

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 1

2 CITY COUNCIL
3 CITY OF NEW YORK

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5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

6 Of the

7 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND
8 YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE
9 ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE
10 ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY

11 ----- X

12 January 28, 2025
13 Start: 1:15 p.m.
14 Recess: 3:50 p.m.

15 HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

16 B E F O R E: Althea V. Stevens,
17 Chairperson for the Committee on
18 Children and Youth

19 Yusef Salaam,
20 Chairperson for the Committee on
21 Public Safety

22 Farah Louis,
23 Chairperson for the Committee on
24 Women and Gender Equity

25 COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- 26 Joann Ariola
- 27 Diana Ayala
- 28 Selvena Brooks-Powers
- 29 Tiffany Cabàn
- 30 Rita C. Joseph
- 31 Linda Lee
- 32 Christopher Marte
- 33 Julie Menin

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 2

4 COUNCIL MEMBERS: (CONTINUED)

5 Chi A. Ossè
6 Carlina Rivera
7 Inna Vernikov
8 Nantasha M. Williams
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1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 3

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

5 Winette Saunder
6 ACS First Deputy Commissioner

7 Ina Mendez
8 ACS Deputy Commissioner, Family Permanency
9 Services

10 Sabine Shery
11 ACS Associate Commissioner, Office of Older
12 Youth Development

13 Saloni Sethi
14 ENDGBV

15 Samantha Dawkins
16 DYCD Senior Director, Runaway and Homeless Youth
17 Services

18 Amy Wilkerson
19 DYCD Assistant Commissioner for Runaway and
20 Homeless Youth

21 Josh Levin
22 NYPD Director

23 Carlos Ortiz
24 NYPD Deputy Chief

25 Kathleen Baer
NYPD Director

Joseph Picarello
NYPD Lieutenant

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 4

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

6 Mari Moss
7 Community Advocate for Families and Communities

8 Eric Lee
9 Volunteers of America

10 Sebastien Vante
11 Safe Horizon

12 Brianna Palmer
13 Covenant House New York

14 Tanesha Grant
15 Executive Director of Parent Support and Parents
16 New York
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1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 5

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Mic check, mic check, this is
5 a mic check, mic check. Today's hearing on Public
6 Safety, Children and Youth, Women and Gender Equity
7 in the Chambers. Today's date is January 28, 2025
8 recorded by Walter Lewis.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good evening and welcome to
10 today's New York City Council hearing for the
11 Committee on Children and Youth joined with Public
12 Safety and Women Equity. At this time, please
13 silence all electronic devices. No one may approach
14 the dais at any time during today's hearing. Chair,
15 you may begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: [GAVEL] Sorry about that.
17 Good afternoon and welcome to today's hearing on
18 Supporting Young Victims of Human Trafficking.

19 I am Althea Stevens, Chair of the Committee on
20 Children and Youth. Sex trafficking is a horrendous
21 crime that preys on some of the most vulnerable
22 members of New York City. Our goal is to assess the
23 city's progress in identifying supports for young
24 victims. Strengthening on protections for at risk
25 youth and ensuring that no child in our care falls
through the cracks.

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 6

4 We will also be hearing the following bill,
5 Intro. 831, sponsored by Council Member Louis in
6 relation to requiring the Police Department to report
7 on missing persons. The commercial and sexual
8 exploitation of young people is a perverse issue that
9 thrives in the shadows. The nature of this crime
10 makes it difficult to capture reliable data but we do
11 know it's alarming. Youth in foster care run away
12 and homeless youth, LGBTQ+, LGBTQ+ youth and those
13 with histories of abuse and neglect are
14 disproportionately affected.

15 Traffickers often prey on the vulnerabilities,
16 offer false promises of love, stability and basic
17 necessities such as food and shelter. In response,
18 the city has taken steps to combat the crisis.

19 ACS established the Office of Child Trafficking,
20 Preservation and Policy, OCTPP, which raises
21 awareness, provides direct services and collaborate
22 with agencies to deliver resources.

23 In 2023, ACS and DYCD identified 760 youth at
24 sexual exploited or at risk and increase from
25 previous years. Those numbers include children
served through preventative services, foster care
placement and homeless support programs. However,

1 despite the efforts in 2022, audited by the New York
2 State Comptroller Officer, revealed significant gaps
3 in the implementation and documentation of these
4 services.
5

6 Issues such as failures to screen for trafficking
7 indicators and insufficient preservations of critical
8 support serves for safe housing and mental health
9 care. While our focus topic today is on youth, we
10 cannot ignore the troubling allegations of sexual
11 abuse at ACS run detentions. Those allegations,
12 which have spent many years, rises urgent questions
13 about why failure in persistent measures have not
14 been taken to prevent further harm.

15 Even today, there was a press conference
16 addressing issues in our facility. It is
17 wholeheartedly unacceptable that young people are
18 entering the city care faces such a risk. We must
19 examine what steps are necessary to ensure the
20 facilities most basic standards of safety and
21 accountability.

22 Our primary responsibility is to ensure the
23 safety and wellbeing of all children in our care. We
24 cannot allow systematic gaps to jeopardize the lives
25 of young people who are already vulnerable. I look

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 8

4 forward to hearing from ACS, DYCD, NYPD and ENDGBV
5 advocates and other stakeholders about how we can
6 close those gaps and improve outcomes about sex
7 trafficking and at risk youth.

8 Finally, I would like to thank my Committee
9 staff, Christina and Elizabeth for their hard work in
10 preparing for this hearing and all of my staff and
11 team back at District 16 and the A-team. And so, at
12 this time, I will turn it over to my Co-Chair Council
13 Member Louis but I would like to recognize Deputy
14 Speaker Ayala who has joined us here for today's
15 hearing. Thank you.

16 Oh, oh and Holden. Oh, hello, how are you doing?
17 And Holden who is also here. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you Chair. Good
19 afternoon. My name is Farah Louis, Chair of the
20 Committee on Women and Gender Equity. I'd like to
21 begin by thanking my colleague Council Member
22 Stevens, Chair of the Committee on Children and Youth
23 and Council Member Salaam, Chair of the Committee on
24 Public Safety for holding this very important
25 hearing.

26 I'd also like to welcome all joining us this
27 afternoon. We appreciate your time and attention.

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 9

1 As Chair Stevens stated, we are here today to oversee
2 and assess our city's support for young victims of
3 human trafficking. Our duty as legislatures is to
4 ensure our agencies are utilizing discretion to
5 investigate any level of bureaucracy that may further
6 harm victims. And we are collectively working, thank
7 you to protect our young people, especially those who
8 are the most vulnerable to exploitation. This is
9 paramount for us here in the Council.
10

11 In addition to our discussion supporting young
12 victims of human trafficking, we will also be
13 discussing my bill Intro. 831, which would require
14 the NYPD to annually report on missing persons cases.
15 This bill would require the NYPD to submit a report
16 to the Mayor and the Speaker of the Council as well
17 as post on its website a report that includes ongoing
18 detailed information on the number of missing persons
19 reports received during the past decade.

20 The report would also include the percentage of
21 cases where the department has determined that the
22 missing person has become a victim of sex, human and
23 labor trafficking. Publicizing this data will also
24 hopefully give us more of an insight into this crisis
25 and how we can best work to combat it. This

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 10

4 legislation represents a significant step towards
5 transparency and addressing the systemic inequities
6 impacting vulnerable youth here in New York City.

7 The Committees look forward to hearing from the
8 Administration, advocates, and members of the public
9 and other interested stakeholders who take the time
10 to join us for this hearing. We thank you all for
11 being here today. I would also like to thank my own
12 staff, Daniel Heredia, as well as those of other
13 Committees who have worked hard to prepare for this
14 hearing. Finally, I'd like to thank the Women and
15 Gender Equity Staff Assistant Deputy Director Sahar
16 Moazami, Senior Legislative Policy Analyst Cristy
17 Dwyer, Legislative Counsel Rachel Conte, Finance
18 Analyst Allie Stofer, and Assistant Deputy Director
19 of Data Operations Rose Martinez. Now, I will pass
20 it back to my colleague, Chair Stevens.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, at this time I would
22 like to recognize Selvena Brooks-Powers who is
23 online, Council Member Menin who has joined us, and
24 Council Member Chris Marte. I'd now like to pass it
25 over to Council Member Salaam for his opening
statement.

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 11

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Good morning. Uhm, good
afternoon. I'm Council Member Yusef Salaam, Chair of
the Committee on Public Safety. I want to thank
Council Member Stevens and Louis for their
collaboration on this important hearing, examining
the city's efforts to provide support for young
victims of human trafficking. As discussed by Chair
Stevens, human trafficking and the exploitation of
young people is deeply concerning.

The city has an ultimate responsibility to
protect our most vulnerable children and those
subject to human trafficking deserve the upmost care.
I look forward to hearing the Administrations
discussion and the various approaches it utilizes to
identify young victims of human trafficking and
delivering the services and support often needed by
this population. As Chair of the Public Safety
Committee with oversight on the NYPD, I also
recognize the ongoing role of Law Enforcement plays
in addressing human trafficking and related criminal
behaviors.

However, a delicate balance must be struck. I
believe that Law Enforcement should prioritize
investigations that seek to identify human

1 traffickers and conduct targeted enforcement that
2 provides significant criminal penalties for those who
3 profit off of the exploitation of young people.
4

5 At the same time, I believe that it is important
6 for the city to promote the safety and care of young
7 victims, even of human trafficking and ensure
8 diversion from the criminal justice systems where
9 appropriate. To this end, I am specifically
10 interested in examining relevant NYPD operations and
11 enforcement priorities to combat human trafficking.

12 We will explore how the NYPD is allocating resources
13 to large scale investigations and how it ensures that
14 young victims of human trafficking do not become
15 entangled in the criminal justice system. We will
16 also explore the human traffic impact certain police
17 practices have on young people throughout the city,
18 particularly critically examining criminal
19 enforcement efforts that might target the very
20 victims of human trafficking that we seek to protect.

21 I look forward to hearing from the NYPD, the
22 other city agencies present, community activists and
23 my fellow Council Members as we collectively work
24 towards a safer city for all New Yorkers. Thank you.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 13

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I would like to turn it
5 over to Committee Counsel to swear in the panel.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, good afternoon. Please
7 raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the
8 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
9 before this Committee and to respond honestly to
10 Council Member questions? Joseph Picarello?

11 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Yes.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Josh Levin?

13 JOSH LEVIN: Yes.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Carlos Ortiz?

15 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yes.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Kathleen Baer?

17 KATHLEEN BAER: Yes.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Amy Wilkerson?

19 AMY WILKERSON: Yes.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Samantha Dawkins?

21 SAMANTHA DAWKINS: Yes.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ina Mendez?

23 INA MENDEZ: Yes.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sabine Chery?

25 SABINE CHERY: Yes.

MARI MOSS: Yes.

MARI MOSS: Yes.

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 14

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Saloni Sethi?

5 SALONI SETHI: Yes.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin.

7 INA MENDEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Ina
8 Mendez. I am the Deputy Commissioner of the Division
9 of Family Permanency Services at the New York City
10 Administration for Children's Services. I am joined
11 here today by Sabine Chery, the Associate
12 Commissioner in the Office of Older Youth Development
13 Services within the Division.

14 Together we oversee the Office of Child
15 Trafficking Prevention and Policy, which manages our
16 efforts to educate ACS, the providers and the public
17 on human trafficking; and to screen, identify, track
18 and provide services to any child or youth who comes
19 into contact with ACS or who has been trafficked.

20 We want to thank Chair Stevens, Chair Salaam,
21 Chair Louis, and the members of the City Council
22 Children and Youth, Public Safety, and Women and
23 Gender Equity Committees for holding today's
24 oversight hearing on "Supports for Young Victims of
25 Human Trafficking."

Unfortunately and due to its many transportation
options and arteries, New York State has one of the

1 highest sex and labor trafficking rates in the United
2 States. Traffickers target those children and youth
3 who are most vulnerable to exploitation, including
4 those who have previously faced trauma, abuse,
5 neglect, and homelessness.
6

7 So, while anyone can be a victim of human
8 trafficking, children and youth in the foster care
9 and runaway and homeless youth are particularly
10 vulnerable, which makes it essential for both ACS and
11 our colleagues at DYCD to be alert to trafficking
12 when working with the children and youth that we
13 serve. ACS is committed to identifying and helping
14 sex and labor trafficked children and youth achieve
15 safety and obtain resources to help them heal and
16 thrive.

17 In September 2014, the federal government passed
18 the "Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening
19 Families Act" to help address sex trafficking and the
20 commercial sexual exploitation of children involved
21 in the child welfare system. Pursuant to state and
22 federal law, ACS is required to screen all children
23 and youth entering foster care for possible
24 trafficking, as well as any child or youth returning
25 to foster care after any period of being Absent

1 Without Consent. To accomplish this, in 2015 ACS
2 created the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention
3 and Policy and issued its trafficking policy in 2020,
4 which remains in effect.
5

6 In short, it requires child welfare staff to
7 screen all children and youth, and outlines steps for
8 identification, documentation, safety planning, and
9 the provision of appropriate services to children who
10 are sex trafficking victims or at risk for becoming
11 sex trafficking victims, as well as guidance and
12 procedures for children who are identified as labor
13 trafficked or organ trafficked.

14 ACS created the Child Trafficking Database, which
15 is an electronic, cloud-based database in which ACS
16 child welfare and provider agency staff can complete
17 the mandated sex trafficking screening tools. ACS
18 also has a Child Trafficking Mailbox where any ACS or
19 provider agency staff can both report youth as having
20 been possibly trafficked and receive expert
21 assistance through one of our master level social
22 workers in our specialized office.

23 As reported in our 2023 Annual Report in 2013,
24 ACS and DYCD jointly identified and served 760 youth
25 who were sexually exploited or at high risk of

1 exploitation, of which 457 were identified through
2 various ACS mechanisms including our child
3 trafficking mailbox, the Child Trafficking Database,
4 our contracted counselors at the Children's Center,
5 our prevention service and FAP providers, our
6 contracted Safe Harbor grant funded service
7 providers, and through OTDA as a confirmed victim.
8 The Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy
9 provides direct and clinical, technical support for
10 professionals, consults with and supports Federal,
11 State, City and community-based agencies, assists in
12 law enforcement recovery operations and coordinates
13 the Safe Harbor Program for New York County, which
14 works to synchronize services for trafficked and at-
15 risk children both within and external to the child
16 welfare system.

18 We are also happy to offer a free tattoo removal
19 service for traffic or gang involved youth. ACS's
20 Missing Children's Outreach Unit provides guidance
21 and technical assistance to foster care provider
22 agencies when a child is absent without consent.

23 This unit also works with the National Center for
24 Missing and Exploited Children and ACS's
25 Investigative Consultants who are retired NYPD

1 detectives who support on the most challenging cases
2 to find AWOC youth. We also plan for youth's
3 physical, psychological and emotional safety, which
4 includes referring youth to trauma informed service
5 providers who are knowledgeable about trafficking.
6 ACS collaborates with a number of organizations, such
7 as Day One, the Hetrick Martin Institute, the Door,
8 Safe Horizon, Sanctuary for Families, and many more,
9 to provide much-needed services for these youth,
10 including: medical, mental health, counseling, career
11 and education, and legal services as well as support
12 groups, peer mentoring, and art therapy.

14 ACS is also creating an ACS Credible Messenger
15 Program, where adult former trafficked foster care
16 youth share their experiences with child welfare
17 involved youth to develop trafficking recruitment and
18 resource awareness. Further, ACS contracts with the
19 Children's Village Empower House to provide on-site
20 social workers at the ACS Children's Center to screen
21 and assess youth for trafficking indicators, assist
22 staff in identifying exploited youth, and provide
23 recommendations and referrals when needed.

24 They also conduct workshops for the youth at the
25 Children's Center on both trafficking awareness and

1 developing healthy relationships. We believe
2 children who have been trafficked or who are at a
3 risk for trafficking need a suite of comprehensive
4 services to not only help them to begin healing from
5 the mental and physical trauma of this experience,
6 but also set on a path towards a happy, healthy
7 adulthood.
8

9 In addition, healthy relationships are a key to
10 preventing and stopping trafficking, which is one of
11 the many reasons we have invested in Fair Futures
12 coaches for thousands of youth in foster care and
13 juvenile justice systems.

