

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL
WELFARE

Jointly with the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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Wednesday, June 21, 2023

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, Chairperson
Shahana K. Hanif, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Gale A. Brewer
- Crystal Hudson
- Rita C. Joseph
- Lincoln Restler
- Shekar Krishnan
- Francisco P. Moya
- Mercedes Narcisse
- Chi Ossé
- Lincoln Restler
- Kevin C. Riley
- Pierina Ana Sanchez
- Althea V. Stevens
- Sandra Ung
- Nantasha M. Williams

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

Kathryn Kliff
Staff Attorney
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Joslyn Carter
Administrator
Department of Homeless Services

Ted Long, MD
Senior Vice President
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George Sarkissian
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NYC Department of Emergency Management

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Jenny Ortiz
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Hildalyn Colon Hernandez
Deputy Director
New Immigrant Community Empowerment

Adama Bah
Supporter of newly arrived migrants

Dr. Xelle Rivera
Chief Program Officer
Bronx Parent Housing Network

Power Malu
Executive Director
Artists Athletes Activists

Pedro Zambrano
Immigrant to New York City

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to
3 today's Committee on Immigration jointly with General
4 Welfare. Place all electronic devices vibrate or
5 silent mode. If you wish to submit testimony you may
6 send it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. That's
7 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
8 cooperation. And please do not approach the dais at
9 any moment during the hearing. Thank you. Chair, we
10 are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sorry about that.

12 [GAVEL]

13 Good morning, everyone. And welcome to today's
14 hearing. My name is Diane Ayala, and I am the Deputy
15 Speaker of the New York City Council and the Chair of
16 the General Welfare Committee. Today our Committee
17 will be joining the Committee on Immigration to hold
18 an oversight hearing on emergency shelter and
19 humanitarian emergency response and relief centers in
20 New York City. We will also be hearing 8 bills,
21 Intro 942, sponsored by Councilmember Hanif, would
22 establish minimum standards for emergency congregate
23 housing, including HERRCs and respite centers. Intro
24 943 also sponsored by Councilmember Hanif would
25 require that asylum seekers receive notification of

1 the right to be placed in shelter. Intro 1064,
2 sponsored by Councilmember Bottcher would require
3 monitoring and evaluating homeless prevention and
4 aftercare programs. Intro 1072, sponsored by
5 Councilmember Hudson would change the housing history
6 requirement for entry into shelter from two years to
7 one. Intro 1080, sponsored by Councilmember Lee
8 would require the publication and dissemination of
9 information on emergency feeding programs, food
10 benefit programs, and senior centers. Intro 1084,
11 sponsored by Councilmember Narcisse would create and
12 required training on trauma-informed care for persons
13 serving refugees, asylees, and migrants. Intro 1095,
14 sponsored by Souncilmember Schulman would require at
15 least one mental health coordinator at any location
16 where refugees, asylees, and migrants receive
17 services from city agencies or providers among their
18 arrival in the city of New York. And finally, Intro
19 1096 sponsored by Councilmember Stevens would require
20 Department of Homeless Services to designate
21 eligibility specialists at all shelters.
22

23 After seeing that much of the Adams
24 administration's response to the asylum seeker crisis
25 in New York City did not go far enough, and casts

1 blame on this population for what was already an
2 overburdened shelter system, Speaker Adrienne Adams
3 put forth a series of recommendations to the
4 Administration in efforts to proactively provide
5 solutions. Many of those solutions came in the form
6 of bills that we are hearing today.
7

8 Moreover, the Adams Administration has made it
9 made it out to be that among only-- Hold on a
10 second. I'm sorry, I am going blind. You got it.
11 You got it-- That among the only ways to address this
12 crisis are to undo the city's long-established right
13 to shelter. This is extremely short-sighted. Today
14 I asked that we are-- ask why we are even at this
15 point, when there are enough beds for 15,000 people
16 lying empty across the city shelter system and in
17 supportive housing.

18 I also ask why the Administration is so intent on
19 making life even more difficult for poor New Yorkers,
20 including those seeking permanent housing with
21 CityFHEPS vouchers, by trying to undo legislation
22 that we recently passed to open up eligibility for
23 CityFHEPS. The Council recognizes that one key way
24 to address the influx of asylum seekers in New York
25 City, and to provide them with safe and humane living

3 conditions, is to free up beds and our shelter system
4 and move people who want to find permanent housing
5 into apartments.

6 Today, we also want to examine the conditions at
7 the HERRCs, particularly those with congregate
8 settings, as they are currently not deemed shelter by
9 the administration, and therefore not subject to many
10 of the protections and standards established by the
11 Callahan decree that created the right to shelter. I
12 look forward to hearing from the Administration and
13 advocates today, and gathering feedback on the
14 oversight topic and on all of these important bills.
15 At this time, I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues
16 who are here today: Councilmember Hudson and
17 Councilmember Hanif. And I'm sure that we will be
18 joined by several others shortly.

19 I also want to thank our committee staff who
20 worked tirelessly to prepare this hearing and work
21 very hard to finalize these bills, Aminta Kilawan,
22 Senior Legislative Counsel, David Romero, Legislative
23 Counsel, Julia Haramis, Unit Head, Rosa Martinez,
24 Assistant Deputy Director, and finally my staff Elsie
25 Encarnacion, Chief of Staff.

I will now like to turn it over to my Co-Chair,
Councilmember Hanif.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you and good morning.

I'm Councilmember Shahana Hanif, Chair on the
Committee on Immigration. Thank you for joining
today's joint hearing with the Committee on
Immigration and the Committee on General Welfare.

I'd like to begin by thanking my Co-Chair, Deputy
Speaker Diana Ayala, Chair of the Committee on
General Welfare for her support in putting this
hearing together. I want to thank my Council
colleagues, representatives from the Administration
and public for being here with us in the chambers,
and to members of the public participating remotely.

Our hearing today will address how the city has
sheltered newly arrived New Yorkers seeking asylum.
It is undeniable that meeting the shelter needs of
the more than 48,000 new arrivals that are currently
in the City's care is an extremely challenging task.
In many ways the Administration has stepped up and
deserves praise. It acted quickly to secure the use
of over 140 hotels as emergency DHS shelters while,
far from perfect, have allowed the shelter system to
rapidly scale, while meeting typical shelter

standards in large part. The City also launched the humanitarian emergency response and recovery center, relief centers, or the HERRC model which is run outside of the DHS shelter system by Health + Hospitals and Emergency Management.

The six of these centers that are based out of hotels have been largely successful with standards of living that meet shelter standards and important services incorporated on site. However, the HERRCs where people are housed in congregate settings have proved more concerning. Because these facilities are not classified as DHS shelters, the City has argued that they are not subject to the minimum standards established by the Right to Shelter Consent Decree. In the now defunct HERRCs on Randall's Island and in the Brooklyn cruise terminal, and the two HERRCs currently operating out of converted office spaces in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and midtown Manhattan. I raise concerns around hundreds of cots being set up head to toe and a mass congregate setting, amongst other conditions that would not be allowed in the DHS shelter system.

In May of this year, the city began operating a new classification of emergency housing called

1
2 emergency respite centers, where living conditions
3 are extremely substandard. These include a Terminal
4 Warehouse at JFK Airport, an NYPD building in
5 Grammercy, and a recently defunct prison in Harlem.
6 They also include the school gyms that were
7 temporarily used as housing last month but are not
8 currently active.

9 Of the sites that Councilmembers and staff have
10 seen, it's clear that they are not fit for housing
11 New Yorkers, especially not for extended periods of
12 time. Issues include not having showers on site,
13 serious plumbing issues that have required complete
14 resident evacuations, and buildings being in general
15 disrepair. While the administration has stated that
16 these are waiting rooms intended for 24 to 48 hour
17 use, people have been languishing in these facilities
18 for as long as a month now.

19 While resorting to these dire measures the Mayor
20 has adopted counterintuitive policy positions that
21 stand to worsen the city's homelessness crisis.
22 First, he has opposed the legislative package that
23 the council recently passed to expand CityFHEPS
24 vouchers. These bills would make it easier for long-
25 term shelter residents to transition to permanent

1 housing and open up more shelter beds. Yet the Mayor
2 has not signed them and is considering vetoing them.
3 Further, he even added new work requirements as
4 prerequisites to accessing the vouchers which will
5 exacerbate the shelter bed shortage.
6

7 Second, he has undermined the Right to Shelter
8 Consent Decree which has served as the city's
9 cornerstone of social service infrastructure for
10 years. Via executive order 402 He suspended key
11 right to shelter potentially opening the door for
12 housing families with children in a congregate
13 setting. Additionally, he has attempted to weaken
14 the decree on a permanent basis by filing a court
15 request that, if successful, could remove the city's
16 obligation to provide shelter to those requesting it.

17 The Right to Shelter Decree is what is what has
18 prevented New York from experiencing the mass street
19 homelessness that other cities in the United States
20 have struggled with. It must be upheld in full.
21 That's why I'm proud that today this Council is
22 hearing two of my bills that would strengthen, not
23 roll back, the right to shelter. I'm grateful to
24 Deputy Speaker Ayala, Public Advocate Williams, and
25 Councilmembers Avila, Sanchez, Cabán, Restler,

1
2 Gutierrez, De La Rosa, Rivera, and Krishnan for
3 introducing these bills alongside me.

4 I also want to thank Speaker Adams for including
5 these bills in the Council's white paper that lays
6 out a comprehensive set of policy recommendations
7 regarding asylum seekers.

8 Intro 942, which is currently sponsored by 19
9 Councilmembers would establish minimum standards for
10 emergency congregate housing in New York City,
11 including congregate HERRCs, respite centers, and any
12 new iterations of emergency housing created in
13 response to asylum seekers coming to our city. These
14 minimum standards would mimic those that are
15 currently in place in DHS shelters via the Right to
16 Shelter Consent Decree, including those around bed
17 spacing, bathrooms, showers, laundry, and meals.
18 This bill will ensure that our newest arrivals are
19 not carved out from the protections that ensure New
20 Yorkers are housed with basic dignity.

