 work that out into a budget in future years, I'm sure
4 the Council will support that. Thank you. Thank you,
5 Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council
7 Member Holden. One question I have is are there--
8 how many training sites are there across the City for
9 people to become lifeguards?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
11 question. Do you want to take that?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: So,
13 currently we had-- this particular year for 2024 we
14 actually extended the training opportunities. So
15 Fort Hamilton High School, for example, was one that
16 actually came to us and wanted to participate in
17 being able to do training. Now, DOE has seen the
18 benefit of being able to try to do that, and we're
19 looking to expand it to other schools throughout the
20 City. So we're looking to be able to host a training
21 program, hopefully, and our desire is to have one in
22 each borough.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Deputy
24 Commissioner. So, right now, is it just--

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: It's
3 at Chelsea. It's at Chelsea. It's at the Gertrude
4 Ederle in Manhattan, and then we had the Fort
5 Hamilton one in Brooklyn. And so we're hoping to be
6 able to have sort of like Curtis High School,
7 possibly in the Bronx and other locat-- Staten
8 Island, Staten Island. And other schools, you know,
9 throughout, and DOE's very receptive to it.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And how-- because,
11 you know, I think Commissioner, you challenged us
12 before on the Council to find 10 people from each
13 district to send, and that's a very good challenge to
14 take up, but of course, the issue is sending 10
15 people from our districts to Fort Hamilton-- I had a
16 constituent whose child passed the test, but there
17 was no way he could go from Jackson Heights to Fort
18 Hamilton. This is a very real issue across our city.
19 So what is-- unless we've got training programs
20 across the five boroughs, as you mentioned First
21 Deputy Commissioner, we're going to run into this
22 issue over and over again. Even if we can find 10
23 people in each council district. So, what exactly is
24 the timeline, and what is Parks doing exactly to make
25 that a reality by next summer?

1
2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
3 question, Council Member. So, as I said, we did a
4 number of different things this year. We expanded
5 the availability of the qualifying test by 42
6 percent. So, we had-- we had 47 qualifying tests in
7 2023. We had 67 in 2024. We also expanded those
8 test sits from nine in 23 to 17 in 2024 including
9 schools in each of the outer boroughs. As I said, if
10 people-- if individuals pass the qualifying test, we
11 also offered free rec center membership to pools
12 across the city for six months so that people could
13 have access to-- young people could have access to
14 training to improve their swim capabilities to be
15 more likely to be able to pass the test, and then as
16 the First Deputy said, we are committed to having a
17 training facility. So there's the qualifying test
18 and we expanded access to that, and then individuals
19 would go into a training in order to be trained to
20 pass the lifeguard test. We're looking to and
21 committed to having a training site in each borough
22 for 2025.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Do you know when
24 that would-- 2025.

25 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That's when we'd need. It hasn't started yet, but when it starts in-- next year in 2025 would have a training site in each borough. That would-- the training starts about March or April.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Look forward to a hearing in March or April to hearing the good news then.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'll tell you before that, I'm sure.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Alright, deal. Council Member Menin, did you have questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Great. Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you, Chair, for holding this important hearing. So a couple questions. So, last year, the City Council passed my bill which would, as you know, require the Department to provide free swim lessons to second graders. I was notified that the program was delayed as part of the PEG earlier this year. So what is the exact status of the program?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member Menin, for that question and for

1 recognizing this-- the importance of our Swim for
2 Life program. Parks began Swim for Life in 2005.
3 It's a really important program for us that we've
4 been conducting for many, many years. It's a
5 partnership with DOE. In FY24 we trained 20,000 to
6 swim, 20,000 individuals to swim. Our Swim for Life
7 in 2024 we trained 6,629 second graders were served
8 through the Swim for Life program. We look forward
9 to continuing to be able to do that. It's a strong
10 partnership, as I said, with DOE, and we're constant-
11 - we're working closely with DOE to be able to
12 provide that access to schools and that training
13 within schools for second graders.

14
15 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: So, when is it
16 going to resume?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, our Swim for
18 Life programming will start-- is happening this fall.
19 It starts at the beginning of the school year.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: And at the same
21 capacity that existed before?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We hope to be
23 able to serve-- as I said, in 2024 we were thrilled
24 to be able to serve 6,629 second graders. We hope to
25 be able to meet or exceed that this year.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: so, the point and
3 why the Council passed this bill was obviously to
4 expand upon it. So, I mean, saying that we're going
5 to have-- do 6,000 kids is simply completely and
6 wholly insufficient. I'm sorry I missed the
7 beginning of the hearing, but we had another hearing
8 at the same time. I'm sure the Chair has already
9 done questions on this. I apologize for, you know,
10 overlapping on that. But it's just-- you've got
11 families who are here who lost a child because of
12 drowning, and then to see that the agency is not--
13 when we have a bill that requires these swim lessons
14 is not doing it to the full capacity is unbelievably
15 disappointing and upsetting. So what--