14 The Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and
15 Policy has trained over 47,000 people since its
16 launch in 2015. We work to ensure that staff in all
17 divisions and provider agencies know how to screen,
18 identify and serve youth who are trafficked. Every
19 new CPS receives training as part of the onboarding
20 process; at least one person from every foster care
21 and prevention provider has been trained; and every
22 ACS child-serving division has a trained liaison.

23 In 2024, we offered 87 trainings that included
24 12,645 attendees. Some people could be duplicates.
25 In addition to 750 people took our e-learn session on

1 how to use the screening tool. I'm including in my
2 testimony information about training sessions
3 currently underway.

4
5 In conclusion, ACS wants to thank all of our
6 partners, including our sister agencies, our provider
7 partners, and the City Council, for all that you do
8 each and every day to prevent youth from being
9 trafficked, and to identify and provide services to
10 those who have been exploited. Thank you.

11 DR. AMY WILKERSON: Good afternoon Chair Stevens,
12 Chair Salaam, Chair Louis, and members of the
13 Committee on Children and Youth, Public Safety and
14 Women and Gender Equity.

15 I am Dr. Amy Wilkerson, the Assistant
16 Commissioner for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services
17 at the New York City Department of Youth and
18 Community Services, DYCD. I am joined by Samantha
19 Dawkins, Senior Director of Runaway and Homeless
20 Youth Services.

21 On behalf of Commissioner Howard, thank you for
22 this opportunity to discuss DYCD's supports for young
23 victims of human trafficking. DYCD is grateful to
24 have worked with the City Council and other partners
25 to build a comprehensive continuum and ecosystem of

1 services for runaway and homeless youth ages 16
2 through 24. DYCD's Runaway and Homeless Youth
3 programs are designed to serve youth holistically,
4 enabling them to obtain the services needed to help
5 them thrive. The three types of services include
6 residential services, drop-in centers, and street
7 outreach. Combined, they reach more than 40,000
8 young people annually. RHY programs serve vulnerable
9 youth, some who have been victims of human
10 trafficking or who could be susceptible to
11 exploitation.
12

13 Residential services include Crisis Shelter
14 programs and Transitional Independent Living Support
15 programs. Residential programs for young people ages
16 16 through 20 offer a total of 753 beds, and for
17 homeless youth adults ages 21 to 24, there are four
18 programs with a total of 60 beds. We are incredibly
19 pleased that Mayor Adams recently announced the
20 expansion of our homeless young adult capacity by 100
21 more beds. We look forward to briefing the Council
22 on plans for the new beds in the time ahead.

23 At our eight DYCD-funded Drop-In Centers, youth
24 are provided with basic needs such as food and
25 clothing, and supportive services such as

1 recreational activities, health and educational
2 workshops, counseling, and referrals to additional
3 services, including shelter as needed. At least one
4 center in each borough is open 24 hours a day, every
5 day of the week. Street Outreach focuses on
6 locations in the cities where runaway and homeless
7 youth tend to congregate, offering on-the-spot
8 information and referrals.
9

10 Runaway and Homeless Youth Services providers
11 help young people to address a range of challenging
12 circumstances through counseling and referrals and
13 offering opportunities for youth to meet their life
14 goals while living in a safe and supportive
15 environment. All DYCD funded RHY programs are
16 required to report youth that have experienced
17 commercial sexual exploitation. Young people have an
18 opportunity to disclose abuse and exploitation at any
19 time. Key moments are during assessment at intake,
20 and during regular case management sessions at which
21 point the young person can receive a range of
22 services, including referrals to specialized mental
23 health services. Providers report incidences of
24 trafficking and exploitation to DYCD on a monthly
25 basis.

1 In Fiscal Year 2024, out of the 3,110 youth
2 served in residential programs and 2,824 who received
3 case management in Drop In Centers, 118 young people
4 disclosed that they were victims of sexual
5 exploitation. All RHY residential program staff
6 members must complete 40 hours of annual training.
7 The mandatory training includes information about
8 identifying and assisting youth who have been
9 sexually exploited. Other relevant topics include
10 safety and emergency procedures, HIV awareness and
11 education, case records, confidentiality, reportable
12 incidents, child abuse, and domestic violence.
13 Counselors in RHY programs work with youth to develop
14 Individualized Service Plans to outline short-term
15 and long-term goals.

16 They can achieve a range of supportive services
17 both directly and through referrals, which include
18 health and mental health services, counseling,
19 education and career support, substance abuse
20 prevention, violence intervention and prevention
21 counseling, and housing assistance. When
22 appropriate, staff members assist young people in
23 reuniting with their families or with moving to
24 transitional and longer-term programs.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 24

4 We thank the Council for their investment of
5 nearly \$1 million to support victims of human
6 trafficking. This allocation, a first for DYCD,
7 supports programs that offer counseling and
8 assistance with mental health, education,
9 immigration, housing and employment services to
10 victims of human trafficking. Our Intergovernmental
11 and Discretionary teams can update the Council on the
12 programs' impact later this year.

13 Thank you once again for the opportunity to
14 discuss how we are addressing the needs of young
15 people in the runaway and homeless youth programs who
16 may have been victims of trafficking. We look
17 forward to continuing to collaborate with the
18 Council, advocates, providers, and young people with
19 lived experiences to improve services for youth. I
20 am pleased to answer any questions you may have.
21 Thank you.

22 CARLOS ORTIZ: Good afternoon Chair Salaam, Chair
23 Stevens, Chair Louis and Deputy Speaker Ayala. I am
24 Deputy Chief Carlos Ortiz and I am the Commanding
25 Officer of the Special Victims Unit within the
Detective Bureau of the NYPD. I am joined today by
Director Kathleen Baer from the Special Victims Unit,

1 and my Lieutenant Joe Picarello from the Human
2 Trafficking Squad, and Director Josh Levin from the
3 Department's Legislative Affairs Unit. Thank you for
4 the opportunity to discuss the NYPD's commitment to
5 keeping the most vulnerable New Yorkers out of harm's
6 way and how to connect those who are being trafficked
7 with the resources they need.
8

9 Estimates put the number of human trafficking
10 victims worldwide at hundreds of thousands to
11 millions. In the United States alone, some estimates
12 report that one in seven children reported to the
13 National Center of Missing and Exploited Children
14 became victims of sexual trafficking. The Human
15 Trafficking Task Force, of which our Human
16 Trafficking Squad is part of, is responsible for
17 investigating both sex and labor trafficking.

18 Our mission is to conduct trauma informed, victim
19 centered and offender focused investigations. Our
20 targeted enforcement, often focused around hotels,
21 are based on leads from Human Trafficking Hotlines,
22 or referrals from Patrol, the Missing Persons Squad,
23 District Attorneys' Offices, the Department of
24 Education, as well as from the Administration for
25

1 Children's Services, along with the National Center
2 for Missing and Exploited Children.
3

4 We then set up encounters and, when there is
5 evidence of trafficking or that the victim is under
6 age, members of the Human Trafficking Squad will
7 conduct a rescue operation, utilizing trauma informed
8 training, to save these young people. Overall,
9 during the calendar year of 2024, we conducted over
10 300 operations, resulting in 191 arrests of pimps,
11 traffickers, and those who promote prostitution. We
12 rescued over 86 rescues of trafficking victims, 27 of
13 whom were minors.

14 I want to stress how challenging this can be, as
15 survivors are sometimes hesitant to accept help. But
16 I am happy to report, however, that we have many
17 stories of survivors who, over time, saw a lifeline,
18 and thanked us for saving them. One example
19 highlights the effectiveness of our work. A five-
20 week long missing child operation, which coincided
21 with the National Missing Children's Day on May 25th.
22 This operation, called "Operation We Will Find You
23 2", was a nationwide, US Marshal led operation that
24 included both the NYPD's Human Trafficking along with
25 the Missing Persons Squad.

1 This multi-state, multi-city operation focused on
2 what we call "critically missing" children and
3 covered all five boroughs. "Critically missing" means
4 children who are victims of trafficking, or who have
5 an aggravating risk factor or factors such as
6 physical, economic, or mental health issues. The
7 results of the operation were overwhelmingly
8 positive. In the span of five weeks, we helped,
9 located and recovered 41 critically missing children,
10 ten of whom had been the victim of trafficking.

11 This multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach
12 provides the best results to our survivors who are
13 transitioning out of a dangerous situation. We work
14 in conjunction with our advocate partners to ensure
15 that we provide the best, most trauma-informed
16 service to survivors.

17 As I mentioned earlier, exploited or trafficked
18 individuals are often deeply traumatized and trauma
19 bonded to their abusers and require significant
20 resources and counseling to break that cycle of this
21 abuse. For those reasons, and not only do we work
22 with advocates from international and national
23 recognized organizations who support survivors of
24 human trafficking, we also work with advocacy
25

1 organizations within the communities we serve to
2 provide the most complete and culturally sensitive
3 care to survivors.
4

5 By cultivating strong relationships with the
6 Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender Based
7 Violence, our Family Justice Centers that operate in
8 each borough, we have been able to better serve our
9 survivors by providing information and access to
10 services. Through these relationships, we've been
11 able to connect our survivors with support services,
12 such as medical care, mental health and psychiatric
13 counseling, housing, and legal representation for
14 immigration concerns, as well as education
15 opportunities, job readiness, job placement, as well
16 as the basic human needs of food and clothing.

17 We also provide support for our advocate partners
18 when they conduct direct, self-initiated engagement
19 with survivors. Our outreach efforts also go beyond
20 that one-on-one interventions. We are currently
21 working in conjunction with the MTA and The Mayor's
22 Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence on
23 an upcoming awareness campaign that will provide
24 information on how to access services and report
25 human trafficking, which will be seen by the millions

1 of people who ride subways and buses each day. This
2 month, we are also putting together a panel of
3 experts to speak at the I-95 Working Group Conference
4 in Tyson's Corner, Virginia. Experts from the NYPD
5 FBI, advocacy groups, the National Center of Missing
6 and Exploited Children, the District Attorneys'
7 Offices will all come together and discuss emerging
8 issues around sexual exploitation and human
9 trafficking along the I-95 corridor. We are always
10 looking to innovate and expand our reach into these
11 vulnerable communities to provide help and bring
12 traffickers to justice.

14 Now, turning to the bill being heard today.
15 Intro. 831 would require the Department to publish
16 information on our website relating to missing
17 persons. The Department supports the intent of this
18 bill and we look forward to working with the Council
19 to craft a version of the legislation that most
20 effectively captures the data and information
21 envisioned by the bill. The loss of innocence these
22 young people experience at the hands of traffickers
23 is immeasurable and should never be allowed to
24 happen. The Department is laser focused on
25 preventing and investigating these crimes and

1 ensuring each survivor has access to the resources
2 they need to begin the healing process.

3
4 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you
5 today, and it is our pleasure to answer any questions
6 you may have. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, thank you and thank
8 you all for being here today and I just want to start
9 off by saying uhm, it was last year that at a budget
10 hearing, I had a group of young people who actually
11 came in to testify and told me that I wasn't doing
12 enough about this. So, I just wanted to start off by
13 telling those young people, thank you for shedding a
14 light on this and that we do need to be doing more
15 and that I heard them and that's why we're here today
16 because it was them who was like, this is something
17 that's not happening. And then I've been a series at
18 the roundtables. We had foster care youth round
19 table, and then I had foster care youth telling me
20 this is happening and you need to do more. And so,
21 in my opening statement, I testified that you know
22 this is like the underbelly that no one wants to talk
23 about and so, it's in the shadows and because it's in
24 the shadows, it's festering.

1 And so, today, we're bringing light to it because
2
3 this is about us coming up with solutions and moving
4 forward and letting those young people know that
5 we're here and we are really putting forth things
6 together to make sure that we're keeping them safe.

7 And so, my first question is towards ACS but
8 honestly would love to hear everyone to kind of chime
9 in on this because it's very relevant and it's things
10 that happening like even in my district today I had a
11 raid. And so, my first question is like, how do -
12 with the executive orders from the federal
13 administration resulting in like deportations and all
14 these things and we're going to have a lot of youth
15 who might be abandoned. This is really actually to
16 me, is going to help fester things like sex
17 trafficking and sex work for young people because
18 they're going to be hiding. They're not going to
19 come for services, and so for me, my question is how
20 do we prepare for this moment to make sure that we're
21 keeping young people safe and what protocols do we
22 have in place? And are all of these agencies working
23 together to make sure especially with what's
24 happening and what we're seeing in our city
25 currently, how do we prepare for this moment?

1
2 INA MENDEZ: So thank you for your question. ACS
3 has a very coordinated response. When we have any
4 indication that a child has been abused and
5 neglected, we have the division of child protection,
6 they do investigations and based on them. While I
7 don't serve in that division, they have a series of
8 protocols they follow to do an assessment to make
9 sure children are safe, our first goal is to keep
10 children with their families, providing additional
11 services if necessary and if needed they need to come
12 into foster care, we look for kin and if not, we find
13 a traditional foster care placement.

14 With that being said, we continue to provide you
15 know comprehensive services that are responsive to
16 their needs and trying to keep all children safe. As
17 we think about trafficking, we'll continue our
18 partnerships with DYCD. ACS is the Administrator for
19 the Safe Harbor Grant for New York County, so we'll
20 continue to do those services with you know a
21 heightened awareness that the dynamics of the city
22 and many different things are happening currently.
23 We'll try to be as responsive as possible.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Does anybody else want to
25 chime into like how we're preparing for this moment?

1 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think it's thinking outside the
2 box. I think it's looking at different ways just
3 like Kathllen uh, along with the Mayor's Office, the
4 MTA which millions of people are going to see that.
5 So, I think it's realizing that we have to be out
6 there and getting this information to these kids and
7 we have to go to places that they're going to be.
8 They're going to be in certain places and we have to
9 make sure that those are locations that the posters
10 are up. Those are locations that we're getting that
11 information up and I think that working with our
12 partners I think figuring out amongst us, okay where
13 are you located at? What can we do to help you? Is
14 there something that we can put out there,
15 information that you need? And I think if we all
16 work together and I think we all realize that we are
17 all working for the same person, I think that's going
18 to be a huge benefit but again, like you said, you
19 know in the times that we're in now, we have to think
20 outside the box. You can't keep going to the same
21 well realizing that because of the new - what's
22 happening now, you have to think outside and I really
23 like the MTA issue because that's something that
24
25

1 millions of kids, millions of people do travel within
2 the subway system.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want to just go and
5 say like you know obviously, I think ACS you guys
6 already have like protocols in place but I think we
7 are at a place where we need to be thinking outside
8 the box right because you might - the kids might not
9 be coming in to go to foster care and thinking about
10 you know, they might drop in the HRY because they're
11 at a drop-in center and things like that just because
12 it's scary at this moment. I've had parents even
13 today call in my office saying they are not taking
14 their kids to school because they're scared of what's
15 going to happen. And again, this is something that's
16 going to fester and allow this to thrive because
17 they're going to be living in the shadows because
18 they don't want intervention because they think you
19 know they're at risk.

20 So, I really think that this is a moment that we
21 need to be coming together to come up with a real
22 plan and strategy on how to get the young people who
23 don't necessarily who can you know have placement or
24 things like that but who are hiding right and who are
25 not getting serves and not seeking those things. And

1 so, yeah, we do need to go to places that we normally
2 don't go and figure those things out and so, I think
3 it's going to be real important. And so, I hope that
4 from this hearing, we can like start working towards
5 a more comprehensive plan with all the agencies here.
6

7 I would like to also acknowledge that we have
8 Vernikov, Council Member Joseph, Cabàn, Ariola on
9 Zoom and Rivera who have also joined us.

10 Uhm, this question is for ACS. How does the
11 child trafficking email box ensure confidentiality
12 and responsiveness for ACS staff contact agencies and
13 providers reporting potential trafficking cases?

14 INA MENDEZ: Thank you for that question. The
15 child trafficking mailbox was established so that as
16 either through a screening or through some source of
17 information, provider staff or ACS staff can send an
18 email to the office of Child Trafficking and
19 Prevention to ensure that they get the expert
20 consultation information about services and follow
21 up. That information, if it's shared by a case
22 planner is then, they are given the information about
23 next steps.