21 Intro 943 which is sponsored by 16 Councilmembers
22 would require that the mayor provide written and
23 verbal notification of the right to be placed in a
24 DSS shelter to individuals and families who are
25 housed in specific types of emergency congregate

1 housing in New York City. This notification would
2 stipulate that individuals and families be placed in
3 DSS shelters within 24 hours of the request to be
4 moved to a shelter. The bill would also require that
5 the city report within one calendar day if they were
6 unable to meet this timed request. This will ensure
7 that asylum seekers are not warehoused indefinitely
8 in substandard living conditions that failed to meet
9 the minimum standards of the shelter system.
10

11 Our hearing today will also address Intros 1064,
12 1072, 1080, 1084, 1095, and 109, which highlight
13 additional protections and actions for asylum
14 seekers, residents of temporary housing, seniors, and
15 recipients of emergency nutrition and food benefits
16 programs. I'm grateful to their sponsors,
17 Councilmember Botcher, Lee, Hudson, Narcisse,
18 Schulman, and Stevens, some who are also here today,
19 or will be here today to speak about their bills. We
20 look forward to hearing from the Administration and
21 the public on their response to the hearings attached
22 legislation.

23 I want to thank all the committee staff for their
24 work on this issue including Jayasri Ganapathy,
25 Senior Legislative Counsel, Rebecca Barilla, Policy
Analyst,

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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2 Amintha Kilowan, Senior Legislative Counsel, David
3 Romero, Legislative Counsel, Florentine Cabore,
4 Finance Analyst, and Julia Haramis, Finance Unit
5 Head. I also would like to thank my staff,
6 Legislative Director Alex Liao, Communications
7 Director, Michael Whitesides, and Chief of Staff Nora
8 Brickner. The Sergeants At Arms and interpreters
9 working to make this joint hearing run smoothly.

10 Now, I will turn it back to Deputy Speaker Ayala.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, I want to
12 recognize that we've been joined by Councilmember
13 Williams. And with that, we're going to begin
14 today's hearing with testimony from the Legal Aid
15 Society.

16 MS. KLIFF: Good morning. My name is Kathryn
17 Kliff, and I'm a staff attorney at the Homeless
18 Rights Project of the Legal Aid Society. I'm
19 testifying on behalf of the Legal Aid Society and the
20 Coalition for the Homeless. Thank you to Deputy
21 Speaker Ayala and chair Hanif as well as their staff
22 for hosting this hearing regarding important
23 legislation to protect the rights of homeless New
24 Yorkers, including recent migrants. As class Council
25 on the landmark right to shelter cases, and the court

1 and city appointed monitor for the city's shelter
2 system, Legal Aid and Coalition for the Homeless are
3 uniquely positioned to provide expertise on these
4 issues.
5

6 At a time when New York City is experiencing
7 record levels of homelessness, the bedrock
8 protections of the right to shelter are more
9 important than ever. While there has been an
10 increase in the number of recent migrants coming to
11 the city from the southern border, the city has
12 created multiple new shelter systems to serve this
13 population separate from the traditional DHS shelter
14 system. Notably, as was discussed earlier, these new
15 systems, including HERRCs and respite centers, are
16 not subject to either state or city rules and
17 regulations that govern the DHS shelter system.
18 Those regulations exist to ensure that people in
19 shelter can meet their basic needs, such as access to
20 showers, a bed with a mattress and a pillow, adequate
21 bathroom stalls for the population size, three meals
22 a day, laundry, lockable storage, and due process
23 rights to contest a discharge.

24 HERRCs and respite centers do not have to meet
25 that basic standard. Clients can be removed at any

1 time for any reason. Our staff has seen firsthand
2 the harm that results. Clients in respite sites have
3 gotten many days without access to a shelter. Many
4 sites have no access to lockable storage to safeguard
5 belongings, including immigration paperwork to
6 preserve asylum claims, or they may lack access to
7 laundry to wash what little clothing the recent
8 migrants may have.
9

10 While all city run facilities must follow federal
11 disability rights laws and honor the civil rights of
12 those in them, we have seen extensive access barriers
13 for recent migrants with disabilities. We have also
14 seen a large number of recent migrants who identify
15 as LGBTQ+, but are placed in a congregate facility
16 where they do not feel safe to be who they are.

17 We strongly support Intro 942 Which would ensure
18 that all shelters in New York City including HERRCs
19 and respite centers have to meet the same basic
20 requirements as the DHS shelter system.

21 Mass homelessness is not a recent phenomenon in
22 New York City, nor is it the result of recent
23 migrants. For decades, New York City has failed to
24 provide sufficient affordable housing or to focus on
25 moving people out of shelter as quickly as possible.

1
2 Rather than pursuing modifications to the Callahan
3 Consent Decree, the City should be focusing its
4 efforts on moving people out of shelter into
5 affordable permanent housing. The more people move
6 out of shelter, the more vacancy there will be in the
7 shelter system, which is a win for everyone. We
8 continue to provide the city with common sense and
9 practical solutions to increase capacity in the DHS
10 shelter system to allow for more space for new
11 arrivals. And we commit to continuing to do so and
12 to working with the Council on these important
13 issues. Thank you for this opportunity to testify
14 today.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much for your
16 testimony today. And thank you for your-- your
17 ongoing support to the Council and to New Yorkers
18 that are struggling every single day. I think that
19 we've seen a whole-- you know, a lot of-- There's
20 been a lot of conversation this year about changes to
21 rules that, you know, seriously impact the well-being
22 of some of the neediest New Yorkers. And that-- that
23 concerns us. And you know, we really appreciate the
24 legal aid, stepping up and being, you know, equal
25 partners with us. Thank you so much.

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MS. KLIFF: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you just speak a little bit more about what stripping away the protections that are mandated by our city's Right to Shelter Decree would mean for New York City, particularly in this moment?

MS. KLIFF: Sure. So the city has reached out to the Court to request to make a motion to modify the Callahan Consent Decree. The Callahan Consent Decree is the decree that guarantees the right to shelter for single homeless men, although this would also extend to single homeless women as well. And so the City's request to the Court was to modify it such that at any time the City could say they had basically an emergency and could no longer meet their obligations under the right to shelter. Obviously, that would-- could result in large numbers of people sleeping outside, even more than already is happening. So it's very concerning to us and to our clients. We have already gotten calls from clients in shelter. Even families with children calling us very concerned that they are no longer going to be able to stay in shelter.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And has something like this
3 been done in past administrations, in terms of
4 modifications?

5 MS. KLIFF: There's certainly been litigation,
6 but every time that the city has tried to modify the
7 consent decree or limit it, it has not-- the Court
8 has not agreed, and-- and it has only strengthened
9 the protections. I mean, the reason we have a right
10 to shelter is so that we don't have mass street
11 homelessness. People need a safe place to stay. And
12 that is why Callahan and its progeny are so important
13 is to keep people off the street and keep people
14 housed.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much for
16 testifying.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We've been joined
18 by Councilmember Narcisse, who will share a little
19 bit with us about her bill.

20 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning. Thank you
21 for being here. And thank you Chair. My name is
22 Mercedes Narcisse, and I come from a different place,
23 an immigrant from Haiti. So any immigrants, you
24 know, the situation in the city of New York, I would
25 like to see it the best way we can invite, you know,

1 welcome people in the best way that we can, not only
2 in the city of New York, but I believe United States
3 of America is built with immigrants. So thank you
4 for being here.
5

6 As our city and the nation continue to struggle
7 and fight, and making sure that-- Yes, we have been
8 through a pandemic, but those are people that coming
9 in on our shore. And the message that we should
10 continue sending is that the comfort, the Statue Of
11 Liberty that we have on our harbor, is-- we stand by
12 it and continue to do the best to ensure that people
13 that coming in feel like that we're rejecting them,
14 but welcome them. And everyone that coming actually
15 they're looking for a dream. No one will be
16 traveling thus far. Some of us come from miles and
17 miles away to be here. And-- and the support of this
18 individual that journey surely been full of stress
19 and adversity. I have introduced some Intro 1084,
20 which will create the training on the trauma-informed
21 care for persons serving refugee, asylum seekers. As
22 we know the travel miles in really conditions that
23 should not be set for human being. So they
24 traumatize automatically so when they come in, I
25 would like to see that we as the City of New York,

1 and being a nurse for over three decades, understand
2 Little things can get you traumatized. Can you
3 imagine someone that travels so far and overcome so
4 much to be here. And not only for them, for the
5 children, their family. The city departments of CBO
6 is in consultation with the New York City, H + H
7 shall develop training on trauma informed care. The
8 training shall include, but not be limited to
9 recognizing signs of trauma exposure, understanding
10 the common behaviors of people exposed to trauma,
11 trauma informed principles for interacting with those
12 individuals and resources in addressing secondary
13 trauma. This training shall be substantive and be
14 consistent with standards developed by Substance
15 Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of
16 the United States Department of Health and Human
17 Services.
18

19 I hope you will be joining me, all of my
20 colleagues will join me in that support, and you can
21 join me and to make sure that we provide the best
22 quality healthcare when it comes to mental health and
23 physical health. So thank you, but this one is for
24 mental health mostly. Thank you so much Chair, and
25 thank you.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE Jointly with the
2 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

23

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Councilmember. I
4 would like-- I would like-- now like to turn it over
5 to our Counsel to swear in members of the
6 administration if there are any Thank you.

7 COUNSEL: From the Administration today we have
8 Joslyn Carter from Department of Homeless Services,
9 Dr. Ted Long from Health + Hospitals, George
10 Sarkissian, from the Department of Housing
11 Preservation Development, and Commissioner Zach
12 Iscol, from New York City Emergency Management.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You guys pulled one over me
14 because I have not used to you being on this side
15 of... [chuckles]

16 COUNSEL: Will you please raise your right hand?
17 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
18 nothing but the truth before this committee, and to
19 respond honestly to Councilmember questions?

20 ALL: I do.

21 COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin when ready.

22 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Good morning members of the
23 New York City Council. I am Zach Iscol, Commissioner
24 of New York City Emergency Management and I am here
25 to discuss the surge in asylum seekers in New York
City. I am joined today by Administrator Jocelyn

1 Carter from the Department of Homeless Services,
2 George Sarkissian, Chief of Staff and Deputy
3 Commissioner for External Affairs at Department of
4 Housing Preservation and Development, and Dr. Ted
5 Long, New York City's favorite doctor, Senior Vice
6 President for Ambulatory Care and Population Health
7 at Health + Hospitals.
8

9 The influx of asylum seekers seeking refuge in
10 New York City continues to be a challenging task, and
11 a great example of collaboration among city agencies.
12 As we face this humanitarian crisis, we have not
13 wavered in our commitment to help and support. As
14 you are aware, and as the Administration has said
15 repeatedly, we are in the midst of a crisis. This is
16 an all-hands-on-deck moment as the system is at a
17 breaking point. This is a national problem, and it
18 requires a national solution. We continue to ask the
19 federal government for a decompression strategy,
20 expedited work authorization, and more funding. The
21 city continues to plan for peak capacity, as hundreds
22 of asylum seekers continue to arrive in New York City
23 every day.

