

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND  
INVESTIGATIONS

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November 1, 2023  
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Gale A. Brewer,  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Diana Ayala  
Rita C. Joseph  
Shekar Krishnan  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Nantasha M. Williams  
Julie Won  
Majorie Velázquez  
Kalman Yeger

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Jill Berry  
Department of Social Services

Karl Snider  
Office of Performance Management and Data  
Analytics

Jeff Shear  
Department of Finance, DOF

Robin Lee  
DOF's Taxpayer Advocate

Timothy Sheares  
Deputy Commissioner for Property

Eric Macfarlane  
New York City Department of Design and  
Construction

Magalie Austin  
Department of Design and Construction

Rachel Laiserin  
Department of Design and Construction

Eva Trimble  
NYCHA

Louisa Chafee  
Independent Budget Office

Sarita Subramanian  
Independent Budget Office

Ms. Deborah Elliott-Bloodman  
Self

Annie Wilson  
Self

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

Juan Diaz  
Citizens' Committee for Children

Theo Chino  
First National Secretary of the Social Democrat  
of America

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check on  
3 the Committee on Oversight and Investigation.  
4 Today's date is November 1, 2023. We're located in  
5 the Council Chambers. Recording is done by Rocco  
6 Mesiti.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and welcome to  
8 the New York City Council hearing of the Committee on  
9 Oversight and Investigations. At this time, can  
10 everybody please silence your cellphones. If you  
11 wish to testify, please go up to the Sergeants desk  
12 to fill out a testimony slip.

13 At this time and going forward, no one is to  
14 approach the dais. I repeat, no one is to approach  
15 the dais. Thank you for your cooperation, Chairs we  
16 are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Good afternoon. I'm Gale  
18 Brewer, I'm Chair of the Council's Committee on  
19 Oversight and Investigations. I'd like to welcome my  
20 colleague. In addition to the wonderful Diana Ayala,  
21 we have Council Member Rita Joseph on Zoom and member  
22 of the Administration. We're here to discuss  
23 findings of the most recent MMR, also known as the  
24 Mayor's Management Report, released in September.

2 For more than 40 years, the MMR has been city  
3 governments bill of health. It has more than 2,000  
4 indicators of New York City's public sector  
5 performance with 100 added in Fiscal Year 2023 alone.  
6 MMR gives policy makers and members of the public the  
7 best picture of whether or tax dollars are being put  
8 to effective use.

9 We had a hearing last week. The first hearing on  
10 the report and we found a number of flashing, warning  
11 alarms regarding city government performance. We're  
12 talking mostly about the contracts with those who are  
13 migrants, as an example.

14 A number of crucial indicators have deteriorated  
15 with implications for health and safety and welfare  
16 of our most vulnerable residents. Human Resources  
17 Administration suffers from high vacancies in the  
18 divisions that administer crucial, federal welfare  
19 programs like Food Stamps and Temporary Cash  
20 Assistance and the number of New Yorkers benefiting  
21 from those efforts has fallen in recent years.  
22 Meanwhile the numbers of persons getting cash  
23 assistance and food stamps/SNAP has gone up

24 Application, timeliness and acceptance rates have  
25 all deteriorated since the pandemic. The Department

2 of Finance also is taking longer to process tax audit  
3 and applications for tax relief particularly for  
4 seniors. These shortfalls cost the city revenue and  
5 put a burden on older adults who have fixed incomes.  
6 The Department of Design and Construction has seen  
7 completion of public buildings slow to a snail's pace  
8 compared to pre-COVID years, restricting our capacity  
9 to deliver public services and they are repairing  
10 vital infrastructure like sewers at a slower pace,  
11 extremely important issue is to clean out those  
12 sewers.

13 And at Night Share, rent collections have  
14 plummeted cutting off reinvestment. We would have  
15 liked to have HPD here but unfortunately they were  
16 not able to participate according to HPD, they didn't  
17 have anybody here to talk about the MMR.

18 I would like to thank many people for  
19 participating and preparing the hearing. From the  
20 Oversight and Investigations Committee Staff, Nicole  
21 Catà Legislative Counsel, Alex Yablon Legislative  
22 Policy Analyst, Erica Cohen Legislative Policy  
23 Analyst and Owen Kotowski, who is a Financial Policy  
24 Analyst. I will talk about some of the others in a  
25

2 minute but I also would like to talk to Sam Goldsmith  
3 from our office.

4 Now, I'll turn it over to the very special, very  
5 wonderful Chair of General Welfare and Member of this  
6 Committee Diana Ayala.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Ahh Gale. You love me.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Just the two of us, plus  
9 Rita Joseph on Zoom.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: We're the dynamic duo.  
11 Don't worry about it.

12 Good afternoon everyone and welcome to today's  
13 hearing. My name is Diana Ayala and I am the Deputy  
14 Speaker of the New York City Council and the Chair of  
15 the General Welfare Committee.

16 Thank you Chair Brewer and the Oversight and  
17 Investigations Committee for holding this oversight  
18 hearing on the Mayor's Management Report on Agency  
19 Performance in Delivering Housing and Services.  
20 Recently released data from the Mayor's Management  
21 Report shows alarming trends in the processing rates  
22 for cash assistance and SNAP at HRA. While the  
23 report did not call this a crisis, it is absolutely a  
24 crisis and I continue to hear from my constituents  
25 and advocates about the many challenges the delays

2 are posing for benefit recipients. The General  
3 Welfare Committee held an Oversight Hearing on  
4 September 27, 2023 regarding public benefit  
5 processing delays at HRA. The many questions  
6 regarding the backlogs remain unanswered after that  
7 hearing and I am hoping to gain more clarity at  
8 today's hearing.

9 On the federal and state law, all SNAP and cash  
10 assistance applications and recertifications must be  
11 processed by HRA within 30 days. Anything that goes  
12 beyond the 30-day threshold is considered delayed.  
13 According to the MMR, the rate of timely process SNAP  
14 applications fell 20.4 percent to 39.7 percent in  
15 Fiscal Year '23, down from 60 percent in Fiscal Year  
16 '22.

17 Both years were well below the target of 90.6  
18 percent. The report cites an unprecedented increase  
19 in applications, fewer staff due to attrition and  
20 retirements and the end of the state waivers that  
21 ease the Administration of benefits and service and  
22 reasons for the decrease in family processing.

23 According to the MMR, the rate of timely process,  
24 cash assistance applications fell 54 percent to 28  
25 percent in Fiscal Year 2023. Down from 82.8 percent



2 in Fiscal Year 2022. Both years were well below the  
3 target of 96 percent. HRA cited that the cash  
4 assistance backlog was caused by the same factors as  
5 the SNAP backlog. Together, HRA's rate for  
6 processing SNAP and cash assistance applications in  
7 Fiscal Year 2023 represented the worst record for the  
8 agency in over one decade. SNAP is the nation's most  
9 important anti-hunger program and the families in  
10 need are immediately impacted by even the shortest  
11 delays in the processing of this important benefit.  
12 Cash assistance is the lifeline for many of the  
13 city's most vulnerable residents.

14 Today, we want to understand why it has taken the  
15 Administration as long as it has to figure out ways  
16 to address these significant backlogs. We've taken  
17 the Administration at their word that they will  
18 reduce the backlogs and we've been partners in  
19 government working together on hiring hauls to ensure  
20 more staff are brought to the city agencies.

21 Today, we want clarity on what caused the  
22 backlogs at HRA and what is being done to address  
23 them. I look forward to hearing from the  
24 Administration and advocates today and gathering  
25 feedback on this important oversight topic. I would

2 also like to thank the General Welfare Committee  
3 Staff Julia Haramis Unit Head, Aminta Kilawan Senior  
4 Legislative Counsel, David Romero Legislative Counsel  
5 and my staff Elsie Encarnacion Chief of Staff.

6 I will now turn it back to Chair Brewer. Thank  
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We will now swear in the  
9 wonderful people from the Administration and thank  
10 you for being here. We do appreciate it.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Brewer. We  
12 will now hear testimony from the Administration.  
13 We'll hear from Jill Berry, Karl Snyder, Jeff Shear,  
14 Robin Lee, Tim Sheares, Eric Macfarlane, Magalie  
15 Austin, Rachel Laiserin, and Eva Trimble.

16 Before we begin, I will administer the  
17 affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right  
18 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
19 truth and nothing but the truth before this Committee  
20 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions.

21 PANEL: Yes.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin  
23 when ready.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Whomever would like to  
25 begin, go right ahead.

2 JILL BERRY: Good afternoon. My name is Jill  
3 Berry and I serve as the First Deputy Commissioner at  
4 the Department of Social Services. With me today is  
5 Karl Snider, Deputy Commissioner of the Office of  
6 Performance Management and Data Analytics. I'd like  
7 to thank Chair Brewer and Deputy Speaker Ayala and  
8 the members of the Committee on Oversight and  
9 Investigations for holding today's hearing on the  
10 Mayor's Management Report.

11 The Mayor's Management Report serves as a  
12 critical function as our agency's report card. It  
13 measures our performance and service delivery to New  
14 Yorkers. As a report card it can serve as a snapshot  
15 in time. It highlights what we are doing well and,  
16 perhaps most importantly, where we need to improve.  
17 The Department of Social Services/Human Resources  
18 Administration recognizes the challenges the MMR  
19 highlights but we would also like to discuss the  
20 context behind the numbers.

21 As we have discussed in previous hearings before  
22 this Council, the long shadow of the COVID-19  
23 pandemic has produced unprecedentedly high numbers of  
24 applications for cash assistance from New Yorks most  
25 vulnerable residents. The high volume of

2 applications is the result of a variety of factors  
3 including: The winding down of the New York State  
4 Emergency Rental Assistance Program, ERAP, along with  
5 the end of the eviction moratorium and pandemic-  
6 related income supports; increased applications for  
7 utility arrears; the end of certain New York State  
8 pandemic related waivers and increased access to the  
9 cash assistance application process, through improved  
10 technology and use of the Access HRA online and  
11 application platforms, allowing clients to apply for  
12 services remotely in addition to in person.

13 These factors are an inescapable part of the  
14 context for the MMR figures we review today. As we  
15 exited the pandemic, we prepared for pre-pandemic  
16 application levels to return. But we could not fully  
17 predict the increased needs reflected in the levels  
18 of applications submitted and ultimately this has led  
19 to processing delays.

20 Indeed, high application numbers continue.  
21 Applications for Cash Assistance increased by 30.7  
22 percent in FY23 compared to FY22. Having discussed  
23 some of the context behind the MMR numbers, we would  
24 also like to highlight how we believe these  
25 challenges can be overcome.

2 The Great Resignation impacted the City of New  
3 York as an employer like it did employers all across  
4 the country. There too, the pandemic cast a long  
5 shadow. However, through rigorous recruitment we  
6 have been able to onboard over 700 employees since  
7 December of 2022, filling critical vacancies. The  
8 work these individuals have been hired to do takes  
9 training. And as we see more and more of these  
10 employees finish their training and hit the ground  
11 running, we are seeing improvements in our ability to  
12 process existing and new applications.

13 In addition to hiring new processing staff, we  
14 have engaged our state partners to press for  
15 additional waivers and we have met some success in  
16 obtaining them. Waiving steps in the application and  
17 recertification processes makes DSS more efficient  
18 and improves the client experience. We've also  
19 aggressively mobilized our existing DSS staff with  
20 redeployments and overtime to assist in processing  
21 applications. And we are investing in technology to  
22 streamline processing and make it easier for both  
23 clients and staff to complete the application review.

24 Although we acknowledge that challenges remain in  
25 addressing our backlog, we remain optimistic because

2 we believe that our mitigation efforts are producing  
3 results. We are already seeing declines in our  
4 backlog numbers, which peaked at almost 39,000 cash  
5 assistance overdue applications and have declined by  
6 31 percent as of the end of September, and we are  
7 eager to continue our work to reduce the backlog.

8 While the MMR helps us identify outstanding  
9 challenges, it is important that we applaud the work  
10 of the public servants in DSS who continue to  
11 tirelessly work to overcome these challenges.

12 Our frontline DSS/HRA staff and partners served  
13 an average of 3,200 adults and children per day in  
14 emergency and family transitional domestic violence  
15 shelters in Fiscal Year 2023. We connected 34,218  
16 households facing eviction with legal assistance.  
17 Issued more than 175,000 IDNYC cards in FY23,  
18 continued a trend of connecting eligible New Yorkers  
19 with Fair Fares, with an 8.3 percent increase in  
20 enrollment since Fiscal Year 2022, a total of 294,505  
21 people were enrolled in Fair Fares as of the end of  
22 June 2023. And we serve over 3 million New Yorkers  
23 each year.

24 These numbers are an indication that our fellow  
25 New Yorkers, some facing the most traumatic

2 circumstances of their lives, are receiving the  
3 assistance they need. At DSS/HRA, we endeavor to  
4 work with each client, treat them with the dignity  
5 and compassion they deserve and advance our ongoing  
6 mission of providing New Yorkers in need with  
7 essential benefits. We fully appreciate that we have  
8 further work to do in order to assist even more New  
9 Yorkers.

10 Thank you for your attention and I'm happy to  
11 take your questions.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. We  
13 have lots of questions. Next.

14 JEFFREY SHEAR: Good afternoon, Chair Brewer and  
15 members of the Committee on Investigations and  
16 Oversight. My name is Jeffrey Shear and I am the  
17 First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of  
18 Finance, DOF. Joining me today are Robin Lee, DOF's  
19 Taxpayer Advocate and Timothy Sheares, Deputy  
20 Commissioner for Property.

21 There are four services and goals in DOF's  
22 chapter in the fiscal year 2023 Mayor's Management  
23 Report that relate to this hearing's focus on the  
24 delivery of services. They are: bill and collect  
25 property and other taxes, administer rent and

2 property owner exemptions, help New York City  
3 taxpayers resolve tax issues, and record property-  
4 related documents.

5 Overall, fiscal year 2023 was a successful year  
6 for DOF, as reflected in our collection of over \$45  
7 billion in revenue that is critical for city programs  
8 and initiatives that are agreed upon and funded in  
9 partnership with the Council.

10 This revenue does not come into the city's  
11 coffers automatically. DOF must explain to New  
12 Yorkers how it determines liabilities, provide due  
13 process, issue bills, facilitate payments, and offer  
14 assistance when customers need further guidance.  
15 Here are two fiscal year 2023 highlights from the MMR  
16 that underscore DOF's performance.

17 The Office of the Taxpayer Advocate, OTA  
18 continues to provide timely assistance, addressing  
19 complex inquiries and challenging cases from New  
20 Yorkers seeking help with tax issues, including tax  
21 exemption applications. In fiscal year 2023, OTA met  
22 its under 10-day resolution target even as cases and  
23 inquiries increased by 19 percent from fiscal year  
24 2022.



2 The Land Records Division improved the average  
3 time to record property documents from 4.5 days in  
4 fiscal year 2022 to 1.3 days in fiscal year 2023, a  
5 71 percent improvement. The recording of such  
6 documents is a necessary step in the process of  
7 transferring property.

8 We also want to take this opportunity to address  
9 MMR indicators that moved in the wrong direction in  
10 fiscal year 2023, chiefly because of lingering  
11 impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

12 One example is a sharp increase in the days  
13 required to process Rent Freeze Program renewal  
14 applications from the date an application is received  
15 until the time that DOF approves, denies, or requests  
16 that an applicant submit more information. DOF  
17 administered its usual renewal process during the  
18 pandemic, but we suspended the final step of ending  
19 benefits for participants who failed to submit a  
20 renewal. This was a policy decision made to protect  
21 vulnerable New Yorkers from losing benefits during a  
22 difficult period in which they may have been ill,  
23 caring for stricken family members, or economically  
24 impacted by COVID. This suspension of benefit

2 revocations lasted for two years and created a  
3 backlog of over 7,000 pending renewal cases.

4 We began a second renewal process last year that  
5 includes robust noticing and outreach before we  
6 resume revoking benefits for households that failed  
7 to renew. To track our progress, we used the date of  
8 our initial renewal outreach letter in February 2022  
9 to mark the start of the processing cycle. As a  
10 result, the processing time that we have reported  
11 includes not only the time required by DOF to review  
12 the applications, but also the time it takes  
13 participants to respond to our mailings.

14 For example, in fiscal year 2023, DOF processing  
15 time for renewals unaffected by COVID averaged 10.3  
16 days, comparable to 10.1 days in fiscal year 2022.  
17 However, once the processing and mail response time  
18 for COVID-impacted renewals were included, the  
19 overall average increased to 24.1 days.

20 While we are concerned with the impression given  
21 by the increase in our processing time indicators, we  
22 stand by the underlying decision to refrain from  
23 revoking benefits for non-responders during the  
24 pandemic. I also want to take this opportunity to  
25

2 thank the Council for with us to increase responses  
3 to our recent renewal mailings.