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: [interposing] I'm
17 sorry, Council Member. First of all, it was an
18 expansion. So, from 2023 to 2024 we expanded by over
19 1,000 children. In 2023, Swim for Life served 5,133
20 second graders. In 2024, Swim for Life served 6,629.
21 So it was an expansion of over a thousand second
22 graders who were served through the program.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: But under the
24 Council bill it requires more of a universal program,
25 the idea that we would get up to speed where we are

1 providing free swim lessons to all second graders who
2 need it. When would you anticipate that the agency
3 could meet that goal?
4

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That's not
6 something I could answer today. It's absolutely
7 something that we're focused on and we agree with
8 you. As I said, Swim for Life has been an important
9 priority of ours for years. We started it back in
10 2005. It depends on a number of factors, including
11 availability of school pools, bussing of kids to
12 those pools and availability of aquatic instruction.
13 So, we are increasing. We increased from last year,
14 served over 20,000 between our Learn to Swim and our
15 Swim for Life programming. We're always looking to
16 be able to expand, and working closely with the
17 Department of Education on partnerships and available
18 pools so we can do that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: So I'm glad you
20 mentioned availability of pools. I'm sure the Chair
21 spoke about the program that he and I launched along
22 with Asphalt Green and the Gray Foundation where we
23 are providing free swim lessons to 2,600 second
24 graders across the City in communities in need. As
25 part of that program, we mapped out every available

1
2 pool and found there are close to 1,000 pools in the
3 city that could be utilized. I mean, I think one of
4 the most important things that could come from this
5 pilot program we're doing is that we can prove that
6 these other pools, they need to be utilized. If
7 we're really going to be teaching children across the
8 City how to swim, we have to utilize tee other pools.
9 So, when will the Parks Department adopt that kind
10 of-- outside of the box thinking where you're using
11 not just city pools?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
13 question, Council Member. As I said, you know, we're
14 working closely with DOE. We worked this year with
15 CUNY and SUNY on, you know, providing additional
16 pools, but in terms of private pools and outside
17 pools, that's not something that we right now have
18 purview over, and there's additional expense with
19 that. That would come from other arrangements.
20 Right now, we're working with our sister agencies
21 where we can to be able to expand.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: I would just-- and
23 this will be my last comment. I would just urge the
24 agency to think outside the box. You have so many
25 different schools, universities that have pools that

1
2 we could be able to utilize. I mean, we're doing it
3 now with our pilot program I think to great effect,
4 and it would be terrific to see. The whole point of
5 our pilot program is to adopt those best practices
6 and have the agency be able to utilize them down the
7 line.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much,
12 Council Member Menin. I mean, that's a really
13 important point, and we mentioned before, too, that
14 we had to do that in Jackson Heights. We don't have a
15 public pool. So, on that point, Commissioner, you
16 may have said it before, but I just think it's--
17 helps to clarify the numbers. So, how many swimming
18 pools are on DOE property? Which of these pools are
19 open to the general public or to groups other than
20 DOE students at any time?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,
22 Council Member. I do not have that number. That
23 would be a DOE question.

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, have Parks and
3 DOE ever discussed opening these pools for use by the
4 public at times when schools--

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: [interposing] We
6 have weekly, almost seems daily, meetings with DOE on
7 availability of their pools and partnerships over
8 pools, absolutely. And so our existing Swim for Life
9 programming happens at DOE schools. And do you know
10 the number of schools that we're using for Swim for
11 Life? I know that it's at least-- yeah. So, right
12 now, our Swim for Life programming is happening
13 [inaudible] but in terms of other availability of DOE
14 schools, I don't have that number. That'll have to
15 come from them.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. I would ask
17 if you can provide the committee that information to
18 reaching out to DOE as well, especially if these
19 weekly conversations are ongoing. It would be
20 helpful to know how many school pools we're talking
21 about so we see the full universe of what could be
22 possible. And going back to-- well, a couple
23 different things. Let's jump back to expanding pool
24 and beach season. So, we held a hearing last year on
25 this issue on my bill in particular which would

1
2 expand Intro 275 which expanded opening hours at the
3 beaches and pools, as well as expand the season. So
4 can you provide any feedback? What would be
5 necessary for the Parks Department to successfully
6 implement this legislation when we enact it?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,
8 Council Member, for the question and we appreciate
9 the focus, obviously only access to pools and beaches
10 and water safety. We are really proud of the
11 extensive work we've done with lifeguards and
12 recruitment. I think that there are two-- there are
13 a number of different factors that we would
14 highlight. We've kept beaches open for a week past
15 Labor Day for the past several seasons, and have
16 consistently found that visitation decreases sharply
17 in the final weeks of the season. We can show you.
18 We track our pools very carefully. We can track-- we
19 can show you the numbers. So we see a decrease, a
20 real fall-off in August in visitation. That's for
21 one thing. And it's important also to note that our
22 staffing rates begin to decrease as the season nears
23 its end, since most of our seasonal lifeguards are
24 students that need to return to school. As I said,
25 45 percent of our new recruits this year were between