24 As this crisis has continued, and in the absence
25 of support, the City has stepped up and opened

1 emergency sites overseen by a number of agencies
2 including DHS, Health + Hospitals, HPD, and Emergency
3 Management.
4

5 New York City Emergency Management helps New
6 Yorkers before during and after emergencies through
7 preparedness, education, and response. The agency is
8 responsible for coordinating citywide emergency
9 planning and response for all types and sizes of
10 emergencies. It is staffed by more than 200
11 dedicated professionals with diverse backgrounds and
12 areas of expertise, including individuals detailed
13 from other city agencies.

14 As the coordinating agency for the city of New
15 York, Emergency Management functions as a general
16 facilitator when it comes to emergency response,
17 ensuring that resources are available for our partner
18 agencies to complete their core competencies, and
19 serving New Yorkers and what can be their worst days
20 with compassion and cultural competency.

21 Emergency Management is no stranger to assisting
22 people displaced from their homes, whether it be a
23 natural disaster like a hurricane, flood, or other
24 emergencies, such as a fire or gas explosion. We
25 have played a role throughout this crisis by

1 coordinating with partner agencies and the opening of
2 HERRCs, coordinating between incoming buses of asylum
3 seekers, and providing support to the operations of
4 the Welcome Center. Most recently, Emergency
5 Management has started to oversee Emergency Respite
6 Centers across the five boroughs. The Emergency
7 Respite Centers provide bed, meals, and security to
8 guests until longer-term accommodation becomes
9 available at a HERRC or another location.
10

11 As the Mayor has said, New York City cannot carry
12 this weight on its own. The asylum seeker operation
13 comes at a very high financial cost, and we urge the
14 federal government to provide us with the necessary
15 support as this crisis continues. This unprecedented
16 crisis has been from the start a true interagency
17 effort, and we will continue to work with our partner
18 agencies, as well as contracted partners and
19 providers to provide assistance and coordination. We
20 are grateful for the support those willing to work
21 with us, and that the many elected officials who know
22 that new immigrants have and will continue to enrich
23 our communities.

24 Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.
25 The panel will now take your questions.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. It's really a
3 pleasure to see all of you. And I want to start by
4 promising that I really like all of you. So this is
5 not personal. But I really just-- I think you know--
6 and Councilmember Hanif, you know, has worked really
7 hard to ensure that this hearing took place. And I
8 want to really allow her a lot of time to ask
9 whatever questions she may want to ask of the
10 Administration.

11 But I think that, you know-- I wanted to just
12 start by saying, first of all, thank you, because I
13 understand, and I have been, you know, people-- some
14 people accuse me of being too nice, some people
15 because maybe not nice at all. I think I like to
16 think of myself as somewhere in the middle. And I
17 like to think of myself as somebody that is very
18 fair. And I like to take a really good look at both
19 sides of every issue, because I know that, right?,
20 there's a there are a lot of nuances to the way that
21 we do things. And it's very easy to point fingers.
22 And I get that, you know, we-- Just because I, you
23 know, I expect that things are done a certain way
24 that that's not always possible. However, I think
25 that we've deviated a lot this. You know, this past

1 year, we've learned a lot of lessons and-- but I do
2 want to recognize that I have been to several of the
3 of the sites and I know that the long-- you know,
4 have the heart of a heart of gold. And I know that
5 the intentions of all of you on this panel is really
6 to do your jobs as effectively as possible with the
7 tools that you're being provided.
8

9 That's kind of where we get-- where the hiccup
10 is, right? So, what are those tools that you're
11 being given, and how-- how those tools meet the
12 needs, right?, of vulnerable people that are coming
13 into a state that they are very unfamiliar with,
14 that, you know, they don't know, and ensuring that
15 we're really meeting the same standards that we
16 expect, right?, of average-- of New Yorkers that are
17 in need of housing.

18 And so there's been a lot of concern about the
19 HERRCs, what they mean, what they look like. Again,
20 I I've been to some I have not been to all. I look
21 forward to, you know, to visiting more of them after
22 the budget is over, and we have a little bit more
23 flexibility. But I do want to recognize that I know
24 how difficult this is, not just for all of you, but
25 also for the Administration. And I think we've been

1 very clear about that, and have you know, really
2 tried to advocate for the same resources that-- that
3 you're requesting in terms of work visas and
4 additional, you know, funding, because we all want to
5 do the right thing.
6

7 Having said that, however, as a chair of General
8 Welfare and as a social services, you know, geared
9 individual, I'm not 100% You know, sure that I love
10 the idea of having a separate system independent of,
11 you know, DHS. I just-- You know, the worry is that--
12 - The concern is that we're not adhering, you know,
13 to policies that have been created throughout the
14 years to address issues, right?, that have been
15 brought to the attention of this body.

16 And so while I you know can appreciate you're
17 trying to, you know, ensure that people have a house
18 you know, a bed to sleep in at night and-- and a warm
19 meal. We also our job, right?, as oversight is to
20 ensure that we are getting as close as possible to
21 ensuring those same-- the same level of protections,
22 right? So if I'm coming in and I'm an asylum-seeking
23 family or a single person, I want to know off the bat
24 what my rights are. I want somebody to explain those
25 to me. And I want to know that I have the right, if

1
2 I chose to go into shelter. And I know that there
3 are limitations there. But-- So I guess my first
4 question is: At this point today, how many HERRCs
5 have we opened citywide?

6 DR. LONG: So I can take that in. And thank you
7 for your comments, too. I just-- I wrote down a
8 couple of things that are really the mantra that we
9 live by as we're trying to design these sites to not
10 just be a place to sleep, but to really meet the
11 specific needs of people that had been through a
12 tremendous amount of trauma as they've traveled here.
13 And we've learned a lot along the way. I think our
14 model has evolved, as it should, to make sure that we
15 are again, meeting the specific needs that meet
16 people where they are from needing vaccinations to
17 having gone through the journey to arrive here.

18 To answer your specific question. We currently
19 have 11 HERRCs in operation, and there has been a few
20 HERRCs that have been operated in the past (Brooklyn
21 cruise terminal and Randall's Island) that are no
22 longer in operation today.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and what is the total
24 number of individuals in the 11?

1
2 DR. LONG: The total number of individuals in the
3 11 is 12,593 as of yesterday. Actually, I apologize.
4 Is that-- The 12,593 is in the H + H HERRCs, which
5 are 10 of the 11. The HPD HERRC, I have the answer,
6 but I'll let George share it if you'd like to.

7 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: We have a HERRC at
8 455 Jefferson Street in Bushwick with 532 asylum
9 seekers.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 532?

11 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

13 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I don't. So can you explain
15 to me what the difference is a between Health +
16 Hospital HERRC, as opposed to an HPD HERRC, and how
17 we arrived at that situation?

18 DR. LONG: Sure. Well, as you can see, we're
19 sitting next to each other today, and we speak a
20 great deal to each other. We've designed the HERRC
21 model. Again, as we've incorporated further staff,
22 like social workers for mental health, or like
23 vaccinations as part of the intake process, things
24 like that. The model that we developed, HPD raised
25 their hand to offer to help us so that we could open

1
2 up more sites more quickly. We only have so many
3 staff, of course.

4 So HPD is using the same model that we've
5 developed and been able to help actually more than
6 20,000 asylum seekers for-- through that H + H HERRCs
7 so far, but HPD raised their hand to offer to help us
8 so that we can help more people more quickly.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But that doesn't mean that
10 Health + Hospitals does-- is not part of that-- that
11 system as well, right? You're still there.

12 DR. LONG: We are deeply involved, and I'll let
13 George share, but I would describe it as-- We've
14 developed a program. They've given us their input
15 too. And they've implemented the same program. But
16 George, do you want to...

17 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah, one-- one
18 program, same services in all of our sites, a unified
19 system. We're all working off of the same host
20 system where we're sharing information, transferring
21 people from one site to another site when necessary.
22 So it's completely integrated. And we talk just
23 regularly. So it functions is one system.

24 DR. LONG: Some of the services for example,
25 they're true and administered in the same way is we

1 have social workers, caseworkers, laundry on site,
2 security for any belongings that people have, 24/7
3 medical care at both of our sites and at all of the
4 HERRCs. So those same services, we've developed, you
5 know, the model based on what we've seen the specific
6 needs of asylum seekers are, like the fact that many
7 don't know how to interpret their symptoms. So it is
8 helpful to have an emergency but also specialty care
9 when people first coming to our sites to help them
10 with what they've experienced during their journey.
11 But then also what they've, maybe, had going on, but
12 haven't really been able to address because of the
13 stress of the journey.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And are all of these
16 congregate settings, like... No?

17 DR. LONG: Of our 11 HERRCs, nine are hotels or
18 dorms, and two our settings that are former office
19 buildings that we've turned into congregate settings
20 only for single adult men. That's the Candler, which
21 is one of my sites, and the Jefferson which is one of
22 HPD's sites.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Now, when we-- when
24 the idea of the HERRC was initially proposed, it was--
25 - it was proposed as a temporary solution while folks

1 were in transition, right?, and trying to determine
2 whether they wanted to stay in New York City, whether
3 they wanted to, you know, be re-ticketed. Since then
4 a lot has changed and these settings have become a
5 little bit more permanent.

6
7 Is there-- I'm assuming that there's a social
8 worker at each site that's working with individual
9 families to try to figure out what the long term
10 planning is for that family.

11 DR. LONG: Yeah, that's exactly right. So-- and
12 we're even having our teams go through it currently.
13 This is just a day in the life, which is literally
14 happening today, to knock on everybody's doors at any
15 HERRC. Again, we've talked-- we obviously talked to
16 people regularly but to make another plan moving
17 forward, to see where you are with-- with respect to
18 your journey, whether that's speaking with a social
19 worker, a caseworker or somebody that can help to
20 make a reconnection to that brother in Chicago, who
21 you've been trying to reach, or maybe you haven't
22 talked to in a while. Whatever it will take on our
23 side to help you to complete your journey, we want to
24 make sure that we're having that discussion early and
25 often with you to help you. And across the HERRCs,

3 you know, one of the things we've learned is that
4 people's situations are different.