24 In 2022, we had 117 cases reported to the
25 mailbox. Overall, in 2022, there were 381 ACS cases.

1 In 2023, there 124 cases out of a total 457. So, a
2 lot of the cases are reported either through the
3 mailbox or through our database or through some other
4 mechanism but the mailbox is a good way for people to
5 keep, share information. And so, that is how the
6 information is shared.
7

8 ACS is able to speak to providers, so I don't you
9 know regarding the confidentiality, it might not be
10 shared obviously beyond the case planner but it is
11 used to help inform their next steps.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, uhm so everyone knows
13 I worked in youth development for over 20 years and I
14 definitely had cases where young people - it wasn't
15 so clear to them that they were being sex trafficked
16 but from conversations you're able to uncover, that
17 that's what was happening. And so, what trainings
18 are you providing staff around being able to identify
19 and recognize signs of sex trafficking? Because
20 sometimes like I said, I have had a number of young
21 people who through conversations they're like, "What
22 are you talking about, that's my boyfriend or he
23 loves me? And you're like, like in my head I'm like
24 no, he's your pimp. Like that's not what's
25 happening.

1 So, I just want to know, how are we preparing the
2 staff to even recognize that and so I ask that
3 question to not only ACS but DYCD as well.

4 INA MENDEZ: So thank you for that question. The
5 Office of Child Trafficking prevention in policy in
6 2024 hosted 87 different trainings for over 12,000
7 seats, attended seats. So sometimes people may go
8 more than once but those trainings talk about, what
9 is child trafficking? What are the red flags? How
10 best to screen follow up services? We also have an
11 e-learn and a training on the screening itself, so
12 the screening is mandatory. It is expected to be
13 done at the beginning of a case, every six months and
14 if a child is absent without consent. And in that
15 training, it talks about the red flags. It talks
16 about how to uncover. You're absolutely right,
17 children are not - a young person is not necessarily
18 going to say they're being trafficked or even know
19 they're being trafficked but based on the training
20 and the information that the attendees get, they're
21 more knowledgeable and then they can pick up on those
22 red flags. And once a child - if there's an
23 indicator, there's an additional; I won't bore you
24 with all the details but there's another training but
25

1 from there, they can get information on the
2 appropriate services, how best to respond to those
3 needs and then we provide follow up and tracking
4 afterwards to make sure those services are being
5 provided and just to kind of see how the child is
6 doing.
7

8 So, they could be trafficked, which is the
9 federal indicator, which means they've been
10 trafficked or we track people at risk. So, that
11 means maybe they weren't trafficked and maybe haven't
12 disclosed but we continue to provide services and
13 supports.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And what do some of those
15 services look like?

16 INA MENDEZ: So, I'll have my Associate
17 Commissioner speak about those.

18 SABINE CHERY: Hello, so some of those services
19 are, we have mitigating trauma through drama. We do
20 group work for our young people. We have our
21 licensed social workers also do those groups where we
22 have the evidence based models. We have another unit
23 called the Residential Care Permanency Plan meaning
24 that does one on one engagement with some of the
25 young people that we flag or have disclosed. So, we

1 continue to do those engagements because we know at
2 first they're not going to disclose. So, we have to
3 build that trust. So, we have a team of lived
4 experienced staff that work at ACS that actually are
5 working with some of our young people in these
6 settings as well. So, it's ongoing services as we
7 identify them.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, thank you and I guess
10 the same question to DYCD. How are you preparing
11 staff to recognize when there's trauma going on?

12 AMY WILKERSON: Our provider organizations are
13 expected to participate in trainings that help them
14 to identify and support youth that have been exposed
15 or victims of trafficking and those trainings can be
16 received from a variety of places. Some of the
17 trainings that they received are through ACS as well
18 as through OCFS. Other provider may select trainings
19 through entities that are more congruent to their
20 organizations culture but it's all the same,
21 identifying, supporting, working with youth,
22 connecting them to resources and referrals is the
23 foundation of the trainings that they receive.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And so do ACS and DYCD, do
25 you do joint training especially with like the

1 Homeless Runaway Youth Staff and things like that are
2 still connected, especially around sex trafficking?
3 I know you said some of them go but is there times
4 where there's cross collaboration, which is like more
5 mandatory and not-

7 AMY WILKERSON: Well, ACS offers the trainings
8 widely and our staff are able to participate in them.
9 I wouldn't call it a joint training but ACS provides
10 the trainings and they are able to participate.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How does the city ensure
12 that trauma informed care is targeted in services for
13 commercially and sexually exported youth in this
14 space here?

15 INA MENDEZ: Sorry, so the city as I mentioned,
16 its required that all children that come to our
17 attention, whether it's through the division of Child
18 Protection, prevention or foster care or any other of
19 our other child serving organizations that we do an
20 initial screening and that is done periodically.
21 That is required and then if there are indicators or
22 they've been trafficked, there's a set of follow up
23 that is necessary.

24 Over the years, the last two or three years,
25 we've increased the number of trainings that we

1 provide so that we can reach, uhm, we do live
2 trainings, virtual trainings, we have an e-learn as I
3 mentioned so that is how we make sure that the
4 information about the expectation. We also have a
5 policy that outlines the regulations and the next
6 steps in terms of what someone is supposed to follow.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: ACS Office of Child
9 Trafficking Prevention and Policy has introduced
10 numerous initiatives, including anti-trafficking
11 counseling, credible messenger programs and the NYCD
12 Child Tattoo Aridification Program. How does OCTPP
13 evaluates the effectiveness of its anti-trafficking
14 counseling and group work initiative in supporting
15 youth and reducing their risk of exploitation?

16 INA MENDEZ: I'm sorry, could you say the last
17 part of the question? I'm sorry.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Basically, I'm just asking
19 how are you guys evaluating the success of these
20 programs and how are you tracking the work around
21 that you're doing as far as the anti-trafficking
22 counseling and group work initiative that you guys
23 have been doing?

24 INA MENDEZ: Thank you. So, we have a system
25 that we have in place. So, as I mentioned, we get

1 information about who is trafficked or at risk. We
2 do follow up every three months where we go into our
3 system. A record called connections and we'll follow
4 up to see the progress the child has made. We'll
5 also follow up with the Case Planning organization,
6 whether it's the foster care agency, the preventive
7 agency to get an update. It has to be mentioned; we
8 have a team that will also follow up with youth in
9 residential care settings and/or in foster placement
10 to just get an update on how they're doing if we need
11 to provide additional services. We also have a
12 missing children's outreach unit that if children go
13 a walk, they will help and assist the agency in
14 following the protocol. We have investigative
15 consultants who also will help partner with the NYPD
16 to help look for youth that have been AWOC and upon
17 return another screening is issued so that we can get
18 an assessment if there are any new flags to follow up
19 on or anything new to report.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What has been the impact of
22 NYPD Child Tattoo Aridification projects since its
23 launch and how many young people have benefitted from
24 the pro bono medical services to remove branding
25 marks?

1
2 INA MENDEZ: We're really excited to have the
3 Tattoo Aridification Project. It started in 2018.
4 To date, 36 youth have been referred and that is an
5 ACS partnership with medical providers to help remove
6 tattoos. Because the medical services are
7 confidential, we don't have all of the information
8 about the outcome but we are very pleased and we find
9 this program valuable because it really allows a
10 youth to get the medical treatment they need to get
11 the tattoo removed and this is part of the healing
12 process as they continue to recover.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, how are adult mentors
14 with lived experience trafficking selected, trained
15 and supported with the Credible Messengers program?

16 SABINE CHERY: Our credible messengers - oh, it's
17 off?

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh no, it's on.

19 SABINE CHERY: So, a couple of our credible
20 messengers are young people that we've worked with
21 while they were in care and we need to ensure that
22 young people with ongoing trauma, that they have to
23 unpack and go through but we work with them closely
24 in providing their stories and seeing where they're
25 at for them to be the credible messengers.

1 Uhm, we have had about six credible messengers
2 that's worked with us throughout the time that we
3 created the program. So, what was the other part of
4 your question because you wanted to -

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, I was just asking like,
7 how are they selected, trained, and supported?

8 SABINE CHERY: So, they receive the same
9 trainings that our office provides, especially the
10 red flags because these are the young people that
11 know what the red flags are because they're walking
12 in the same shoes that the young person is that
13 they're working with.

14 So, they provide that training. They provide
15 their testimony. They walk with them through those
16 stories. We provide them an overview of some of the
17 policies that we have at ACS, especially the AWOC
18 policies and just really understanding where they're
19 at as they share their information with the young
20 person and helping them to go through the training
21 that they're in.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And what supports are they
23 given? I mean because that's you know obviously a
24 lot of people want to help but it still can be
25 traumatic to relive that again as you're helping

1 someone else. So, what supports are they given as
2 they're going through this as well?
3

4 SABINE CHERY: They are continuing to get their
5 own trauma informed focused therapy. So, without
6 disclosing too much of their personal lives but they
7 are still in therapy and working through their own
8 issues as well. Because this is something that's an
9 ongoing healing.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm.

11 SABINE CHERY: So, we recognize that. They do
12 roundtable healings with our young people when we do
13 groups. I mentioned trauma, mitigating trauma can
14 drama, so it's a lot of like art therapy as well. As
15 well as really acting out and helping them write out
16 their stories to be able to act it out, so that
17 they're really seeing what's going on. So, those are
18 some of the healing processes that they go through.
19 We also partner and work with day one on some of the
20 things that the young people are going through to
21 help them as well as the credible messenger work
22 through those programs.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What factors does ACS
24 believe contribute to the increased number of
25 identifying sexual exploited youth between 2022 and

1
2 2023 and how is ACS reporting responding to those
3 trends?

4 INA MENDEZ: We believe that with our increased
5 trainings that we've been offering in 2022 and 2023,
6 we have more staff, whether it's ACS staff or the
7 provider staff that are more comfortable, more
8 informed, more knowledgeable about sex trafficking.
9 How to identify it. How to unpack it. How to
10 discuss it.

11 So, as a result of those increased trainings, we
12 think that more youth have been identified because
13 more people are using the screening tools and they're
14 better equipped to do the work. We don't actually
15 know of these numbers are representing more kids than
16 if you know we look back ten years ago but we have
17 the data. We continue to respond to it but we do
18 think that with the expanded knowledge base and also
19 knowing how to apply that knowledge, they're able to
20 recognize the red flags as used that might be at risk
21 or actually trafficked.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Local Law 41 of 2016
23 requires DYCD and ACS to report on the number of
24 sexual exploited youth in contact with those
25 agencies. In 2023, reports identified 760 such

1 youth. How many of those young people have
2 successfully been connected to safe housing, medical
3 care, mental health services and other essential
4 supports?
5

6 INA MENDEZ: So as part of foster care services,
7 one of the pillars is to make sure that all children
8 in care have a case plan and a service plan and that
9 service plan needs to be responsive to their needs as
10 it pertains to medical, mental health, education and
11 social, other social issues. It's the same for youth
12 that are trafficked or at risk. However,
13 additionally, we would make sure that they have
14 trauma informed services that are designed to help
15 support them as they begin to heal with those
16 particular - as a result of being trafficked or at
17 risk for trafficking.

18 Additionally, older youth across the continuum
19 but including youth that are trafficked or at risk
20 for trafficking, have access to housing services. We
21 have an office of housing that helps connect older
22 youth to various housing programs. We have a
23 partnership with an organization called Anthos Home
24 which helps doing housing navigation so that they can
25 find viable housing within the community. We have

1 our Fair Futures program that gives everyone in
2 foster care a coach.

3
4 Two years ago, that program was expanded, so even
5 as they leave care, they can have the coach up to 26.
6 We have a college choice program for youth interested
7 in going to college. Whether it's a two or four year
8 degree. For youth that sign themselves out of care
9 at 18, we have supervision to 21 unit that continues
10 to track those youth. They check in with them and if
11 needed, if they come back into care, we can help make
12 that transition back into care.

13 So, I say that all to say that we continue to
14 support youth who are trafficked or at risk for
15 trafficking with all of these services but they also
16 get the more tailored responsive services to sex
17 trafficking and/or at risk.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What metrics or systems are
19 in place to track the evaluation and long term
20 outcomes and wellbeing of youth? Because you know
21 especially folks who are older, and you know it's
22 interesting because sometimes I feel we have
23 dualities here where obviously we often talk about
24 like sex work is work and all those things but a lot
25 of times it starts out because they were sex

1 trafficked when they young. And so, how are we
2 tracking like keeping people out of that and the
3 success of the work and things that you guys have in
4 place?
5

6 INA MENDEZ: So, I think we're going to have to
7 continue to refine that tracking and develop outcomes
8 in how we measure. We do have a system in place and
9 I'll Sabine talk about that more generally.

10 SABINE CHERY: We proactively created a tracking
11 mechanism about three years ago where we quarterly
12 check in to see how young people are doing. So, we
13 are listing to all our young people that we have come
14 across whether it's through screening the mailbox
15 etc., and our team, the residential care permanency
16 planning meeting unit, as well as Office of Child
17 Traffic and Prevention and Policy. Quarterly we go
18 back and we look to see what's happening with the
19 young people and even talking with those young people
20 if they're still reachable, if we're able to talk to
21 them.

22 So, we do that follow up and then see what
23 additional services are required and then we work
24 with the planning agency because as you know, foster
25

1 care agencies that we contract with provide direct
2 service to our young people.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How does ACS ensure the
5 safety of foster care children from potential
6 trafficking risks posed by individuals residing in or
7 entering foster homes? Particularly those who are
8 not required to undergo background checks.

9 INA MENDEZ: So, we work very closely with our
10 foster care agencies to make sure that as they are
11 recruiting foster parents, they're following all of
12 the state regulations as it pertains to
13 certifications. We are aware of a very public case a
14 few years back where there were concerns that while
15 you know someone connected to the home involved in
16 sex trafficking. We have not heard of any other
17 cases to that magnitude since then at all but we do
18 provide a lot of training and information on how to
19 do foster parent recruitment and certification.
20 We've talked as a response to that particular case.
21 We did have conversations with providers to make sure
22 as they're doing the home assessment and the self-
23 assessment, they're asking additional questions.

24 If someone says they're divorced, can I see the
25 divorce decree? Those types of things to make sure

1 that people that are you know connected to the home
2 are safe as well and then you know obviously through
3 regular onsite case, home casework contacts, doing
4 home visits, speaking to the youth, getting a sense
5 of how the home adjustment is going to make sure
6 children are remaining safe.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, this is one of the
9 things that came up when I had the foster care youth
10 roundtable where they were saying that this is
11 something that needs to be revamped because they had
12 experience where they either didn't feel safe or
13 there was a risk of being sex trafficked, so I think
14 that we do need to like kind of dig deep here around
15 this issue around like other people who are in the
16 home who are staying there you know temporarily and
17 all the things because this was something that you
18 did bring up as a red flag of like, they feel like
19 this isn't being taken serious.

20 So, I know there's only one case that was public
21 but sometimes when you talk to the young people, it's
22 not just one case. That usually is the light is
23 being shined of other things that's going on and this
24 is something they did bring up.
25

1
2 INA MENDEZ: Thank you for sharing. We'll
3 definitely take that back.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What safeguards are in
5 place to monitor - uhm, wait no. There are known
6 hotspots such as areas outside ACS Children Center
7 where traffickers are known to target vulnerable
8 young people. Are NYPD and ACS working together to
9 patrol these areas to ensure the safety of young
10 people? This is another thing that I heard like
11 outside the children centers. It is a known
12 recruiting area for pimps and folks who do sex
13 trafficking to stand outside, look at the bags that
14 they have, to recruit young people because they know
15 that they're vulnerable. They're outside, they're
16 like, "oh they have garbage bags so we know we're
17 going to target them." How are you guys working
18 together to make sure this area outside is safe?