1 the ages of 16 and 18. Those are kids that are going
2 to go back to school in August. So,-- or that's made
3 up of teachers. A big part of our corps is people
4 who are able to do the summer, but then have to
5 return to school. so, both in terms of seeing
6 visitation decrease and then we know based on the
7 data we have on who our lifeguards are, you'd see a
8 drop in both staffing and visitation.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so
11 understanding the staffing issue, but also knowing
12 there's a decrease in visitation, has the Parks
13 Department had any conversations about what it would
14 take to open up pool and beach season-- extend pool
15 and beach season? I understand the challenges, but
16 has there been any conversation internally about how
17 it could be done with the current lifeguard corps
18 that we have, or in other ways?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: What we tend to
20 look at is going to-- how our peers, you know, across
21 the state do it. The Parks beach season is
22 essentially identical to long Island beaches such as
23 Jones Beach and Long Beach and it's significantly
24 longer than many of the New Jersey Beach season. So,
25 we feel like we're well aligned with outer

1 municipalities in terms of length of season, and then
2 also what we know is that-- and again, I emphasize
3 our concern about water safety. As the summer
4 progresses and sun goes down earlier, there is
5 limited-- you know, visibility gets more difficult
6 especially at the beaches. One of the things that we,
7 you know, prioritize is the lifeguards being able to
8 provide that protection and water safety for beach
9 goers. So we'd have real concern about extending, you
10 know, the hours of the beaches when it starts to be
11 that dusk comes earlier and, you know, would want to
12 make sure that we can be able to keep people safe.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And on another
15 point, [inaudible] legislation that we're hearing
16 today, are Parks and DOE currently engaging in any
17 efforts to recruit and train students at DOE schools
18 who may be interested in working as lifeguards?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, yes.
20 It's a big part of our conversation is working
21 closely and hand-in-hand with DOE, and as I said,
22 there's an extensive-- the amount of work that this
23 team did in recruitment, going to PSAL events,
24 tabling at swim meets, attending swim practices at
25 schools, universities, talking with coaches across

1 the City, and I think that's really why. That
2 extensive recruitment effort is why we saw that 45
3 percent increase in new recruits, and those new
4 recruits were between the ages of 16 and 18. So high
5 school students certainly got the message and came
6 out and that's where we saw a lot of growth, and
7 that's why we're going to continue that close
8 partnership with DOE and continue to work hard to
9 attract these young people.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And would you
12 agree that if the testing methods were expanded, not
13 just the Parks Department test, but also Red Cross
14 certification or YMCA, that we might be able to see
15 an increase in the size of the lifeguard force that
16 we have? would allowing more and varied forms of
17 testing that are already being employed in other non-
18 Parks Department pools, would that help to expand and
19 increase the size of lifeguard force?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
21 question, and given that we haven't done it, I
22 couldn't say definitively. As I said in my
23 testimony, we're quite pleased. We did make some
24 changes to the lifeguard contract that we, I believe,
25 were only beginning to reap the benefits of with the

1 shallow water certification, and we'll continue to
2 see increases in our numbers because of the changes
3 that we made, and this was historic. It's been 40
4 years since that contract was changed. The changing
5 any kind of certification process would be based on
6 collective bargaining. So, that would-- that's a
7 process we'd have to go through.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But it is true
10 that the Parks Department pools have a different test
11 than let's say YMCA pools or other-- even DOE pools
12 or schools pools. Are there different tests employed
13 at these different pools?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There is a
15 curriculum that's specific to the New York City
16 lifeguard certification process, absolutely, yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my last
18 question from my end is-- you mentioned before the
19 Learn to Swim program and Swim for Life. And I know
20 I've sked this before, Commissioner, I always get a
21 bit confused, too. But will it be helpful to
22 distinguish Learn to Swim from Swim for Life? And
23 specifically there was also funding that two budgets
24 ago Mayor Adams had put in to expand one of those

1
2 pograms that was then cut. Which program was it that
3 was cut?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, the Swim for
5 Life focuses on second grade students and provides
6 them with certified swim instruction at our indoor
7 pools during the school day as a regular part of
8 their weekly class schedule. The Learn to Swim
9 program is a targeted initiative conducted in
10 partnership with the Department of Education, and so
11 what we're doing with each of those is swim lessons
12 to provide life-saving, water safety skills,
13 introduce kids to the sport. So, Swim for Life is
14 essentially second graders, and the Learn to Swim is
15 general swim instruction for the general population.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is it safe to
17 say that those programs being very popular are often
18 oversubscribed, that there's a wait list--