5 So in our HERRCs, I'm proud to say that we've
6 cared for more than 20,000 asylum seekers. Among
7 those we just shared some of the math, that my
8 HERRCs, the H + H HERRCs, we have a little bit over
9 12,000 asylum seekers today. That's 8,000 asylum
10 seekers that do through our help have been able to
11 identify what the next step in their journey is. And
12 we've helped to help them succeed taking the next
13 step forward. That's about 40% of everybody that has
14 come through our door that we've offered care to has
15 been able to take the next step in their journey with
16 our help.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are you getting? Are you
18 getting a rotation of folks, like people coming in
19 that left and then coming back?

20 DR. LONG: No, that-- that's not common.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So what is the average
22 length of stay per family? Are these families that
23 came in, you know, from-- you know, as soon as the
24 HERRC open and are still there? Or, you know, have
25 some families left?

1
2 DR. LONG: Yeah, it's a great question. And I--
3 I'll be very upfront with you. I focus more on the
4 discharge percentages. Because I've spent a lot of
5 time talking to asylum seekers, and everybody's
6 situation is different. For-- You know, a good clear
7 example, which actually is a really common one is
8 we'll have an adult man come into one of our HERRCs,
9 let's say initially. We'll have a discussion, make a
10 plan. And he'll tell us, this is a common story, I'm
11 going to be here for about three or four weeks. Why
12 three or four weeks, because that's the amount of
13 time it's going to take for him to get money back to
14 the rest of his family, to have them come up to New
15 York City. And we literally see families get
16 reunited and leave our HERRCs.

17 So the length of stay can be variable. Some
18 people's families-- Some people travel with their
19 families, some people's families are closer behind,
20 some it's going to take more time for a variety of
21 reasons. So I think the important thing to me at the
22 end of the day is, if you're trying to bring your
23 family up here, or if you're with your family here,
24 helping to see what it would take for you to take
25 that next step forward in your life with your family.

1
2 And whether that's on day one, day 10, or day 30,
3 we're there for you. We'll work with you, we'll have
4 a plan with you. And we'll make it happen with you.
5 But we are flexible, given people's individual
6 situations, because again, people's situations,
7 especially again, looking at Councilmember Narcisse,
8 here, the trauma they've been through, everybody's
9 situation is a little bit different, and we want to
10 be effective in helping you to achieve your goals.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So how many-- how many
12 discharges have you had? Since that's the number
13 that we're going to focus on?

14 DR. LONG: So-- No totally. So I'll share with
15 you the numbers again, that are specific to the
16 HERRCs. But then I'll zoom out a little bit and talk
17 about our citywide numbers.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Go ahead.

19 DR. LONG: So specifically in the HERRCs, we've
20 been able to care for more than 20,000 asylum
21 seekers. Among those 20,000, 12,000 are with us--
22 over 12,000 are with us in our care today. So 20,000
23 minus 12,000 is about 8,000 that we've helped to take
24 that next step in their journey since starting to--
25 since we started to open the HERRCs months ago.

1 That's, again, about 40%. Citywide (and these are--
2 I'm going to share a couple of public numbers now,
3 but just to walk you through), we've been able to
4 care for, citywide, over 78,700 asylum seekers. So
5 that includes DHS (and I'll turn to see if
6 Administrator Carter wants to add anything in a
7 moment), and among them, we currently have over
8 48,700 currently in our care. That means that about
9 30,000 asylum seekers across New York City, we've
10 been able to help and take the next step forward in
11 their journey.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, a significant number.

14 DR. LONG: Yeah, I agree.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's a significant number.

16 Oh, we've been joined by Councilmember Ung.

17 Is there a Bill of Rights that's provided to
18 individuals that are coming in? Could you just walk
19 me through-- Let me-- Let me kind of backtrack
20 because, again, this has been evolving for the last
21 year. So what I remember from two weeks ago may not
22 even be accurate today. So I'm on a bus-- You know,
23 I'm newly arrived, right? I don't even know where
24 the bus is going anymore, because it's not-- it may
25

1 not even be going to Grand-- it was Grand Central
2 Station, right?

3
4 DR. LONG: Penn-- Or I'm sorry, Port Authority.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Port Authority. So are they--
6 - are the buses still coming to the through the Port
7 Authority, or are they going-- being redirected?

8 DR. LONG: So the buses-- Actually, that's a
9 great question. So I can walk you through a little
10 bit of shedding the light, starting with, if you're
11 coming on-- from a bus or if you're coming through
12 other modes of transit, which I'll note is how most
13 asylum seekers are coming into New York City today.
14 If you're coming through a bus, you'll typically get
15 on the bus in Texas. It's a charter bus, meaning we
16 know when you're going to arrive at Port Authority.
17 We have that information ahead of time. Zach,
18 Commissioner Iscol's team is there awaiting the bus,
19 arranges for people to get off the bus, and then
20 transported via another bus over to our new arrival
21 center. That's true for anybody coming from any
22 chartered bus from Texas.

23 We are noticing that a lot of people are coming
24 through planes, trains, automobiles, you name it,
25 nowadays. So the single point of entry for anybody--

2 any asylum seeker coming into New York City, we've
3 made our Arrival Center. So you may get off of the
4 plane and come to the Arrival Center, you may be
5 coming from a bus from Texas, and then Zach's team
6 will get you over to the Arrival Center. But either
7 way, you come through the same doorway at the same
8 Arrival Center, and you'll have the same experience
9 there moving forward.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Where is Arrival Center?

11 DR. LONG: It's at the Roosevelt Hotel.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

13 DR. LONG: So then when you come through the
14 front door of the Arrival Center, we do have a pretty
15 regimented process where you check in, our staff will
16 actually walk you up to the main waiting area in the
17 lobby. First thing we do, which has been true
18 drawing from, you know, what meant the most to people
19 at our HERRCs over the last six or eight months of
20 experience, is we're going to offer you food, water
21 and a bathroom first.

22 Again, this is, as Councilmember Narcisse said,
23 "You've come a long way." And food can go a long way
24 too.

1
2 So we make sure that you're comfortable. Then we
3 register you. And the registration is a pretty quick
4 thing. But we give you a wristband that just says
5 your-- we know that you're on site, so that we can
6 know who's on site at any given time. So we want to
7 make sure that we have all of our operations very
8 smooth.

9 In terms of the number of people that have gotten
10 that far in the process, since we opened the Arrival
11 Center, over 13,000 asylum seekers have registered,
12 meaning come to the Arrival Center and gone through
13 our process, since we opened it just a little bit
14 over a month ago.

15 Then once you've registered, you go into really
16 the heart of the operation. First thing that will
17 happen to you is you'll go through a medical
18 screening process. Again, a lot has happened to you
19 including you could have caught communicable diseases
20 along the way. So we screen for active tuberculosis,
21 we do screen for COVID, and we actually do a total
22 skin exam as well, because we've seen a lot of
23 communicable diseases like varicella, because people
24 coming from a lot of countries in South America have
25

1 not been exposed to things like chickenpox, which are
2 routine here, but are not as common there.

3
4 Then we talk to you about if there are any
5 critical medical issues for you that you may have
6 been, you know, biding your time to really address.
7 So we've seen some-- some actually really sad cases
8 that, you know, this wasn't at the Arrival Center,
9 this was at Port Authority, but we've seen, you know,
10 a child had a witnessed seizure, we even had a mother
11 who gave birth, and we've had a variety of other
12 chronic diseases. But the-- the silver lining there
13 is we're able to immediately intervene, and we have
14 medical teams, again, there 24/7. So whatever we
15 see, we're able to help you right away. We bring you
16 up to a private room on the second floor. We'll
17 address your medical issues before you take the next
18 step forward in your process.

19 Then we go through (and this is really part of
20 the concept behind the Arrival Center) is people have
21 been coming into New York City again, in a variety of
22 different ways, coming to a variety of different
23 places, and you Councilmember Ayala, have seen some
24 of the different places, but we wanted to have the
25 same intake for everybody. So we're asking everybody

1
2 the same questions, getting to know everybody in the
3 same way, and being able to make plans with everybody
4 in the same fashion as well. And part of the concept
5 which has been proven true in the last month for us
6 is, we've learned that for a lot of people coming in,
7 they may come to one of our sites, but they may
8 actually know where they're trying to go next, what
9 the next step of their journey would be, but they
10 just can't do it on day-- within a few hours. So we
11 have a set of rooms set aside, based on experience
12 that that we've had, but that also, you know, that
13 DHS has had through their centuries of experience.
14 And we let people stay the night.

15 So if what it's going to take is to help you to
16 complete your journey to find your brother in Chicago
17 (that's a true story, by the way), you can stay the
18 night with us. And then we'll pick up the
19 conversation again with you tomorrow, get you a
20 ticket if that's what your choice is, communicate
21 with your brother in Chicago with you, and get you on
22 your way to Chicago.

23 So in the Arrival Center, we have-- we offer that
24 same opportunity with the same discussion to
25 everybody coming in. And then we also get a line of

1 sight into what part of the process people are in as
2 well with respect to their seeking asylum in the US.
3 And then I know I'm very being very verbose. And
4 then we will get you to where we decide together the
5 next place for you is. Oh sorry, last thing, though:
6 As part of this process, too, while you're waiting to
7 have a conversation with us, a really effective thing
8 that we've done is we have roving vaccine teams. So
9 we have vaccine teams that will go around to children
10 and adults just while you're waiting, just like
11 Administrator Carter here is, we would just go up and
12 say, "Would you like to be vaccinated?" If you've
13 been vaccinated for common things like MMR,
14 varicella, we too often hear the answer is no. But
15 we're able to fix it right then and there. And my
16 team's alone in our HERRCs Arrival Center and
17 Navigation Center have now surpassed more than 20,000
18 vaccines administered to asylum seekers.

19
20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I had heard of a couple of
21 incidents in my district of chickenpox outbreaks at
22 the schools. So that's-- that's good to hear.

23 But at the Arrival Center, is that where you make
24 the determination who goes to DHS, and who goes to
25 HERRCs, and who goes to HPD?

3 DR. LONG. Correct. Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And how is that
5 determination made? Based on-- is that-- is that
6 based on preference from the individual, or is that
7 at the recommendation of the staff?