4 In closing, I want to thank the 1,650 dedicated  
5 DOF staff members who are making every effort to  
6 provide exemplary service to our customers. We  
7 acknowledge that we must continue to track and  
8 improve upon our performance in all areas, and we are  
9 grateful for the opportunity to discuss the many ways  
10 in which our team is working to serve New Yorkers.

11 Thank you for your time and I look forward to  
12 answering any questions.

13 EVA TRIMBLE: Good afternoon Chair Gale Brewer,  
14 Deputy Speaker Ayala, members of the Committee on  
15 Oversight and Investigations, other distinguished  
16 members of the City Council, NYCHA residents,  
17 community advocates, and members of the public. I am  
18 Eva Trimble, NYCHA's Chief Operating Officer. Thank  
19 you for this opportunity to discuss our efforts to  
20 become the landlord that residents deserve. We are  
21 making process in adjusting issues that are critical  
22 to residents' quality of life and we are intensely  
23 committed to the areas that need improvement. The  
24 information outlined in the annual Mayor's Management  
25 Report is an expression of values as an agency,

2 guiding our focus and investment of resources.

3 Together with our stakeholders, including residents  
4 and members of the Council, we will continue to  
5 transform our organization using the data we're  
6 collecting.

7 In line with the mandates of the HUD Agreement,  
8 NYCHA made progress in the past year in areas such as  
9 mold, elevators and heat service. For example, in  
10 Fiscal Year 2023, NYCHA met our goal to prevent the  
11 return of mold following remediation and repairs. 87  
12 percent of mold cases were not recurrences, exceeding  
13 the HUD Agreement target of 85 percent. We abated  
14 mold in nearly 3,300 apartments in Fiscal Year 2023,  
15 a 426 percent increase over the prior year. The  
16 average time to resolve elevator outages dropped by  
17 23 percent, from 11.8 hours in Fiscal Year 2022 to  
18 9.1 hours in Fiscal Year 2023, below the HUD  
19 Agreement target of 10 hours. The average outage per  
20 elevator per month also decreased from 1.07 to 0.93.  
21 We reduced the average time to resolve heat outages  
22 by 10 percent from 8.3 hours to 7.5 hours, well below  
23 the HUD Agreement target of 12 hours.

24 In addition to demonstrating where we are making  
25 progress, the MMR highlights areas where we need to

1 improve. For instance, rent collection is well under  
2 our target of 97.5 percent, standing at 62.2 percent  
3 in Fiscal Year 2023. To help address this, we apply  
4 for ERAP funding we are receiving from the state to  
5 residents' arrears. We will work with our residents  
6 to connect them to supportive services.  
7

8 Additionally, the average time to resolve emergency  
9 repair requests did not meet our 24-hour target in  
10 Fiscal Year 2023, and the time to resolve non-  
11 emergency and skilled trade repairs also increased,  
12 as we've discussed it's a struggle to keep up with  
13 the needs of our aging buildings, due to decades of  
14 insufficient federal funding, there are more than \$78  
15 billion in capital needs across the portfolio.

16 However, the average time to complete maintenance  
17 work orders, which are typically minor repairs,  
18 decreased from 8 days in fiscal year 2022 to 6.2 days  
19 in fiscal year 2023. Our Work Order Reform and  
20 Neighborhood Model initiatives are helping to improve  
21 service to residents through increased staffing,  
22 federal work order planning and scheduling, enhanced  
23 communication with residents and increased staff  
24 accountability and productivity through continuous  
25 monitoring.

2 Another area that requires improvement is the  
3 time it takes to prepare vacant apartments for a new  
4 occupant. As we discussed with the Council earlier  
5 this year, NYCHA apartments require extensive health  
6 and safety work once vacated due to their age and  
7 often deteriorated condition. Thanks to city  
8 funding, we are prioritizing the turnover of vacant  
9 apartments and are closely monitoring these efforts.  
10 We are happy to discuss more details with you and  
11 answer any questions you may have. As always, we  
12 look forward to continuing our partnership with the  
13 Council in service to our residents. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead sir. Council  
15 Member Williams has joined us. Thank you Council  
16 Member Williams.

17 ERIC MACFARLANE: Good morning Chair Brewer,  
18 Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the Committee. I  
19 am Eric Macfarlane; the First Deputy Commissioner for  
20 the New York City Department of Design and  
21 Construction and I am pleased to appear before the  
22 Committee today.

23 DDC is a city construction management agency,  
24 meeting the everyday construction needs for more than  
25 25 different city agencies and also stepping up in

2 times of crisis. During normal times, we build  
3 firehouses, clinics, public plazas, libraries and  
4 street water main and sewers. During the pandemic,  
5 we also built testing and vaccination centers and  
6 most recently the agency has been performing  
7 technical vetting potential of potential sites for  
8 asylum centers, about 46 of them at this count, and  
9 managing the construction of those centers at city-  
10 owned sites, about 10 of them.

11 DDC has seen a large expansion of its  
12 responsibilities in the last several years and we are  
13 working to ensure that our MMR data reflects that.  
14 Specifically, the agency has recently been called  
15 upon to build the new jail system that allow for the  
16 closure of Rikers Island. We are building the city's  
17 new coastal resiliency defenses, such as the East  
18 Side Coastal Resiliency. We are part of the city's  
19 new cloudburst management effort along with DEP and  
20 we are building thousands of pieces of green  
21 infrastructure. We are with DOT reconstructing  
22 thousands of pedestrian ramps to comply with a court  
23 order. And we are also implementing a new alternate  
24 delivery program so we can bring the benefits of

2 contracting methods such as design build to more city  
3 projects.

4 Mayor Adams recently announced that the \$141  
5 million Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center will be  
6 built by DDC, two years faster using design build  
7 than could have been with the old system of lower  
8 bidders contracting.

9 In the most recent Fiscal Year 2023 MMR we  
10 reported a total portfolio size of \$17.06 billion for  
11 596 active projects. This is in addition to \$9  
12 billion for the ten-borough jail-based contracts,  
13 bringing the agency's total active portfolio to a \$26  
14 billion. For reference, five years ago in Fiscal  
15 Year 2018, the portfolio size was about \$14 billion.

16 These new requirements affect the agency's MMR  
17 data. The responsibility for the borough-based  
18 jails, for alternate delivery and for emergency COVID  
19 and asylum center work largely falls on Public  
20 Building Division. We have public buildings and  
21 infrastructure. Public Buildings also completed this  
22 year more than \$200 million of emergency work on  
23 Rikers Island and Hart Island. For the year, the  
24 division has seen a reduction in its project  
25 completed early and on time even as it successfully



2 tackled these other new challenges. The division is  
3 also still feeling the effects of the COVID pause  
4 that halted consultant design during the pandemic.

5 In our Infrastructure Division, the MMR data  
6 reflect the changing needs of the agencies that fund  
7 our project. Over the last five years, there has  
8 been a decrease in the miles of water mains, sewers,  
9 and roadway constructed even as the division has  
10 successfully taken on coastal resiliency program,  
11 pedestrian ramp and green infrastructure. The  
12 decrease in those indicators does not represent a  
13 decrease in productivity, it simply means that the  
14 agencies that sponsor our infrastructure projects are  
15 funding other needs. If green infrastructure and  
16 pedestrian ramps are prioritized, then that is what  
17 we build.

18 DDC also reported good news in the most recent  
19 MMR. Our M/WBE program continues to thrive and in  
20 the first three quarters of the fiscal year, DDC had  
21 30.5 percent M/WBE participation with more than \$261  
22 million in contract awards. Design projects  
23 completed was increased by 25 percent, thanks largely  
24 to the end of the pandemic. In our infrastructure  
25 division, where designs are completely mostly in-

2 house, 91 percent of our design were completed early  
3 or on time. Also, in infrastructure, 87 percent of  
4 construction projects were completed on time, early  
5 or on time. And our front-end planning unit  
6 continues to weed out problematic projects before  
7 they start with 106 reviews completed last year  
8 versus 49 two years ago.

9 DDC MMR data reflect the changing needs and  
10 priorities of our city, as well as factors outside of  
11 the city's control such as climate change and court  
12 orders. The growth in the agency's portfolio also  
13 represents the necessity of an agency like DDC and  
14 the faith city government has in DDC to carry out  
15 important life-saving initiatives such as the East  
16 Side Coastal Resiliency.

17 These new initiatives have been a challenge for  
18 our data team to represent accurately in the PMMR,  
19 the MMR and now the DMMR, and we plan to rectify that  
20 before the next full MMR is published to take into  
21 account these new challenges to increase the  
22 portfolio. And while new responsibilities do not  
23 relieve the agency of its traditional duties, we  
24 encourage the Committee to consider the agency's new  
25

2 burdens, what they mean to the city and how  
3 effectively they are being managed by DDC.

4 Thank you and I would be pleased to answer any  
5 questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. We've also been  
7 joined by Council Member Salamanca. Just in terms of  
8 I know Council Member Ayala is going to ask questions  
9 particularly about human services but when you talked  
10 about the persons who have been hired, I think you  
11 said 700 employees since 2022, but how many employees  
12 have left? Do you know that? I'm just curious  
13 because obviously staffing is important. Do you have  
14 any sense of what that is? It's nice to have new  
15 people but people leave too.

16 JILL BERRY: Yeah and I don't have that exact  
17 number with me. However, we are continuing to hire  
18 monthly for both the SNAP and cash programs currently  
19 at numbers that are higher than our attrition rates  
20 to make sure that we continue to see increases in the  
21 numbers of staff and we monitor the overall numbers  
22 of staff in both the SNAP and the cash programs, to  
23 make sure those numbers continue to increase. And  
24 you know that there is a hiring freeze coming but we  
25 will plan to work with OMB on exemptions for these

2 particular titles to make sure we don't lose any  
3 ground in the staffing for the SNAP and cash  
4 programs.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and I do want to say  
6 something nice because I know we don't often do that  
7 but we had a person come into our office who had SNAP  
8 issues. He had issues himself. He had issues  
9 getting SNAP and his name is Robert Spence, I don't  
10 think he minds being named but the person who came  
11 with but I don't know. Somebody came from DSS to the  
12 office, helped him, had to go back that night, eight  
13 o'clock at night to Brooklyn and then came all the  
14 way back to the upper west side with the SNAP card.  
15 So, we wrote a letter of thanks but I just want to  
16 say that was a big deal and we thank you for that.  
17 Not many employees would do that.

18 JILL BERRY: The staff really do care about the  
19 work they do.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, that was huge from my  
21 perspective. The other question I had and then I'll  
22 turn it over to Council Member Ayala to talk  
23 specifically about HRA but when you have listed here  
24 connected households facing eviction with legal  
25 assistance, issued ID cards and so on. Do you also

2 have some sense of how many more are eligible?  
3 Because it's good to have legal assistance for x-  
4 34,000. It's good to have ID cards but do you have  
5 some sense of like, do you keep track of what really  
6 is needed?

7 JILL BERRY: I think it's - I know that it's very  
8 hard to really track exactly how many people are  
9 eligible. So, for example, Housing Court, people  
10 come into Housing Court, you don't know what their  
11 income level is to know how is eligible when they  
12 walk in the door. So, we try to make the connections  
13 with each person who walks in the door and figure out  
14 you know what is your level of need for a lawyer at  
15 that moment and time? What is your income level?  
16 And making sure that we're connecting everybody who  
17 is eligible for and needs supports. Maybe not on day  
18 one but at the appropriate point in the Housing Court  
19 Process.

20 IDNYC, the demand currently with the asylum  
21 seekers is absolutely outstripping our ability to  
22 keep up with the demand but we are putting all the  
23 resources and efforts towards trying to get IDNYC  
24 cards into as many hands as possible. And you can  
25

2 see that the application and numbers of cards being  
3 issued has dramatically increased.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And the backlog is on ID?

5 JILL BERRY: The backlog on the MMR indicator on  
6 timeliness for the IDNYC, dropped. That drop  
7 corresponded with the influx of asylum seekers coming  
8 into New York City. And what we did was we – rather  
9 than trying to meet the 14-days of issuing a denial  
10 or a card, we took a step back to make sure that we  
11 were really evaluating each application in its whole  
12 doing as many manual secondary reviews as possible to  
13 get the IDNYC card to as many people as possible.  
14 And that – we took that time, looked at each  
15 individual application and then put some new  
16 processes in place and the data is not published yet  
17 for July, August, and September for IDNYC but it's  
18 back up to 98 percent timeliness. And really, the  
19 MMR just reflects that period of time where we sort  
20 of took a pause to make sure that we really were  
21 careful at considering every piece of documentation  
22 people were submitting and making as many people  
23 eligible as possible because that's the whole goal of  
24 this IDNYC program is for these new arrivals.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, I have people  
3 complaining but I appreciate your response. Council  
4 Member Ayala.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Thank you. Thank you so  
6 much. Obviously we've had a couple of oversight  
7 hearings on the issue of the timeliness of  
8 application processing and you know the concern that  
9 New Yorkers in desperate need of specifically SNAP  
10 benefits are having to wait longer periods. Uhm, and  
11 you mentioned in your testimony that you've been  
12 working with the state for additional waivers. Can  
13 you elaborate on what you mean by that? You know  
14 what waivers?

15 JILL BERRY: Yup, yeah, thank you Deputy Speaker.  
16 Happy to talk about a couple of our very recent  
17 waivers that are making a big difference, seeing some  
18 differences already. One of the waivers that we've  
19 implemented, phase one we're going to continue to  
20 implement additional phases but it's called selective  
21 case review. It's something we use a lot on the SNAP  
22 only side of the house where we have waivers from the  
23 federal government and the state to not have a  
24 supervisory review of certain types of applications  
25 and recertifications that are less prone to errors.

2 So, those supervisors then don't have to review first  
3 of all the processing is faster because many cases  
4 don't need a supervisory review and it will also  
5 freeze up the supervisor time to spend more time in  
6 particular with the new staff that we've onboarded  
7 who need help and support and supervision to make  
8 sure that they're getting the work done. That's one  
9 recent waiver. The other waiver that we implemented  
10 in October and we're going to see the effects in  
11 December, is we've eliminated the six-month mailer  
12 for cash assistance cases without earned income. So,  
13 these are people who are on fixed incomes, generally  
14 don't have a lot of changes to their income or case  
15 composition and they now only have to do the recert  
16 every 12 months. They don't have to do that six-  
17 month internal mailer. That is for the month of  
18 December. We're going to have 15,000 fewer cases to  
19 take action on as a result of this waiver and this  
20 will be similar numbers we expect every month.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm assuming the waivers  
22 are temporary?

23 JILL BERRY: These waivers are -

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They'll be permanent?  
25



2 JILL BERRY: The selected case review is a  
3 permanent waiver. It's something we have on the SNAP  
4 side permanently. We've expanded to the cash  
5 assistance side. The six-month mailer is also  
6 permanent.

7 It's also permanent, that's great. My concern is  
8 always, how do we ensure that these services are, you  
9 know that the waivers are a permanent solution and  
10 that these are sustainable ways of moving forward.  
11 Uhm, you also mentioned that the agency has been  
12 investing in technology to streamline processing and  
13 one of the major things that came up at our previous  
14 hearing, was to the staff, directly who shared with  
15 us that during the beginning of the COVID pandemic,  
16 they had started using I believe it's the Ashley  
17 system. Is it the Ashley system? Am I correct?

18 JILL BERRY: ANGI.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: ANGI, okay and that you  
20 know they had just started it and were - because of  
21 the influx of applications in the early onset of the  
22 pandemic, they reverted back to the old system.  
23 Because when we were looking at the numbers, we did  
24 you know see that there was an uptick right and it  
25 seemed like the processing rate was significantly

2 hire while staff was working remotely and then when  
3 they came back, there was a significant drop. And  
4 the staff you know mentioned that part of that had a  
5 lot to do with you know the implementation of this  
6 system. And the flaws that they have identified  
7 within the structure of the system that concerned  
8 them because if there was an error with a specific  
9 client and they couldn't move forward with that  
10 person, then they have to kind of you know proceed  
11 with the next one and they had no way of coming back  
12 and checking to make sure that you know a person  
13 actually, the application was processed. And that  
14 made a lot of sense to me you know because I think  
15 we've been focusing a lot of our efforts I think  
16 rightly so on the staffing ratios and the fact that  
17 you know we were obviously understaffed but this  
18 system seems to be you know a focal point of  
19 conversation amongst your staff, as one of the  
20 primary reasons that the application rate is so low.

21 JILL BERRY: Yeah, so before the technology, I  
22 just want to touch on your point about the processing  
23 times being better during the COVID period.  
24 Absolutely because we didn't have to process recerts.  
25 We didn't have applications for one shots for rent

2 arrears for utility assistance because of the HEAP  
3 program because of the ERAP program, we had less work  
4 to do during the pandemic and that's really why our  
5 processing was much more efficient during the  
6 pandemic.

7 In terms of the system -

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Hold on, was there fraud at  
9 that time or can we just continue that? Was there  
10 fraud or why can't we just continue the faster way?

11 JILL BERRY: We would love to continue those but  
12 we have been unsuccessful in convincing our federal  
13 and state partners to continue those waivers.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We should work with you to  
15 do that. Go ahead.