19 INA MENDEZ: It is my understanding and I don't -
20 I work very closely with the Children Center but I do
21 know that they are in frequent conversations with the
22 precinct and they do work a lot to keep youth safe,
23 because we know sometimes the youth like to hang out
24 outside the Children Center. They, you know
25 teenagers want to be out and about. So, I do know

1 they do have a good relationship. I can't speak to
2 details. Maybe NYPD might be able to speak more but
3 you know, thank you for bringing that to our
4 attention and we will continue to work with the NYPD
5 to make sure children are safe. There are a lot of
6 activities that have been embedded in children's head
7 or programming.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want to also point
10 out, it's not just the Children Center. So what I'm
11 hearing from young people in conversations that that
12 is one of the known spots and not just from children
13 but providers that they're outside children centers.
14 They're often outside of group homes. Like, they
15 know where to go and they're going there and doing
16 recruitment and talking to the young people. And so,
17 I'm a little disappointed that there's not like a
18 concrete plan about how we are making sure that young
19 people who are being targeted in these areas are -
20 we're able to keep them safe and really want to hear
21 what does this coordination look like between ACS and
22 NYPD? Because this is something that obviously I'm
23 hearing, so we can't pretend like this is not
24 happening.

25 WINETTE SAUNDERS: I can swear in.

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 54

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, do you affirm to tell the
truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

WINETTE SAUNDERS: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

WINETTE SAUNDERS: So, good afternoon Chairs.
Thank you so much. Hello Chair Ayala. My name is
Winette Saunders. I'm the First Deputy Commissioner
at ACS and I provide oversight at the Children
Center. We work very closely with Precinct 13 and 17
to discuss all areas of -

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We got you a chair.

WINETTE SAUNDERS: Oh, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Thank you
Sergeant of Arms, we appreciate that.

WINETTE SAUNDERS: Thank you sir. So, we work
very closely with Precinct 13 and 17 and Chief Comodo
to really address any needs that we have at the
Children Center, whether it be crime, whether it be
sex trafficking, we report directly to them. We meet
monthly. Our IC's talk to them very frequently on
cases that need to be spoken to before that timeframe
comes up for our next meeting. We have very close
relationships with our NCO officers, Phillip and
Randon. We are very close, in very close contact on

1 a number of different issues including sex
2 trafficking.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And what about the foster
5 care placements because I'm hearing that that's a hot
6 spot and they're out there.

7 SABINE CHERY: So, when we hear about those hot
8 spots because we do cover all our residential care
9 providers and we get that feedback. We work closely
10 with our investigative consultants who go back to
11 their head, who is Mr. Fay and we contact NYPD in
12 those areas. The different precincts in those
13 boroughs and then they do the patrol and go out,
14 especially where our young girls group homes are that
15 are very prone to traffickers. We have the precincts
16 in the Bronx that are always patrolling and working
17 closely with the provider agencies and they are
18 there.

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah and just to let you know
20 under Special Victims what we do also is to help out
21 patrol, we do roll call trainings. Kathleen Baer is
22 in charge of that in regards to different things that
23 they should be looking while they're out there.

24 So, we also pick different situations. You know
25 let's say for instance, it's a main hospital where

1 let's say they may have a lot of sexual violence
2 victims at you know, survivors that go to the
3 hospital, we would train that patrol like you know at
4 midnight say, "hey, when you go the hospital, these
5 are things you got to look for." So, a lot of things
6 that we do in special victims is we help our partners
7 in patrol say, "hey you do have you know let's say a
8 shelter or a foster area in the area, these are
9 things you should be looking for while you're out
10 there." You know in coordination with everything
11 else. So, we do speak to our counterparts and kind
12 of give them ideas that we have through our human
13 trafficking unit and things like that, so.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I know we spoke about
16 how we are helping staff identify is how are we also
17 supporting young people and identifying uhm, like
18 trends and giving them also the information. What
19 are we doing to prepare them, especially because we
20 know a lot of times these places are being targeted.
21 People are looking for vulnerable young people. What
22 are we doing as far as supporting young people on
23 having them prepare to be able to identify? Not only
24 when it's happening to them but when their friends -
25 what are we doing around that?

1
2 SABINE CHERY: We do some prevention work.
3 There's videos that we use. It might be a little
4 animated but we still use it for the young people
5 called, "I'm A Little Red." We do discussion groups
6 with the young people around that. We have flyers.
7 We do roundtables. We operate a youth leadership
8 council where we have our young people come in and
9 talk and just talk and find out what's happening. We
10 look at the red flags because we've created red flags
11 for our young people as well.

12 So, those are some of the things that we're doing
13 as far as prevention work. Having posters, having
14 them do a contest where they can share and disclose
15 their talent but yet and still also expressing what
16 they are going through or they are seeing. Whether
17 they are at risk or trafficked. So, we do that as
18 well with our young people.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I have more questions for
20 you guys but I am going to pass it over to some of my
21 Co-Chairs now and then I'll come back to ACS and
22 DYCD. So, I'll pass it over to Council Member Salaam
23 at this time.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. I'd like begin
25 with a few questions about NYPD investigations and

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 58

4 enforcement relating to human trafficking. This is
5 around how many human trafficking investigations took
6 place, what did the NYPD conduct last year? I wanted
7 to know did this compare to previous years?

8 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Good afternoon Council Member.
9 I'm Lieutenant Joseph Picarello of the NYPD Child
10 Exploitation Human Trafficking Taskforce. So, the
11 human trafficking unit is comprised of approximately
12 24 detectives at the time. This past year alone,
13 we've ran 337 investigations, effected 191 arrests
14 and received approximately 334 law enforcement
15 referrals. As far as the number of past years, I do
16 not have that data with me at this time but I'd be
17 happy to follow up with you and provide that to you
18 as far as you know the last three years.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I definitely would like to
20 see that. To what extent is the NYPD identifying
21 young victims of human trafficking in the course of
22 its investigations? I mean, does the Department also
23 have any data available on youth identified as
24 potential human trafficking victims?

25 JOSEPH PICARELLO: As far as identifying minor
sex trafficking victims last year alone, we recovered
27 minor trafficking victims. As far as you know

1 these investigations are very complicated, so as you
2 get a law enforcement referral or respond to a
3 hospital and although we suspected sometimes you know
4 the individual is reluctant to identify as a
5 trafficking victim. As far as capturing that data
6 and saying specifically this is s a minor sex
7 trafficking victim, other than the data that I'm
8 providing you today with the 27 minors that were
9 recovered, I don't have anything else to provide.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Of human trafficking
12 investigations, how many relate to allegations of sex
13 trafficking and uhm how many relate to labor
14 trafficking? You know like is there a difference
15 also in the investigation of sex trafficking versus
16 labor trafficking and is the department seeking
17 differences in types of victims subject to
18 trafficking versus labor trafficking?

19 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Yeah, so it's a great
20 question. Labor trafficking is something that we
21 don't see a lot of. You know during my last seven
22 and a half years in this unit, I haven't seen many
23 labor trafficking cases and investigated many. We
24 have had them but it's not as common as sex
25 trafficking.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Gotcha. How does a typical
3 human trafficking investigation unfold? You know
4 like what units within the department are involved
5 with the investigations and enforcement related to
6 human trafficking and to what extent does the
7 department rely on enforcement against individuals
8 engaged in sex work as a strategy for identifying and
9 addressing human trafficking?

10 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Okay, so there's a - I think
11 there's a couple questions that you asked in there
12 but we get referrals in many ways. We get them from
13 different units within the NYPD. We get them from
14 patrol. We get them from hospital referrals. We get
15 them from hotline tips. As we receive these
16 obviously, we take action on them. However, we also
17 take a very proactive approach in trying to identify
18 specifically minors here in the city that are
19 trafficking victims but like I said, we're getting
20 these referrals from you know DA's offices,
21 hospitals, NYCMEC (SP?). We're getting them from all
22 over.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I know that Deputy Chief had
24 addressed this in his opening statement regarding how
25 many arrests were trafficking related crimes were

1 made by the NYPD last year. What I want to know is
2 specifically is for what specific offenses are
3 individuals charged with when suspected of directing
4 human trafficking and are there any trends in arrests
5 occurring during recent years?
6

7 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Yeah so uhm, generally
8 speaking obviously we're the human trafficking unit.
9 Our main goal is to investigate sex trafficking.
10 However, you get a bunch of different crimes that are
11 linked into this. You could get murders, for
12 instance, burglaries, grand larcenies. So, it's
13 really a mixture of everything.

14 As far as trends go, you know I wouldn't say that
15 there's a specific trend. I would say that a
16 trafficker is primarily a trafficker but they're also
17 engaged in a lot of different activities as well.
18 This isn't their only criminal business so to speak.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Gotcha. So, I want to know
20 what proactive steps does the NYPD take to identify
21 human trafficking. For instance, you know is there a
22 strategy for identifying traffickers that operate
23 online through social media platforms to target and
24 exploit youth.
25

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 62

1
2 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Yeah, so we do our best. You
3 know just to go back for a second. The human
4 trafficking unit is comprised of three different
5 squads but all of our investigators do our best at
6 trying to open up self-initiated cases, review social
7 media like you said. We have specific identifiers
8 that we look for. Not only that, but we also take a
9 proactive approach with other investigative tools
10 available to us to identify our trafficking victims
11 as well as our traffickers.

12 You know I could speak for myself and the other
13 supervisors on the squad. On our downtime, we're
14 going through department complaint reports trying to
15 look for specific identifiers which are common crimes
16 committed by traffickers.

17 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: In 2017 the NYPD created a
18 dedicated sex trafficking hotline for victims and
19 concerned individuals who want to report trafficking.
20 What I want to know is, how many calls did the
21 hotline receive in 2024? How many individuals were
22 under 18? And what training do the officers who
23 staff the hotline receive?

24 CARLOS ORTIZ: So, when I took over in 2022, they
25 actually gave special victims human trafficking used

1 to be part of Vice and they split up because they
2 figured there's more a correlation with special
3 victims than with Vice.
4

5 Now I have a 24 hour hotline so I merged the
6 calls together. It's a 24 hour hotline that have
7 detectives handling those calls, so along with calls
8 that may come in because there's a call that may come
9 in and like we say, a lot of our survivors may not
10 say, "I'm being sex trafficked." They may say a
11 couple things and that detective on the other line
12 now has to kind of like you said read into it and
13 say, "okay, well, you know this may be better off
14 going to the sex trafficking unit." And we reach out
15 to them and we give them the cases. I don't have the
16 exact numbers because the hotline, some of those
17 calls at the beginning are not labeled as sex
18 trafficking until let's say one of my adult squad
19 special victims investigators speaks to the person
20 and go, wait a minute, oh this is a human trafficking
21 and now they work in coordination with human
22 trafficking because they are part of my unit, which
23 again was the best thing that happened because now
24 they can all work together. And again, I'm big on
25

1 not retraumatizing that survivor with having to tell
2 her story twice.

3
4 So, this way she's told the story to let's say
5 that special victims investigator that first time and
6 now that's a continuation of pretty much not getting
7 the other; I guess by choice of words, yeah the
8 troops involved. So, that hotline is 24 hours a day.
9 Like I said, I have at least two or three detectives
10 on each tour that kind of triage all those calls.
11 Those calls come from everywhere. Those calls come
12 from the hospital, they come from ACS, they come from
13 mandated reporters, they come from everywhere and at
14 that point, they kind of parse it out to let's say
15 Brooklyn child, Brooklyn adults. It could be a
16 transit case and then it also does like human
17 trafficking.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Is there any specific
19 training that they receive in order to work on those
20 lines?

21 CARLOS ORTIZ: Within special victims, I have
22 specific training when it comes to trauma informed.
23 When it comes to interaction, all my detectives go
24 through every year at three, a refresher course and
25 within those refresher courses I bring in ACS. I

1 bring in ADA's. I bring in different units in order
2
3 to speak to certain things, along with my season
4
5 detectives, anybody that comes into that unit also
6
7 gets trained also, mentored by other officers where
8
9 the investigators are.

7 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: You mentioned the bill,
8
9 Intro. 831 that requires the NYPD to report on
10
11 missing persons. Does the NYPD currently collect
12
13 data on the number of missing persons reported
14
15 citywide and do certain communities in New York City
16
17 experience higher rates of missing persons? And if
18
19 so, where and does the NYPD patrol efforts or other
20
21 enforcement strategies take into account trends
22
23 related to missing persons occurring in any given
24
25 community?

17 JOSH LEVIN: Chair, Josh Levin, nice to see you
18
19 again. How are you?

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Pretty good.

20 JOSH LEVIN: Yes, we do track missing persons
21
22 numbers. The bill, for example, goes back about ten
23
24 years broken down by precinct, by gender, by race and
25
I have some of those numbers. We do track those
things. I would be leery to give any type of
conclusion about trends right? Because there's a lot

1 of information, 70 plus precincts, 10 years' worth of
2 data but what I am comfortable saying is for the
3 precincts that I spot check, we're seeing some things
4 for trends. Like for example, the breakdown is
5 around you know I would say 60, 70 percent male and
6 the rest female. There's always some unknowns or not
7 identified.
8

9 So, we see that. Another thing that I thought
10 was interesting is again, missing persons is you know
11 I know we're doing it in context stuff the human
12 trafficking but they overlap but they're not 100
13 percent the same, right because some people may be
14 reported missing and you know they were just hanging
15 out with friends or something or it could be an
16 elderly person, right?

17 Okay, so we see - I'm seeing in this data that I
18 broke it up into up to 20 years old and then 20 years
19 old and after because there's a lot of data. I'm
20 seeing disproportionately more people over 21 being
21 reported missing than 20 and below because again,
22 missing person is different. You see a lot of
23 numbers skewed upward. When I'm going through these
24 numbers, I'm seeing 80-year-olds. I'm seeing 77-
25 year-olds. You know my father has some issues, so I

1 understand where that comes from. So, that's the
2 type of stuff I think you're seeing there.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Interesting. And this is
5 going to be my last one for now. In 2017, it was
6 announced that the NYPD was hiring an additional 25
7 detectives to investigate sex trafficking cases and
8 the department, which strengthened training to help
9 officers identify warning signals for trafficking.
10 What specific efforts has the department recently
11 made to strengthen the city's response to human
12 trafficking and what is the current number of NYPD
13 detectives and other staff dedicated to working on
14 human trafficking investigations?

15 CARLOS ORTIZ: Excellent question Chair and I
16 think that's one of the reasons why they combined
17 human trafficking with special victims because along
18 with I forgot what was the number? I told the
19 detectives. Yeah, along with the 24 detectives, we
20 also have over 300 detectives in special victims.
21 So, it's kind of like a common coordination with
22 everybody working on it. Whatever Jo needs, he's
23 part of the family for a better choice of words.
24 Whatever he needs, he's going to get so my detectives
25 also within those adult squads and the child squads

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 68

4 are also helping the human trafficking unit and I
5 think that again, that I go back to that was kind of
6 the best thing that happened in 2022 when they
7 actually combined them under special victims.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I would like to acknowledge
10 Council Member Williams who is on Zoom and I am going
11 to pass it to Chair Louis.

12 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you Chair Stevens. I
13 just want to quickly go back to a question NYPD, if
14 could just elaborate a little bit. I wanted to know,
15 how does NYPD collaborate with ACS and DYCD to
16 address trafficking cases comprehensively? And I ask
17 this question because according to a report in 2023,
18 760 youth served by ACS and DYCD were identified as
19 sexually exploited or at risk and an increase from
20 that was from 703 in 2022. And then, in your
21 testimony just now, your response, I heard 330
22 investigations, 191 reports - arrests, sorry. So, I
23 just wanted to know like how are you all
24 collaborating regarding all of those numbers?

25 CARLOS ORTIZ: Just to kind of clarify that a
little bit. The 330 said, actually came over as sex
trafficking complaints. We do get other complaints

1 within that 24 hotline that come over as just you
2 know a regular sex crime, not human trafficking, so
3 that specifically numbers. So, we get thousands and
4 thousands of calls within that hotline on a daily. I
5 don't have the number in front of me. I can
6 definitely get that number back to you but on a daily
7 basis, on a regular tour, we could probably get 10 to
8 15 maybe 20 calls coming into that hotline. And some
9 of those calls are coming from our partners at ACS.
10 Our partners in the schools. Our partners in
11 different organizations that are mandated reporters
12 or just someone happened to see you know just to make
13 it simple, a child walking by with a black eye. We
14 may get four calls on that. The teacher may see it.
15 The school safety agent may see it. The person at
16 the bus may see it. So, those calls that he
17 mentioned are specific to saying they mentioned that.

19 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Okay.