8 DR. LONG: So it's based on a couple of things.
9 One is availability. So if you're, for example, a
10 family with children, the most convenient option for
11 you, I believe, would be for you to stay at the
12 Roosevelt Hotel, which has rooms only for families
13 with children who will be staying there and moving
14 forward.

15 So if you're a family with children, we offer you
16 room at the Roosevelt if we have one. The challenge
17 is, while our effectiveness and compassion has been
18 infinite throughout this crisis, our space in the
19 Roosevelt Hotel and across New York City just is not.
20 So we run out of space regularly. When we open
21 rooms, we fill them with families with children at
22 the Roosevelt. So then we look at our other HERRCs,
23 if we have availability. Or that's when, if you're a
24 family with children, we touch base with our DHS
25 colleagues who are on site 24/7 at the Arrival Center

1
2 as well, and find the best option for you if you're a
3 family with children.

4 If you're an adult, it's a different scenario.

5 You aren't going to any of the hotels that are
6 exclusive for families with children. But we go down
7 to see where there's availability within our city
8 system, and that would include our respite sites as
9 well.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. All right. I have a
11 million other questions. But I want to be fair here.
12 I could be here all day, because it's-- No, it's,
13 you know, again, because it's changing so rapidly
14 that it's almost impossible, even from us, from the
15 outside looking in, trying to kind of decipher what's
16 what, you know, on a given day. But I did ask a
17 question. I don't know that I-- So is there some
18 sort of-- is there the ability-- I know that there's--
19 - some of the bills speak to-- about providing some
20 sort of Bill of Rights that ensure, you know, in the
21 appropriate language, that folks understand, right?,
22 that they're, they're in a HERRC, and they decide
23 they want to transition over to a shelter, that they
24 can do that freely?

1
2 DR. LONG: Currently in the Arrival Center, and
3 the HERRCs (and then I'll turn to my colleagues here,
4 if there's anything they want to add on this), we do
5 Know Your Rights in multiple languages, which I'd be
6 happy to share with you after the hearing today. And
7 if you have feedback on that, you know, we'd welcome
8 that as well. I don't know if there is anything
9 Administrator Carter or Chief of Staff Sarkissian
10 want to--

11 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'm happy to just-- just
12 make one comment, Councilmember. In your opening
13 remarks, you mentioned about having sides in this.
14 And I just want to sort of emphasize that the
15 priority of all of us at the City is the health and
16 safety of the individuals in our care. I don't think
17 there's any sides when it comes to that. In terms of
18 the bill, a Bill Of Rights, and I know that
19 throughout this process, and throughout these
20 unprecedented emergency over the last year, there has
21 been a lot of talk about Bills Of Rights, about right
22 to shelter, about putting people into the DHS system.
23 I can't make this any more clear: We're out of
24 space, right? And so we need a flexibility to be
25

3 able to respond, to be able to prioritize people with
4 special needs, families with children.

5 I wish we lived in a world where we could provide
6 for everybody within the standards of Callahan or
7 otherwise. That's not the nature of this emergency.
8 That's not where we are today. And I think that's
9 sort of an important point. But I do also just want
10 to re-emphasize that our number one priority is the
11 health and safety of individuals in our care. And we
12 are doing-- and I think actions speak louder than
13 words. I think the actions of the City have
14 consistently demonstrated that commitment over the
15 past year.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I think that we're--
17 where we-- and I agree with most of what you're
18 saying. However, I-- You know, obviously it's not
19 our intention to have, you know, a division, right?,
20 between both sides of City Hall on this matter, this
21 is so important, right? We should be working
22 together. We should be you know, use-- Many of us
23 have experience, you know, on this matter, you know,
24 Shahana wants to be helpful. I want to be helpful.
25 Members of the Committee want to be helpful. We just
haven't been allowed to be a part of the

3 conversation, and because we haven't been allowed to
4 be a part of the conversation, then we have to use
5 our oversight abilities to be able to get the
6 information that we need and to provide whatever
7 feedback we may have.

8 And so, you know, we really are not-- Like I
9 know that I, you know, I can speak for myself. Again
10 being a fair person, and having seen the situation, I
11 understand that we have a capacity issue. That is--
12 That-- You know, that is crystal clear. However,
13 saying to an individual, "Hey, you know, Mr.-- Ms.
14 Smith, you are entitled, right?, if you would like to
15 transfer to a DHS site. Unfortunately at the moment,
16 there's just not any capacity. So this is the option
17 that we're going with today. And this is why. If
18 that should change in the future, right?, we can-- we
19 can take your information, and we can make that
20 accommodation at a later time."

21 But that-- that level of transparency is what we
22 are concerned about, right? Because if a person
23 doesn't know, and they're just, you know, being sent
24 from one location to another location, they're going
25 to, right? People are going to-- they need a place
to stay. So they're going to-- So that-- that level

1 of transparency is what we're looking for, right?
2 We're saying that, but I do get it. And I think most
3 of us understand that we have a serious capacity
4 issue and we're not trying in any way to impose or
5 make it more difficult for you to be able to do your
6 job. Because I honestly don't know how you do it
7 every day. And I get calls, you know, like-- like,
8 you know, from Ali, and you know, from other folks
9 sometimes, and they're like, "Hey, you know, like, we
10 ran out of space." Like, "Do you have any, you know,
11 any recommendations?" And at that point, you know,
12 we're able to, thankfully, come up with a couple of
13 strategies that may be helpful. But that's really
14 the extent of the communication. And, and I think
15 that it should go beyond that, right? Because we're
16 not trying to be obstructionists, you know, in the
17 least. And I, again, have a huge, you know, amount
18 of respect for the work that you have done. But our
19 responsibility is to make sure that families are
20 informed and that they know, you know, that that they
21 have options at some point, limited as they may be.
22 They still have a right to know. So with that, I'm
23 going to turn it over to my Co-Chair, Councilmember
24 Hanif.
25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. Deputy
Speaker Ayala.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry, can you-- I didn't
acknowledge Councilmember Stevens, who's giving me
the side eye. I want to just want the record reflect
that she gave me the side eye.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We are-- We are joined by
Councilmember Althea Stevens. Thank you so much to
the Administration for being here. And like Deputy
Speaker Ayala, I want to just emphasize, like, this
is us playing our part in ensuring that we are asking
for more transparency where there hasn't been, or
getting the clarification that we need to continue
serving and working together.

And so I too, don't want to come, or come off as
being combative or playing a role that is in some
fantasy world. I acknowledge for the-- from the time
I started my term that we have been welcoming asylum
seekers, and that is the city's current reality. It
has shifted the way in which we address every single
issue. And all of the Councilmembers are deeply
committed to continuing to welcome asylum seekers and
working with the Administration to ensure that we get
the adequate legal services, housing, ensuring that

1 the students have adequate food and bilingual
2 educators and guidance counselors, all of the-- all
3 of the facets of their life is absolutely meaningful
4 to the way in which this Council has shifted in how
5 we are working.
6

7 And so I just want to begin with-- with that,
8 because really, this is the investigative part that
9 we are-- we are responsible for.

10 So I want to ask a little bit more about the
11 Respite Centers. Could you share how many Respite
12 Centers there are at the moment and how many people
13 are in these Respite Centers?

14 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So we're currently operating
15 about 11 Respite Centers, two we are currently
16 shutting down, one we're in the process of opening
17 across the five boroughs. We have approximately
18 3000, on any given day, people in the Respite Centers

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And the Respite Centers: How
20 are they different from the HERRCs?

21 So the Respite Centers are supposed to be really
22 just temporary facilities. And so what we did is,
23 you know-- And this goes back to Councilmember
24 Ayala's question about HPD versus Health + Hospitals
25 and the difference between different systems. One of

1
2 the things that we've done sort of collectively as a
3 city is really focused on agencies' sort of core
4 competencies, right? Health + Hospitals, HPD, they
5 both have a core competency of providing shelter.
6 And so they are running the HERRCs, which is sort of
7 more robust places where we can host people for a
8 longer period of time.

9 One of our core competencies is coastal storm
10 shelters, right? If we have a coastal storm coming,
11 we put people in shelters. We adopted that model,
12 which really is only for housing people 48 to 72
13 hours, to be able to provide an overflow room for
14 people to stay while we wait for capacity to open up
15 in other systems around the city.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And how are the Respite
17 Centers sited? What are the qualifications for...?

18 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So I mean, I will tell you,
19 we have now looked, as a city, at close to 1000
20 spaces across the city. Essentially, there are a
21 number of variables that we look at. But at the end
22 of the day, it is really about: What's the
23 infrastructure in place? What are the transportation
24 needs? How many-- What's the capacity to house
25 people there? What are the terms of the lease?

1
2 There's a number of variables that go into it. And I
3 think when you look at sort of the diversity of types
4 of facilities we're using, you can see what we have
5 to do to make this work at this stage.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. And of the
7 Respite Centers that Councilmembers and staff have
8 seen or heard reports from, we have heard countless
9 reports of these places being conducted, like not--
10 not suited for housing or for shelter, and especially
11 not for extended periods of time. Could you
12 describe, like, if there's a cut off period for when
13 you are moving people out? Or what is the maximum
14 and minimum stay at the Respite Center?

15 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah. This is an
16 unprecedented emergency. There's no maximum amount
17 of time. It's when space becomes available at other
18 places. What I will say is sometimes one of the
19 things that we are seeing at some of these sites, is
20 we will canvas to provide options for people to go to
21 other places. And sometimes people don't want to
22 move because of other issues, right? They've gotten
23 to know the community, the neighborhood, they have a
24 job in the-- in the in the neighborhood. And so

3 those are sort of other things that we need to
4 consider.

5 We'll also say, in relation to both your and
6 Councilmember Ayala's comments about oversight: I
7 just want to make clear that we really welcome the
8 oversight. You know, we welcome the conversation. I
9 personally invited Legal Aid to tour these
10 facilities, because I wanted their feedback of how we
11 can do better at these places. There are some things
12 that they identified that were low-hanging fruit that
13 we could identify, to provide greater health and
14 safety for the people in our care. We had folks from
15 Department of Health come through, hygenist-
16 sanitarians, who could provide some feedback on
17 making the environment more healthy. But this is
18 something that we're literally building these and
19 increasing the capacity for more-longer-duration
20 stays out of the necessity, until there's other
21 places for people to go.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sure. I totally understand
23 the conditions and wanting to place everybody in-- in
24 some facility so that they have a place to sleep.
25 Could you share if there are services on site at the
Respite Centers, or are folks told to go to the

1
2 Navigation Center or the Welcome Center for those
3 services?