16 JILL BERRY: And absolutely, and we've as I  
17 mentioned, the other waivers, we're getting creative.  
18 We're thinking so we can't do those waivers what else  
19 can we do to reduce the work load for our staff?

20 Uhm, in terms of the technology, of course rolling  
21 out any new technology system, it's going to be hard.  
22 There's as much as we plan and design and test, there  
23 are going to be bugs that don't work. The staff have  
24 to adjust to the systems. Some of the systems like  
25 ESPAS and ANGI, were designed pre-COVID at a

2 different time when we weren't necessarily just  
3 trying to process the work faster. At times we were  
4 trying to slow people down to process the work  
5 correctly. To make sure people get the right benefit  
6 level. That people make the right decisions on  
7 eligibility. And so, the systems were designed to  
8 for example, in the interview process, force you to  
9 go through every single question in the interview.  
10 It did make it harder for people to skip questions in  
11 the interview compared to the old system.

12 Now that we have these backlogs, that's certainly  
13 a hard thing to deal with. Those systems that slow  
14 the processing down but they are designed to help  
15 make sure the clients get the right benefit levels.  
16 And there are growing pains every time we implement a  
17 new system. In your example where we rolled out  
18 something, we peeled it back a little bit while we  
19 had the IT people make those tweaks and improvements  
20 to performance and then we roll it back out a little  
21 bit more slowly one center at a time to make sure  
22 it's working.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: When exactly did DSS roll  
24 the ANGI program back into the rotation of processing  
25 applications? How long?

2 JILL BERRY: Yeah, I don't have the exact dates  
3 but we implemented ANGI during COVID. We rolled it  
4 back for a portion of COVID while we made the  
5 adjustments. It is now in full operation and works  
6 well at this time.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Really because I mean the  
8 hearing was just what maybe a little over a month ago  
9 and the staff was still adamant that this was an  
10 issue?

11 JILL BERRY: We can take another look at what the  
12 staff complaints are.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I mean and I would imagine  
14 that they're correct because if the rate of  
15 completion is still you know significantly lower than  
16 it should be - bless you. Uhm, we're not seeing you  
17 know we're not seeing a rapid increase in application  
18 processing numbers. So, you know it doesn't seem  
19 like they're aligned.

20 JILL BERRY: Yeah, ANGI is only for the SNAP only  
21 processing, it is not for the cash assistance  
22 processing. And our SNAP only backlog numbers are  
23 currently under 2,000. We are up to date essentially  
24 on processing most of our SNAP only applications and  
25 that is what the ANGI system pertains to. So, it's

2 not effecting our SNAP only backlog at this time.  
3 But I take your point and we have done in the past  
4 where we've brought in staff from the locations to  
5 talk specifically with the IT team about systems and  
6 issues that they're having with systems and create  
7 these little work groups so that we can make  
8 improvements and we can do the same thing again here.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Yeah, I mean do you  
10 normally speak with the state to try to identify  
11 redundancies in the application process to streamline  
12 them a little bit better?

13 JILL BERRY: We are constantly looking for ways  
14 to improve and streamline and reduce the application  
15 process. I can't think of a recent occurrence where  
16 we have significantly streamlined the application.  
17 There have been some small things like not having to  
18 produce uhm documentation to prove household  
19 composition for example. For everybody, unless it's  
20 questionable, that is a recent change, fairly recent  
21 change that the state has allowed. Small things like  
22 that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Alright, so can you share  
24 a little bit about how specifically do you use the  
25 MMR to improve the agencies functions? And who at

2 the agency is responsible for overseeing those  
3 actions?

4 JILL BERRY: So, the MMR is overseen by our Chief  
5 Program Performance and Financial Management Officer.  
6 Most of the data that's collected in the MMR is  
7 overseen by my colleague Karl Snyder, Deputy  
8 Commissioner Karl Snyder and the MMR is one of the  
9 real values I think of the MMR is its longevity.  
10 It's consistency of indicators over long periods of  
11 time, where you can really see historical changes in  
12 particular indicators. It's also a great snapshot of  
13 how the agency is doing a couple times a year but  
14 we're a data driven agency. We don't just rely on  
15 the MMR, those twice a year snapshots. Some cases we  
16 have monthly data but we like to also look at things  
17 in a more granular level where we have vendors  
18 managing programs, we will look at - we will compare  
19 data of individual vendors to each other's to see how  
20 they're performing.

21 Things like timeliness, we are not just looking  
22 at timeliness on even a monthly basis, we are looking  
23 at it every day. I personally am looking at the  
24 backlog numbers at least twice a week.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: That's great. Uhm, could  
3 you share how, how did last year's MMR inform your  
4 work over the 12 months, between September 2022 and  
5 September 2023?

6 JILL BERRY: I'm not -

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I mean, were there any  
8 recommendations that came from last year's MMR that  
9 allowed you to implement new policies this year to  
10 help inform, right? The changes in policy?

11 JILL BERRY: Uhm, I'm not sure that there's a  
12 particular MMR indicator that does that necessarily  
13 for us but there is a lot of value in the MMR and the  
14 data and what we see.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Okay, uhm, in the MMR  
16 reporting on SNAP processing timeliness. According  
17 to the Fiscal 2023 Mayor's Management Report, the  
18 SNAP application timeliness fell 20.4 percent. I  
19 know we discussed a little bit of this. Uhm, the  
20 target for the metric was I guess it was 90.6. Why -  
21 so I guess we discussed some of why the SNAP  
22 timeliness continued to drop so significantly over  
23 the last two years. I know - I want to bring that  
24 back to a little bit of you know regarding the recent  
25 announcement on the you know additional PEGs and the



2 hiring freeze and how do those impact your ability to  
3 kind of ensure that we're continuing on the right  
4 trend in terms of the rising application processing  
5 rates?

6 JILL BERRY: Uhm, we look at — to address the  
7 backlogs and to look at the numbers, when we're  
8 looking at the numbers, we're not just looking at  
9 staffing right? So, we develop models for the  
10 backlogs that show short of where we are, where we've  
11 been and where we think we're going to go and the  
12 leavers we push in those models, it's not just  
13 staffing, staffing is not the only solution right?  
14 There's things like the waivers that are  
15 quantifiable, having 15,000 fewer actions to take in  
16 the month of December because of the six-month mailer  
17 waiver. It's a tangible thing that's measurable that  
18 we can create and model out what the backlog is going  
19 to look like and we can make adjustments as needed  
20 and we can plug in all those inputs of technology  
21 improvements, hiring additional staff when they get  
22 trained up and the waivers we implement.

23 And I just also want to point out the SNAP  
24 timeliness indicator. I know I mentioned that our

2 SNAP only backlog is down to almost nothing but that  
3 SNAP timeliness indicator –

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think you said 2,000  
5 right?

6 JILL BERRY: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's nothing. That's not  
8 nothing. Okay.

9 JILL BERRY: Yes, not nothing. The SNAP  
10 timeliness indicator includes both the SNAP only  
11 cases and the cash assistance cases. So, we're sort  
12 of double counting the backlogs on the cash  
13 assistance program in both the cash assistance  
14 timeliness rate and the SNAP timeliness rate.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I don't think I've heard  
16 that before. Uhm, I wanted to get back really  
17 quickly because I didn't ask this question regarding  
18 the Ashley – ANGI. I don't know why I have Ashley in  
19 my head but one of my staffers name is Ashley, she  
20 must be doing something. I'm going to go check on  
21 her. Uhm, but does that system work with Access HRA?

22 JILL BERRY: So, the way the systems work is  
23 people apply via Access HRA. That data gets loaded  
24 into our PAS on the cash assistance side or SPAS on  
25 the SNAP only side. It gets loaded into one of our

2 PAS systems and that's where our work happens is in  
3 those PAS systems. What ANGI does for SPAS, on the  
4 SNAP only side, is it helps to determine which cases  
5 should be worked on next. Cases where an applicant  
6 has indicated there's an emergency. Cases that are  
7 due for recertification where that recertification  
8 period is ending soon. And it dishes out that work  
9 automatically based on that information to the  
10 workers, so that we're working on the right cases at  
11 the right time.

12 The staff members aren't working in ANGI. ANGI  
13 is sort of indicating to them which PAS case they  
14 need to work on next.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm and  
16 you did promise that you are going to go back and  
17 look into the trouble shooting issues.

18 JILL BERRY: Yes, absolutely.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I'm going to hold you to  
20 that because I'm going to ask the staff.

21 JILL BERRY: I got it.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Uhm, okay, can you explain  
23 why the cash assistance timeliness rate dropped so  
24 much specifically in Fiscal Year 2023 when it was  
25 just 28 percent?

2 JILL BERRY: Yeah, during COVID, the cash  
3 assistance application timeliness rates were actually  
4 not that bad because we didn't have to process  
5 recerts. We didn't have applications coming in for  
6 one shots, for rent arrears and utility assistance  
7 because of the additional assistance.

8 What we found starting in the middle of 2022; I  
9 don't know if Karl is going to want to – We started  
10 to see a huge increase in applications. Of course we  
11 expected some of that because of the end of the  
12 eviction moratorium, because of the end of the ERAP  
13 funds, because of the end of the utility arrears  
14 money. We certainly expected an increase in  
15 applications but Karl can tell you a little bit more  
16 the application numbers we're seeing now are  
17 unprecedented. Things we have not seen in modern  
18 times.

19 KARL SNYDER: Yes, so in the early days of the  
20 pandemic –

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Were you sworn in Karl?

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, he was.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Alright, sorry.

24 KARL SNYDER: Not a problem. So, in the early  
25 days of the pandemic, there was a large number of new

2 cash cases that came in but we didn't see a huge  
3 influx in applications. The large number of  
4 applications started coming in began in towards the  
5 tail end of 2021. Largely when the pandemic  
6 benefits, like the expanded unemployment began. And  
7 since then, they've been in an upward trajectory,  
8 also when ERAP was over, that's what happened.

9 And so, we've gone up to a level where you can  
10 see I think the FY23 MMR, there's like close to a  
11 half a million applications that came in. And like  
12 we had in August of this year, the record number of  
13 cash assistance applications we've ever seen over  
14 51,000 in a single month.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Wow. Wow.

16 JILL BERRY: Yes, so it really is the  
17 applications on the cash assistance side that is  
18 driving our timeliness, impacting our timeliness and  
19 driving our backlogs.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But what are you going to do  
21 about it because this is life and death for people?

22 JILL BERRY: Yeah, four-pronged approach  
23 staffing, hiring staffing, retaining the staff we  
24 have, making sure that we're keeping up with  
25 attrition levels, requesting the additional waivers

2 from the state and federal government. I mentioned a  
3 couple that we just recently got and have  
4 implemented. Improving technology where ever we can  
5 and operational efficiencies. We recently are  
6 contracting with three CBO's to provide additional  
7 assistance to people while they're filling out their  
8 access HRA application. They have a live person that  
9 they can call for assistance. They're specifically  
10 helping people who may have already submitted an  
11 application and haven't received a decision to help  
12 them with what are the next steps as opposed to just  
13 sending more and more applications in. Making sure  
14 people understand what documentation that they need  
15 to provide to us, so that people provide the right  
16 documentation the first time. It makes it easier and  
17 faster for us to process and process right the first  
18 time. So, those are things that we are doing.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: And what is the  
20 repercussion for being late? I mean, I know that the  
21 state and the federal government are pretty stringent  
22 on these you know deadlines. So, what happens if you  
23 go beyond the 30-day mark? What is the consequence  
24 for that? Like what -

2 JILL BERRY: It's showing up in audit findings  
3 right now.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Aye, Yai, Yai. Alright,  
5 uhm, has there been action from the state or the  
6 federal government relating to the processing delays?

7 JILL BERRY: We're not - we could be under a  
8 corrective action plan. We are not currently under  
9 any formal corrective action plan. Uhm, we wouldn't  
10 be surprised if that comes but we're in constant  
11 communication with the state about our backlogs and  
12 where we are in the numbers. And the efforts that  
13 we're taking to improve; I'm sending emails every  
14 week to the state to prove that we are continuing to  
15 hire staff and maintaining staffing levels, as just  
16 one example.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I mean but how short are you  
18 on staff? So that we understand what it is because  
19 51,000 per month is very, very high. And I have to  
20 tell you given the economy, it might get worse.

21 JILL BERRY: I think that if it stays at those  
22 levels, we're certainly going to have to hire a lot  
23 more staff.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But I think you have to hire  
25 - I'm sorry, a lot more staff now in order to deal

2 with your backlog. What's your backlog for case  
3 management, I'm sorry, I know it's 2,000 for – What  
4 is your backlog for case management?

5 JILL BERRY: For the – for cash assistance?

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm sorry for cash  
7 assistance.

8 JILL BERRY: Uhm, as the end of September, we had  
9 26,728 cash assistance applications that were more  
10 than –

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's what you said in your  
12 testimony?

13 JILL BERRY: Yup.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Yeah, that's pretty  
16 significant. I mean I think it's a sad reflection of  
17 the state you know that we're in and the impact that  
18 the impact had on so many New Yorkers and you know  
19 and also that we continue to have so many folks still  
20 working you know jobs that are not paying enough and  
21 they're still having to supplement their needs by  
22 applying for these resources. And I think that  
23 that's why it is imperative right that we have a  
24 system that looks at you know pay equity with a  
25 larger lens because you know, I'd rather have 70 jobs



2 that pay well than have 100 that don't. And so,  
3 alright I'll ask one more question regarding the  
4 missing. So, the missing MMR metrics, there are many  
5 HRA benefit programs that are either not included in  
6 the MMR at all or only limited metrics are provided.  
7 Most importantly there are no metrics including on  
8 rental assistance programs such as City FHEPS. Would  
9 HRA be open to working with the City Council to  
10 discuss the additional reporting of new metrics to  
11 the MMR and will HRA commit to including reporting  
12 metrics specifically on the City FHEPS program in  
13 future MMRs?

14 JILL BERRY: So, we're happy to look at any new  
15 indicators. I know that in this last MMR, we added  
16 the Community Food Connections program and indicators  
17 to the MMR and we're absolutely open to talking about  
18 it and looking at other indicators including City  
19 FHEPs going forward.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Okay, what is the issue  
21 with the City FHEPS program? Because I'm still, I  
22 mean I'm not lying when I tell you that I get you  
23 know quite a substantial number of calls from  
24 constituents who are already receiving City FHEPS  
25 whose payments are not being processed. And so, just

2 yesterday I was emailing the Commissioner. I have a  
3 constituent who I have reported in the past for the  
4 same issue, whose landlord is not taking her to court  
5 you know to start eviction proceedings because the  
6 City FHEPS portion of her rent hasn't been paid in  
7 you know in quite a while. What are the delays in  
8 that you know in that department? What do those look  
9 like?

10 JILL BERRY: I don't believe we're seeing any  
11 delays in City FHEPS renewals at this point and time.  
12 Sometimes and I don't know what the particulars of  
13 this case but sometimes it is that the individual  
14 received the renewal package and didn't complete it  
15 and didn't submit it to us or submitted it to us  
16 late.

17 One thing we are doing to address that is in  
18 December, we'll be adding City FHEPS renewals to  
19 access HRA. It will be easier for individuals to  
20 monitor when their City FHEPS needs to be renewed and  
21 submitted online through us.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: That great. So, you  
23 process the applications, the renewal applications  
24 but in terms of the payments, who - that also on the  
25 DSS right?

2 JILL BERRY: Once we process the application, the  
3 renewal, the payments go out. There wouldn't be a  
4 delay in between a payment and a processing.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Okay, so there is a  
6 disconnect somewhere because the information that  
7 we're receiving is not consistent right with what  
8 your sharing with me at this moment. And you know I  
9 think it's important because as we're talking about  
10 expanding on you know the City FHEPS program, it's  
11 also equally important to ensure that the timelines  
12 of payments is made because this happened to be  
13 individual that was in shelter and was able to find  
14 permanent housing, which is a great thing and it's  
15 what we all right are hoping to be able to do and  
16 duplicate. But we're not paying landlords in a  
17 timely manner and we're forcing folks into court  
18 unnecessarily.

19 You know I tried to explain to folks, like you  
20 know this is not something that you know you should  
21 lose too much sleep over because you know it's not  
22 you that owes the money, right? You're paying a  
23 portion, the city owes theirs portion and once it  
24 gets to court right, the city has to respond as to  
25 why they haven't been paying but it does absolutely

2 nothing to alleviate the fear of the threat of  
3 eviction and you know right now, the backlog in  
4 Housing Court is pretty significant as well, so that  
5 means that not only are you scared to death that  
6 you're going to get evicted but you're waiting right  
7 languishing in Housing Court for months on end with  
8 that threat hanging over your head. And so you  
9 should not have to be reaching out to an elected  
10 official to help rectify that. I really you know  
11 would love to see some improvement and I would love  
12 to see the call volume to my office with these types  
13 of complaints come down.