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: [interposing]
20 Absolutely, yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: to join them?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Very popular
23 programs. They're free and available to everyone.
24 Very popular.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so how many
3 slots do you have for each program compared to what
4 the demand typically is?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, we'd have
6 to circle back to that.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. but you'd
8 agree, I think, that having more swim programs
9 accessible and available with nonprofit organizations
10 given the high demand for the Parks program that are
11 oversubscribed would help to address that need,
12 correct?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. If
14 there's more free swim programming available, it's to
15 the benefit of everyone, absolutely.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I'm now going to
17 turn it over-- well, sorry. I will ask questions on
18 behalf of Council Member Cabán who was on virtually,
19 but because we don't have quorum, I'll have to ask
20 the question for her. So these are Council Member
21 Cabán's questions regarding Astoria pool. I'm just
22 going to-- I'm going to read them. When the pool
23 first opened for the summer, our office, Council
24 Member Cabán's office, received an outpouring of
25 community feedback sharing that there was a chronic

1 lifeguard shortage at Astoria pool. Can you please
2 outline the steps that the Parks Department has taken
3 to ensure that more lifeguards are hired and
4 adequately trained?
5

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, yes,
7 for the question. And as I shared in my testimony,
8 we've done an extensive amount of work to add more
9 recruits and bring more people into the pipeline,
10 whether it be expanding the number of qualifying test
11 sites, expanding to having those test sites be
12 available in the boroughs, offering swim training,
13 working with DOE in partnership, and what it led to,
14 as I described, real success. We saw a 45 percent
15 increase in new recruits from all of that work and
16 that partnership.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Constituents in
18 District 22 provided feedback that during the first
19 weeks of the pool opening they were waiting up to two
20 hours to be let inside to swim. As also the Parks
21 Chair in the neighboring district, I received a lot
22 of those complaints as well from people in Queens, my
23 own district, too, and I saw it for myself firsthand
24 on a number of occasions. So waiting two hours to be
25 let inside to swim. Many constituents noted a lack

1
2 of clear communication and management at the entry of
3 the pool. Could you please describe how many staff
4 are needed to run the Astoria pool at full-capacity?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, thank you
6 for that question. We were so pleased to be able to
7 reopen Astoria pool after a nearly \$20 million
8 renovation. It's absolutely beautiful. It's the
9 biggest pool in the system, over a million gallons of
10 water. It's beloved, we know, by the community.

11 Because it was closed last season there's no doubt
12 that there was a whole lot of pent up demand for that
13 facility leading to lines, and it is-- it's a
14 beautiful facility and one that we know is beloved by
15 the community. And so-- and it also because it's the
16 biggest pool in our system, takes about 30 lifeguards
17 to run that facility. So there's no doubt that at the
18 beginning as we were adding staff there were lines,
19 but by July we were able to open that at 100 percent
20 capacity. But even at 100 percent capacity, there
21 was still unmet demand because of the popularity of
22 this pool. And so what we do in those circumstances,
23 we work really hard to make that line experience as
24 pleasant as we possibly can. And so we-- if there
25 are lines we'll often go to a wrist band so that

1
2 people-- what we do is we limit the amount of time in
3 the pool. Instead of being there, you know, for the
4 full [inaudible] session, we'll say people can be
5 there for an hour. We have people leave so that we
6 can let more people in on the line. So people on the
7 line can have a wrist band. We'll tell them to come
8 back at a certain hour so that we can be able to
9 accommodate as many people as possible t a very
10 popular newly renovated pool.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, 30 lifeguards
12 are needed to fully staff it. So, how many were
13 there on call when the pool first opened?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm not sure if
15 we have that number. Do we have that? Yeah, we can
16 get back to you.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. If we can
18 get information that'd be very helpful.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yep.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Much easier. Does
21 Parks plan to open the entire pool without closing
22 down sections of the pool in summer 2025?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We anticipate
24 we'll do everything we can to. That's why we're
25 already focused on recruitment for 2025 and bringing

1
2 in as many lifeguards as possible. We look to do
3 that at all of our pools, absolutely.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Our office,
5 Council Member Cabán's office, was made aware of a
6 disturbing incident in which a woman wearing a hijab
7 was prevented from entering the pool. My office
8 through Council Member Cabán was also made aware of
9 this, too, and she I both spoke directly about it.
10 We sent you a letter as well from both our offices.
11 When Council Member Cabán's office inquired with the
12 Parks Department regarding this matter. There was a
13 lack of clarity around the pool's policy about
14 religious attire. Has the Parks DEIB investigated
15 the incident and made a determination about training
16 or measures it will take in order to prevent such
17 incidents from happening again?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
19 question and I'm aware of the letter that you and
20 Council Member submitted. First off, we do do
21 extensive training around customer service at our
22 pools. And we absolutely want to ensure that our
23 pools are welcoming and friendly and accessible to
24 all. So it is an important part of the work we do
25 leading up to pool opening is making sure that people