4 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So the-- Most folks go to
5 the-- the Navigation Center or the Welcome Center for
6 services. We do have some services that are on site.
7 We have nurse practitioners that are on site. We
8 have mental health providers that stop by the sites.
9 But the more robust services that are provided at a
10 HERRC are not provided at these Respite Centers.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. And then our
12 school gyms still being considered as locations for
13 Respite Centers?

14 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The intention is not to use
15 school gyms. But everything is on the table. The
16 school gyms that we did use, we needed an immediate
17 place that we could open up very quickly for 24 to 48
18 hours, while we waited to sign another lease to move
19 people into. Could that happen in the future? I
20 hope not. But as we have said repeatedly, everything
21 needs to be on the table with this unprecedented
22 emergency.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then in-- in the-- in the
24 school gyms or other respite center locations, could
25

1 you describe what the bathroom and shower situation
2 entails?
3

4 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So every site is different.
5 Every site has bathrooms. Every site varies in terms
6 of the number of bathrooms per individual. Every
7 site now has some sort of shower solution, whether
8 it's on site or whether they need to go to a parks
9 facility, or a HERRC in order to get a shower. But
10 these are all things that we have to solve for as we
11 are building these things and housing them at the
12 same time.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then in identifying the
14 Respite Centers, are you working with the local
15 electeds? Or how are the decisions getting made
16 about this center here, or this vacant building here
17 will be a Respite Center.

18 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I mean, decisions are being
19 made around us not wanting people to sleep on the
20 street. And so, I mean, we've literally had a
21 situation where we were so pressed for room we
22 started lease negotiations at 4 p.m. We finished
23 lease negotiations at, what? 10:30? [DR. LONG: Mm-
24 hmm] We were moving people in by midnight, and then
25 continued to build out infrastructure for longer

3 duration stays with people staying in those
4 facilities. And that has become sort of normal at
5 the pace that we're doing this simply because of how
6 unprecedented this crisis is, and just need, and our
7 concern, primary concern, of making sure people are
8 not sleeping on the street.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. And which ones
10 are shutting down?

11 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So there are two hotels that
12 we are in the process of closing. The leases run out
13 June 30th. And so those are the two that we're
14 closing.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How long are the lease
16 agreements?

17 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: It varies per site. We aim
18 for at least 30 days with extensions. Some are as
19 long as, I think until-- I think the longest-- I'd
20 have to get back to you on the specifics for each
21 site, but I could do that.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So then when the Respite
23 Centers close, or the two that are closing, is it
24 with everybody already having...?

25 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: No. We're in the process of
moving people out into other facilities. Those are

3 non-congregate shelters where we had-- Respite
4 Centers, excuse me, where we had families with
5 children, some folks with special needs, that we are
6 identifying the places where they're going to go
7 next.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And how frequently are
9 Respite Centers shutting down? Because it seems like
10 you're moving people out--

11 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: They're not. They're not.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay, so-- but to do that--

13 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I mean, it's based on the
14 lease agreement, and-- and in this case, the
15 agreement with the hotels, which was brokered by the
16 Red Cross sunsets on June 30th.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And how long was that lease?
18 Was that a one month?

19 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I don't remember. George,
20 do you remember when we start-- two months?

21 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: It was about a two
22 month lease.

23 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: About two months.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then has there been a
25 push to increase-- Like, ensure that the lease
doesn't just end on June 30th? And is--

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE Jointly with the
2 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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3 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We should be able to get
4 everybody out before then.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I think we're very close to
7 accomplishing that this week.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. And then I know, you
9 mentioned that bathrooms and showers vary site to
10 site. Are there any facilities that don't have
11 showers on site, and which ones are those that have--
12 that basically designate--

13 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: There are sites that do not
14 have showers on site, but there is a shower solution
15 for all sites at this time.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And is--

17 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Meaning that people can go
18 to a shower off site. They can take a shower off
19 site at a nearby location, whether it's a Parks
20 facility, a hotel, or otherwise.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Which Respite Centers are
22 those?

23 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I could-- I could circle
24 back with you and give you a list of which ones have--
25 - you want to know which ones have them on site
versus not on site?

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Have-- don't have them on
3 site. Yeah, I mean, we'd love to know both. But for
4 the moment right now, could you share the Respite
5 Centers that don't have a shower on site?

6 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So some of them have-- I
7 mean, I don't want to make this more complicated.
8 Some of them might have a shower on site or a shower
9 solution on site, but not ideal. So we also have a
10 facility off site. I think that there's probably,
11 looking at the list. I think of all of the sites,
12 three of the ones that are currently being operated,
13 do not have an ideal shower solution on site.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then-- So they don't have
15 an ideal, meaning--

16 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Meaning they might have--
17 they might have a couple of showers that, you know,
18 are-- can be used, but it's better for people to go
19 to the Parks facility or a hotel.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And in those Respite Centers,
21 how many people are there?

22 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: A few hundred.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Like 500 versus 100. I mean,
24 it's concerning. And you know, you're looking at
25 [crosstalk]--

1
2 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I share your concerns. But
3 again--

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No, I understand.

5 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: --people are able to get--
6 people will--

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I don't want to debate this.
8 I just, like, find it-- You know, we've got some
9 bills that would regulate and really address the
10 issue around dignity. And I understand the scale of
11 how many people this city is serving. And I
12 appreciate that we-- New Yorkers appreciate that and
13 we see it. But for folks needing to have to step out
14 of a facility to go to another facility. And I do
15 want to ask, like how far is this Parks site? Or how
16 far people are going, particularly if these are folks
17 with families, to take a shower? I'm just curious.

18 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: With all due respect, I wish
19 that there was a piece of legislation that could be
20 waved like a magic wand to magically create the
21 capacity in the city for us to open up Respite
22 Centers, shelters, HERRCs, or otherwise, with
23 everything that we-- that is needed at that moment.
24 That is not where we are today. I wish that I had--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I recognize that. We're just
doing our part in wanting to understand--

COMMISSIONER ISCOL: plenty of spaces-- I wish
that I had plenty of spaces with showers on site that
could do this.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Totally.

COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The alternative--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We're going to continue to
push on that.

COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The alternative is people
sleeping on the streets.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And we don't want that.

COMMISSIONER ISCOL: That's the alternative.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah. And we've had to be in
a battle right now, arguing about--

COMMISSIONER ISCOL: And so the team has done a
remarkable job of identifying other solutions nearby--

-

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Nobody is saying you haven't.
No one is saying you haven't does that.

COMMISSIONER ISCOL: To make sure that people
have showers and otherwise.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No one is saying you haven't
done that. We are simply just wanting to know a

1 little bit more about what are the existing services
2 on site?

3
4 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Right. But I do think it's
5 important to note that--

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And, I mean-- I mean now, you
7 know, like--

8 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: --a piece of legislation
9 will not solve that problem.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And, you know, in your
11 remarks, you haven't talked about how you look at the
12 legislation. So it would be good right now to get a
13 clearer understanding of the positions, particularly
14 around 942 and 943. And on any of the others if the
15 administration has taken a position yet.

16 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah, I mean, on 942 I think
17 it's performatory at best. I think it's dangerous at
18 worst. You know, our number one priority during an
19 emergency, any type of emergency sheltering operation
20 is the health and safety of those in our care. And
21 as I said, I wish we could wave some legislative
22 magic wand to generate three feet of space between
23 cots, to make sure that we have you know, 15 showers
24 and 10 toilets for every individual. But that's not
25 the nature of emergencies. We have to operate in the

1
2 real world. And this threatens to remove the
3 flexibility we need to respond. It could also impact
4 the willingness of critical partners like the Red
5 Cross to partner with us in opening up congregate
6 facilities.

7 I think also, it's important note, state law does
8 grant the Mayor the power to take a range of broad
9 actions, including suspension of local laws in an
10 emergency.

11 I think bills that invite suspension should not
12 be passed. Rather, I think the Council should work
13 with the Admin to discuss the best ways to respond to
14 these emergencies and make sure that we're doing
15 everything in our power to serve people in places
16 that meet their basic health and safety needs.

17 On 943, you know, I would defer to DHS, but I
18 will say that DHS makes every possible effort to
19 provide shelter to eligible families and adults, as
20 is required by the state regulator. I think this
21 bill is also at odds with the reality of where we
22 are. Passage will not change the fact that our
23 shelters are full, or the simple fact that beds are
24 not available. This bill would also likely be
25 subject to suspension in an emergency. And I think

1
2 it would impact the flexibility we need to prioritize
3 in particular families with children, people with
4 special needs, disabilities, or otherwise.

5 But one thing that I do want to add to that is,
6 you know, I think the spirit of what you're trying to
7 do, as I said earlier, actions speak louder than
8 words. And when I see the work that not only
9 Emergency Management, but our sister agencies and the
10 city workers have done-- I mean, we had a-- we put
11 out a call the city volunteers to work at these
12 sites. In the first 72 hours, we had 5000 city
13 workers volunteer to work in these Respite Centers.

14 And I will tell you, this is very hard work.
15 multiple languages being spoken, 12 hour shifts,
16 overnight, serving the needs of a population that
17 really needs our love and our support.

18 I think the City is doing everything it can to
19 meet the spirit of what you're trying to do. But I
20 don't think this legislation really helps.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for the feedback.
22 I respectfully disagree. And similarly want to lift
23 up all of the city workers and all of the ways in
24 which New Yorkers have stepped up. I mean, we're
25 seeing it in our district with mutual aid workers and

1 all sorts of arts organizations and folks across
2 experience just stepping up to support those in the
3 DHS shelters that have been sited, at least in my
4 district as emergency shelters. And that is
5 remarkable. It speaks to the strength of New Yorkers
6 and the strength of the city as one that is built on
7 deep roots as a sanctuary city. And-- and it is with
8 that premise that these two bills come from.

9
10 I mean, I don't find I understand the-- the
11 emphasis on health and safety. But when you say that
12 there are folks needing to go outside for a better
13 shower that feels antithetical to health and safety.
14 So it feels contradictory. That, on one hand, we're
15 saying here's-- here's what we're doing to ensure
16 health and safety. Meanwhile, there are facilities
17 that have-- So shower solutions, which I don't know
18 what that means. I would love just an explanation of
19 what a shower solution also means just for to be
20 stated on the record here.