20 KATHLEEN BAER: Good afternoon everyone. I'm
21 Director Kathleen Baer from the NYPD. Also, we work
22 with ACS, basically as soon as we rescue a child out
23 of a situation. What happens is there is a minimal
24 fact interview done by the investigator to determine
25 as much as they can find out about what happened and

1 see if this is trafficking. And they're immediately
2 contacting ACS to then determine where does this
3 child go and what services are they going to be
4 getting. So, that's on every case where a youth is
5 recovered from one of these situations.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you for that. So,
8 let's just go back a little bit regarding a response
9 on youth. How many instances of trafficking involves
10 youth occur in the New York City public schools in
11 2024 based off NYPD's investigations? Like that 330,
12 is that a part of some calls by mandated reporters?

13 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah, those calls can come in from
14 everywhere. We don't document specifically where
15 they're coming from.

16 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Is it different from schools?
17 Does NYPD handle it differently if you're getting
18 calls from schools?

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: No, I think every crime should be
20 handled the same way I think in my opinion. I think
21 you know a survivor is a survivor, which ever way it
22 is reported, whichever way it comes in. So, you know
23 once it gets on the hotline, you know our goal and my
24 detectives goal is to get somebody there, whether
25 it's a school, whether it's a church, whether it's

1 outside, whether it's somebody's house. My goal is
2 getting somebody there as soon as possible.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Do you all have a number of
5 cases of children that may have potentially been
6 trafficked from New York City public schools? Do you
7 have any case numbers on that?

8 CARLOS ORTIZ: No, not that I can think of.

9 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Okay. I also wanted to know
10 because this is a popular season right, we're in
11 February. The Superbowl is coming up. I wanted to
12 know what steps does the NYPD take to protect the
13 youth from trafficking during public events, such as
14 large gatherings, maybe Superbowl parties, school
15 related activities. What's the process for NYPD?

16 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think that the NYPD in general
17 in those large events does focus on those things. My
18 unit, we do start looking at internet. We start
19 looking at different ways. Again, I don't want to
20 put out a lot of our investigative tools but there's
21 a lot of investigative tools that we look to see
22 trends, see what's going on, see what we're hearing
23 and also from our partners, see what they're hearing.
24 Because you know like the Chair said, sometimes you
25 maybe not listening to the right group for instance.

1
2 You know, you may have someone at the school safety
3 that has a great relationship with the kids in the
4 school that's hearing stuff. We have coordination
5 with the school safety agents.

6 So again, it goes back to what I said from the
7 beginning is it's thinking outside the box and trying
8 to get you information from as many locations as
9 possible in order to kind of put it together.

10 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Hmm, hmm and just expanding a
11 little bit on the conversation we just had about
12 immigrant youth. I've worked very closely with the
13 75th Precinct. The 67 Precinct but mostly the 75th,
14 like the Louisiana area and East New York. So, we
15 know that a lot of young people have been trafficked
16 over there. So, I wanted to know, how does the NYPD
17 handle trafficking cases involving immigrant youth
18 when they fear deportation or have limited access to
19 resources? You answered it before but if you could
20 just expand on that?

21 CARLOS ORTIZ: I'll hand it to Picarello, he's
22 been all over that area down there for a couple years
23 already.

24 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you.
25

1 JOSEPH PICARELLO: So, it's not our practice to
2
3 number one, ask any of these victims their
4 immigration status. So, we handle all these victims
5 with kid gloves and you know so when they come in
6 contact with us, it's obviously repour building is
7 number one and obviously trust. So, this isn't
8 something that we dive in and not- obviously we also
9 look to share what resources are available if they
10 make an omission that they are in fact an immigrant
11 so to speak.

12 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Alright, thank you.
13 Sometimes they identify themselves but thank for that
14 Mr. Picarello.

15 This question is for ENDGBV. Does ENDGBV
16 currently produce any data relating to human
17 trafficking, including instances of child
18 trafficking?

19 SALONI SETHI: Good afternoon and thanks for that
20 question. So, right now, we don't have a lot of data
21 that we collect in human trafficking, partially
22 because most of our data collection I think as folks
23 have mentioned is done at the front end when somebody
24 comes in for services and that's often not when
25 somebody identifies right as a survivor of

1 trafficking gets found out later on. But what I will
2 mention is recently this fiscal year, we took on an
3 oversight of a few new programs, including the city's
4 24 hour hotline and family based - uh family court
5 based programs, criminal court based programs and we
6 are requesting working with our providers to see how
7 we might be able to collect data about victimization
8 type as part of those programs. So, it is a goal
9 that we have so hopefully you know further down the
10 road we'll have more to say.

12 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Alright and does ENDGBV share
13 their data, whatever data you have right? Do you
14 share that data with any other city agencies, NYPD,
15 DYCD, ACS and how do you all coordinate?

16 SALONI SETHI: Yeah, so I think you know I'll
17 speak to the coordination piece first because I think
18 that that is a role that we play a lot in the city.
19 I think of us as kind of really trying to coordinate
20 making sure that all of us are speaking the same
21 language when it comes to issues like human
22 trafficking and all issues of gender based violence.
23 So, we actually have a city agency working group that
24 I think everybody at this table has been a part of
25 and includes other city agencies, including my

1 neighbor of public health agencies, DOE and others,
2 where we're sharing best practices, sharing
3 information and really trying to work across. We
4 share data like as it's relevant, right? And I think
5 and then when it comes to specific cases, it's always
6 sort of with permission of the survivor if they're
7 comfortable sharing or they want us to you know
8 facilitate reporting, we definitely work with our
9 other sister agencies on that as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thanks and your agency highly
12 relies on outreach, so I wanted to know what type of
13 outreach is your agency currently conducting to focus
14 on trafficking?

15 SALONI SETHI: Yeah, so we are doing all kinds of
16 outreach. I think, you know I think in terms of our
17 community based outreach, we work with providers in
18 all of our boroughs to kind of outreach on the topic
19 of trafficking, right? And so, our office, I think
20 we're always making the assessment of who is the best
21 deliverer of the message for the community that we're
22 serving, right? And sometimes that's our office and
23 most of the time, it's our office at partnership with
24 our community based providers who are on the ground.

1 I think in addition to that, I think public
2 awareness as folks have mentioned, we have done in
3 2024, we actually in January did public awareness
4 through linknyc kiosks and developed like posters on
5 human trafficking that are really focused on you know
6 what are some of the signs that somebody might self-
7 identify as a survivor of trafficking and how do we
8 connect them to resources. We also again partner I
9 think when it comes to outreach really on that public
10 awareness and that basic information of how do we
11 connect, right?

13 So, I think we have our NYC Hope website which
14 we're continually updating. We're actually working
15 on trying to get mapped based resources there, so
16 somebody can pull it up on their phone and look up
17 services that are actually around them, which is you
18 know a new feature that we hope to have online soon.
19 We've partnered with the Brooklyn Human Trafficking
20 Taskforce on a guide of resources specifically for
21 trafficking survivors, and I think you know that
22 that's something that we're sort of continue to doing
23 more of but I think as you know folks at NYPD
24 mentioned, we're hoping that MTA Campaign also really
25 helps push our public awareness efforts further.

1 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you for that response.

2
3 Can you share the way in which ENDGBV ensures its
4 work includes the distinction between consensual sex
5 work and trafficking? Because and I think Chair
6 Stevens mentioned it before. Because we want a clear
7 distinction of that for the record. Thank you.

8 SALONI SETHI: Yeah, so I think you know again,
9 when we think of our work right? I say this all the
10 time. Our work is to support survivors of gender
11 violence, no matter what they call themselves. So,
12 honestly in some ways it's you know for the work that
13 we do, it doesn't matter how you identify. What
14 matters is the violence that you experience and how
15 we can kind of wrap around you to figure out a
16 service plan to address that experience of
17 victimization to get you to a place and a path to
18 healing. That's the number one goal.

19 I think you know, there's obviously clear lines
20 when it comes to age around the issue of like sex
21 work versus trafficking, so I think that law is one
22 guiding bright line and so, when we're, I think you
23 know if we were to see somebody that was under 18 who
24 was being trafficked, we'd immediately contact our
25 partners that work with young people and that would

1 always be trafficking. And then I think you know the
2 other piece, which is more of an art, is really kind
3 of getting that survivor to identify that experience
4 for themselves right?
5

6 So, I think it's really like how does that person

7 -

8 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Your agency helps with them
9 identifying that?

10 SALONI SETHI: Yeah, as you're having a
11 conversation with somebody right, how did you end up
12 here? What are the choices you made? If somebody
13 you know I think questions like, is somebody holding
14 your documents? Is somebody taking the money you're
15 earning? Like those are really relevant questions
16 right in terms of when we're thinking about
17 trafficking, it's like there is often a trafficker
18 that is there. So, that's another way that we really
19 work with somebody to make sure that you know again,
20 as I said, a lot of times we see this in the context
21 of like intimate partner violence for instance or in
22 the context of other forms you know if somebody comes
23 for services around sexual violence and the
24 trafficker becomes identified through a conversation
25 with them. But I think it's questions like that in

1 COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE COMMITTEE ON
3 WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY 79

4 terms of like, what do you have control over? What
5 do you have say over? Where is your agency in this?
6 That really gets to that delineation.

7 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. That's all for me
8 Chair Stevens.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I'm going to
10 pass it over to Council Member Joseph.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you Chair Stevens.
12 I want to go back a little bit. How are you
13 improving awareness about human trafficking among
14 foster youth?

15 SABINE CHERY: We have our ACS Youth Council. We
16 have them go talk to the young people. We also have
17 lived experience staff that's hired that does engage
18 with our young people and informing them about
19 trafficking awareness. We have posters that we
20 bring. We also have our flyers and again, we are
21 running a contest now where we're trying to get the
22 young people to engage whether you're at risk or
23 trafficked or do not want to disclose but through
24 your art form, you can share what's happening.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: What kind of training are
you providing for caregivers once they're placed in a
home?

1
2 SABINE CHERY: So, the caregivers are open to
3 join also our conferences to understand what is the
4 red flags. We have the provider agencies that have
5 their map training that also provides generalized
6 training to foster parents with regards to red flags,
7 AWOC which is absent without consent. So, there are
8 some trainings that are guided. We also have Planned
9 Parenthood do some direct training for our young
10 people, whether it's for LGBTQI+ and also looking at
11 those red flags as well.

12 So, that was an open training that was virtual
13 that was provided to our foster parents, as well as
14 our young people because we also had that targeted
15 training for young people to join as well virtually.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How long is the training
17 for caregivers and how often are they renewed on the
18 training?

19 SABINE CHERY: So, I'll have my Deputy answer
20 that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you.

22 INA MENDEZ: So, as part of foster parent
23 certification, in 2022, we introduced a trauma
24 responsive informed parenting program that helps
25 foster parents look at things through a trauma lens,

1 so they can understand behaviors, maybe if there's a
2 mental health concern being presented, that the
3 underlying cause may have to do with trauma.

4 Additionally, foster parents are informed of
5 expectations so for example, if a child goes - you
6 know they don't return from school especially if
7 they're a particular age, they had to report that to
8 the agency immediately. They should follow up with
9 NYPD to make a missing person report and they are
10 expected to be recertified on various things every
11 year.
12

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So, if it's a married
14 couple for example, both parents are supposed to
15 attend the training, not one?

16 INA MENDEZ: I have to - my understanding is - I
17 need to get back to you on that around the
18 expectation depending on who is the actual certified
19 foster parent.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Because as a foster
21 parent right, you're supposed to list the families
22 that are living in the home. What if I did not list
23 that person? As you heard earlier from Chair
24 Stevens, the trafficking is happening among our young
25

1 people and sometimes it's not the foster parent but
2
3 it's someone who comes into the home, correct?

4 INA MENDEZ: So, through regular case we're
5 contacting home visits, you should be understanding
6 who is in the home, recognizing that maybe if - and
7 we're expecting that visits on occasion are
8 announced, so that you can see who is in the home on
9 a regular basis and then also through conversations
10 with the youth, understanding if someone is not uhm,
11 if the background hasn't been completed, let's say
12 you discover someone, a background check is supposed
13 to be completed. There are mandatory disqualifiers
14 and this is expectations that are outlined.

15 Based on your feedback, we will definitely
16 reenforce this with the providers and make sure that
17 the expectations are met.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uhm, there's still uhm
19 young people; I have somebody who is texting me now
20 who was a victim of trafficking. They felt
21 criminalized. How do you interact with young people
22 that's going through that system? Is it led? How
23 are they - how - the person who is interviewing them,
24 how are they treated? How do they feel, right?

1 Because you can make them feel they're a victim or
2 they can be victimized all over again.

3
4 INA MENDEZ: So, the training we offer for our
5 case planning staff, our ACS staff, excuse me, I
6 can't read and see so sorry.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That's okay.

8 INA MENDEZ: For the training we offer for the
9 case planning staff, ACS staff, is very trauma
10 informed. The Executive Director for the Office of
11 Child Trafficking and Prevention and Policy and the
12 staff are all licensed social workers, so we're
13 hoping that in having conversations, in conducting
14 the screenings, it's done compassionately.

15 These young people are not - uhm, they should not
16 be treated in any way but as a victim and they need
17 the support. Even there are times when you know
18 young individuals may be encouraging their peers to
19 maybe go AWOC and even that behavior should be
20 corrected in a supportive manner.

21 So, it's somewhat disheartening to be honest to
22 hear that they feeling that way and we can always
23 reenforce in our trainings. As I mentioned earlier,
24 we give a lot of training throughout the year and we
25 can make sure that as we're developing response

1 strategies, that it's supportive and uhm,
2
3 compassionate.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Chair, can I con- can I?
5 Thank you. And that goes for NYPD as well. What
6 type of training do you offer to your police officers
7 who are dealing with trafficking victims?

8 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah, so every person in special
9 victims gets uh, it's a trauma informed training
10 because as you say, these crimes are probably the
11 highest underreported crimes there are and a lot of
12 it is because of that first interaction be it with
13 police, be it with anybody. So, we do within our
14 refresher courses within whatever training before any
15 new investigator comes into special victims, they do
16 get a training before they even touch a case along
17 with a mentoring program, along with also with the
18 human trafficking. All of our human trafficking
19 detectives are all season detectives. No brand new
20 detectives. These detectives have been on it for a
21 while and I've seen their interactions and it's
22 incredible hearing that having that conversation and
23 being able to kind of speak to somebody to the point
24 where the person is open. And it is heart wrenching
25 hearing that from a youth saying that she feels like

1 she's a victim when she shouldn't because she's done
2 nothing wrong and I think you know hearing that kind
3 of - you got to double the efforts when it comes to
4 these trainings and getting it out to even when we do
5 our roll call conversations with the patrol officers,
6 because at the end of the day, the patrol officers
7 are the first ones that are going to interact with
8 these survivors is just giving them basic things.
9 I'll give you something that Kathleen brought up to
10 me when she first got to the unit, which is when you
11 think about it, it's like wow. You have a survivor
12 sitting on a chair. You have an officer six foot two
13 standing over her. He doesn't know any better, he's
14 just asking for information but how do you think that
15 survivor feels at that moment?
16

17 She just experienced one of the worst experience
18 in her life and there's a six foot two man standing
19 over her. So, just simple things like that is what
20 we try to get out to the patrol officers but within
21 our unit itself, within our training, we do bring in
22 - we actually have survivors that do come into our
23 training and speak to our detectives and things like
24 that because I think it's important for them to
25 realize that that first five minutes is key of

1 whether that survivor continues with us or whether
2 that survivor says, "why did I even call the cops?"

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Why did I bother? And
5 how often is that training done for officers in your
6 unit?

7 CARLOS ORTIZ: I'll let Kathleen talk to you
8 more.

9 KATHLEEN BAER: Sure so we actually were allotted
10 money for the trauma informed investigations and
11 interviewing training. So, we have an outside
12 organization who is hired. It's a law enforcement
13 professional and a survivor advocate who come in and
14 train and that's a three day training that we're able
15 to give to our investigators twice a year. We were
16 also just allotted funds. The department sees the
17 importance in the trauma informed training and
18 especially around youth, so we were just allotted
19 funds to have the National Child Advocacy Center come
20 in and do trainings that are five days a week, three
21 times a year. That way we can get all of our
22 investigators that are working with minors trained in
23 child forensic interviewing practices. So, that was
24 really huge for us because we used to go through
25 partner agencies like Safe Horizons and ask them,

1 "can we have some spots when the National Center
2 comes to train your people?" But now the NYPD is
3 giving us the ability to give that training to all of
4 our investigators three times a year. In our
5 mandatory annual refresher courses for the child
6 squads including the Human Trafficking Squad and the
7 Adult Squads, we have advocate partners who come in
8 and train on trauma informed practices, how to trauma
9 effects the brain. How we see that manifest in
10 survivors, so and ways to sit down with the survivors
11 and really be able to talk to them in that trauma
12 informed manner.
13

14 We also do scenario based training so that we're
15 testing our investigators to see; we give them a
16 scenario and they have to act it out in front of
17 people who are critiquing them to see how they would
18 interact in certain situations.