1 that are staffed is focused on customer service and
2 awareness of the rules. I am aware of the incident
3 that was mentioned and apologize if there was not
4 appropriate communication. We do have signage at the
5 entrance to each of our pools. Someone just handed
6 it to me. We can submit it for testimony. It does
7 show what is allowed on the deck and the water.
8 Hijabs and turbans are allowed. We do also allow for
9 modest, observant swimwear. So there would not be a
10 reason why someone would have been turned down for
11 wearing a hijab. We post that. It's very visible.
12 So if there was a miscommunication, I apologize on
13 behalf of the agency, but we do work really hard to
14 make sure our pools are welcoming and accessible to
15 all.
16

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That was an
18 extremely concerning incident and it raises a number
19 of questions, and clearly I know that Parks has the
20 policy, but what happened on the ground in reality
21 was very different and was very traumatic and
22 especially for so many Muslim New Yorkers and
23 communities like Astoria, Jackson Heights, for a pool
24 in Astoria, you would expect a far different standard
25 of treatment, and making sure that staff there are

1
2 adequately trained to understand different religions,
3 cultures, and ensure pool policy reflects that. So,
4 on that note, I think you already answered it, too.
5 The question was, can you share parks policy on
6 allowable attire to enter the Astoria pool. We'd
7 appreciate if you could submit that as well.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. Have
9 it right here. We'll leave it, yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Can you share the
11 Parks Department policy on permitting religious
12 attire within the boundaries of the Astoria pool or
13 any New York City pool?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, as we just
15 discussed, we do have very clear signage on what's
16 allowed. We do prioritize welcoming, accessible,
17 access to all of our pool facilities. We-- that's
18 why we make this signage readily available right at
19 the front and our folks who are working at the pool
20 facilities know and are trained in what is allowed on
21 the deck and in the water. We work really hard to
22 make sure that people are aware and there's good
23 customer service around that.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: is it your
25 understanding that the Parks Department is allowed to

1
2 limit and/or deny access to a New York City public
3 pool based on an individual's choice of religious
4 attire?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, the-- we do--
6 there-- in terms of our-- what's allowed on the pool
7 deck, the material of the swimsuit, what people are
8 wearing in the pool does need to be suitable. There
9 are rules and regulations round that, but as I've
10 said, we will submit. We do-- we're very clear about
11 allowing for hijabs, turbans, modest observant [sic]
12 swimwear, and we provide access to, you know, all New
13 Yorkers in our pools, absolutely.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Seems to me that
15 this situation needs to be closely addressed as we
16 wrote about in our letter, too, to ensure this does
17 not happen ever again. Council Member Cabán's office
18 asked for immediate website updates and signage
19 information informing guests of this policy. When
20 can we expect to see these updates for pool guests
21 posted online and at pool facilities?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, they already
23 are posted at pool facilities. This document that I
24 have is exactly what's posted in the pool facility.
25 We'll leave that with you today and we can submit it

1
2 for testimony, make sure you have it. So it is there
3 today. It was there for the 2024 beach season and it
4 will be there always, and we can also make sure that
5 it's available and on our website.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: have there been
7 any culturally sensitivity trainings provided for
8 pool staff? Will there be any in the future?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I said, we
10 work hard at the Parks Department to ensure that we
11 have good customer service for all of our front line
12 staff and people working at our pools and beaches and
13 really throughout the parks system. I'm always so
14 proud of the dedication and commitment of our park
15 staff to making sure our facilities are welcoming.
16 They know that it's important to me and senior
17 leadership at the Parks Department, and it's part of
18 the training that they receive to make sure that our
19 pools and our facilities are welcoming to all.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, when will
21 those trainings take place? Are they ongoing? When
22 do they happen throughout the year?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We-- all of our
24 folks are trained when they're beginning the job.
25 People are well-versed in what the requirements are

1 on the pool deck, and then our-- we have an Office of
2 Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, and we-- given
3 this incident at Astoria pool, we did have specific
4 training for the staff post this event.

5
6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And are all the
7 staff offered those trainings part-time, full-time,
8 seasonal?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, all the
10 staff were offered that training.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so will the
12 Parks Department commit to continuing to provide
13 training for all staff regardless of seasonal status?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. We
15 provide extensive training across the board for all
16 of our staff.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Now
18 I'll ask questions from Council Member Narcisse. Is
19 it possible to-- is it possible to develop kid-
20 friendly PSAs that effectively communicate drowning
21 prevention and water safety tips. These could be
22 shared on social media.