21 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So a shower solution means
22 that there is a place nearby, within a few minute
23 walk, or there's transportation available to a shower
24 facility where they can go and take a shower. That's
25 what a shower solution means. I would also though, I

1
2 would say, you know, I want to give you sort of just
3 one example, you know, in the last week and a half,
4 we've had three really tragic fires, that I've gone
5 to in the middle of the night, worried that we would
6 not be able to provide shelter to the residents who
7 were vacated from these buildings, largely because
8 the Red Cross does not have a lot of hotel room
9 availability because of the number of people that we
10 are now housing at all of the different sites around
11 the city.

12 And in some of these cases, we've had to consider
13 opening up congregate shelters for folks. So a bill
14 like this would require that I look for a location
15 where I can have 15 showers per individual, 10
16 bathrooms per individual, and three feet of space
17 from a cot. Do you want me using that facility, a
18 mile and a half away, or a gym that is much closer
19 that maybe those costs are going to be a foot away,
20 maybe the bathroom and the shower facility is not
21 ideal.

22 But in these real world emergencies, we need the
23 flexibility to be able to make these decisions to
24 best serve the folks. And what I just want to
25 emphasize is that we will always make those decisions

3 with the best interests based on the resources and
4 capacity and what we can do, actually accomplish.
5 But this bill makes it more challenging for us to
6 operate in an emergency and actually serve New
7 Yorkers.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Well, right now, with folks
9 living in varied conditions, really raises concerns.
10 And it's based on those concerns that we are trying
11 to identify policy.

12 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: And again, these are very
13 temporary facilities where people are not-- these are
14 not long-term shelters. So I want to be clear about
15 that.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I hope not. I mean some
17 people have been languishing.

18 COMMISSIONER ISCHOL: This is not long-term
19 housing. This is not a permanent solution for folks.
20 This is a short term waiting room, while we wait to
21 put people into more long-term places with DHS,
22 Health + Hospitals, and HPD.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I hope so. I mean, I think
24 we are seeing that, while the administration has
25 shared that these are short-term facilities, that
there are people who are languishing for days on end.

1
2 And we have put out legislation to really ease the
3 shelter system and allow folks to be able to
4 transition out and that is being debated with us.
5 And so while we have offered solutions that would
6 really support folks moving out of the shelter
7 system, to ease out the shelter facilities, to
8 welcome new families or individuals, that is now
9 being debated with. And so I recognize your
10 feedback. But I think pulling away or eroding our
11 city's foundation of the Right to Shelter Decree can
12 have egregious, egregious consequences that I know
13 this Council will fight back against, fight back
14 against on any effort to erode the consent decree.

15 I'd like to pass it back to Deputy Speaker for
16 questions or my colleagues.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, we lost a few
18 colleagues. Actually, Councilmember Narcisse had a
19 question.

20 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Yeah. Thank
21 you. Thank you again. And Deputy-- I mean, Chair,
22 both Chairs, thank you.

23 This is a very important hearing. And that's the
24 reason I stay here. And I do understand you now. I
25 was listening to what you were saying. You need

1 flexibility and in emergency, yes, we do need
2 flexibility. But at the same time we trying to
3 create like I was saying before, a structure. You
4 know what? You have Dr. Long with you in that panel,
5 which I love so much. Guys, I love you. But that's
6 my colleagues in medical. And I love when people put
7 their heart and soul in their work and want to do the
8 best. But at the same token, I heard my colleague
9 said, "That's our job too," to making sure that there
10 is structure, that people cannot do anything they
11 want to do. We are all trying. It's just like a
12 check and balance. That's the way it is. We're
13 trying to put legislation in place, so where people
14 when they welcome-- when they come to New York City,
15 they feel like they welcome. But in case of
16 emergency we have maybe that's something-- you gave
17 me something to kind of process. But at the same
18 time, we have to make sure people are treated fairly,
19 like for somebody to travel, how many miles that we
20 want that person to travel to take a shower? How
21 many feet away? Yes, we want to-- for you to have
22 the flexibility. We understand that. No one
23 expected 78,000, more than 78,000 people to hit us in
24 New York City at once. But like you said: Yes, we
25

1
2 need a place to put them. But we want to make sure
3 that we create-- we do the best we can at all time.
4 And our job as Councilmembers is to put legislation
5 in place. And then I understand. I respect your
6 work. I know that is can be very stressful. I mean,
7 I've been there done it. Working in the ER. Trust
8 me. Working different places, running business. It
9 is hard. Life is hard. But at the same token, those
10 folks are coming from miles away, looking for that
11 dream. And we have to make that dream as-- as less
12 painful as possible, before they hit their way.

13 There's some hard things I want to get to. When
14 the women come for their full assessment, I know
15 something that probably you did not-- you're not
16 going to expect for me to ask. What I have heard
17 throughout the process, those women have been raped
18 along the way. So how many women thus far that you
19 find what's the percentage that have actually been
20 raped along the way while they're coming to our-- to
21 New York City.

22 DR. LONG: I unfortunately I-- I am familiar with
23 this. This is one of the most devastating things.
24 Nobody could forget once they start to hear some

1 stories about what people had through including women
2 that have been raped.

3
4 And so our job here in New York City is to do the
5 best we can to offer them immediate help. What
6 happens at the Arrival Center now-- So I'll sort of
7 walk you through it. I'll say, as I walk through the
8 process that we've set up, though, I don't have the
9 percentage of women that have been raped on the
10 journey in our data here, but I can look into it, and
11 see what I'm able to find in our data. And I'd be
12 happy to circle back on that.

13 I can tell you what the process is the in terms
14 of how we help people, though.

15 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah. So when anybody
16 comes through the Arrival Center, we acknowledge that
17 a variety of sources of trauma can happen to you
18 along the journey. So we set up a few things. I did
19 mention a couple of them at the Arrival Center that
20 we do at the outset. One is the PHQ screen. And
21 another is an evaluation, again, with questions as
22 part of your intake process. The PHQ, which I know
23 Councilmember Narcisse is very familiar with, but
24 just for everybody, is the general screener for
25 depression.

3 So what we've done is, again, with Health +
4 Hospitals involved, I did the simplest thing I could:
5 I set up the same system I have my clinic at
6 Morrisania, where I see my patients in the Bronx
7 every Friday. Everybody does the PHQ, 12 and above.
8 That's how it was-- how it standardized. And if you
9 screen high on the PHQ, then you immediately,
10 without-- just in a matter of minutes, you'll be
11 talking to one of our social workers that's on site.
12 So we're not having you screened and then scheduling
13 you an appointment a few weeks out. If you need
14 help, and we know who needs help based on what your
15 score on the PHQ for depression, for example, we
16 offer you that help immediately. Then we'll plug you
17 into longitudinal care. And we have again sites in
18 our system that we can utilize like Roberto Clemente
19 and sites that, for example, that site 100% of my
20 staff are bilingual, speak Spanish.

21 But, you know, from when you come into the door,
22 we do understand, because we've heard too many times
23 about the horrors and that-- the hell people have
24 been through to get here. That's why-- On day one,
25 we weren't doing the PHQ for everybody, but day
whatever this is, we certainly are now because we've-

3 - we've heard so many of the stories that you've also
4 heard that we need to do everything in our power to
5 help people, and we have an opportunity in New York--
6 in New York City to do things differently than
7 anything people have experienced prior to getting
8 here.

9 So from the PHQ, to plugging you into
10 longitudinal care, to giving you the ability to share
11 your story with our social workers, to them bridging
12 that to, you know, what you experienced at one of our
13 sites. These are all things that we've learned are
14 important based on what people have told us. And
15 that's why we built up the system we have.

16 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: So do you refer them to--
17 - like for those that are living in the HERRCs, do
18 you refer them to CBOs where they're going to be? Do
19 you kind of do a followup? Because that's a lot for
20 women to be traumatized that way, not only taking the
21 path, but being raped along the way. Some of them
22 end up pregnant. And that's kind of a horror for me.
23 So do they get that support along the way? Do we
24 keep up with them?

25 DR. LONG: So--

3 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: I know we're supposed to
4 keep up with everyone. Sorry.

5 DR. LONG: No. No, it's--

6 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: But those particular
7 population, it's hard. Because I have talked to a
8 few, and for me as a woman listening, it just--

9 DR. LONG: I can't imagine how hard it is. So
10 I'll-- If I'm putting my doctor hat on for a moment.
11 There's two sort of things that we do to make sure
12 that we're supporting people, you mentioned, at a
13 HERRC. So I'll just give this specific example of
14 what materially happens at the HERRCs. So if you're
15 a woman as part of a family or a single adult woman
16 that's coming to one of our HERRCs, we train all of
17 our staff in Mental Health First Aid. So that-- the
18 first thing is, we want to make sure that we don't
19 have just one set of eyes on people who could be
20 going into crisis. Because you're processing what
21 you've experienced as you arrive. You're going to
22 continue processing that for days, weeks, months,
23 maybe years beyond. Exactly right.

24 So we want to make sure that all of our staff are
25 eyes on people who could be going into crisis. So
26 that's why we do that training for all of our staff.

3 But we don't just do that. We even have, for
4 example, our survivors of torture program at
5 Bellevue, and our Libertas Clinic, which does a
6 similar function at Elmhurst Hospital. They're
7 helping to train our staff as well. So we'll make
8 sure that our staff, again have the right set of eyes
9 looking for the right things.

10 But that's only a piece of it. The second piece
11 that I wanted to really emphasize, which I know is
12 where you're going here, is that we can only do so
13 much on site. We only have so much staff. People
14 are only with us for so much time. But we need to
15 set people up for the care that they need for-- and
16 to use your words, because you're right about this,
17 for the years to come. That's where it comes into
18 play that with, you know, with Health + Hospitals
19 doing this, we have the ability and a lot of
20 experience, in how to most effectively set people up
21 with not only primary care to look after their
22 physical issues, but with the right mental health
23 care at the right time meeting them where they are.

24 I gave the example, which I'm proud of-- Again,
25 we have clinics. I don't know how many clinics are
like this around in New York city or the country, but

1
2 Roberto Clemente I'm very proud of. We've set up a
3 special referral network to them. 100% of our staff
4 there speak Spanish from the front desk clerk to any
5 of the clinicians they are going to see. That's
6 where people can get world class care in New York
7 City. And again, I view our job is as figuring out
8 how to get people into the right care at the right
9 time for them. And we are trying our very best,
10 leveraging all of the resources have the 40,000 plus
11 employees at New York City Health + Hospitals to
12 address the hell that people have been through, that
13 are the stories you've been hearing.