14 JILL BERRY: Yeah, absolutely. We don't want  
15 people to end up in Housing Court either because then  
16 we're also running the Right to Counsel program and  
17 we see people there too. It's always better for us  
18 to rectify the issues as quickly as early as  
19 possible. Paying the arrears people owe as early as  
20 possible while the numbers are low before somebody  
21 even gets to that point and time.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Yeah, actually one last  
23 question regarding the headcount. Can you tell us  
24 what the headcount currently is on the uh, what the  
25 exact number of budgeted and actual positions for the

2 Administration of key benefit programs including SNAP  
3 and cash assistance? It's not clear from publicly  
4 available budget documentation as it is also  
5 comingled in budgeting program areas with other  
6 programs.

7 JILL BERRY: We're going to have to get back to  
8 you on that. I wasn't prepared to answer that  
9 question.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Okay, I appreciate it.  
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. I'll call on  
13 Council Member Krishnan and then Council Member  
14 Williams in a minute. So, but I want to follow up on  
15 what we just heard. The question of the PEGs and the  
16 hiring freeze, because when you have 26,000 people  
17 who need cash assistance or they may or may not  
18 depending on whether they're eligible. How in the  
19 world are you going to get there with PEG and hiring  
20 freeze? I know you said you're hiring but I wasn't  
21 clear and you didn't seem to be able to know the  
22 answer to that last question. I mean this is the key  
23 is staffing.

24 JILL BERRY: Absolutely, staffing - hiring staff  
25 is key.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The other day the Mayor's  
3 Office was here. They have lots of things in the  
4 Mayor's Office, I can't keep track of all those  
5 little divisions he has and one of them mentioned  
6 that she was hiring ten people. So, I guess there's  
7 no real hiring freeze. That's me being very cynical  
8 but what are you doing to address with staffing and  
9 PEG, the 26,000 or almost 27,000 people, cash  
10 assistance?

11 JILL BERRY: So, as I said before, staffing is  
12 not our only solution. It's not our only lever.  
13 We're looking at other levers as well. We are  
14 working with OMB to have the in particular the cash  
15 and SNAP program be part of the exemptions that will  
16 be allowed to continue.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Did they say when they're  
18 going to tell you that you are exempted or not? They  
19 haven't told you when that -

20 JILL BERRY: They are exempt positions but we're  
21 - every month, we're going to go with our group of  
22 exempt positions and get OMB approval so that we can  
23 hire and make sure we don't lose any ground on the  
24 staffing that we have.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, so you have to go  
3 every month to say x number of people need to be  
4 hired in order to address, that's how it works?

5 JILL BERRY: That's how it works even today even  
6 without the hiring freeze. We go every month to OMB  
7 with the people that we want to – the numbers of  
8 people that we want to hire and get the approvals to  
9 do so.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Maybe some of them should be  
11 part of this 26,000, so they know what it's like not  
12 to have any cash. I feel very strongly about this.  
13 Uhm, the other question I have is, there is an  
14 average customer in person wait time for service at  
15 HRA offices. It increased by 53 percent in Fiscal  
16 Year 2023 compared to 2022. The average wait time is  
17 over an hour and only 11 percent of calls are  
18 answered in 30 seconds or less. What are we doing to  
19 shorten wait times at HRA? And how again will the  
20 cuts, the PEG, 15 percent, 5 percent depending on how  
21 you look at it. The impact of those times. These  
22 are the things that really bother people and that get  
23 them to not continue in the system and you know do  
24 other things. Go ahead.

2 JILL BERRY: Yup, so the in person wait times,  
3 those are in our centers where we serve cash  
4 assistance and SNAP individuals, so it is the same  
5 staff that are processing applications. It's the  
6 same 700 staff that we hired over the last year and  
7 our working with OMB to make sure we don't lose staff  
8 with attrition. That is who is serving the in person  
9 with our in person wait times. Absolutely because  
10 our timeliness is not great right now, that is why  
11 the traffic has increased and that wait time has  
12 increased. As we continue to address timeliness and  
13 backlogs, we expect the in-person wait time to be  
14 reduced.

15 For Infoline, absolutely, we're not answering 80  
16 percent of our calls within 30 seconds. We do have  
17 wait times for Infoline.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: How long usually, do you  
19 know?

20 JILL BERRY: It's in the hours. It is too long  
21 but things that we're doing to address it is we've  
22 implemented a new IVR self-service option, so we have  
23 a lot more self-service options.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I hate those things. I  
25 always zero, zero, zero, zero. I'm good that that



2 and I get rid of I don't care if it's an airline, the  
3 credit card, zero, zero, zero. The hell with number  
4 one, two, three, four. Nothing, never, go ahead.

5 JILL BERRY: Yes, I understand.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I hope it works at HRA too,  
7 zero, zero, zero.

8 JILL BERRY: We also have a call back assist  
9 feature so that while people, while the wait times  
10 are long, people are not actually sitting on their  
11 phone or using up their minutes during that wait  
12 time. They can opt in to the call back assist and  
13 we'll call you back when we get to your point in the  
14 line. People also have the option to check status  
15 and information on their Access HRA account, or they  
16 can walk into our centers.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, I mean it's hard. We  
18 all deal with this but I do think for people who are  
19 most vulnerable, you know you're not waiting for you  
20 Visa Card. You're waiting for somebody who needs  
21 cash and that's more important and I wish that we  
22 could - we need staff.

23 The other question is, 50 percent of families in  
24 the shelter system were served by licensed social  
25 workers in fiscal year 2023, representing a decrease

2 from 72 percent in FY22. What is the agency doing to  
3 hire more social workers to address this need?

4 JILL BERRY: So, what I do know is the big driver  
5 in that decrease is the large increase in asylum  
6 seekers into the system. That we have ramp up  
7 quickly, staff up quickly and we were not able to  
8 hire enough social workers at the same rates that  
9 people were coming in in order to meet those  
10 timelines but as we're bringing providers onboard for  
11 the additional shelters, they have their staffing  
12 level, their allocated staffing that are approved  
13 within the contract including the social workers and  
14 we are encouraging them to fully staff up. And as  
15 we, the staffing and the contracts and all that  
16 catches up with all the additional shelters we've  
17 opened over the last year and a half, those  
18 percentages should increase. It really is a  
19 reflection of the fast pace of opening shelters, not  
20 hiring the staff at quite that rate, particularly  
21 social workers.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, I'll keep – Council  
23 Member Krishnan.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair  
25 Brewer. Good afternoon everyone and thank you all

2 for your testimony. It's good to see you First  
3 Deputy Commissioner Berry and I particularly want to  
4 thank you for your work with me and my office too to  
5 help particularly distressed individuals who needed  
6 access to public benefits and you've always been  
7 there to be very receptive and ensure they got the  
8 resources they needed.

9 I do have you know one question for you in  
10 particular. You know I think with the testimony and  
11 the MMR, you know it's pretty clear what we see,  
12 which is really an age-old issue at HRA and that is,  
13 you know as the needs go up and resources go down,  
14 the need is increasingly unmet and becomes more and  
15 more urgent and the needs go up precisely because if  
16 the economy or any other crisis we face will  
17 especially affect low-income people who do depend and  
18 need public benefits.

19 And so, you know that happens. We've seen it  
20 happen before. Now with this Administrations  
21 disastrous PEG proposals, we're going to see that  
22 happen again and two things are clear to me. One, we  
23 can keep having this discussion but I just know over  
24 years of doing this work in legal services and having  
25 many clients in exactly this situation and working

2 with HRA over many years, that this is not going to  
3 be solved anytime in the near future. It is going to  
4 always a lack of resources and understaffing unless  
5 this Administration now is serious and I have yet to  
6 see it to really put the resources behind social  
7 services and HRA and public benefits in particular to  
8 make sure that staffing is there to help those in  
9 need.

10 So, that problem will continue. And the second  
11 thing is what Chair Brewer alluded to, which is there  
12 is a very real human impact. I have seen it too many  
13 times. I have seen and representing my clients so  
14 many times, and those faces are seared in my mind  
15 when they cannot pay their rent. They're struggling  
16 desperately. They're in urgent need of help and it  
17 is very, very difficult because of long wait times,  
18 because of difficulties with getting access to  
19 benefits, language access, lack of language access,  
20 that they aren't able to get the resources they need  
21 in time to pay their rent, therefore free up the  
22 resources to support their children and pay childcare  
23 and their family while they're also waiting in  
24 housing court, taking off days from work in a  
25 traumatic eviction case that should never have been

2 brought in the first place and waiting and waiting  
3 for their day in court to contest it and in the  
4 meantime not having the ability to pay their rent.

5 On top of that not having access often times,  
6 even with Right to Counsel, two lawyer to represent  
7 them and defend them in court, against, as I  
8 mentioned often time baseless eviction cases. It's  
9 clear to me given that that one of the biggest and  
10 most effective way that HRA could be helpful if the  
11 resources and staffing you know aren't there is to be  
12 really effective, clearing house to connect  
13 constituents with legal services organizations, with  
14 social service organizations that can immediately  
15 ensure that they have a lawyer to talk to. That  
16 there are individuals and organizations that can help  
17 them process their SNAP paperwork or secure other  
18 means of grants or other things to help them to pay  
19 their rent or otherwise.

20 And I've seen really for years that uhm and I  
21 will say over time since Commissioner Banks before  
22 came in until now, there's been a much more  
23 conservative effort for HRA to help with those  
24 things, but I still feel like there's a long way to  
25 go to make sure that if we reach out to HRA and you

2 have personally done it when I called you, so I give  
3 you a lot of kudos and credit for that but for the  
4 agency overall, to take the approach of if we call  
5 with a need and someone needs help desperate in a  
6 situation, to be able to connect them with the right  
7 nonprofit organization or legal services organization  
8 to help them and to make sure they have another human  
9 being on the other end that could work with them.

10 And so, I just wonder what HRA, what  
11 conversations if any have happened internally with  
12 HRA to focus on that piece of it because that seems  
13 like a huge and critical piece that would help with  
14 this immensely if HRA could be that clearing house  
15 and connect people with organizations that can help  
16 them. Where does the discussion stand on that? Has  
17 there been any planning to improve that at this time?

18 JILL BERRY: So, just last month we rolled out a  
19 new initiative with three CBOs, Bronx Works,  
20 Community Service Society and Montefiore to make the  
21 connection when people are applying online via Access  
22 HRA. There's a few key points where we know people  
23 have difficulty where a phone number pops up and they  
24 can speak to a live person at one of those community-  
25 based organizations to get assistance in real time

2 while they're doing the application, and we just  
3 rolled this out last month. We're collecting the  
4 data so that we can track how effective it's been but  
5 we agree that this is an opportunity and this is a  
6 place where we absolutely starting it out and we'll  
7 see how it goes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I think and if the  
9 Chair would allow me to pinch up. You know I think  
10 that they're - I'm glad to hear that but obviously  
11 you know there needs to be much more done in that  
12 area. Many more organizations across the city; if  
13 you look at models like the pro bono cleaning houses  
14 that are either with organizations like New York  
15 Lawyers For Public Interest or even a law firm side.  
16 They have whole networks where you send the case over  
17 and they immediately refer it out. I think HRA could  
18 really benefit from a model like that too and you  
19 know ensure that as I said, the connection is made  
20 between individuals and organization in a way that's  
21 quick, that's easy, that addresses the point that I  
22 mentioned which is, there's a human being in real  
23 distress and that's compounded exponentially when  
24 they can't get through to get help that they need.  
25 And that's a role that while HRA works on its

2 staffing and resource issue, could really ramp up in  
3 a significant way. So, that when our accounts  
4 offices reach out, there's immediately a way to help  
5 connect the two together and for HRA to be that  
6 bridge in a much more effective way. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think what he's saying is  
8 when your expanding the program, because this pilot  
9 program can only work.

10 JILL BERRY: Say that again.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think what the Council  
12 Member is saying is the pilot - I mean I would say  
13 the pilot program can only work; I don't know how it  
14 would not work. They're all good organizations, so  
15 when are you expanding it?

16 JILL BERRY: We, this is actually sort of subset  
17 of our New York City benefits work, where we are  
18 contracting with 39 CBOs to provide additional  
19 assistance in the community and so this builds on  
20 that. Uhm and I think that as we see the successes,  
21 that we can measure the successes to get additional  
22 funding from OMB to expand these types of programs,  
23 we will absolutely advocate for that.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, can we get the list  
25 of those 39?



2 JILL BERRY: Absolutely.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Sorry, I'll just jump  
4 in Chair to say you know on that point, I would  
5 really urge HRA to just short circuit all this and  
6 just do it because we know, I can tell you right now,  
7 it will be much more effective. It's filling a need  
8 that you all have in the agency. And so, the need  
9 for more studies to show its effectiveness, we know  
10 what the effectiveness will be.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We don't need any more  
12 studies.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Exactly. I hope OMB  
14 hears that too.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: If you have studies, we're  
16 going to cut them. Next, Council Member Williams.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. I have a  
18 question for DDC, which I see Jeffrey back there. Hi  
19 Jeffrey. I just had a briefing with him actually.  
20 So, I have a question about the watermains and  
21 sewers. So, since FY19, there has been 77.4 percent  
22 decrease in the amount of water mains being replaced,  
23 falling from 82.7 miles in FY19 to 18.7 miles in  
24 FY23, which is a significant decrease. Is this  
25 decrease due to the inability to fully hire vacant

2 positions or a lack of budgeted headcount in  
3 different areas of the department? And I know like  
4 pretty much in everybody's testimony, you cited  
5 COVID-19 as a problem but just wondering how much of  
6 COVID-19 is the problem and how much of it might be  
7 persistent agency issues that have existed before  
8 COVID?

9 ERIC MACFARLANE: Alright, thank you for the  
10 questions. So, the as you know our projects come  
11 from agencies in the DEP, with DEP basically and it's  
12 based on their priorities. Right now, besides of  
13 course, COVID-19 was not such a factor in this but  
14 because all our design basically for DEP basically  
15 were in house engineers, and construction was going  
16 on with essential services.

17 But all of a sudden the city is confronted with  
18 the issue of flooding, intense -

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yes, in Southeast  
20 Queens. You guys have major water mains, sewer  
21 issues and projects in Southeast Queens.

22 ERIC MACFARLANE: That is correct. And that is  
23 where the priority is now. It has been to Southeast  
24 Queens for example, is a good example where we can  
25 actually rebuild sewers. Actually build storm sewers

2 between the area because there's a - so, you have  
3 7,000 miles in the city, so it's more so is to deal  
4 with that issue is not going - it's not a short-term  
5 answer. The quicker way to do this, which is what  
6 DEP is doing, is the clean infrastructure. They're  
7 concentrating on these practices in the city, the  
8 green infrastructure that we are building to actually  
9 reduce the amount of sewer, flood water or storm  
10 water that gets in the sewers. So, that's is where  
11 the concentration has been and of course building -  
12 and of course we have programs throughout the city  
13 that we have do and of course the East Side Coastal  
14 Resiliency, the resiliency jobs. So, the focus has  
15 been on projects. It's not within less projects, we  
16 are doing more projects but the focus has been on  
17 projects that doesn't have a significant amount of  
18 the normal, typical sewer and water main in the  
19 basement.

20 So, that is why the number - although we're doing  
21 more with green infrastructure to address the issue  
22 of flooding, the amount of sewer construction has  
23 sort of decreased.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, sewer  
25 infrastructure issues have been a long-standing issue

2 way before COVID and like the delays and the lack of  
3 investment has always been a persistent problem in  
4 the community. So, is there anything that you  
5 suggest the Council do to ensure that targets are met  
6 in moving forward the amount of sewers and water  
7 mains installed increases?

8 ERIC MACFARLANE: Take out the [01:19:55] for  
9 example. Essentially we have it's a \$3 million  
10 program, which we have the money. It's the question  
11 of - but the issue of sewer construction for example  
12 is that you have to start from the outlet. It's a  
13 gravity system. So, which mean that the flooding  
14 that's upstream, in order to solve that problem, you  
15 have to start downstream in a different part of the  
16 community and move forward up to actually. Because  
17 by increasing the sewer size upstream without taking  
18 care of the outlet, you're not going to solve that  
19 problem. So, it's a [01:20:30] is where we're  
20 actually doing this. It's a \$3 million program.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So, you have the  
22 resources.

23 ERIC MACFARLANE: We have the resources.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I hear you. So, then  
25 like, how can you articulate the delays if you have

2 the resources, you have everything you need than what  
3 is causing the delays?

4 ERIC MACFARLANE: The delays is not in projects  
5 that we have. In other words, in the type of – as I  
6 said, the type of projects that we do right now, do  
7 not involve the same amount of sewer and water main  
8 construction. It's all the things. Like if we do it  
9 around the city, that's not – there's no minimal  
10 sewer or water main replacements.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So, you're saying like  
12 the – what reflects this sort of 69 percent decrease  
13 or really 70 percent decrease is not for the same  
14 type of work?

15 ERIC MACFARLANE: That is correct. We are doing  
16 more work actually but not of that type.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, and so the other  
18 work that you're doing on the sewers, is that also  
19 reflected in the report?