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
24 question, and we do work hard on our social media
25 channels to emphasize beach safety, water safety. As

1
2 I said, we did a whole lot of work this summer about
3 the dangers of rip currents. So we're always looking
4 ways that we can attract interest-- our park users
5 and our park patrons. That's something we can
6 absolutely look at.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Just a couple more
8 questions from Council Member Narcisse before I open
9 it up for public testimony. What role do community
10 outreach and education play in your current drowning
11 prevention strategy and how is this being expanded?
12 You answered it before, but if you can just summarize
13 it again, please?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.
15 So it is an important aspect of what we do is
16 emphasizing water safety training. As I said, we had
17 our Urban Park Rangers out and tabling at our
18 beaches. They're first and foremost about educating
19 people and they play that role. And so they were out
20 talking to people about water safety. We had a flyer
21 that we made up that we posted that was on our social
22 media. We also has fliers in multiple language,
23 specifically about the dangers of rip currents. We
24 know that open ocean like the Rockaways, rip currents
25 are a huge, huge concern. So we specifically focused

1
2 on some of the Urban Park Ranger programing and
3 education around rip current. We-- our Parks
4 Enforcement Patrol, people out, you know, on the
5 beaches, pools, are there to help to educate and
6 inform people about water safety. Our messaging
7 throughout the summer, our signage is very much
8 focused on being safe in the water.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And finally, how
10 does the Parks Department collaborate with city
11 agencies like the Health Department or DOE to promote
12 water safety across different demographics?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, we work
14 closely with DOE, DOH-- DOH we have a very close
15 partnership. They monitor our pools and inspect our
16 pools on a regular basis, and DOE as I said, we have
17 regular meetings with them and they are aligned with
18 us in terms of our Swim for Life programming, access
19 to pools. So we all have a common mission in that
20 we're very focused on expanding access to water
21 safety training and swim instruction.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much.
23 I look forward to hearing more updates and
24 information that we requested sent over to, and look
25 forward to all the work that Parks can do to make

1
2 sure that we have a better pool and beach season next
3 year, too. We appreciate all your efforts,
4 Commissioner, First Deputy Commissioner, all the
5 Parks Department staff here. We also know that this
6 is a larger issue beyond you all at the Department
7 and requiring much greater intervention and
8 assistance from City Hall. I'd now like to turn it
9 over for public testimony. And the first witness I'd
10 like to call up is Ms. Amina Noah. Sorry, Ms. Noah,
11 before I start, I do have to read something into the
12 record for public comment. I now open the hearing
13 for public testimony. I remind members of the public
14 that this is a formal government proceeding and that
15 decorum shall be observed at all times. As such,
16 members of the public shall remain silent at all
17 times. The witness table is reserved for people who
18 wish to testify. No video recording or photography is
19 allowed from the witness table. Further, members of
20 the public may not present audio or video recordings
21 of testimony, but may submit transcripts of such
22 recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in
23 the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's
24 hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the
25 Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When

1
2 recognized you will have two minutes to speak on
3 today's hearing topics on water safety. With that,
4 thank you, Ms. Noah for joining us today, and you can
5 feel free to testify when you're ready.

6 AMINA NOAH: Good morning everybody. So,
7 I'm just basically here just to-- there's been a lot
8 going on with all the situation, especially with the
9 drowning of my son, and I can [inaudible] the things
10 that I have been dealing with at home by myself and
11 with the help of friends and family surrounding me.
12 That's really what's helping me at this moment.
13 That's my only son, my only child, so. That's the
14 one who has been a part of me, I say. Without him
15 going to basketball practice or sports, dealing with
16 sports all the time-- he's always around me. We
17 always do things together, whether go out to eat, go
18 to food events and different places. Now, I don't
19 have that no more. I just want to say how do we fix
20 this issue? Because I don't want to make another
21 family feel what I'm going through on a daily basis.
22 It's not a great feeling, and how do we fix this?
23 What precautions we need to take? Because we need to
24 have more lifeguards, more trained and proper
25 education, too, even for our kids, because a lot of

1
2 teens goes to the beach all the time in the summer,
3 thousands and thousands of people go to the beach. I
4 don't think most of us know what's the difference of
5 what does a flag stand for, a red flag stand for,
6 especially these young kids out here. They just want
7 to go to the beach and have fun with their friends
8 and hang out. Unfortunate mine didn't come home this
9 summer. It's a lot. But I just want no family to be
10 going through what I'm feeling right now. That's
11 all. [inaudible] I'm sorry.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Ms. Noah, I want
13 you to know that I speak on behalf of all New
14 Yorkers, parents, myself included that our hearts go
15 out to you, our prayers, our condolences. We are so
16 unimaginably sorry, and I-- as I said before and as
17 we spoke about our press conference last week, you
18 have a commitment from our City Council with the
19 Speaker, my leadership at the Parks Committee, that
20 we in the City Council will do everything we can to
21 make sure that no one else loses their lives in the
22 water, and as I said before it is to honor your son
23 Elyjha, in your and his name and the names of all
24 those who have drowned, for all of you as parents, as
25 family. We must do no less as a city. We will do

1
2 our part as a City Council, and we urge City Hall to
3 do the same, too. All our love is with you for such
4 a difficult time, and our hearts break for you, and
5 we will continue this work. Thank you.