19 Another thing that we recently added as of when I
20 started was vicarious trauma training, which is
21 extremely important for the investigators. These
22 investigators are handling the most horrific crime
23 investigations every single day they are seeing child
24 sexual assault materials. They're hearing from
25 children. They're hearing from adults that have been

1 through horrific rapes and we need to give them the
2 tools to identify how that's manifesting in them.
3 Because if they're feeling burnt out from that or
4 just taking every case, like they need to be able to
5 identify this is what's happening in my personal
6 life. How can I fix this so I could be the best
7 investigator on my case?
8

9 So, we're really paying attention to that as
10 well. So, also in the Chiefs interviewing practices,
11 Chief and I interview everybody who's is going to be
12 an investigator within Special Victims division. And
13 that's important because we are looking for people
14 who have a demonstrated history working with children
15 when it's going to be someone who goes in the Child
16 Squad. Is this a former ACS worker? Someone who has
17 shown some sort of passion? Is this a person who
18 worked with under privileged youth or a person who
19 worked with children who have mental health issues?
20 Because we want that person because it shows that
21 they have this demonstrated history of wanting to
22 work with these type of people and these type of
23 victims and not just, I want to go and get my
24 detective shield in Special Victims.
25

1 So, everything in our training goes to the trauma
2 informed practices and we hear from the different
3 advocate partners that we work with that come in and
4 we allow them to review our cases for victim
5 interaction and how we're doing and they are seeing
6 major improvements since all of this training has
7 come to fruition in Special Victim.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Please continue to scale
10 up and do as much as you can to make sure victims
11 feel respected and treated with dignity. Have you
12 engaged the faith based community in any CBO's that
13 you're working with? That can go to anyone.

14 INA MENDEZ: Around this particular work or just
15 foster care in general?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I can't hear you.

17 INA MENDEZ: Around this particular work?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Hmm, hmm.

19 INA MENDEZ: I'm not aware of - I mean yes,
20 definitely community based organizations. Our
21 trainings are open to the public. We often partner
22 with them to provide services, so in that vein yes,
23 in terms of the training and then also providing
24 particular supports and services. In terms of foster
25 parent recruitment, we often partner with faith based

1 communities to get the word out. Foster parents are
2 engaging their own religious family members or within
3 their networks. So, whether they're going to church
4 or a temple or synagogue to recruit and inform people
5 about foster care.
6

7 SABINE CHERY: We also have worked close with Not
8 On Our Watch, Reverend Q. so we are working with
9 faith based organizations. She had a range with
10 different faith based organization, a sex trafficking
11 forum and ACS was part of that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. I just
13 have one last question. I read a report not too long
14 ago that as Chair Stevens said, the highest - there's
15 always a hotspot. They always say right around Super
16 Bowl is the highest time for human trafficking. Are
17 you guys keeping your eyes on any particular area in
18 New York?

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: Council Member, off the top of my
20 head, I probably wouldn't be able to think of any but
21 again, it's also something that the Department itself
22 in general, the whole department whenever those
23 situations come, all star games, all those big events
24 that were coming. I think we're having the World Cup
25 in a couple years. Those are the times where they

1 really start focusing and looking at those things,
2 using every tool in the toolbox that we have.

3
4 JOSEPH PICARELLO: Yeah and to piggyback what the
5 Chief said, one of things that most certainly look at
6 especially if the Superbowl for instance is going to
7 be in New Jersey or you know close to New York. One
8 of the things that we look at is obviously hotels and
9 that's one of the things that our unit does to start
10 looking for especially minors that are within you
11 know posting in Manhattan or you know I don't want to
12 get into too much specifics but that's one of the
13 things that we do look at.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. Thank
15 you Chairs.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I have a couple
17 questions from DYCD and some of our members who are
18 on Zoom sent me some questions over, so I'll ask
19 those right after I ask DYCD these couple questions.
20 The 2022 State Comptrollers audit of ACS and DYCD
21 service round that DYCD does not have, procedures
22 requiring its providers to screen youth for
23 indicators of trafficking. Since the release of this
24 report, has DYCD implemented procedures to screen
25 youth at risk for being trafficked?

1
2 AMY WILKERSON: No, we do not have a specific
3 screening tool that we require our providers to use.
4 They are able to screen the youth that come into the
5 program in a way that they see best for their case
6 management services and their mental health practices
7 of their organization.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And but do we not think
9 this is something that's important because I think
10 that even especially with like the drop in centers
11 and the shelters that operated, that it would be
12 important for us to make sure that you know there is
13 some uniformity around screening for this because
14 they're so influx when they're coming in.

15 AMY WILKERSON: Yeah, I think that the point that
16 you're making is definitely uhm, a valid one and one
17 that we have been considering since the audit. I
18 think in our exact response was that you know it's
19 something that we would continue to look into and to
20 figure a way that we can apply that but uhm outside
21 of like an RFP process, you know we're not able to do
22 that just yet but it is something that we're
23 considering for future implementation.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I mean, we can convene
25 providers and say these are some tools that we want

1 you to implement. We don't need to necessarily do an
2 RFP process to continue to give providers additional
3 tools to implement the work. So, I don't want us to
4 like fall on that one because -

6 AMY WILKERSON: I want to just clarify what I'm
7 saying is to require them to do it is different than
8 to suggest.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You could strongly
10 recommend because we are the funders and we can
11 strongly recommend that we want information and
12 because it happens all the time with stuff that they
13 don't want. They don't feel like it's necessary, so
14 you know I think that when we have situations like
15 this, this is important for us to be thinking about.
16 How do we make sure that there's uniformity and like
17 there is some screening tools and also giving them
18 support. I don't think you know we should do
19 something not super strenuous but I think this is
20 something that you know after this audit came out, we
21 should have like started to put things in place.

22 AMY WILKERSON: We've definitely been discussing
23 and talking about different tools that can be used
24 but implementation is not present but we do suggest
25 tools that are viable to our providers. It's just

1 not a requirement for something that they must use.

2 So, we do suggest it but they do have the ability to
3 select the one that they think is best for them.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, uhm, and not to harp
5 here and I'll move on but I just want us to like make
6 sure especially even with best practices because
7 there's a couple of things that could be going on.
8 We know that our providers are often pulled in so
9 many directions, they might even not know to look for
10 it and so we might have some providers doing it and
11 some doing it better than others. And so, I think
12 out of this conversation in this order, we should
13 really be thinking about how do we buckle down and
14 really put together some best practices and strongly
15 recommend in the same way we recommend other things.
16 But sometimes this is necessarily mandatory that we
17 ask them to do it and I do not see any provider being
18 like, we don't want to screen for sex trafficking. I
19 don't see anyone saying that. Like, I know a lot of
20 them and I don't see them saying that, so I think
21 that we can move in a direction to start getting some
22 work and best practices put in place around this.

23 AMY WILKERSON: Yes Chair. We continue to
24 require them to screen. Screening is not an option.
25

1 They all have to screen. It's just in the uniformity
2 that you're referencing.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What factors does the DYCD
5 believe contributes to the increase in the numbers of
6 identifying sexually exploited youth between 2022 and
7 2023? And how is DYCD responding to this trend?

8 AMY WILKERSON: Uhm, the difference between those
9 two years of course there's going to be some, always
10 some slight variation but from the previous years,
11 that was actually a big decline. We had significant
12 decreases from 2020 and 2021 as we went into 2022.
13 So, there's always going to be some variations. To
14 know exactly where those are coming from, not sure
15 but we will always continue to assess the needs of
16 the population to make sure that they're getting the
17 supports that they deserve.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Research indicates a strong
19 link between youth homelessness and vulnerability to
20 trafficking. What metrics does DYCD take to protect
21 youth in its care from falling victim to trafficking,
22 especially as they're transitioning out of shelter?

23 AMY WILKERSON: I think that for us, the main
24 approach that we've used is ensuring that our
25 providers are trained. You know this is - our

1 requirement is for all of the individuals that work
2 with youth and all of our programs are trained in
3 identification and also how to work with youth that
4 have been exploited or sexually trafficked. So,
5 making sure that they all have the trainings and we
6 monitor that as part of our program performance to
7 ensure that every single staff member is actually
8 receiving that training and if they are not receiving
9 it, then it would be compliance issues that would be
10 followed up in our technical assistance and support.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, uhm, and you know I
13 do want to acknowledge, we did additional 100 beds
14 for 18 to 24, so no one fought harder for that than
15 me and I know you guys are super excited about it
16 because I can stop asking you about it every time you
17 show up here. So, that's one last question for you
18 guys but DYCD serves up to 24 year olds but Safe
19 Harbor Act only provides protection for youth under
20 18. How does DYCD respond if they identify
21 trafficked youth who are between the ages of 18 and
22 24?

23 AMY WILKERSON: The approach is the same
24 regardless of the age range. We do not treat a youth
25 that has been sexually trafficked or exploited who is

1 under the age of 18 any different than we would treat
2 one that is 24 years old. We would try to assess
3 their needs and provide them to individualize
4 services that uhm, you know meets their experience
5 and their goals.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. A covenant house
8 study revealed that nearly one third of the
9 trafficking, trafficked LGBTQ youth experience
10 exploitation during homeless. What specific programs
11 exist to support LGBTQ youth and address those
12 vulnerabilities?

13 AMY WILKERSON: All of our providers are expected
14 to be able to work effectively with youth from the
15 LGBTQ community. We do have some providers that
16 specialize in providing those kinds of supports.
17 Uhm, and if a young person identifies that they would
18 prefer to have LGBTQ specific services, they would be
19 referred to one of those programs.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay and I guess even in
21 the same way, I ask ACS, how are we also working with
22 the young people to help identify that? Not only
23 within themselves but with others and also, just kind
24 of like have a climate where this is actually being
25 spoken about so they can like be aware.

1
2 AMY WILKERSON: I think that for the work that we
3 do, there's a lot of like uhm, workshops, group work,
4 discussions, that take place in our drop in centers,
5 as well as in our residential sites. Where they're
6 discussing you know all of these issues and helping
7 to assess the needs of young people but youth choice
8 and youth voice is the cornerstone of the work that
9 we do in the runaway and homeless youth community.
10 So, you know whatever youth identifies they need is
11 what the expectation is that they will receive. So,
12 if they want specialized services for a particular
13 issue and we work with them and we identify that that
14 becomes part of their goals then we would make sure
15 that they receive it. Whether it's directly or by
16 referral.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I think that's one of
18 the things that often to me is like you know we're
19 always talking about how we are training the staff up
20 and those things but you know I'm real big on like
21 how are we like even shifting the culture within our
22 participants for them to also like be able to
23 identify if someone is like even coming to them with
24 these type of things and like preparing them so they
25 can know how to ward it off. Because sometimes

1 again, like I said, I worked with young people where
2 they did not know because no one told them. Like,
3 this is not okay. So, I really want us to even think
4 about like how do we you know continue to cultivate
5 these conversations because if it's - it's not
6 something that people would be proud of, right? And
7 so, even with you know understanding that we thrive
8 on like youth voice and choice and all that. But if
9 this happened to me, I'm ashamed and I don't want
10 people to know and so it's really hard to you know
11 allow that, so I think we have to figure out a way to
12 you know make sure that these are part of our group
13 discussions and in our healing circles and all those
14 things because it becomes really hard for young
15 people to even want to talk about it even if it's
16 been identified, it's a sense of shame that comes
17 with it.

19 How does DYCD ensure that in shelters and
20 programs funded are equipped to meet with the unique
21 needs of trafficking survivors, particularly LGBTQ
22 youth and foster youth?

23 AMY WILKERSON: For us, it would be the same
24 response. It's really in the training. Working with
25 LGBTQ youth is also a required training. Working

1 with youth that have been exposed to sexual
2 exploitation is a required training for every single
3 person that works in any of the programs that come in
4 contact with one of the youth and this is something
5 that we monitor for performance and uhm, we enforce
6 you know effectively with our providers.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How does DYCD collaborate
9 with OCTPP and other specialized providers to deliver
10 a continuum of care for trafficked youth?

11 AMY WILKERSON: OCTPP?

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, yes, what is that
13 program? What is it called again?

14 AMY WILKERSON: We definitely collaborate with
15 all of our -

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Office of Child Trafficking
17 Prevention. Sorry.

18 AMY WILKERSON: Yes, we definitely collaborate
19 you know with all of our other city organizations.
20 You know we collaborate with uhm in gender based
21 violence with ACS. You know with all of the
22 different entities to provide the resources that we
23 need for the young people that we work with. We
24 frequently have those various entities presented in
25 our provider meetings to explain the resources that

1 they have to our providers so they know how to access
2 those resources. And in more uhm specific instances,
3 sometimes we make intentional connections between
4 providers that may you know need more support in that
5 area or they have specialized population needs,
6 directly to those entities.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I know ACS talks about
9 that they have credible messengers and folks who have
10 been in this work. How is that on the RHY side? Is
11 it the same thing? Do you guys also have like a
12 credible messengers program and folks who are
13 survivors and who have been through these things to
14 also to relate to these young people? Is that
15 something that you guys you know work with providers
16 on identifying with staff?

17 AMY WILKERSON: Uhm, so Jem's is one of our
18 contracted providers for runaway and homeless youth
19 services. So, Jem's is definitely one of the
20 organizations that uses that model. But outside of
21 Jem's I think that you know it's encouraged for our
22 providers to recruit individuals with lived
23 experience and people with adjacent lived experience
24 and people with adjacent lived experience that can
25 best connect with the young people that we serve.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I just you know, just
3 hearing some of that today, I just think it's just
4 like so important because again, it does come with a
5 sense of shame and so, to have someone to be able to
6 identify with that at these places and also thinking
7 about how do we then if that's not a requirement how
8 do we then collaborate to then whether that's them
9 being part of some of those groups and doing the
10 work? You know, you know how I feel. Like, I don't
11 understand why we're not doing a lot of the cross
12 collaboration anyway if you know if ACS is doing it
13 and they have this, then how are we making sure that
14 every one has access to it? It's all the city.
15 These are all our children and so, you know even
16 thinking about if providers don't have that, you know
17 how do we then open up the space to use the resources
18 that we have. So, that's definitely something we
19 should be thinking about and working on because I
20 think that it's so important that these young people
21 do not feel shame and that there's other people who
22 experienced it and they've been able to overcome it
23 and understand that there is life on the other side.
24 So, we need to figure out how your incredible
25 messengers can go to these you know RHY shelters and

1 be talking to these young people and just working
2 together because I think that that is really
3 important. And I see you guys wanted to add.

5 KATHLEEN BAER: Hi, yes, just to your point, I
6 also think that that's incredibly important. When we
7 go and do outreach in some of the areas that are
8 prone to sexual exploitation, we do outreach with
9 some of our advocate partners and they all have
10 survivor leader programs and they - some of the
11 survivor advocates do come out with us to do that
12 outreach. So, that it's not just an advocate or a
13 member of the Police Department approaching these
14 young individuals. It's actually a person who has
15 that lived experience. So, we absolutely agree with
16 you and we are going to continue to work in that
17 space.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. Uhm, I have some
19 questions from my colleagues who are on Zoom and
20 because we don't have quorum they can't ask. So,
21 these question is from Council Member Williams.
22 Would you agree that this annual reporting will
23 require increased transparency in public trust in
24 NYPD's handling of missing people? So, I believe
25 they're asking about the bill around, do you think

1 that this would help with transparency and getting
2 this information out?

3
4 JOSH LEVIN: Uh, more eyes on something sure but
5 what I want to do is I'd love to work with Council to
6 actually figure out, I'm telling you it's a lot of
7 data.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm.