20 ERIC MACFARLANE: Uh.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Because I'm just going  
22 off of like what we have here. I don't have the full  
23 report so I'm just wondering like, the other things  
24 that you're talking about seem to be somewhat on  
25 schedule, so for the things that we're reporting on

2 that seem to not be on schedule and significant  
3 delays, I'm wondering if what you're reflecting is  
4 also in the Management Report.

5 ERIC MACFARLANE: Okay, so no because and that's  
6 one of the things that we are trying to address to  
7 actually deal with the other projects that we are  
8 doing.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay.

10 ERIC MACFARLANE: To sort of reflect - they have  
11 been more reflective in the MMR. It's not just sewer  
12 and water main that we are doing.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, uhm, Chair -

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: No, we can - uh, let me just  
15 ask you back to HRA for a minute though. Maybe  
16 Council Member Ayala got this but what is the  
17 budgeted and actual headcount for both cash  
18 assistance and SNAP separately? And then what do you  
19 need in order to address these backlogs? What  
20 specifically?

21 JILL BERRY: So, I don't have the budgeted  
22 headcount for cash and SNAP in front of me. Uhm,  
23 what we need is to make sure that we are continuing  
24 to hire to make sure that we don't lose pace on  
25 attrition. And what we are doing every month is we

2 are targeting onboarding 15 ES's in SNAP and 45 JAS  
3 in the Cash Assistance Program every single month.  
4 That is our goal. That's our target. That is what  
5 we are working towards every month.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, but you could get us  
7 information that you don't have now as to what the  
8 actual and budgeted?

9 JILL BERRY: Yeah, absolutely I can get that.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Next time you need to have  
11 it if you don't mind. That would be like a good MMR  
12 question. I would think so.

13 JILL BERRY: You got it.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, that in other words,  
15 what we're trying to find out is what staff is needed  
16 to eliminate the current processing delays and what  
17 you're saying is, if you can work sufficiently with  
18 OMB, then you will be able to do that. Is that what  
19 you're also trying to say? I don't trust OMB, that's  
20 why I'm asking you.

21 JILL BERRY: No, I understand but again and I go  
22 back to, this is not just a staffing issue, this is  
23 also working with the state and federal government.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right, to get the waivers.  
25

2 JILL BERRY: To get the waivers and so as we  
3 reduce -

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But do you ask us for help  
5 with that? She can do anything.

6 JILL BERRY: Will do. But we've been successful  
7 with some of these waivers. Having 15,000 fewer  
8 actions to take in the month of December.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I understand that but you  
10 still -

11 JILL BERRY: And going forward, it reduces our  
12 need for staff too.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I understand that but you  
14 still got 28, whatever it was 27,000 people on cash  
15 assistance on the backlog. That's a lot of people.

16 JILL BERRY: It is.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And you can't just wave them  
18 away. They need help.

19 JILL BERRY: We are going to help every single  
20 one of them.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know but in a timeframe so  
22 they don't get evicted, so they don't need a legal  
23 aid attorney, that's the problem and Homebase can  
24 only do so much. Homebase, I don't like their hours,  
25 9 to 5 right? Homebase, I don't like those hours.



2 They should be till 10:00 at night, they should  
3 Saturday and they should be Sunday. That would help  
4 too as an example of how to keep people in their  
5 homes.

6 So, while we're waiting, why don't we go to  
7 Finance, which will be helpful. Okay, so with  
8 finance, uhm, according to the report, there's a  
9 turnover of Field Auditors in 2023, so that's longer  
10 completion time. 17 percent increase in turnaround  
11 time between 2022 and 2023. 23 percent decrease in  
12 tax liability as a result of non-field audits  
13 compared to the previous year and then since FY18, a  
14 63 percent increase in the average turnaround for  
15 field audits. And I think what field audits means is  
16 just an audit, unless I'm missing something in terms  
17 of an audit.

18 So, how you know, it's the same kind of question.  
19 The current budget, the actual headcount. How are  
20 you going to address some of these issues, so you are  
21 able to answer the audits, the field audit questions  
22 more quickly, quicker sorry?

23 JEFF SHEAR: Yes, so just to start, to be clear,  
24 a field audit is when an auditor goes to an actual  
25 place of a business to look at the books and records.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yup.

3 JEFF SHEAR: The non-field audit is when we are  
4 doing the review entirely within our own offices.  
5 So, that is the distinction being made but in any  
6 case, uhm, it is true that our audit division did  
7 experience a high level of attrition during the  
8 pandemic and uhm, there's a double impact. If an  
9 auditor leaves before an audit is completed, than  
10 that audit case must be transferred to another  
11 auditor who has to get up to speed with the case  
12 issues before proceeding.

13 We have made some progress in this area. In  
14 Fiscal Year 2024, bringing the average from 528 days  
15 in Fiscal Year 2023, which is I think the figure  
16 you're referencing in the MMR to 481 days as of  
17 September 2023. And the auditor title so far has  
18 been exempt from the hiring freeze and since the  
19 start Fiscal Year 2024, we have brought aboard 26  
20 additional auditors. Uhm and however despite the  
21 challenges, we do want to note that the audit  
22 division did bring in nearly \$1.3 billion in Fiscal  
23 Year 2023, through audits of large corporations,  
24 including many Fortune 500 companies.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know that sounds like a  
3 lot of money but I mean to me probably more if you  
4 had more auditors. That would seem to me they would  
5 go together.

6 JEFF SHEAR: Auditors do generate revenue. The  
7 \$1.3 billion was significantly higher than the plan  
8 for Fiscal Year—

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But what was it pre-COVID?  
10 Maybe we didn't have as many audits, I don't know.  
11 What was it pre-COVID?

12 JEFF SHEAR: I'll have to get back to you with  
13 that.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Because \$1.3 doesn't sound  
15 like a lot of money I have to say in our budget, so  
16 who knows. I think that more could — I feel very  
17 strongly that you obviously need more auditors. The  
18 question I have though is, are they part of the non-  
19 union exemption for those who can do hybrid or are  
20 they not allowed to be hybrid?

21 JEFF SHEAR: The auditors are allowed to be  
22 hybrid.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, does that help you in  
24 your hiring? Because the Mayor took a whole long  
25 time to get to the point that he should understand

2 that the rest of the world is hybrid and you're not  
3 going to be able to hire unless you —because I'm sure  
4 every other accounting firm does hybrid. So, is it  
5 making it easier or it's hard to say?

6 JEFF SHEAR: It's early to say. We are pleased  
7 that now that it's in place that we are able to offer  
8 that.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes, it took him forever.  
10 Do you want to add? You know, I think the most  
11 popular program perhaps in New York is SCRIE, as we  
12 know. So, uhm obviously there are lots of issues.  
13 You talked about some of them. I'm sure you might  
14 blame some of it I understand on the COVID situation.  
15 We are just swamped and I'm sure my colleagues are  
16 also with you know issues regarding SCRIE, DRIE and  
17 SHE, etc..

18 So, what is the Administration's plan to fix this  
19 issue and be able to get SCRIE or DRIE in a  
20 reasonable amount of time? And of course, we're also  
21 trying to do more outreach because whatever you know  
22 people don't know that if they make 58 or less, they  
23 can get it as a senior, as an older adult.

24 JEFF SHEAR: Yes, so there are many things that  
25 we're doing. First and foremost, I do want to focus

2 on the backlog of 7,000. We've cut it approximately  
3 in half and we are on course to working through that  
4 by the beginning of 2024 through February. So, we  
5 think that that will help us. And actually I did  
6 want to ask our Taxpayer Advocate to come up for a  
7 moment to talk about the outreach that we have been  
8 doing to reach this in other populations.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: No, you can sit there,  
10 that's fine.

11 ROBIN LEE: Thank you First Deputy Commissioner.  
12 Thank you Council Member for this opportunity and  
13 some of the efforts that Department of Finance, main  
14 office of the Taxpayer Advocate is making to improve  
15 on SCRIE and DRIE enrollment is often by in-person  
16 direct assistance and we thank you Council Member  
17 Brewer. Your office is one of the most active and  
18 engaged when it comes to SCRIE and DRIE enrollment.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Come to my district any time  
20 and you will see active engagement. You have no  
21 idea. Go ahead.

22 ROBIN LEE: Sorry, thank you. We come to your  
23 office monthly for SCRIE and DRIE enrollment.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And we appreciate it.

2 ROBIN LEE: Yeah, absolutely and in those events  
3 we're able to provide that direct assistance to  
4 taxpayers. We're meeting customers where they are  
5 and so, our office in conjunction with the external  
6 affairs outreach team; I know you're familiar with  
7 this team, along with the Mayor's Office of Public  
8 Engagement, we have engaged in significantly more in-  
9 person outreach and providing information sessions.  
10 Enrollment events as well, and across the city at  
11 older adult centers. Thanks in large part to our  
12 partners at Aging. And we've partnered with many  
13 Council Member offices to provide training sessions  
14 for your staff and the volunteers so they can also  
15 make the enrollment process and the application  
16 process easier for taxpayers. And again, meeting  
17 them where they are.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Oh, I appreciate that. So,  
19 what is the headcount for the SCRIE office in terms  
20 of what you have now and maybe what you need to deal  
21 with the 3,500? I assume, if my math is right, that  
22 that will still end up being another - you know there  
23 will always be hopefully more applicants and then if  
24 you don't have enough staff, you'll still have a big  
25 backlog?

2 JEFF SHEAR: Right, well, so a couple of things I  
3 want to say about that. First, in terms of the  
4 staffing, so this isn't specific just to SCRIE, DRIE  
5 but to all of our senior and disabled programs, so  
6 that's SCRIE, DRIE, SHE and the HE. So, the  
7 staffing, uhm, is down. We were at 23 in July of  
8 2021 and most recently we're at 17. So, that's a  
9 decrease of 26 percent.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And are those, I mean my  
11 friends at OMB are saying I'm not being nice to them  
12 on my little cell phone right here, just so you know.  
13 So, the fewer people, are they exempt if you want to  
14 hire or able to get more people? Are they exempt  
15 from OMB's hiring freeze?

16 JEFF SHEAR: We are having conversations with OMB  
17 now about -

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, the answer is no at this  
19 particular time. I'm going to tell them that they  
20 should hire because the seniors in order to stay in  
21 their apartments need to have SCRIE and DRIE and it's  
22 a great program.

23 JEFF SHEAR: Right, so I do want to add some as  
24 well. Just to let you know first that the backlog of  
25 the 7,000, that was a one-time event. So, when we

2 worked through in February, we do not expect a  
3 recurrence. Also the Fiscal Year 2023 was a heavy  
4 year for SHE and the HE applications. So, because of  
5 historical reasons, we have most of the beneficiaries  
6 have to renew in odd years. So, two-thirds of them  
7 renew in the odd years and one-third in the even  
8 year, so we are expecting a lighter year this year  
9 and the third thing I wanted to say was that we did  
10 at the state level, were able to achieve new  
11 legislation that simplifies the income requirements  
12 across these programs, so that they're consistent.  
13 And we're planning to use automatic income  
14 verification to increase the effectiveness and  
15 efficiency of our staff.

16 So, we think all of those things combined is  
17 going to put us in a much better place in this coming  
18 Fiscal Year compared to last year.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know Council Member  
20 Dinowitz has a bill to for those who are at Mitchell  
21 Lama to do population; to populate the application  
22 because they're slightly different, as you know.  
23 That comes under HPD perhaps, I don't know because  
24 they're not typical rent stabilized. But I'm just  
25 saying, you have to think of every possible way



2 because the seniors get so confused. They come to  
3 your staff and to my staff with a million questions  
4 and the easier you can make it, the better. It's  
5 still not easy enough I'm afraid.

6 JEFF SHEAR: We agree. It's not easy enough.  
7 We're working to make it better. Part of why we have  
8 a Taxpayer Advocate is precisely to work with people  
9 who do not want to deal with the internet or with  
10 automated systems. They push zero, zero, zero. They  
11 want a person.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: They sure do. They know  
13 exactly how to do that.

14 JEFF SHEAR: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I taught them.

16 JEFF SHEAR: Yes, so we understand that and so,  
17 we are looking at both in order to improve our  
18 performance.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright. Council Member  
20 Ayala.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Does that improvement  
22 include making changes to the recertification process  
23 notifications? Because I know that some time ago,  
24 the onus was really on the applicant to remember they  
25 had to recertify. Do they get some sort of a

2 notification advising them that recertification is  
3 coming up?

4 JEFF SHEAR: Yes, they do. So, it varies by  
5 program but for example, bear with me. I believe for  
6 the SCRIE, DRIE for example, I was describing that we  
7 had started to do the recertification process during  
8 the pandemic, then we stopped short of cutting anyone  
9 off. So, that process consists of four mailings.  
10 One notice 60 days prior to the end of the benefit  
11 period. One on the actual renewal date. One notice  
12 that's 45 days after the renewal date and one notice  
13 90 days after the renewal date. So, it's a very  
14 robust process and that is supplemented by the  
15 outreach programs that we have through our offices,  
16 through the Taxpayer Advocates offices and yes, with  
17 a lot of help from Council Members.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I appreciate that.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Uhm, a question to do with  
20 property tax collection. When I did my IBO report  
21 last year, it wasn't - it didn't include when I say  
22 IBO report meaning \$2.1 billion the city's owed by  
23 people who don't pay their taxes. So, obviously  
24 you're a different level of challenge for getting  
25 people. You don't have a lien sale. I would

2 actually support some of the suggestions that your  
3 Commissioner has made in terms of the lien sale.  
4 I've got buildings that are sitting there. They owe  
5 taxes. Nobody has to pay them, so they don't pay  
6 them. Why should they? But so, I'm wondering is,  
7 what is your collection rate challenge? How are you  
8 dealing with it?

9 JEFF SHEAR: Yes, so it has been a challenge.  
10 Our property tax enforcement method, the tax lien  
11 sale authority expired last February. So, now we've  
12 gone a year and a half without having that tool  
13 available. And even before then, in the last several  
14 years, we got out of the practice of having a tax  
15 lien sale every year. It was a regular cadence and  
16 for the last six years, it's basically been every  
17 other year. And corresponding with that, we've seen  
18 a steady increase in the amount of property tax  
19 delinquencies.

20 So, increasing from \$338 million for Fiscal Year  
21 2018, which was the end of the string of regular  
22 annual tax lien sales through Fiscal Year 2023, it  
23 has increased to \$708 million. So, that's a \$370  
24 million increase in tax delinquencies. So, we are  
25 concerned about that. We understand that

2 improvements to the process need to be made. That  
3 the problem with the lien sale process was that it  
4 did not - it failed to distinguish between those who  
5 could pay but sought to avoid doing so and those who  
6 were genuinely struggling, who are disproportionately  
7 low-income homeowners of color.

8 We have been talking to you and other Council  
9 Members about our vision for improving it. We are  
10 ready to talk to any Council Member who wants to have  
11 that conversation with us and we're very much looking  
12 forward to pushing that forward in the months to  
13 come.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, I mean somewhere  
15 between \$300 million and \$700 million would be a nice  
16 number to collect, depending on making sure that  
17 people like you said, who can't pay don't get  
18 penalized but the ones that I'm thinking of, they can  
19 pay. They just don't, so to be discussed.

20 JEFF SHEAR: Yes, we look forward to those  
21 discussions.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Council Member  
23 Williams, you had another question I think for HRA?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yes. Thank you. I  
25 lost it. Alright, this is about SNAP and cash

2 assistance. Uhm, of course since COVID, there's been  
3 an increase in the need for public assistance and we  
4 wanted to know what the current average monthly  
5 volume of new applications for each SNAP and cash  
6 assistance and how does this compare to pre-pandemic  
7 levels and peak pandemic levels?

8 JILL BERRY: I'm going to have Karl come up and  
9 uh walk you through the data.

10 KARL KNYDER: Alright, so our current average  
11 benefits for uhm, for SNAP are around \$280. So, that  
12 is up. That's up due to and if you go back to pre-  
13 pandemic, it was around \$150. Uhm, so the pre-  
14 pandemic values were based on - so it's gone up  
15 several times because there are sort of increases  
16 that happen and also, we saw an increase sort of in  
17 that middle period that shows up in the MMR values  
18 that you can see that come from the pandemic  
19 additional benefits that were there.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Got you. What is the  
21 current average monthly volume of recertifications  
22 for each SNAP and cash assistance and how does this  
23 compare to pre-pandemic levels and peak pandemic  
24 levels?

2 KARL SNYDER: So, the values that I gave were  
3 overall for all people receiving SNAP. We don't  
4 break it down between sort of -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: By month?

6 KARL SNYDER: Yeah, or a new applicant versus  
7 somebody who is recertifying. We just look at it on  
8 average what's happening across the entire caseload.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So, you count  
10 recertifications the same as a new applicant?