6 AMINA NOAH: Thank you, sir.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I think before we
8 go any further giving the testimony, I just want to
9 take a moment of silence for all those whose lives we
10 lost on the water this year. Thank you. Our next
11 witness to call up for testimony is Maryam Shuaib on
12 behalf of Malikah.

13 MARYAM SHUAIB: Thank you, Council Member
14 Shekar Krishnan. I would also like to emphasize that
15 I'm also a member of your district, so nice to see
16 you in person. I would also like re-emphasize the
17 situation that was brought by Council Member Tiffany
18 Cabán, and also I wanted to shout out Tiffany Cabán
19 for her presence online. Thank you for representing
20 us. As a representative from the Malikah Center, we
21 are a nonprofit organization that is specifically
22 tethered to protecting women, more specifically
23 Muslim women. And the situation that was brought to
24 light by Council Member Cabán resulted from a Muslim
25 woman that wanted to take her eight-year-old son out

1 to the Astoria pool just for a day to relieve
2 themselves from the heat, and not only was she denied
3 entry, but in addition to that she was also bolstered
4 with a lot of Islamophobic comments coming from one
5 of these staff members that called "crazy" for her
6 beliefs, as a woman who should look different than
7 what is advertised on the guidelines that they had
8 for appropriate swimwear. So I would like to take
9 this time to also emphasize that two of the seven
10 deaths that occurred this past summer were Zainab and
11 Aisha Mohammed, two Muslim women who were at Coney
12 Island Beach who are both beacons of selflessness to
13 their respective communities. Both Zainab and Aisha
14 had dreams to pursue a future in the medical field,
15 one as a pharmacist and the other as a future doctor.
16 So unfortunately, we have lost both of those
17 prospects from our communities, but I would like to
18 emphasize that we need more than just cultural
19 sensitivity training. We need more than just signage
20 that amplifies the specific guidelines of acceptable
21 wear to the pools across the City, and I as a Muslim
22 woman who also doesn't know how to swim, I don't know
23 how to swim because pools are not a safe environment
24 for me, and I feel that I am ostracized just for my
25

1 simple choice of looking differently than the, I
2 guess, the conventional look of what a woman should
3 wear to a pool. I feel like just because I wear my
4 hijab that I am looked at as someone who does not
5 deserve the right to know how to swim which is a
6 very, very imperative survival tactic that everyone
7 should know about, but unfortunately I don't. And I
8 would also like to emphasize that we need more than
9 just a cultural sensitive training, because these
10 Islamophobic comments are the result of a rather
11 narrow mindset that people have about what a Muslim
12 woman should look like while she is taking a dip in
13 the pool, or let alone watching one of her children
14 take a dip in the pool. And I would also like to
15 emphasize that as a woman safety organization,
16 Malukah is committed to guaranteeing the rights of
17 all women, more so Muslim women, and when a Muslim
18 woman does not feel welcome at one of our City's
19 oldest pools, then that is a line that we draw. And
20 I thank you Council Member Shekar Krishnan for
21 leading.
22

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You can finish.

24 MARYAM SHUAIB: Thanks. I just wanted to
25 thank you for all the work that you've been doing to

1 address this crisis that we have. we should not be
2 scared for our lives when we go to enjoy ourselves in
3 a beach or in a pool, and furthermore, Muslim women
4 should not be scared to take up the freedom to take a
5 swim in the pool, and I shouldn't be dictated as to
6 like-- I shouldn't be criminalized just because I
7 choose to wear a head covering to the pool, and
8 that's my comments. Thank you for giving me the
9 space.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
12 for your testimony, your powerful testimony. I
13 couldn't agree more, and it's nice to see you as a
14 constituent and advocate here in our district and
15 Queens too. I'd now like to call up Olga Perez from
16 MVP Lifeguards.

17 OLGA PEREZ: Thank you. So, again, my
18 name is Olga Perez from MVP Lifeguards, and we are
19 the vendor for the New York City Department of Health
20 Making Waves Program, and we were part of their
21 expansion. So it existed in 2015 where they were
22 providing progressive swim to summer camp students
23 from the New York City Department of Youth and
24 Community Development, and with their pilot program
25 and expansion into the high schools became the

1 contract that we're currently overseeing. So
2 essentially, what we're doing is providing
3 progressive swim and lifeguard training in selected
4 schools throughout the City, and the swimming lesson
5 sis part of the PE credit. So I wanted to just make
6 you aware of this program that's already existing
7 through the New York City Department of Health, and
8 then with additional funding for this program, we
9 would be able to create a pipeline for the lifeguards
10 for the City. So, for example, again, we participate
11 in various schools throughout the City. So example,
12 over at Sewer [sic] Park right now, unfortunately due
13 to the lack of funding for the fall, we're not able
14 to provide swimming in that school, but if we had
15 additional funding, then we would be able to provide
16 swimming lessons in the fall and also in the spring.
17 So by the time the summer season comes around they'll
18 be able to get certified. So while the city is
19 aggressively recruiting lifeguards let's say from the
20 swim teams, let's also be mindful of the other
21 students that we can teach them how to swim and
22 really implement swimming as a PE credit and as a
23 requirement, not only for the pipeline of lifeguards,
24 but also for water safety in general where our kids
25

1 should be able to be safe in the water. And also
2 educate them with the importance of rip currents and
3 the beaches and so on and so forth. So, I just
4 wanted you to be aware of this amazing program that's
5 already existing.