9 JOSH LEVIN: Right, so I would love to work with
10 you to figure out what gives you exactly what you
11 need without having to be too onerous of a poll every
12 time. You and I have spoken about this before at
13 other hearings. This one wasn't a clickity clack,
14 boop.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You always talk in
16 clickity, clack boop.

17 JOSH LEVIN: And I'm going to keep talking about
18 it because -

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because listen, you could
20 get the data and you could make it clickity clack.

21 JOSH LEVIN: I did, I did get it. I did get it
22 but I spent a lot of time doing a stick count myself
23 making sure it was in some type of digestible format
24 for you all. So, uhm, yeah, in summary yes.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Alright, do you - could you
3 - could this reporting lead to improved community
4 outreach efforts in an area like Jamaica where
5 significant immigrant populations and ensuring that
6 non-English speaking residents are aware of the
7 resources available for reporting missing persons?

8 So, you know, I believe she's just hinting at
9 like in Queens they have a big thing around this,
10 especially in immigrant populations and folks who
11 don't speak English. Do you think that this
12 reporting could like actually help some of that?

13 JOSH LEVIN: Is the question in regards to
14 missing persons or human trafficking or both?

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Missing person, yeah.

16 JOSH LEVIN: Missing persons, gotcha.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm, hmm.

18 JOSH LEVIN: Yeah, I think, I think our people
19 internally always have eyes on where we're seeing
20 things spike and where we're seeing things go down.
21 And as a result, we specifically target resources to
22 those specific areas. And that's in all of our
23 campaigns and the Crime Prevention Division, elder
24 abuse. I appeared before the Committee to talk about
25 that. We go to the place where these people are.

1 So, we use these numbers to determine what we're
2 doing. Uhm, so I think we're already doing that. I
3 think this is just something for the public facing I
4 guess.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah and that's what she's
7 getting at like having the community be more being
8 able to like identify some of this information
9 because even her next question, would you agree that
10 the visibility of precinct specific data would
11 empower community leaders and organizers in Jamaica
12 Queens to advocate for more focus interventions and
13 resources?

14 JOSH LEVIN: Yeah, I think you can't wrap your
15 arms around an issue until you actually see like the
16 nuts and bolts of it. So, yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I see you agree with all
18 these things. Love it, great. So, love that for
19 you. Alright, well next question. This is from
20 Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers.

21 This is for NYPD. Does the NYPD have any data
22 available specifically on missing children? If so,
23 does this include data broken down by race, age and
24 contributing factors? If not, does NYPD track this
25 data?

1
2 JOSH LEVIN: Yes to 80 percent of that. I don't
3 know what contributing factors means. Did they give
4 any clarification on what that means?

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Or other contributing
6 factors, like other things that might go along with
7 like why they might be missing other than like age,
8 race?

9 JOSH LEVIN: Yeah, so the director just pointed
10 out maybe mental health or something else related to
11 that. You would have to dive into every individual
12 case to figure that out but yes, we do track by
13 precinct, age, race, gender.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, alright.

15 JOSH LEVIN: It's a lot, just saying.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: It's okay to be a lot. Why
17 are we afraid of it being a lot? Like, it's
18 important for us to know that it's a lot so then that
19 gives us the information that we can fight for to get
20 you more resources. So, I don't care if it's a lot
21 and I'm sorry that it's making your job hard. You
22 know you all will be running up overtime. Tell them
23 to have somebody else do it, you know? But thank you
24 guys today for being here. I don't - do you have any
25 more questions Chair Salaam?

1
2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Actually just a few very,
3 very short ones.

4 So, I wanted to know if you could provide details
5 about the training provided to officers assigned to
6 work on human trafficking cases and how often is this
7 training updated to reflect emerging trends and best
8 practices?

9 KATHLEEN BAER: Sure, like I said before, we have
10 refresher courses that are required. Those are
11 mandatory three day courses on best practices that
12 are given usually three times a year for the child
13 abuse squads and four times a year for the adult
14 trafficking squad is including in those. And then
15 the other training that we do is like the trauma
16 informed training, which are these are outside
17 organizations that are coming in and in those
18 refresher courses we bring in the different people to
19 talk about the best practices and we have experts in
20 human trafficking that come in and talk about the law
21 enforcement piece and the trends and investigations.

22 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah and in those Chair, we do get
23 topical so every year it's different. You don't have
24 the same three day training every year, so depending
25 on what's you know what the new law the Rape is Rape

1 law that just started September 1st of 2024, that's
2 something that would be in the training this year.
3 So, we always look at different things that are
4 trending, different things that are coming out now.
5 Yeah, changes in the law and things that we add to
6 our training.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And last question from me.
9 To what extent do all NYPD Officers receive training
10 on identifying signs of trafficking during routine
11 operations or investigations?

12 JOSH LEVIN: Chair, let me just make sure I'm
13 understanding you correctly. Do you mean all NYPD
14 officers are do you mean specifically the people are
15 assigned to this type of work? All?

16 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yeah because I mean I know
17 that you know in terms of the work, it's a lot that
18 you all may be exposed to. So, I'm just trying to
19 find out you know is there -

20 JOSH LEVIN: I got you. I got you.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yeah.

22 JOSH LEVIN: I didn't look into that but I will
23 double check and I can circle back with you for that
24 information alright? Unless-

1
2 CARLOS ORTIZ: One of the things that we do is we
3 do have a block of recruit training that my special
4 victims trainers, as she teach all the recruits that
5 are coming into the police department. The other
6 things that I mentioned before is we do roll call
7 trainings. We specifically you know target different
8 precincts for different type of reasons.

9 So, we ourselves as a unit, we're small but we do
10 reach out to our patrol partners and I know the
11 training within the NYPD is working on something in
12 regards to the main question that you have.

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thanks.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Uhm, Amy, Selvena Brooks-
15 Powers wanted me to tell you to say hello. She text
16 me to say that specifically, so I don't want to get
17 in trouble because she's on Zoom and she couldn't
18 come in because we don't have quorum but she said to
19 let you know she said hello and you're doing great.
20 I don't have any more questions but I do just want to
21 make a quick statement before I let the
22 Administration go. Just uhm around today there was
23 another press conference about an additional 100
24 youth who were in juvenile detention centers who
25 experienced sexual violence and that to me is a huge

1 alarm just in the sense around we're sitting here
2 talking about sex trafficking and then we cannot even
3 keep people safe in our care. And some of the cases
4 are as late as 2021 and so, this is a huge problem
5 for me and although it is not as intertwined or
6 related, but it is related because we know that young
7 people who experience trauma then come out and
8 they're more vulnerable and so, we have to think
9 about what this looks like moving forward because
10 this is unacceptable and honestly, we cannot allow
11 this to happen. We cannot talk about the underbelly
12 and all these things and then in our care, we are
13 setting kids up for you know failure and this is not
14 okay and I just want to say that and there will
15 definitely hearings and continual work around this
16 issue because you know for the last couple of months,
17 this has been something that has been at the top of
18 the bill. I've been getting calls from advocates and
19 people who have experienced this and actually had a
20 roundtable last week around this and the stories that
21 I heard were 100 percent unacceptable and this will
22 not be tolerated on my watch. So, I just, I had to
23 make a statement around that as well. And so, I
24
25

1 don't have any more questions for the Administration
2
3 and so, thank you all for being here today.

4 PANEL: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. [02:05:05]-

6 [02:05:19] I now open the hearing for public
7 testimony. I remind the members of the public that
8 this is a formal government proceeding and decorum
9 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of
10 the public shall remain silent at all times.

11 The witness table is reserved for people who wish
12 to testify. No video recordings or photography is
13 allowed from the witness table. Further, members of
14 the public may not present video or audio recordings
15 as testimony but they may submit transcripts of such
16 recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for the conclusion
17 of the hearing. If you wish to speak at today's
18 hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the
19 Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When
20 recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on
21 today's topic, Support for Young Victims of Human
22 Trafficking.

23 If you have a written statement or additional
24 written testimony you wish to submit for the record,

1 please provide a copy of that testimony to the
2
3 Sergeant at Arms.

4 I will now call the first panel. Brianna Palmer,
5 Sebastien Vante, Eric Lee, Mari Moss.

6 SEBASTIEN VANTE: Good afternoon. My name is
7 Sebastien Vante, and I am the Associate Vice
8 President of Streetwork Programs at Safe Horizon.
9 Safe Horizon's mission is to stand with those who
10 have experienced violence, abuse and exploitation.
11 We offer unwavering support and advocate for system
12 change.

13 Safe Horizon envisions a world where safety is a
14 universal human right, and we all share a collective
15 responsibility to protect and uphold it. WE strive
16 for a society where people are safe in their
17 communities, homes, bodies and minds.

18 I'm honored to share with you the critical work
19 we do to support homeless youth and young adults, a
20 population that faces extraordinary challenges,
21 including the very real risk of trafficking and
22 exploitation.

23 At Streetwork, our mission is to meet homeless
24 youth where they are, on the streets, in parks, or
25 other public spaces and provide immediate support and

1 a path to stability. Traffickers prey on the
2 vulnerability of these young people, targeting their
3 lack of resources, safety and support. This is why
4 the collaboration between our Streetwork Project and
5 Safe Horizon's Anti-Trafficking Program is so vital.
6

7 ATP provides our staff both in our drop in
8 centers and our outreach teams with specialized
9 training to recognize the signs of trafficking and
10 take appropriate steps to address their immediate and
11 long term needs. Whether during an intake
12 conversation or while engaging youth in the field,
13 our teams are equipped to identify red flags, ask the
14 right question and connect these young people to
15 critical resources that can help them escape
16 exploitation and begin their healing journey.

17 But the work doesn't stop there. Many of the
18 youth we serve are also navigating complex
19 immigration challenges. For these young people, our
20 Immigration Law Project plays an essential role by
21 offering legal assistance to those who may qualify
22 for asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, or
23 other protections, we provide a lifeline for young
24 people who are not only fleeing trafficking but also
25 seeking safety and stability in a new country.

1 The legal protections and support we offer are
2
3 often the key to helping them rebuild their lives
4 free from fear and harm. To truly address the issue
5 of trafficking, it is essential that street work and
6 other runaway and homeless youth providers have the
7 resources and support they need to identify survivors
8 and offer immediate assistance. This requires strong
9 partnerships with the Mayor's Administration and City
10 Council to ensure there is adequate funding,
11 staffing, and training for programs like ours.

12 With sufficient resources, we can make sure that
13 every young person who is vulnerable to trafficking
14 receives not just shelter but also access to
15 specialized programs that meet their unique needs.
16 This work is deeply impactful because it saves lives.
17 Each connection we make whether through outreach,
18 anti-trafficking support, legal assistance or
19 specialized care is a step toward ensuring that these
20 young people have the safety, dignity, and freedom
21 they deserve.

22 Human trafficking thrives in the shadows but our
23 work is about shining a light and empowering those
24 most at risk. I am proud of the collaboration
25 between our programs, the role we play in addressing

1 these challenges, and the opportunity to advocate for
2 the resources and support that make this work
3 possible. I am also grateful for our partnership
4 with the City Council and for your ongoing support
5 for our work. Thank you for this opportunity to
6 share this critical work with you today.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

9 BRIANNA PALMER: Good afternoon all. My name is
10 Brianna Palmer, and I am an intern working with the
11 Anti-Human Trafficking team at Covenant House New
12 York, where we serve youth ages 16 to 24 who are
13 experiencing homelessness.

14 Many of these young people are survivors of human
15 trafficking or have been at heightened risk of
16 victimization. I want to thank the Committee on
17 Public Safety and the bill's sponsors, Council
18 Members Louis, Stevens, Riley, Restler, Farías,
19 Williams, Brooks-Powers, and Schulman, for the
20 opportunity to testify in support of Intro. No. 831.

21 Covenant House New York is the largest provider
22 of services to homeless youth in New York City,
23 serving over 1,600 young people annually. Beyond
24 providing safe shelter, we offer a comprehensive
25 array of services, including medical care, mental

1 health services, education, employment training, and
2 critical legal assistance. Many of the young people
3 who come to us have faced unimaginable trauma,
4 including trafficking.
5

6 The issue of missing persons is deeply
7 intertwined with human trafficking. At Covenant
8 House New York, we know that when young people go
9 missing, especially those from marginalized
10 communities, they often become vulnerable to
11 exploitation, including sex and labor trafficking.
12 This proposed legislation represents a critical step
13 forward toward addressing these vulnerabilities by
14 requiring a comprehensive and annual reporting on
15 missing persons cases in New York City.

16 Having accurate and transparent data is essential
17 to understanding the scope of the problem and
18 crafting effective interventions. By disaggregating
19 missing persons data by age, race, gender, and
20 precinct, as well as including information on cases
21 linked to trafficking, this bill provides a framework
22 for identifying trends and responding more
23 effectively to the needs of at-risk individuals.

24 Mandating annual reports will highlight systemic
25 disparities and trends in missing persons cases. The

1 disaggregation of data ensures that we can see which
2 populations are disproportionately affected and
3 allocate resources accordingly.
4

5 Requiring data on the percentage of resolved
6 cases that involve trafficking victims underscores
7 the link between missing persons and exploitation.
8 This information will be invaluable for organizations
9 like ours, which work tirelessly to support survivors
10 and prevent trafficking.

11 By institutionalizing this reporting, the NYPD
12 will be better positioned to identify patterns,
13 improve investigative strategies, and collaborate
14 with community organizations to protect vulnerable
15 individuals. This accountability also ensures that
16 policies are data-driven and reflective of the
17 realities faced by marginalized communities.

18 At Covenant House New York, many of the people we
19 serve have been reported missing at some point in
20 their lives. As a trafficking survivor myself, this
21 was also true for me during my experience.

22 These missing persons reports are often the first
23 indication that a youth is in danger of exploitation.
24 Unfortunately, existing gaps in reporting, data
25 collection, and coordination have made it difficult

1 to track these cases effectively and provide the
2 interventions needed to prevent harm. This
3 legislation will give organizations like ours the
4 data needed to advocate for survivors, inform our
5 services, and partner more effectively with law
6 enforcement and policymakers.
7

8 Additionally, it will send a clear message that
9 New York City prioritizes the safety of its most
10 vulnerable residents. We are grateful to the
11 sponsors of this bill for recognizing the importance
12 of transparency and accountability in addressing
13 missing persons cases.

14 Your leadership will not only help prevent
15 trafficking and exploitation but also support the
16 efforts of organizations like Covenant House New York
17 that work daily to help young people reclaim their
18 futures.

19 I urge the City Council to pass Intro. No. 831.
20 By doing so, we take a meaningful step forward
21 protecting our city's most vulnerable individuals and
22 ensuring that no missing person is overlooked.

23 Thank you for your time and for your commitment
24 to this critical issue. Together, we can make New
25

1
2 York City a safer and more equitable place for all of
3 its residents.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

5 ERIC LEE: Good afternoon and thank you Chair
6 Stevens, Chair Salaam and Chair Louis and members of
7 the Committees for allowing me to testify today. My
8 name is Eric Lee, I am the Director of Public Policy
9 for Volunteers of America Greater New York. A 128
10 year old anti-poverty organization which operates six
11 emergency and one tier two domestic violence shelters
12 in New York City. We also serve a large population
13 of survivors within our general homeless family and
14 women shelters and are launching a federally funded
15 transitional housing program for survivors of labor
16 and sex trafficking later this year.

17 First, I would like to take the opportunity to
18 thank you Chair Louis, as well as members of the
19 Council, ENDGBV Commissioner Sethi and the
20 Administration for your leadership and support of
21 Resolution 165 of 2022. Calling on the state
22 legislature to pass the Safe Act. This would help
23 single household survivors, which is often how
24 survivors of trafficking present at intake to access
25 domestic violence shelters.

1 While we are disappointed that the Governor
2 vetoed the bill, we are hopeful that the State
3 Legislature will reintroduce it and we look forward
4 to your continued support and leadership. Survivors
5 of human trafficking may turn to domestic violence or
6 general homeless shelters to flee their traffickers,
7 but additional expertise and services are needed to
8 better support them in their healing. VOA-GNY, in
9 recognition of this service gap, is standing up a new
10 Federally funded transitional housing program for
11 survivors of labor and sex trafficking, which will
12 include a full time Human Trafficking Specialist to
13 conduct outreach and public awareness as well as
14 offering specialized training for our staff within
15 our domestic violence shelters on serving survivors
16 of trafficking.