11 KARL SNYDER: For the purpose of looking at an  
12 average benefit.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, okay, cool. Uhm,  
14 is there any regular reporting on new application  
15 volume or recertification that you can point us to?  
16 The HRA fact sheet reports monthly on caseloads for  
17 programs such as SNAP and cash assistance but no  
18 information on application or recertification volume  
19 is included. Cash assistance applications are  
20 important on the PMMR and MMR but those reports are  
21 only issued twice a year.

22 KARL SNYDER: Yeah, uhm, so the cash assistance  
23 application volume is in the DMMR that is published  
24 monthly.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: In the DMR? There a  
3 lot of R's. DMR, TMMR, MMR, what does the DMR stand  
4 for?

5 KARL SNYDER: It's the monthly version of the  
6 MMR.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay.

8 KARL SNYDER: So, we put it in their monthly and  
9 that's available there.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay but then it's not  
11 reflected in the larger comprehensive document?

12 KARL SNYDER: So, it gets aggregated into the  
13 final version of the PMMR or the MMR. You can see -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: We just won't be able  
15 to see it monthly as you mentioned?

16 KARL SNYDER: Correct.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: You just aggregate it  
18 based off of the length of time?

19 KARL SNYDER: Correct because the PMMR and the  
20 MMR are like you know static once a year  
21 publications, right?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So, you just take it  
23 cumulatively from the month?

24 KARL SNYDER: Correct, the monthly values are  
25 there.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Got you. We know the  
3 processing timeliness rates from MMR for cash  
4 assistance and SNAP but want clarity on how the  
5 processing delays are impacting clients. Currently,  
6 what is the average amount of time between  
7 application and receipt of benefits for each SNAP and  
8 cash assistance client? And what is the permitted  
9 processing time for each program?

10 JILL BERRY: So, even one application that is one  
11 day late is too late for that family that is waiting  
12 for benefits.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So, do you calculate  
14 that as late after one day or is there a certain  
15 sugar, like if you're a week out, then that triggers  
16 like late for how you calculate and report on the  
17 data?

18 JILL BERRY: So, for benefits, we have 30-days  
19 generally to process the benefits for the timeliness.  
20 So, when it hits day 31, it is considered late.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Got you. What is the  
22 timeline for someone submitting an application with  
23 an error? Like missing a file or wrong format to  
24 then learning about the error and does this happen  
25



2 when they submit or do they not find out until it's  
3 fully processed or the benefits were denied?

4 JILL BERRY: So, the way - where they find out  
5 about errors or additional documents needed is the  
6 interview. So, an individual can apply online via  
7 Access HRA or in person at one of our centers or over  
8 the phone through one of our partners. The first  
9 step is the application. And the second step is to  
10 call our on-demand system for the interview and  
11 during the interview, the HRA worker is looking  
12 through everything that was submitted in the  
13 application. All the documents that have been  
14 uploaded so far. They're asking questions about any  
15 missing information that they can enter verbally from  
16 the individual and at the end of the interview, they  
17 list out all the additional documentation that's  
18 needed in order to process the case. And we also  
19 mail to them the list of documents that are needed  
20 immediately after the application. The goal is for  
21 all of this even if there are additional errors or  
22 additional documents needed to happen within the 30-  
23 day period.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, so after the  
25 interview, let's say you know human error, let's say

2 they still forgot to put something in their  
3 application. So, you're saying you reach out to them  
4 within the 30-day window before you make a  
5 determination on the application packet itself?

6 JILL BERRY: So, the only thing that would be  
7 missing would be additional documentation that's  
8 needed to verify information on the application.  
9 Anything they missed in filling out the application,  
10 we go through in the interview, we catch in the  
11 interview. There's nothing left after that except  
12 documentation. For example, you say that you're  
13 working and you're \$50 a week and we need your pay  
14 stubs or other employment information to verify the  
15 50 hours a week.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, so after pretty  
17 much the interview is a part of what happens before  
18 you make a determination?

19 JILL BERRY: Absolutely.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, awesome. Just  
21 one more question. We have heard that delays in cash  
22 assistance are also creating problems for City FHEPS,  
23 including termination of benefits. How many voucher  
24 holders have had City FHEPS terminated due to changes  
25 in their cash assistance case in the last year?

2 JILL BERRY: I'll have to get back to you on that  
3 number.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, no problem.  
5 Thank you Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. We're  
7 going to go to NYCHA. In your testimony, I just had  
8 a question because you talked about mold, elevators  
9 and heat service regarding the feds or at least the  
10 courts. And I know Mr. Schwartz, he makes a lot of  
11 money, oh my God. But he also includes lead. Why  
12 didn't you talk about lead in that paragraph?

13 EVA TRIMBLE: Thank you Council Member. I was  
14 simply trying to be brief in my remarks but we have  
15 had tremendous improvement in our lead program, both  
16 within the MMR and since the MMR. Let me just find  
17 my lead numbers here.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Mr. Schwartz talked about  
19 lead a lot.

20 EVA TRIMBLE: Yes, well lead is a very you know  
21 serious issue for NYCHA and many others. So, I did  
22 actually, I think I did mention in the testimony that  
23 the total number of units abated has increased by 426  
24 percent between Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023. And so  
25 far in Fiscal Year 2024, we've continued to do that

2 level of production. As of September 2023, we've  
3 abated 1,233 units for lead, almost triple the number  
4 abated during the same time last year.

5 So, we've been very proud of how we scaled up our  
6 lead program. It's a very serious environmental  
7 issue and we've been really focused on scaling it up.  
8 In order to do a lead abatement, that usually  
9 involves relocation of residents temporarily for a  
10 few days while that work is performed for their  
11 safety. And so, in order to scale that up, we've had  
12 tremendous work with our residents to make sure they  
13 understand the importance of doing this work.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, maybe more later.  
15 Also, on the last paragraph, you talked about  
16 preparing vacant apartments for new occupants.  
17 That's I know, I've been non-stop talking about this  
18 because in one of my developments as we speak on 64<sup>th</sup>  
19 and Amsterdam, I have 40 vacant apartments. That's  
20 insane. So, my question and I don't know how many  
21 citywide 6,900 I hear, 6,200. You can tell me. Too  
22 many.

23 So, my question is, uhm, you said you know  
24 improvement for vacant apartments. So, my question  
25 is how much time does it take now? Obviously it

2 depends on the unit. If it's under a roof and  
3 there's a leak than that's a different than just -  
4 But I know one there was a fire, ain't no leaks,  
5 ain't no nothing and it's still sitting there. So,  
6 you got some money from the City Council thanks to  
7 the Speaker and others and I assume you have some  
8 from the Mayor, so what's going on with these vacant  
9 apartments?

10 Maybe it's hard for the public to understand that  
11 at the New York City Housing Authority, there are  
12 6,900 vacancies when we have all these people who  
13 need homes. Go ahead.

14 EVA TRIMBLE: It is. We have as of the middle of  
15 October, we have 4,900 vacant units available and we  
16 know that that is a lot of vacant units given the  
17 affordable housing crisis in New York City but the  
18 number one reason that apartments are taking a long  
19 time to turnover is because we're committed to doing  
20 the environmental work that's required on those  
21 apartments, including the environment, including  
22 making them lead free and asbestos safe upon  
23 turnover. And that alone can take four to six months  
24 just to do that testing and abatement of those two  
25 hazards. And then after that, we have to do

2 significant turnover as our apartments are typically  
3 occupied for 25 or more years. There is wear and  
4 tear on that that needs to be corrected including new  
5 cabinets, painting, plastering, tiles. And so, that  
6 work you know typically right now we're looking at  
7 approximately 370 to 400 days to do turnover.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And how soon do you think  
9 the 4,900 - my math isn't fast enough to do 370 days  
10 into 4,900. So, how much, how much time do you need  
11 to do this 4,900 vacant units?

12 EVA TRIMBLE: We're right now -

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: What are you aiming for?

14 EVA TRIMBLE: Right now we are - our production  
15 target internally is to do 250 units a month. And  
16 the money that the City Council has provided, the  
17 city has provided for the Vacant Readiness Program,  
18 is a significant source for us. We're really  
19 appreciative of that.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You better be because it was  
21 a lot of money.

22 EVA TRIMBLE: It does significantly help towards  
23 that 250 a month production.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and then - uh, how many  
25 do you - you know I have no clue as to how many

2 become vacant. It's obviously not a static number,  
3 so do you know how many become vacant like every  
4 month or every year or something, just to see how the  
5 backlog is able to be addressed?

6 EVA TRIMBLE: I don't have the move out numbers  
7 handy but we can certainly follow up with you on  
8 that.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, because if you got  
10 4,900 vacants then I mean do you have another 4,900  
11 that could be vacant in the next year? That's what  
12 I'm trying to find out.

13 EVA TRIMBLE: Okay, we can get back to you on  
14 that.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Uhm, then the obvious issue  
16 is rent collection. We know it's down. We know  
17 arrears are up. We don't want anybody to get  
18 evicted. I know that you don't either. So, the  
19 question is what you know, how do you - we know about  
20 ERAP. We know that people are having challenges,  
21 just post COVID but they do need to pay the rent but  
22 they need help sometimes paying the rent. So, what  
23 are you doing to address the delinquency rate? The  
24 arrears? I don't think there's anymore ERAP. I  
25 think it took care of maybe some portions. I'd like

2 to know what portion it took care of and then what  
3 are you going to do about those that are still -  
4 there's still a gap? It's a big question but it's a  
5 big problem.

6 EVA TRIMBLE: It is a big problem. It is a big  
7 gap for us. Rent collection is a significant source  
8 of revenue for us and I think it's been the hardest  
9 thing since COVID is the lack of rent collection for  
10 us.

11 We have continued to work with our residents.  
12 The rent collection efforts include our property  
13 management staff speaking with residents, going door  
14 to door and most importantly connecting them with  
15 social services that they need, including the Office  
16 of Financial Empowerment and Financial Counseling.  
17 We work very closely with our partners at HRA on the  
18 one-shot program. We've done one-shot events at our  
19 development.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Do you know how many one-  
21 shots you've done in the last year or?

22 EVA TRIMBLE: We don't track the number of one-  
23 shots that are done, partially because residents  
24 reach out directly to HRA sometimes without us.  
25 Sometimes with us -



2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But like the same  
3 administration, so you could check.

4 EVA TRIMBLE: We can follow up with HRA on that  
5 number for sure. So, we are continuing those efforts  
6 and it's you know right now, our arrears are  
7 significant and it's hard when the average NYCHA  
8 resident you know has an income of maybe 25,000 and  
9 right now our average arrears is per resident is  
10 about 7,400. And so, with that level of arrears, it  
11 becomes very overwhelming and residents you know  
12 choose to stop paying rent because they feel it is  
13 insurmountable. They're never going to be able to  
14 climb out of that hole. And that is why the ERAP  
15 program has been so important to us. So, last year  
16 in the state budget, we were really fortunate to be  
17 able to finally get an allocation of ERAP and have  
18 public housing residents prioritized for the program.  
19 We are working closely with our state partners at  
20 OTIDA in order to have those funds allocated to NYCHA  
21 now and then applied to resident accounts. We're  
22 hoping that we will begin applying the funding to  
23 resident accounts sometime in the next month.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: One of my friends just got  
25 his ERAP paid last week. So, there must be something

2 happening after months and months and months. What  
3 happened?

4 EVA TRIMBLE: Yeah, after months and months,  
5 we've, as I said, we've been working with our  
6 partners at OTIDA to have the funding applied to the  
7 accounts and that's starting to happen and we hope  
8 that once residents see their arrears significantly  
9 reduced through the application of the ERAP, that  
10 they will begin in the habit again of paying rent.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, how do you deal with  
12 this staff-wise? In other words, we hear from other  
13 agencies challenging's on staff. Is that the same  
14 issue? Because this is what I would call retail  
15 work. You have to actually talk to every family and  
16 figure out what their challenges are and address  
17 them. You can't, there's no sending out an email and  
18 saying, "hey buddy, you got to pay your rent." That  
19 doesn't work.

20 EVA TRIMBLE: No, definitely not. And this is  
21 not a staffing issue for NYCHA, so the staff in the  
22 property management office are the first lines -

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know but sometimes they're  
24 nice and sometimes they're not in the property  
25 office.

2 EVA TRIMBLE: They are the first line of defense  
3 with our residents that we, as I said, we also have  
4 our family partnerships department that does  
5 connections with various social services financial  
6 empowering and really trying to meet the residents  
7 where they are and get them the services they need to  
8 get back into the habit of paying rent.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, do you feel that  
10 this has had any marked improvement in the last  
11 couple of months in terms of what you're - the way in  
12 which you're trying to address these issues?

13 EVA TRIMBLE: We're not seeing it yet in the rent  
14 collection numbers but we hope as you say once the  
15 ERAP is applied to resident accounts, we are hopeful  
16 to start seeing a change in that rent collection  
17 number.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Soon, when you say when?  
19 When do you hope to see a change?

20 EVA TRIMBLE: Maybe starting in December or  
21 January where as I said, we're hoping the application  
22 of the ERAP tenants accounts is just starting now, so  
23 it will happen over the course of the next month or  
24 two and then we hope to see a change in the behavior.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, what do you believe is  
3 needed to close the gap in terms of the money number?

4 EVA TRIMBLE: Right now we have as of October 1,  
5 2023, we have \$533 million in arrears.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Alright, that's quite  
7 a bit. Uhm, okay, uh I wanted to know about  
8 emergency service requests. That's always a  
9 challenge. Uhm, they took over a day to resolve and  
10 23 that would be emergency and non-emergency, 65.4  
11 days. That's a five year high. It's well beyond the  
12 15-day target. So, what accounts are these market  
13 increases? What is the current headcount and vacancy  
14 rate in the maintenance teams who resolve service  
15 requests? And I know that's a hard job. I know the  
16 number by heart the CCC and I would love to know.  
17 You know these are the issues that are in our offices  
18 every single day. Go ahead.

19 EVA TRIMBLE: So, for the 2023 MMR indicator on  
20 emergency requests, over 80, approximately 80 percent  
21 of those emergency work orders are actually related  
22 to heat but they're not related to our typical heat  
23 outages. They're individual unit complaints for  
24 heat, which are rated as emergency complaints.

2 However, because they're not connected to an  
3 outage, we actually have to have a staff person go to  
4 each of those individual apartments and check the  
5 temperature in those apartments and so that accounts  
6 for why the Fiscal Year 2023 MMR is over one day for  
7 those complaints. Sometimes they come in and it's  
8 not until the next morning that we can get in there  
9 into the apartment to check the temperature.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But isn't there like a tech  
11 group that everybody can have the information in  
12 their apartment and then you just have to read it as  
13 opposed to somebody having to go there? So, it's not  
14 he said, she said. Are you familiar with fixed heat?

15 EVA TRIMBLE: Yes, we do have a building  
16 management system in about over 60 of our buildings  
17 right now that does give us -

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Real time?

19 EVA TRIMBLE: A real time temperature. However,  
20 we do want to go into the apartment, hear what the  
21 resident has to say, understand what their concern  
22 is. Maybe there's an issue with an element in the  
23 radiator. And so, it is important that we go and  
24 follow up on that complaint, even if we see the  
25 temperature in our system.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Council Member Ayala.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Yeah, I'm sorry I have to  
4 rush out of here to pick up my kid but which I forget  
5 all the time. Uhm, but my question is I've always  
6 been kind of confused about this situation with the  
7 rental arrears because one of the you know, one of  
8 the perks of having public – being a public housing  
9 resident or having Section 8, right, subsidized  
10 housing is that, if there's a change income, there's  
11 usually an adjustment that's made to the rent. And  
12 so, I wonder how many of the folks that fall into the  
13 category of being behind on rent, uhm should have  
14 actually had a rent reduction application completed?  
15 And if NYCHA even you know looked into that?

16 EVA TRIMBLE: Yes, I'm sorry, I don't have those  
17 numbers with me today but during COVID, we did  
18 process thousands of what we call interim  
19 recertifications for rent hardship and at the time,  
20 we were able to streamline the application during  
21 COVID to process those rent hardships and we  
22 encouraged all residents that were facing any  
23 decrease in rent to come in – a decrease in income  
24 rather, to come in and have their rent adjusted  
25 accordingly.

2 So, we did do a lot of outreach on that and yet  
3 there was still yes, as you say significant arrears  
4 despite the income. We don't, as I said, I don't  
5 think it's about just making sure that the rent is  
6 aligned with income. Once a resident starts having  
7 arrears and they start building, it's very hard to  
8 climb out of that hole.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: It is but I think that's  
10 why you know communication is key here right and  
11 ensuring that folks understand what resources exist  
12 to help them out of that hole is you know a unique  
13 opportunity. I will just share that I represent the  
14 largest you know number of public housing  
15 developments citywide and I haven't heard of any of  
16 these one-shot deal uhm you know workshops or  
17 opportunities at any of my developments. I mean,  
18 they may have very well have happened. You know it  
19 would have been nice to have been included as part of  
20 those discussions because my staff and I do attend  
21 you know all the monthly resident meetings and we are  
22 continuous you know contact with the resident  
23 leadership and it could be helpful you now in  
24 ensuring that residents understand that there are  
25 other avenues.