6
7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
8 for your testimony, Olga, too, and for all your work
9 and all the work MVP Lifeguard's work too and for
10 making us aware of all the work you're doing too.
11 Would love to hear more about it as well, so please
12 reach out to our office, and we'd be very happy to
13 meet and to discuss more, too. So, thank you for
14 your work.

15 OLGA PEREZ: Definitely. I'll give you
16 my card on the way out.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure, thank you.
18 And our last witness for today is Kaitlin Krause from
19 Rising Tide.

20 KAITLIN KRAUSE: Good afternoon esteemed
21 members of the City Council and fellow New Yorkers.
22 My name is Kaitlin Krause. I'm the Founder and
23 Executive Director of Rising Tide Effect, and I am a
24 member of the taskforce for the City called the
25 Lifeguard Interorganizational Taskforce, along with

1
2 Parks, and I'm an appointed Commissioner for the
3 State on the Temporary Commission to Prevent
4 Childhood Drowning. Today I'm here, though, to speak
5 about the crisis, the one that's not only
6 preventable, but is actively claiming the lives of
7 our children. This is not just a concern, it's an
8 emergency. Imagine if this were happening on our
9 roadways, if four to seven people were dying on the
10 same street every summer. Would we stand idly by?
11 No, we would immediately see traffic lights, signage,
12 speed limits, anything and everything to prevent
13 further loss of life. Action would be swift,
14 decisive, and prioritized. Yet, for some reason, when
15 it comes to drownings we haven't responded with the
16 same urgency. Perhaps it's because the full scope of
17 the issue isn't being recognized. Our data is
18 selective and limited and this has slowed progress.
19 The community is ready to act, but feet have been
20 dragged and unhelpful responses have jammed up
21 initiatives we need to save lives, especially the
22 lives of our children. The solutions are right in
23 front of us and the stakes couldn't be higher. The
24 time for going to the drawing board and debating next
25 steps has passed. City Hall must act now. At the

1 heart of this issue is the need for water safety
2 education to be part of our school curriculum. It's
3 not enough to rely on lifeguards and parents. Every
4 child must be equipped with situational awareness
5 around water. A 10-minute conversation about rip
6 currents in schools can save lives, but despite being
7 surrounded by water, our children are not taught
8 these essential skills in school. Now, the largest
9 resource in this crisis is the Parks Department which
10 oversees our city pools and beaches, but logically
11 speaking, how can they do more with a budget that has
12 been continually slashed, especially when it comes to
13 water safety? How can they adequately staff our
14 beaches if more than half of our New Yorkers have no
15 swimming or water safety knowledge at all? The Parks
16 Department is at the mercy of the Administration's
17 priorities. Budget cuts have made it clear where
18 water safety ranks on that list. And while this is a
19 Parks hearing, it's a vital issue that needs to land
20 on the desk of our Mayor. We can't simply resign our
21 youth to drownings as nature being nature. It's
22 unacceptable to claim that parents who oftentimes
23 don't have the knowledge themselves about the water
24 should bear the full responsibility for their
25

1 children's decision to enter the water, especially
2 when those children are tempted into the water during
3 a heat wave after lifeguards have left, but the sun
4 is still beating strong. At the memorial at Beach
5 44th just this Friday morning, Ms. Amina, the mother
6 of one of the young drowning victims told us, "Elyjha
7 knew how to swim. He just didn't know about rip
8 currents." Our leader of New York City should not
9 wait for other cities to lead. We are New York City.
10 We lead the way. Water safety education must be a
11 public priority. Our Administration should be
12 investing in lifeguard recruitment, comprehensive
13 water safety campaigns, and most critically, a
14 curriculum in our schools that teaches every child
15 how to stay safe in and around the water. I urge this
16 Administration to take immediate common sense action.
17 Together we can prevent these unnecessary tragedies
18 and build a safer future for our children. Thank you
19 for your time and consideration.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
22 and thank you so much for Rising Tide's work. This
23 ends the public testimony of our hearing and
24 concludes today's hearing, too. I want to thank all
25 the advocates and organizations who are here for the

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great work that they do. As I mentioned at the beginning of this hearing, this is a crisis and we must do everything we can to address it. Thank you so much everyone. This hearing is now concluded.

[gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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 October 9, 2024