17
18 Given recent actions of the Trump Administration
19 efforts to curtail Federal funding to immigrant
20 support organizations, we ask the Council to please
21 consider adding local funding to help bridge the gap.
22 Within our transitional housing programs - sorry.
23 While our new transitional housing program will
24 strengthen the skillsets of existing staff, there
25

remains a need for deeper clinical expertise than
current Domestic Violence contracts fund.

Survivors suffering from traumatic brain
injuries, PTSD, and other risk factors which can pose
barriers to long-term safety and stability have acute
needs related to physical or emotional trauma, mental
health or other crises. Case managers and social
workers and other staff across our shelter sites
would benefit from additional clinical support for
their most complex and high-risk cases, and the
ability to better connect clients to supports and
services within their local communities across the
five boroughs.

We would welcome the new resources from the
Council and the Administration to help provide
enhanced services to support survivors. Thank you
for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

MARI MOSS: Thank you Chair Louis, Chair Stevens,
and Chair Salaam. Good afternoon. My name is Mari
Moss. I am the proud mother of three young Harlem
girls and a community advocate for families and
communities. I serve on the Mayor's Task Force to
End Gender and Domestic-Based Violence, the

1 Neighborhood Advisory Board, the Community Action
2 Board, that gives federal funding to nonprofit
3 organizations through DYCD, and the We Love Harlem
4 Initiative. I am here today to express my strong
5 support for Intro. 831, a critical step forward to
6 protecting children and families and addressing
7 systemic failures within our institutions.
8

9 One of the most urgent issues this legislation
10 addresses is the criminalization of parenthood,
11 particularly motherhood in domestic violence cases.
12 Far too often, protective mothers are penalized by
13 the very systems that should support them, with
14 children being unjustly removed from their care.
15 This not only traumatizes families but also exposes
16 children to greater risks, including exploitation and
17 trafficking. When parental rights are ignored or
18 weaponized, the consequences are devastating.

19 Practices like parental alienation and systemic
20 neglect allow harm to thrive. We already have laws
21 in place to safeguard survivors and their children,
22 but these laws are not consistently or effectively
23 enforced, leaving families vulnerable and
24 unsupported. Intro 831 is a vital step in ensuring
25 greater accountability and collaboration. Workers in

1 child welfare must regularly be vetted to guarantee
2 they are following proper protocols and safeguarding
3 families.
4

5 Agencies such as ACS, the Child Trafficking
6 Prevention Department, and the Domestic Violence
7 Units of ACS, within the agency, must collaborate
8 closely work together. The Family Justice Center and
9 the End Gender and Domestic-Based Violence Task Force
10 must also work with a cross cutting agency
11 coordination. This is essential to ensure survivors
12 are not slipping through the cracks and that families
13 receive the support they need. Additionally,
14 education and preventive measures must be
15 prioritized.

16 Young people need to be taught to recognize
17 violations, understand their rights, and know what
18 resources are available to them. Through
19 collaborative efforts, prevention programs, and
20 community outreach, we can empower youth to protect
21 themselves and create a culture of safety and
22 awareness.

23 As a mother and advocate, I've seen these
24 failures firsthand. My experiences navigating these
25 systems inspired me to write the Letter to

1 legislation, a call to action addressing these
2 systemic issues. Supported by leaders across all
3 levels of government, these initiatives align with
4 the goals of Intro. 831 by advocating for reforms
5 that protect children, empower families, and ensure
6 justice is upheld.
7

8 We cannot afford to allow these systems to
9 continue to fail our most vulnerable. Intro. 831 is
10 a powerful tool in the fight to educate, train, vet,
11 and reform these agencies. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I just want to commend you
14 all for standing up. I don't really have a question
15 I don't think, I'm just thinking about what else can
16 we do and I'm thinking about that from the
17 perspective of even classroom education. You know
18 that allows for folks who are vulnerable who may not
19 necessarily know or understand what it is that they
20 are experiencing. And also for friends who might be
21 able to stand in that gap to assist in some way form
22 or fashion.

23 So, I'm not sure if we have all of the answers
24 that really, really speak to the need of the
25 vulnerable communities that you all are a part of and

1 supporting but whatever we can do, I'm sure we want
2 to do all that we can for that and towards that
3 effort.
4

5 MARI MOSS: I would just like to speak to that
6 very quickly. We just can't keep sweeping things
7 under the rug. We keep ignoring the issues, the
8 elephants in the room so to speak, just to keep
9 things comfortable and copasetic and our community is
10 very close knit. Everybody pretty much knows
11 everybody. You know, our churches are like families
12 but we have to address the issues and not sweep them
13 under the rug. We have to talk about them actively.
14 We need to have forums about them if we need to but
15 we need to protect the vulnerable and stop protecting
16 perpetrators of violence.

17 SEBASTIEN VANTE: I just want to add, one of the
18 things that we found very effective in the population
19 that we work with specifically runaway and homeless
20 youth in our drop in centers but also in our shelters
21 is that we create a very sex positive environment,
22 which allows for young folks to kind of engage staff
23 in conversations that may seem really sensitive and
24 in that we may determine or find out a little deeper
25 things around like some of the things that some of

1 our young folks are experiencing. So, I think kind
2 of creating that environment that allows young folks
3 to you know reach out and connect with staff around
4 things, around sexual health or things that they may
5 be experiencing that they're not quite understanding.
6 I feel like has created a better connection in
7 allowing us to connect them to appropriate resources.
8 So, just to kind of add to that point where you were
9 making about school, I think you know not demonizing
10 certain things or criminalizing certain things but
11 allowing for that kind of open dialogue and
12 conversations around things that we consider
13 sensitive like sex. So, just putting that out there.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want add, I remember
15 when I visited Safe Horizon, that was one of the
16 things you guys definitely talked about of having a
17 sex positive place, so it wasn't as taboo.
18 Especially I think in a lot of youth organizations,
19 it's always looked at as shame and so young people
20 don't want to talk around it and all the things. And
21 so, which is why it leaves them so vulnerable on
22 being sex trafficked because there's this sense of
23 shame that's being put on it.
24
25

1 So, I definitely like, love to hear that you guys
2
3 are doing like actual outreach on the ground and in
4 going out into communities and not just waiting for
5 them to show up in your centers and facilities and
6 things like that. And thank you for being so brave
7 and strong up here today and sharing your story and
8 putting support around this bill that I know Chair
9 Louis has been advocating for for a number of years
10 at this point. So, I was just so happy we were able
11 to hear because it is a critical step. We know that
12 women of color are some of the highest numbers around
13 missing in this country and are often silenced and
14 you know I had a Resolution a couple years back on
15 BIPOC women and missing and you know we have sort of
16 a lot of pressure, even for the Governor to sign it
17 into law and so, thank you for showing up here and
18 supporting this bill because I do think it is a
19 critical step in the right direction to being able to
20 identify or have some support around it. So, I don't
21 have any more questions for this panel, so thank you
22 for joining us.

23 PANEL: Thank you.

24 [02:26:17]- [02:26:19]

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: After in person testimony
3 is done uhm, this concludes the in person portion of
4 our public testimony. We will now move to remote
5 testimony. If you are testifying remotely, please
6 listen for your name to be called. Once your name is
7 called, a member of our staff will unmute you. You
8 may then start your testimony once the Sergeant at
9 Arms sets the clock and queues you to begin. I will
10 call Jennifer Madira(SP?). Jennifer Madira going
11 once, going twice. Alright, we'll move on. We will
12 be going to Tanesha Grant.

13 TANESHA GRANT: Thank you so much Chair Stevens,
14 Chair Louis and Chair Salaam. My name is Tanesha
15 Grant. I am the Executive Director of Parent Support
16 and Parents New York. We are based in Harlem and
17 Washington Heights. I want to share my personal
18 story. I was one of these trafficked youth. I was
19 put into the system at birth and I aged out the
20 system at 17, straight to having a baby, straight to
21 being trafficked and being on Huntz Point. There was
22 never any support for children like me, for youth
23 like me. What I got was a jail cell.

24 So, I am very, very, very happy to see you guys
25 doing this work. I have some concerns. This work is

1 being led ACS and the Police and that's not too good
2
3 for us. I deal with children that are being
4 trafficked, youth that are being trafficked all the
5 time and the first thing they say to me you guys is
6 don't call the police. Don't call ACS.

7 I think that people who have lived experience
8 really need to be called in. I just got an award for
9 being a volunteer from the President, so I am telling
10 you now that there are people like me that are
11 willing to lend our lived experience and also our
12 time to help the youth that it is happening right
13 now. I want to say that this is a generational thing
14 and there are lots of children that get left behind
15 and fall beneath the cracks.

16 Also, these programs or whatever support that
17 these systems are offering are not publicized in our
18 community. A lot of things I heard today, I'm
19 hearing for the first time and I'm very nosy about
20 what's going on in our community. So, while this
21 legislation is great first steps -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is
23 expired.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You can let her go.

25 TANESHA GRANT: Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much for
3 joining us today. I really appreciate it and you've
4 been at a number of our hearings and sharing your
5 stories and advocating for young people and making
6 sure that they don't have to have the experience that
7 you've experienced. So, one I just want to say thank
8 you for the work that you're doing and I guess the
9 question I wanted to ask you and I know you talked
10 about having folks who have lived experience lead
11 this work. Could you talk about like what that
12 vision would look like for you and ideally, obviously
13 most young people who are in these situations are
14 like, don't call the cops because they think they're
15 going to be criminalized or don't call ACS because I
16 don't want to be back in foster care. So, what are
17 some of your suggestions around what that could look
18 like if those you know, if you don't call those?
19 Because I mean, obviously you're encountering some of
20 these young people. So, what are some of the things
21 that you're doing to work with them?

22 TANESHA GRANT: Uhm, first of all, thank you for
23 your question Chair Stevens. Our young people need
24 to feel safe and most times the people that are going
25 to make you feel safe is people that have had your

1 lived experience. So, there are things that young
2 people will talk to me about that they won't talk to
3 social workers about. That they won't talk to people
4 from ACS about. That they won't talk to police
5 about. So, it's really about encouraging you guys to
6 work with people like me to make sure that when the
7 youth don't want to go to ACS or to the police or to
8 some of these larger nonprofits, that you have
9 people, community based organizations and people in
10 the community like me, that you can call as well.
11 But if we're not being pulled to the table to discuss
12 these issues and to lend our support and our
13 expertise, then we're kind of defeating the purpose.
14 If we're going straight to let's give it to these
15 agencies that we know have a harmful history of
16 supporting our youth, then I just, I just you know
17 urge you all to rethink that and I'm always here
18 Chair Stevens, Chair Louis and Chair Salaam. You all
19 know me. I'm not going nowhere.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, we really appreciate
22 that.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I mean, I definitely
24 appreciate your testimony as well. I'm thinking
25 about the cross section of all that's been said today

1 and I think the voice of the victims who have
2 survived is really speaking volumes.

3
4 To that, one of the things that I'm concerned
5 about is how do we stop this? And what I'm trying to
6 figure out is putting those parts in place. I know
7 you said we want to make sure that you know people
8 who are victimized feel safe and I'm definitely in
9 support of that 1,000 percent. But I also want to
10 make sure - well, I shouldn't say but. In addition,
11 I want to make sure in fact that this type of
12 behavior does not go unchecked. And so, those
13 individuals that are out there doing these types of
14 things, preying on our children or preying on the
15 most vulnerable, what other - is there other steps
16 that you're envisioning that speak specifically to
17 okay, if we do this first, then we can do this other
18 stuff? Because we've heard testimony from the NYPD
19 about you know sometimes victims feel extremely
20 unsafe when there's a six foot four individual
21 standing over them and they're just there. It's not
22 like they're trying to intimidate but to the victim,
23 it feels intimidating. It feels pressuring. It
24 feels like I'm being victimized all over again, I
25 don't want to do this. So, that's my question.

1
2 TANESHA GRANT: Thank you Chair Salaam for your
3 question. I think what we need to look at are the
4 systemic problems inside the system. As I said, I
5 was left at birth in Lincoln Hospital, so I spent my
6 whole childhood; I had a failed adoption and winded
7 right back up in the system at 11. Right now today,
8 I sometimes have to work with the agency that traded
9 me away, which is Children's Aid Society, which has
10 now - has been rebrand as Children Aid but if we know
11 our history, we know that Children Aid Society is
12 also the orchestrator of the Orphan Train. I think
13 we have a lot of systemic issues inside our system
14 that we have not addressed. There are a lot of
15 foster care agencies. There are a lot of people who
16 work inside these agencies that do the same thing
17 that people did 20, 30 years ago. A lot of times why
18 our youth don't feel safe is because they have not
19 been nurtured in these places, right? They have not
20 been nurtured in foster care. They have not been
21 nurtured by any ACS worker that they have
22 encountered. So, if we could stop the harm that
23 where these children feel like they're looking for
24 any type of love. That's why a lot of children get
25 trafficked because they are looking for someone to

1 love them and if they can go out on the street and
2 make some money and have a pimp say, good job, it
3 makes them feel like they are valued. So, if we can
4 value our children before they encounter these very,
5 very, very, destructive you know emotions and shower
6 them with love and care before that, that would be
7 great. We need more support inside the system to
8 support our children before they get, even get to
9 that point where they can be trafficked.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Ms. Grant? Did she log off?

12 TANESHA GRANT: I'm here. Hey Chair Louis.

13 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Hey girl. A quick question
14 because I know we have to end soon. I'm listening to
15 everything you're saying and I want to thank you for
16 joining us, for your vulnerability as well as
17 everyone else that came here earlier to testify.
18 Like you, I'm a Black woman and like you, we got to
19 learn how to hustle right to get to where we need to
20 be and you went through a lot, so you definitely have
21 that lived experience. I wanted to know if you could
22 share with us briefly and quickly, how do you work
23 with what you got? You heard from the agencies today
24 NYPD and ACS. While we're trying to make strides to
25 change the system and to break down the systemic

1 barriers that caused these ongoing issues, share with
2 us how do we work with what we currently have as we
3 continue to work diligently to make those changes?
4 Because these are the agencies that are currently
5 working on it and we can't deny that. You can't beat
6 a dead horse right? You got to work with what you
7 got. You're a hustler, I'm a hustler. How do we
8 work with what we got?
9

10 TANESHA GRANT: I think that you encourage these
11 agencies to really bring in people like me. Bring in
12 people that's going to say no. You know that's not
13 the way to do it. Like, I feel like a lot of people
14 who work in this field don't have the lens of you
15 know lived experience. This is a profession to them.
16 This is a job to them but to me, this is my life.
17 These are our children's lives. So there has to be
18 better cooperation where it's not you know the system
19 is at the top and the people that hustle, like you
20 said and the people that literally have dedicated
21 their lives to helping other people because they have
22 the lived experience are left at the bottom and out
23 of the conversation.

24 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you for that.
25

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, thank you for always showing up and being such an advocate in these spaces. And just so you know because you're not here in chambers today, so you don't see, ACS is still in the building and so, hopefully they heard what you said right, around how do we make sure that we're connecting the dots because in their testimony, they did say they have a credible messengers program that they're working on and I did encourage DYCD to do the same to support providers on that and do some type of collaboration. So, I think this is a beautiful opportunity where we can have some collaboration and cross between someone saying that they want to help and be a part of the solution and city agencies hearing that and taking that in and figuring out how to make that happen.

So that's my hope and like I said at the beginning of this hearing, this hearing is about us talking about something that is the underbelly of this city that no one wants to talk about because no one wants us to think that young people are being trafficked in the city. Just like they don't like to talk about homeless young people, right? And so, for me, it's about how do we shine the light on these

1 issues and they're not the underbelly so that we can
2 come up with solutions together to support our young
3 people.
4

5 And so, thank you so much for being such an
6 advocate. Thank you to ACS, DYCD, NYPD, and what was
7 the - ENDGBV who was also here to talk about
8 solutions and we're going to continue to work
9 together to really develop solutions that are helping
10 our young people and making them feel safe and making
11 them understand that they should not walk around with
12 shame and we should be the ones that are ashamed
13 because this is happening in our city under our
14 watch.

15 So, thank you every one and with that I close
16 this hearing. [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 February 6, 2025