2 And I also, I wonder, was there any attempt to  
3 because I want to understand because what initially  
4 happened at least from my perspective is that folks  
5 that were in arrears, whether they were public  
6 housing residents or not were told to apply for ERAP  
7 right? And the reason for applying for ERAP was  
8 because if you had an application pending, then that  
9 would slow down the eviction process. However, I you  
10 know, I wondered if that was the right thing to do at  
11 the time. Would it have been easier to just redirect  
12 those folks to a one-shot deal while they still owed  
13 pretty minimal amounts of arrears?

14 EVA TRIMBLE: At the time, it was hard to say  
15 what was going to happen with the ERAP program, so we  
16 were focused on getting the applications in to make  
17 sure that we were at least part of the process and  
18 part of the state workload there. I think during  
19 that time we were – you know we never stopped  
20 referring to one-shots. That's always something  
21 that's part of our standard conversation with  
22 residents in need but and I appreciate your  
23 partnership and we'll make sure that any time we have  
24 any type of workshop or event, that we include you



2 and notify your office so that you can participate as  
3 well.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Have you seen a growing  
5 number of self-evictions as a result of this?

6 EVA TRIMBLE: No, I mean our eviction rate is  
7 still very low and you know NYCHA's goal is to keep  
8 residents stably housed. We understand the  
9 importance of our affordable housing. And so, our  
10 goal is definitely not to evict residents. We've  
11 only had 33 evictions since the moratorium was lifted  
12 in January 2022.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: But those were initiated  
14 by NYCHA, correct?

15 EVA TRIMBLE: They were initiated by NYCHA.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I'm referring to people  
17 that self-evict right. Somebody owes \$10,000,  
18 \$15,000 in arrears and has you know convinced  
19 themselves that NYCHA is going to evict them at some  
20 point and so they voluntarily leave.

21 EVA TRIMBLE: I can find out our total move out  
22 numbers but we don't always have a reason for the  
23 move out.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Hmm, interesting. Okay, I  
25 think one last plug I will put in is that we

2 absolutely need to make some adjustments to the  
3 budget to uhm, you know cover the cost of  
4 refrigerators and stoves. One of the many complaints  
5 that I receive at my development on top of the  
6 heating, which has been consistent this week, is the  
7 need for refrigerators and stoves and residents being  
8 told by management that there just aren't any on the  
9 property and they have to wait until new ones come  
10 in. So, they often times have to settle for what  
11 they call a Frankenstein equipment because you know  
12 they're taking parts from one and putting it in the  
13 other and you know that's what residents have to use.  
14 So, you know and it's not as simple as being able to  
15 purchase your own stove, right? Because there are  
16 then you know issues with the gas risers and it has  
17 to be very specific.

18 So, it's complicated but uhm, I mentioned it  
19 because I've tried you know to advocate for giving  
20 NYCHA the money to pay for it, but my understanding  
21 is that you know at least for some of my developments  
22 so they could have some on hand and I was told that  
23 capital - it's not capital eligible but it's you know  
24 definitely a great challenge for a lot of my  
25 residents and as you can understand, you know people

2 that are already struggling and you know may not have  
3 the resources to buy food when it's you know damaged  
4 now because it's gone bad because the refrigerator is  
5 not working or you know medication that goes bad.  
6 You know these are things that happen and uhm, you  
7 know because I have such a high stock of  
8 developments, I see a lot of that. And so, I would  
9 really greatly appreciate if at some point I saw that  
10 reflected in any of the budgetary uhm requests  
11 because I have never seen it and I don't understand  
12 why.

13 EVA TRIMBLE: Thank you, yes. I agree.  
14 Appliances are a critical need for us as our many  
15 other items and NYCHA does have significant budget  
16 limitations. I will say I can follow up with you on  
17 stoves as we are doing right now, a push to replace  
18 broken fix and replace broken stoves a head of the  
19 holiday season and I'm happy to share some data with  
20 you on that separately.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Just please don't mess up  
22 the gas before Thanksgiving.

23 EVA TRIMBLE: I cross my fingers every day the  
24 gas stays on.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You wanted to say something  
3 also about one-shots?

4 JILL BERRY: Yeah, I just wanted to say at the  
5 time when people were applying for ERAP benefits, one  
6 of the requirements of the state ERAP program was  
7 that you had to apply for ERAP as opposed to a one-  
8 shot. So, we did the right thing.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I really think that it just  
10 - it confused folks you know and so, after a while  
11 they didn't hear back you know from the state and  
12 they just you know maybe that contributed to their  
13 freezing in time right because now they're like wow,  
14 you know the state didn't respond. Maybe I'm not  
15 eligible. What do I do and my fear is always that  
16 people do self-evict because they get scared. You  
17 know I was sitting in housing court the other day and  
18 I had a gentleman; you know had a similar situation.  
19 He lost his job and you know he owed the arrears. He  
20 was waiting for his one-shot deal. He applied for  
21 it, getting pressure from the landlord. Getting  
22 pressure from having to go to court and so, he took  
23 all his stuff out of the apartment and almost turned  
24 in the key and thankfully the judge was like, once  
25 you turn in the key right, like it's a different

2 situation but as of now, you still a legal tenant  
3 regardless of whether or not you still owe the  
4 arrears. And you know, so you know I get it and I  
5 understand that you know we're all doing the best  
6 that we can but I always, I feel really badly that I  
7 get to home to my nice you know little stove and  
8 refrigerator and you know they're functional and I  
9 have to work with folks that sometimes have none you  
10 know for days and that's just horrible and obviously  
11 as housing becomes more and more difficult to obtain  
12 in the City of New York and we're building less and  
13 less subsidized housing, that you know it's  
14 imperative that we do whatever we can to ensure that  
15 people are not displaced unnecessarily. So, thank  
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: One other question is those  
18 that are not - have not been able to pay rent,  
19 without putting names necessarily because that is  
20 probably not appropriate but do you let the local  
21 officials know on making this stop. You have 30  
22 people in your district would like to work with you,  
23 or is that not something that's being done? This is  
24 an all-out effort with all due respect to get people  
25 to pay rent and I think just having NYCHA visit them,

2 maybe there's enough of a relationship in the  
3 community to help also.

4 EVA TRIMBLE: I truly appreciate your partnership  
5 and request for engagement. Unfortunately that is  
6 protected information that we could not share but I  
7 know during our efforts in Albany last year to get a  
8 public housing resident in the ERAP bill, we did  
9 share with elected officials the number of residents  
10 in their districts and the amount of arrears they had  
11 and that was a tremendous effort and partnership in  
12 bringing everyone together to realize how widespread  
13 the problem was.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and you've shared it  
15 with City Council Members? At least on some new  
16 updated numbers also?

17 EVA TRIMBLE: We can do that.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We would appreciate that.  
19 We'll figure out who it is with a number. We know  
20 how to do that. We know everybody. I know everyone,  
21 she knows everyone wherever there is -

22 Design and Construction, I know you charge a lot  
23 when you go fixing peoples sewers, library, libraries  
24 always complain that you charge them too much.  
25 That's what I hear. Uhm, I think you talked a little

2 bit with Council Member Williams about the water  
3 mains. I think one of the questions I would have is  
4 according to the MMR and I think you talked about  
5 this in your testimony. The projects completed  
6 decreased by 12.2 percent. So, I wanted to know  
7 because I certainly – the one I know the best is  
8 East, the Eastside project, meaning the park and that  
9 I assume just to let – is that on budget and on time  
10 despite all of the COVID issues?

11 ERIC MACFARLANE: Yes, it is. The Eastside  
12 Coastal Resiliency?

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes, that's the one I'm  
14 talking about.

15 ERIC MACFARLANE: Yes, absolutely on schedule and  
16 on budget.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, so there are others  
18 than that have other challenges?

19 ERIC MACFARLANE: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, if it's not headcount,  
21 what are some of the reasons why there are decreasing  
22 metrics? What would be some of the reasons that you  
23 talked about with Council Member Williams?

24 ERIC MACFARLANE: Well, if you look at the  
25 report, most of the decrease is in public building

2 area, you know the structures. And as I mentioned,  
3 we believe that – uh, we know that one of the reasons  
4 for that to happen is because of all the emergency  
5 work that the building division has been tasked with.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Because of the migrants  
7 you're talking about in the HERCs right?

8 ERIC MACFARLANE: The HERCs, the migrant,  
9 Bellevue, SCS, we are doing some on 22 street, Rikers  
10 Island on the borough-based jails and our work  
11 basically what has happened is that we need to, once  
12 we get this emergency projects, we assign the staff.  
13 We do need people who are confident and can make  
14 decision quickly and quick assessment as an emergency  
15 declaration.

16 So, which mean that uh, uh, the other project  
17 sort of suffers. It's not that we have been in the  
18 project, but again the efficiency is gone because  
19 they have taken the top people out there and  
20 reassigned them. So, that's what's happening.  
21 That's the reason we think and again, we're trying to  
22 recruit. We're trying to increase our staff and we  
23 believe that we can get out of this but right now  
24 with all those emergencies as they come in, we have  
25 issues because we have to do the same with staff.



2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know you said earlier to  
3 Council Member Williams, in terms of the sewers long  
4 term for new sewers, I understand that. How many  
5 sewers are you able to clean or that will citywide in  
6 terms of hopefully preventing floods? I know in one  
7 of my districts, the day care center is at NYCHA.  
8 I'm not saying this is your problem, I think it's  
9 NYCHA's but the flooding of the day care center came  
10 about because the sewer wasn't clean. And now,  
11 because I got the New York Times involved, and I got  
12 Melissa Russo involved, it got cleaned.

13 I just called the newspaper and that's what I do,  
14 then that works. So, my question though is how much  
15 uh staffing is allocated to the sewers or to how many  
16 are you able to clean, even though that might not be  
17 specifically an MMR, it's a huge issue.

18 ERIC MACFARLANE: Unfortunately, this is not our  
19 area. The maintenance of the sewers is the DEP.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right but don't you - you  
21 don't clean them?

22 ERIC MACFARLANE: We don't clean them.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You don't have anything -  
24 all you do is build them?

2 ERIC MACFARLANE: We build with new capital  
3 projects, yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, all you do is build  
5 them, okay. Uhm, the other question would be, are  
6 any of your positions able to be filled more readily  
7 because you have a waiver or because people are  
8 hybrid? Are you having the same staffing issues that  
9 other agencies have?

10 ERIC MACFARLANE: We're having - and this is more  
11 critical. We don't have a waiver by the way.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right.

13 ERIC MACFARLANE: We just in discussion with OMB.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'll tell them right now  
15 that you need a waiver. I'm tired of them emailing  
16 me.

17 ERIC MACFARLANE: What we need is essentially  
18 staff but more importantly to deliver these projects,  
19 I need engineers and architects and there's a  
20 shortage of that nationwide. And we're competing  
21 with the private industry and other city agencies  
22 that are looking for the same type of people.  
23 Despite that, we're making a tremendous effort for  
24 equipment. We go to the schools. We go to - we hold  
25 hiring pools and so on and so forth. So, we've been

2 able to fill about 188 positions. We still have 126  
3 vacancies left, which is a combination of technical  
4 and administrative and we're talking to OMB to  
5 basically say, you know the program is increasing  
6 with people.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Do you think the Mayor  
8 coming around to hybrid will help because your people  
9 can easily go to an architectural engineering firm  
10 that has hybrid.

11 ERIC MACFARLANE: That is true and then we are  
12 offering this at this point, at DDC also.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It only took them a year.  
14 Alright, thank you very much. We appreciate your  
15 work and much more discussion to go.

16 PANEL: Thank you. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your  
19 testimony. We will next hear from Louisa Chafee and  
20 Sarita Subramanian of the New York City Independent  
21 Budget Office.

22 Before we begin, I'll administer the affirmation.  
23 Panelists, if you could please raise your right hand.  
24 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
25

2 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to  
3 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

4 PANEL: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. You may  
6 begin when ready.

7 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Thank you Chair Brewer. I  
8 am Sarita Subramanian, Senior Research and Strategy  
9 Officer at the New York City Independent Budget  
10 Office. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on  
11 agency performance vis-à-vis the 2023 MMR, in  
12 delivering housing and services. In this testimony,  
13 I will focus on a few key areas within the New York  
14 City Housing Authority, Department of Social Services  
15 and Department of Education, where IBO is also able  
16 to use data on staffing levels through the city's  
17 payroll management system to analyze the level of  
18 staff turnover over the last year.

19 First, regarding delays and timeliness and  
20 repairs and turnover of vacant apartments at NYCHA.  
21 NYCHA reported substantial timing increases in  
22 several critical indicators, attributing the delays  
23 to an increase in demand with no comparable increase  
24 in staffing to address specialized areas. The  
25 average times to prepare vacant apartments and to

2 turn them around more than doubled from 2022 with  
3 both metrics reaching over 365 days.

4 In 2019, the average times were both less than 90  
5 days marking a significant upward trend over the past  
6 five years. The MMR attributes this to aid in  
7 conditions in building which require time consuming  
8 repairs and remodeling.

9 The other metric related to service requests in  
10 NYCHA's capacity as a landlord. The average time to  
11 resolve emergency requests exceeded the 24-hour  
12 target increasing by 26 percent since 2022 and more  
13 than doubling since 2019. The MMR states that most  
14 emergency requests relate to heat and hot water,  
15 which took longer to resolve in 2023 due to a lack of  
16 adequate specialized staff. Resolving non-emergency  
17 service requests has increased by a larger percentage  
18 than emergency request, reaching 65 hours in 2023, a  
19 33 percent increase from 2022 and more than tripling  
20 since 2019. The MMR attributes this to a backlog of  
21 work orders from the pandemic, during which non-  
22 emergency work was put on hold.

23 IBO found that although headcount at NYCHA has  
24 increased compared with June 2022, the average  
25 experience level of staff has declined due to high

2 turnover rates, with more experience staff leaving at  
3 relatively higher rates than in past years. This  
4 leaves less experienced staff to prepare vacant units  
5 and respond to service requests. According to the  
6 City's Payroll Management System, headcount has  
7 increased by 1.5 percent since June 2022. However,  
8 NYCHA staff turnover rate was nearly 20 percent in  
9 that time.

10 With regards to timeliness of cash and food  
11 assistance declining despite increased hiring of  
12 eligibility specialists for HRA, IBO continues to  
13 monitor to focus on the timeliness of benefit  
14 processing indicators. IBO observed this starkest  
15 declines in timeliness for processing cash assistance  
16 with applications within 30 days down to 29 percent  
17 of all applications, from 82 percent one year ago.

18 Applicants receiving cash assistance is also the  
19 subject of a legal aid and New York Legal Assistance  
20 Group lawsuit in progress against the city. There  
21 were also sizable changes in processing Supplemental  
22 Food Assistance or SNAP benefits within 30 days. The  
23 metric has declined to just under 40 percent of all  
24 applications from 60 percent one year ago and 92  
25 percent two years ago. The delays in cash assistance

2 and SNAP processing stand in contrast to Medicaid  
3 application processing, which remained at 94 percent  
4 in 2023. Below the target rate of 99 percent but an  
5 improvement in timeliness over the 81 percent in  
6 2020.

7 At HRA, total headcount has increased by about  
8 1.5 percent since the end of 2022, but turnover in  
9 that same period was approximately 16 percent,  
10 signaling retention issues and a less experienced  
11 workforce on average. The number of eligibility  
12 specialists, one of the critical positions that work  
13 to approve application, benefit applications declined  
14 11 percent, about 225 employees between June 30, 2020  
15 and 2023. While there has been a recent rebound in  
16 the first few months of 2024, an increase of four  
17 percentage points or 70 employees, it may not be  
18 sufficient to meet the increase in caseloads given  
19 that the timeliness indicators continue to lag. The  
20 number of cash assistance recipients has grown almost  
21 13 percent over the last year, increasing from more  
22 than 585,000 recipients to more than 660,000. The  
23 number of SNAP recipients has held relatively steady  
24 at around 1.7 million.

2 In the interest of time, I'm going to talk about  
3 the Department of Education but the testimony does  
4 include some details on DHS as well. Student and  
5 teacher absence rates at the Department of Education  
6 remain higher than pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, the  
7 MMR reported that about 64 percent of students had  
8 attendance rates of 90 percent or higher. In other  
9 words roughly 36 percent of students we absent in at  
10 least ten percent of the school year, a threshold  
11 that the DOE and the State Education Department used  
12 as a measure of chronic absenteeism.

13 While 2023 marks a decrease in chronic  
14 absenteeism from the previous year, during which  
15 nearly 40 percent of students were chronically  
16 absent. The indicator is still ten percentage points  
17 higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 26 percent in  
18 2019. IBO's recently updated education indicators  
19 for school year 2021-2022 provided some warning signs  
20 for higher levels of chronic absentee rates,  
21 particularly for some student subgroups.

22 For traditional public-school students in school  
23 districts 1-32, we found chronic absenteeism rates  
24 highest for students with disabilities, students from  
25 low-income neighborhoods and students in temporary



2 housing. Chronic absentee rates were largest for  
3 students in high school overall. Among high school  
4 students, while 40 percent of general education  
5 students were chronically absent that year, the rate  
6 for students with disabilities was 57 percent. There  
7 were similar 17 percentage point differences by  
8 student neighborhood income and housing status.

9 The MMR also reported an increase in teacher  
10 absences in 2023, nearly 19 percent of teachers were  
11 absent 11 days or more. Before the pandemic, in  
12 2019, only 13 percent of teachers were absent that  
13 many days.

14 These absences coupled with new hiring needs  
15 following the State Class Size Reduction Law,  
16 represent an area of concern. IBO has estimated that  
17 the city will need to hire more than 17,000  
18 additional teachers to meet the fully phased in  
19 requirements of the new Class Size law. And in a  
20 recent report, IBO found that while teacher hiring  
21 has returned to pre-COVID levels, the 2022-2023  
22 school year saw a decrease in teacher retention.

23 As the rate of returning teachers has declined,  
24 the overall number of teachers also decreased by  
25 2,500 teachers compared with the workforce in 2018-

2 2019. IBO will be monitoring further changes and  
3 teacher headcount, especially after the recent  
4 announcement by the Adams Administration to reduce  
5 school budgets this year due to lower-than-expected  
6 enrollment.

7 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify  
8 and I'm happy to answer your questions.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, first of all, thank  
10 you to IBO for your excellent oversight on the  
11 budget. It's much, much appreciated. I certainly  
12 have called on you to do many different things. I  
13 had a question about the vacant apartments because  
14 obviously you heard me or maybe you didn't ask about  
15 that and it seems to me that it's almost criminal to  
16 have I think she said 4,900 vacant apartments in the  
17 city of New York that could house people who are low-  
18 income.

19 You attributed to the MMR to the aging conditions  
20 but then we heard you mention that previously, it was  
21 many fewer days and the buildings were aging then  
22 too. So, it's not as if they all of a sudden became  
23 more aging. They were aging pre-pandemic. So, do  
24 you have any - do you think it's a staffing issue or  
25 do you have any other suggestions. We didn't really

2 get an answer. There is money. It's not I mean, \$73  
3 million is what the City Council allocated. Go  
4 ahead.

5 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Yeah, so that's exactly the  
6 conversation that we had as well, which is why we  
7 wanted to look at the city's payroll system data to  
8 really be able to track turnover because we think the  
9 - identifying those staff that have left might help,  
10 help better understand the special you know sort of  
11 skills that might be necessary in order to address  
12 the emergency repairs. So, I know that they spoke  
13 also specifically about visiting particular  
14 apartments. I know one area that we have looked at  
15 or heard about was in the Bronx and a particular need  
16 for specialized staff in that area or to specifically  
17 address the heating repairs that needed to be made.  
18 So, we thought that looking at turnover would also  
19 help to understand that it's not just about total  
20 headcount but also understanding the churn and that  
21 might mean in terms of additional training or time  
22 that people might require to handle the service  
23 delivery.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, I mean what was said,  
25 I think was asbestos, etc., I don't know that there

2 was more or less from pre-COVID. I mean if it was  
3 there then, it's going to be there now. It seems to  
4 me that's your analysis makes sense but you still  
5 need to be able to figure out how to do it.

6 I don't really care what you have to do, those  
7 apartments need to be repaired and habited. The  
8 Medicaid was interesting. You said that we know cash  
9 assistance and SNAP. I think 2000 SNAP and I don't  
10 know; it's was like a very large number of people  
11 backlogged, 37,000 for cash. So, my question is,  
12 Medicaid didn't seem to have the same issues. Do you  
13 know why the different staff, according to your  
14 wonderful testimony.

15 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Uhm, yeah, so I think the  
16 reason way we wanted to uhm mention it was that we  
17 thought the contrast you know was interesting. We  
18 wanted to highlight; we looked particularly at  
19 eligibility specialists because of the large declines  
20 for cash assistance and SNAP in particular. Uhm, so  
21 I don't have the data on but we can try to take a  
22 look at you know specific titles that handle Medicaid  
23 applications and what you know the degree to which  
24 turnover may or may not have been an issue for that  
25 particular area.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and then I know your  
3 expertise in education. We didn't talk about that  
4 here today. Do you have some ideas about how to stop  
5 even ten percent increase is a lot of students and  
6 I'm quite familiar. I mean, I also think; I hate to  
7 say it but I have to say this the smoke shops aren't  
8 helping either. That's my own particular challenge  
9 in terms of what I think is not helping our students.  
10 But do you have some ideas about how to address the  
11 absenteeism?

12 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Yeah, I think it certainly  
13 is a challenging area and I think one group of  
14 students in particular are students with disabilities  
15 that we highlighted in the testimony. Uhm, I know  
16 there are often issues with busing for those that  
17 receive busing as required by their disability  
18 status, so perhaps looking at transportation to  
19 ensure that transportation is consistent and that  
20 there aren't delays in that realm.

21 Uhm, another area that I can think of are  
22 attendance teachers within schools. And so, that's  
23 maybe one. We haven't looked specifically at that  
24 and whether staffing uhm in that particular area  
25 might be an issue. So, yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, there's no question.  
3 We've had a couple of hearings on the lack of bus  
4 transportation reliability and we're certainly going  
5 to continue that issue but particularly for the  
6 students who need it the most. The migrant children  
7 have been a great asset to the schools, at least in  
8 Manhattan because they have upped the numbers of  
9 students in under populated schools. So, I know you  
10 mentioned that uhm, lower than expected enrollment,  
11 obviously that impacts that school budgets.

12 I personally would hope that we don't cut the  
13 school budgets but that's a discussion for the budget  
14 negotiation. But I do think that the lower-than-  
15 expected enrollment may now be higher because of the  
16 whatever it is 2,700, 2,200. 2,100 students from  
17 asylum families. Is that your understanding also?

18 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: So we don't yet have data  
19 for this school year on that but based on -

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Previous, yes.

21 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Right.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Oh, so you don't have it.  
23 So, your lower-than-expected enrollment does not  
24 include this?

2 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Well, it's not based on our  
3 data but more the announcement that was made. And  
4 so, I know that technically the audited enrollment  
5 date was yesterday, so I'm expecting to hear some  
6 preliminary figures probably from the DOE in the  
7 coming weeks.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, we'll see what the  
9 enrollment is.

10 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Right.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much for your  
12 testimony. Thank you.

13 SARITA SUBRAMANIAN: Sure, you're welcome.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. We will now  
15 turn to public testimony. We will be limiting public  
16 testimony today to two minutes each. Please note  
17 that if you're prepared testimony exceeds two minutes  
18 in addition to testifying before the Committee today,  
19 you may also submit your full testimony to the record  
20 up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by  
21 emailing it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

22 If you are here to testify in person and you have  
23 not yet completed a witness slip, please visit the  
24 Sergeants table and complete a witness slip now, even  
25 if you registered to testify online. For in-person

2 panelists, please come up to the table once your name  
3 has been called. For virtual panelists, once your  
4 name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you  
5 and the Sergeant at Arms will set the timer and give  
6 you the go ahead to begin. Please wait for the  
7 Sergeant to announce that you may begin before  
8 delivering your testimony. Now, I'll call our in-  
9 person panel. Ms. Deborah Elliott-Bloodman and Annie  
10 Wilson.

11 MS. DEBORAH ELLIOTT-BLOODMAN: Good afternoon.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Good afternoon. Thank you  
13 for being here.

14 MS. DEBORAH ELLIOTT-BLOODMAN: Thank you. I'm a  
15 disabled senior and uhm, I've been having problems  
16 with Shuhab. We went to your office. We met with  
17 you several times. Every time there's a new City  
18 Council person or a new Manhattan Borough President,  
19 I go and I share my concerns and it's over 25 years  
20 now, I'm still repeating myself no matter who is in  
21 the chair. And it's very mentally stressful and my  
22 health is depleting. If I called 311, I'm in Housing  
23 Court. I'm being harassed by my neighbors, the Board  
24 President. People are threatening me for making any  
25 type of complaints. There's ice on my windows and



2 I'm paying rent. If I ask for an ADA toilet, the  
3 work is sabotaged or my life is in danger. Where my  
4 doctor have to write a letter to say the toilet is  
5 too high because my blood is not circulating from my  
6 head to my toe, which I didn't even know, I'm so  
7 stressed out and it's ongoing. This is over 30 years  
8 with Shuhab. I'm in Housing Court, saying I owe this  
9 enormous amount of money. My DRIE goes directly to  
10 Shuhab. It doesn't come to me and they're saying I  
11 owe them all this money. On my rent statement, it  
12 doesn't state my part that I owe and you know what  
13 DRIE has sent to them. If I say anything at all, if  
14 I go to the office to try to pay my rent, I am being  
15 harassed, threatened, intimidated and it's steadily  
16 increasing. It's much more than that but I'm trying  
17 to be as humane and have a little dignity about  
18 myself but my health is depleting.

19 I've had bed bugs for over 20 years. Bed bugs.  
20 If I ask for that, Rhonda, the lawyer, well known  
21 throughout the city. Oh, Ms. Bloodman, waiver your  
22 rights. If I ask for a paint job after 20 years  
23 after I renovated the building, \$46 million and every  
24 floor and every wall is not even and the quality of  
25 service is constantly declining. If I ask for

2 anything, she's asking me to waiver my right, no Ms.  
3 Bloodman. And no matter what's on the court papers  
4 for stipulation, she has not done one repair that's  
5 done adequately, basic service. Outlets are very -  
6 the Fire Department was at my house on Friday  
7 morning. Because why? The Super gave me a defective  
8 smoker, smoke detector. It's not the first time.  
9 It's not the first time. All kind of sabotaging  
10 criminal acts, they get away with it. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Thank you very much  
12 for waiting this long of time. Thank you.

13 ANNIE WILSON: I'm trying to record it, so.  
14 Hello, I'm Annie Wilson and thank you for hearing us  
15 out. I also was connected to an HDFC. I was a  
16 Cofounder since 1984.

17 Oh, let me start again. Let me start again.  
18 Hello. Thank you. Thank you for this opportunity to  
19 speak. I am Annie Wilson and I'm here to report that  
20 I have also been in an HDFC scenario as Cofounder in  
21 1984 and eventually forced out by the developers.  
22 This building was a building that was transferred to  
23 the nonprofit in 2002 to be completed in 2004. And  
24 uhm, I have to say that there had been a fire. They  
25 kept the fire insurance money. They forced us out by

2 claiming a foreclosure need of \$179,000 and an  
3 agreement that they had made with the for-profit  
4 developer and they had not disclosed to us or  
5 revealed that they had taken a mortgage out on us a  
6 couple years prior for \$850,000.

7 So, based on this scheme, we were forced out of  
8 our apartments and given relocation apartment  
9 contacts. I was not allowed to return to my  
10 apartment 5C. When negotiation for alternatives,  
11 they took me to court I believe as a retrieval for  
12 speaking out in this body in 2018 and 2019.  
13 Detailing the issues that we had and particularly  
14 financial issues and if you look up the record, I  
15 testified on July 22, 2019. If you go to pages 261  
16 to 268 and I had testified April 26, 2018 page 174 to  
17 177.

18 I know I have to wrap up now but I would like to  
19 add uhm, that I'm still in a relocation apartment,  
20 over stayed five years, facing eviction from there  
21 and I would like to work and meet with you and help  
22 with any kind of investigation needed because the  
23 situation is dire right now for me and others.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright and what borough are  
25 you in?

2 ANNIE WILSON: It was 13<sup>th</sup> Street lower Manhattan.

3 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: 13<sup>th</sup> Street Manhattan, okay.

4 I'll be glad to, I'll give you my card and be glad to  
5 meet with both of you at any time.

6 ANNIE WILSON: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you and thank you for  
8 waiting all day. Thank you.

9 ANNIE WILSON: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you both very much for  
11 your testimony. Now we will turn to virtual  
12 panelists. We will hear first from Juan Diaz  
13 followed by Theo Chino. Again, please wait for the  
14 Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin  
15 before starting your testimony but we'll now hear  
16 from Juan Diaz.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

18 JUAN DIAZ: Thank you. Thank you Chair Brewer  
19 for holding today's important hearing. My name is  
20 Juan Diaz and I am a Policy and Advocacy Associate  
21 Citizens' Committee for Children multi-issue child  
22 advocacy organization.

23 CCC is also a student community of the Family  
24 Homes Coalition. The recent Mayor's Management  
25 Report highlights the need to fully staff HPD, DHS

2 and HRA to streamline housing application and redo  
3 the paperwork so that families with children who  
4 remain housed and secure housing timely. For  
5 instance, the MMR report reveals that the percentage  
6 of applicants that completed application approval  
7 within six months has decreased from 42 percent in  
8 Fiscal Year 2022 to 32 percent in Fiscal Year 2023.

9 The Mayor proposed 50 percent cuts in agency like  
10 Department of Social Services and Department of  
11 Homeless Services will further extend the time in the  
12 families receive housing and public assistance  
13 benefits. Therefore CCC and FHE partners – the city  
14 administration to exempt DSS, HRA, DHS, HPD from the  
15 major 50 percent PEG and hiring freeze, prioritizing  
16 the fighting of open agency staff lines and reject  
17 cuts to nonprofit human services agencies and  
18 homeless shelter providers.

19 Additionally, we urge this Administration to  
20 allow all families to access HPD set asides  
21 regardless of which shelter system they are in, as  
22 promised by the Adams Administration on Page 51 of  
23 the Housing our Neighborhood Blueprint.

24 Also, reduce the steps and streamline to fill the  
25 vacant affordable housing units made available

2 through the Housing Connect to meaningfully reduce  
3 these timetables. Lastly, prioritize access to  
4 homebase services by refraining from budget cuts and  
5 advocating for additional funding to expand capacity  
6 within existing programs and open new sites, to  
7 ensure that families in the community have access to  
8 supportive services such as emergency rental  
9 assistance, housing subsidy renewals and legal  
10 assistance to avoid shelter entrance and continue  
11 their path and housing and economic mobility.

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. A  
13 written testimony will be submitted with more details  
14 and recommendations.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I want to thank you very  
16 much. You know I'm a huge fan of CCC and really  
17 concise, excellent testimony. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your  
19 testimony. We'll next hear from Theo Chino.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 THEO CHINO: Hello. My name is Theo Chino, I'm  
22 the First National Secretary of the Social Democrat  
23 of America. The social [02:39:14] of the democratic  
24 party, also known as the Committee of the Second  
25 Socialist International. We are referred as Type II

2 socialists and you can check our website at socialist  
3 U.S. to understand the differences. We socialists  
4 believe dignity for the population we aim to serve,  
5 even if Mariah Webster would define a client, a  
6 person served by utilizing the service of a social  
7 agency, we need to stop referring to New Yorker as  
8 customer or client. It is New York asking for help  
9 from their government or not customer or client.  
10 They are citizens. Because we believe housing is a  
11 human right, is the job of the Council to provide a  
12 strong oversight over the housing stock against bad  
13 actors.

14 City Council over the last 50 years have given  
15 nonprofit rent property taken from slumlord in hope  
16 to turn the equity back to the resident. This  
17 nonprofit such as you have, have literally stolen the  
18 equity from those tenants because those numbers does  
19 not appear in the MMR. The MMR report shows the  
20 percentage of lottery applicant but not the equity  
21 those lottery gives them. We socialists believe the  
22 MMR needs to actually reflect the number that  
23 actually means something.

24 We socialists, when we get elected, we would like  
25 to see it added to the MMR, new data point such as

2 the actual equity numbers for each project in HPD  
3 portfolio.

4 Another example is SNAP. It doesn't show if the  
5 amount of money are going to people who are going to  
6 bed hungry. The city needs a strong oversight and  
7 good number, so we can ensure domestic tranquility  
8 and promote general welfare. Another idea we  
9 socialists Type II have is our desire to tax the  
10 rich. Thank you very much Councilwoman and just to  
11 finish, I really would like to see an oversight  
12 investigation in all those nonprofit that take the  
13 equity from tenants such as Ms. Wilson that you just  
14 heard a few seconds ago. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. Thank  
16 you very much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
18 We have now heard from everyone who has signed up to  
19 testify. If we inadvertently missed anyone who would  
20 like to testify in person, please visit the Sergeants  
21 table and complete a witness slip now. If we  
22 inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify  
23 virtually, please use the raised hand function in  
24 Zoom and I will call on you in the order of hands  
25 raised.



2 Seeing no one else, I would like to note that  
3 written testimony which will be reviewed in full by  
4 Committee staff may be submitted up to the record up  
5 to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by  
6 emailing it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). And now,  
7 I'll turn it back over to Chair Brewer to close us  
8 out.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. I  
10 appreciate everybody who was online listening. I  
11 appreciate the Administration and my colleagues and  
12 we certainly have a lot of work ahead of us to try to  
13 make sure that the government is responsive to its  
14 residents and citizens. Thank you very much.

15 [GAVEL]

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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 November 15, 2023