14 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. I went over
15 my time. I have other questions. But thank you so
16 much. Continue doing the work that you're doing.
17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I have a couple
19 of questions for HPD. We've been met-- Sorry. We've
20 been joined by Councilmember Chi Ossé online. I'm--
21 Bear with me. Okay. All right. So I have some
22 questions regarding the out-of-state-- out-of-New-
23 York-City-County placements.

24

25

1
2 So can you tell us which specific locations where
3 the asylum seekers and migrants have volunteered to
4 transfer to upstate locations housed?

5 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Sure. So we're
6 talking to in recruiting folks from a couple of
7 locations. We're recruiting folks from the Arrival
8 Center. When they get there, we're talking to them
9 about the Upstate option. And we're actually
10 recruiting a lot of our folks from the Respite
11 Center, the Respite Centers. So, you know, that's
12 kind of like fertile ground for these conversations.
13 You know, we're talking to folks about upstate hotels
14 that have private rooms, private bathrooms, private
15 showers, and that's one of our solutions to kind of
16 decompress the city, you know. What Commissioner
17 Iscol was talking about was all the pressure that's
18 kind of built up in the city. And you see that at
19 the Respite Centers, you know. So the Upstate
20 program is a way to kind of relieve some of that
21 pressure and move some of those folks out of the
22 Respite Centers more quickly.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How many upstate sites do we
24 have currently operational?

3 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: We have 10 hotels
4 Upstate.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: In which counties?

6 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: So our hotels are in
7 a few counties. So we have hotels in Albany, two
8 hotels in Westchester County, one in White Plains,
9 one in Ardsley. We have a-- we have two hotels in
10 Newburgh, and we're just opening up hotels just
11 outside of Buffalo and Cheektowaga. And one in
12 Poughkeepsie. Pardon me.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can you tell us what
14 information asylum seekers receive before
15 volunteering to that state?

16 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Sure. We give them
17 two bits of information. First, we tell them about
18 the actual program and services they're going to
19 receive. The services they receive upstate are the
20 exact same services our HERRC-- our HERRCs are
21 providing here in the city. So they're getting
22 shelter. They're getting food, three meals a day
23 plus snacks. They're getting access to healthcare,
24 social workers, caseworkers, and laundry service.
25 Also, while they're up there, we have a shuttle that
kind of takes them around those cities and

1 essentially gives them access to the kind of key
2 employment centers, commercial centers in these
3 places. The hotels might not be in downtown Albany,
4 but we want to give them access to downtown Albany.
5 So we tell them about kind of the transportation
6 they'll have access to. And the second thing we tell
7 them is a little bit about the places they're going.
8 If you're coming from Venezuela, you don't know much
9 about Albany, you know? And they need to know what
10 they're getting into. So we'll tell them about
11 Albany, how many people live there, it's our capital,
12 show them a couple pictures. Give them a sense of
13 where the hotel is actually located in relation to
14 downtown Albany, and make sure they know (a) the
15 services, and (b) the place they're going.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and they have the
18 options to come back if they choose to.

19 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah. So our goal
20 when we were taking folks up there is to help them
21 integrate into these places. So we're building
22 relationships with CBOs, faith-based organizations,
23 political leadership. And the goal is to actually
24 help them integrate. Like Dr. Long was saying, you
25 know, we want this to be kind of a step in-- in their

2 process of kind of integrating into this country.

3 And we're trying to give them a platform to do that.

4 But they're free to go and come as they choose, you
5 know, they have status here.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. How do they travel?

7 Is that by? Do they have a shuttle--

8 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: A bus. Yeah. Well--
9 Sorry, within the city?

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How do they travel around--
11 How do they get around Albany? I mean, Albany is--

12 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

13 We provide a shuttle. That's part of the service
14 that we provide. That takes them from the hotel, to
15 downtown Albany, to the grocery store, and a couple
16 of other key locations.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I felt like there was
18 another question I wanted to ask you, George. I know
19 that there was a-- there was a lawsuit in some
20 counties. Have those resolved?

21 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Several lawsuits.

22 And they're still ongoing. It's probably best to ask
23 the Law Department about their current status.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Okay. I mean, yeah,
25 my concern about the out-of-state, you know,

1 accommodations, is really that a lot of you know, I
2 mean-- I've been to Newburgh. You can't go to the
3 store without having a car.
4

5 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Totally. Totally.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's just-- You know,
7 nobody's outside because nobody wants to run into--
8 little furry friends outside. They don't tell you
9 that. So everybody's stuck in the house, and you're
10 wandering around, and there's no people.

11 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah. No. 100%.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Very isolating.

13 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah. We know that's
14 an issue. And actually, we're being very selective
15 about the hotel sites we choose, you know. We don't
16 want them to be in the middle of nowhere. We want
17 folks to envision their lives in these places: That
18 they can go there, live there, get an apartment, get
19 a job, and kind of integrate into these communities.
20 And when there's a gap, like a physical gap between
21 the hotel which might be on the side of a highway in
22 downtown Albany or downtown Buffalo, we're providing
23 shuttle service.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And who is coordinating all
25 of this?

1
2 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: So we've contracted
3 out to a company named DotGo that's doing a lot of
4 the other HERRCs down here in the city, who have a
5 lot of experience in providing this type of kind of
6 very nimble operational kind of service, where they
7 are right now focused on kind of like providing
8 medical care, essentially. You know, they're-- they
9 provide medical care to like folks in the city. You
10 know, they were the folks that set up all those,
11 like, booths on the side of your street to get your
12 COVID tests, right? So they're kind of like, they
13 have medical care that they provide, and they're very
14 nimble in how they kind of staff up and hire up and
15 really focus on operations.

16 So we hired DotGo, and they're essentially going
17 to these places, staffing up, providing all the
18 services, providing the medical care, and doing all
19 the work they're kind of used to doing down here in
20 the city.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Okay. Commissioner
22 Iscol, so I want to kind of go back-- Thank you,
23 George-- I want to go back a little bit to some of
24 the questions that Councilmember Hanif had regarding
25 the-- the emergency placements with or without

1 showers and-- and I get it, right? You're in an
2 emergency. You have to put people someplace, and
3 this is the only option you have that night. I'm not
4 going to debate that. People need a place to stay.
5 Are they there temporarily, while you're trying to
6 figure out a more long-term solution to moving them
7 out of that space? Like is the goal always like,
8 "Look, we're going to put you here tonight, because
9 we just have no place to put you, but we're working
10 on moving you to a more suitable housing placement."
11

12 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes. That's exactly right.
13 These are short-term, temporary facilities. They are
14 a waiting room while we wait to develop, build, or
15 have the capacity and other sites that we can move
16 people into that are either run by DHS, HPD, or
17 Health + Hospitals.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Now we've-- I know
19 I've suggested, and I know that the Council,
20 initially the Speaker and I issued-- we issued a
21 letter in the beginning of the crisis that
22 highlighted a couple of, you know, spaces and
23 locations, I guess, in some of the hotels. But part
24 of the conversation was always like dealing with,
25 like, the Catholic Church with Catholic Charities and

1 some of the closed churches. Have those-- have those
2 conversations been ongoing?
3

4 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yup. We've been using a
5 facility offered to us by Catholic Charities. Again,
6 every single site that we look at, and we've now
7 looked at close to 1000 sites, poses a range of
8 challenges. And so if there are sites that you can--
9 and you have recommended sites. But if there are
10 sites that, you know, Councilmember Hanif, that meet
11 your standard in terms of the numbers of bathrooms
12 and showers and space between cots that can fit 250
13 300 plus people, send them our way, we'll take a look
14 at them. But it's not just about identifying the
15 space, right? We then have other issues with
16 negotiating the lease, around insurance. You know,
17 there's a host of other issues around fire code,
18 building code, infrastructure that's in place. All
19 of these things need to be addressed at all of these
20 different sites.

21 So just because something might even look good
22 initially, it doesn't mean that it's actually
23 something we can use for a variety of reasons.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And what is the number of
25 people that have come into the city in the last week?

2 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: In the last week? Do you--
3 Dr. Long, do you know the number of folks that have
4 been in the last week through the Welcome Center?

5 DR. LONG: Through the Welcome Center?
6 Approximately 2800.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 2800 in the last week?

8 DR. LONG: Yeah.

9 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Which-- Don't quote me on
10 this number, but I think that is half of what Chicago
11 has been-- has received in the last year.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. No, no. This is a--
13 It's a-- it's a crisis. And I think it's important
14 that we will do our due diligence and ensuring that
15 you know, that we have the resources that the
16 families need, right? Because we're-- we're all just
17 trying to figure out, you know, what the pieces of
18 the puzzle look like, but at the end of the day,
19 these are people, individuals, human beings that have
20 been impacted. And, you know-- So. So I'm going to
21 move on to DHS, because I think that there's been a
22 lot of contro-- I don't think I know. There's been a
23 lot of controversy in the last couple of weeks
24 regarding a couple of bills that this Council
25 introduced and passed. And I just want to kind of

1 explain a little bit about, you know, back-- give a
2 little background about how we kind of arrived at--
3 at those bills as a possible, not solution to the
4 problem, but possible tools at our disposal. You
5 know, we had a hearing, an oversight hearing with
6 DSS, and we were discussing the issuance and
7 processing of vouchers. And in that hearing, you
8 know, I remember sitting here, and I'm thinking,
9 "There has to be a better way to move-- you know, to
10 ensure that we're moving families out as
11 expeditiously as possible." Because the truth is
12 that independent of this crisis, we already had a
13 shelter crisis. We had, you know, we have over
14 40,000 individuals in shelter. I believe, over 20-
15 plus thousand of those are children.

17 And so that that conversation had-- was not being
18 had prior to the asylum seeking, contributing to the
19 numbers.

20 And so we sat here, you know, trying to kind of
21 figure out what are the-- what are the impediments,
22 right? So we identified that the Office of Income
23 Discrimination, which is not under your purview, was--
24 - was an impediment, right? That was-- They
25 wouldn't-- They were not processing income

1
2 discrimination cases, the office was not adequately
3 staffed, and so we've made, you know, numerous
4 recommendations on, you know, the appropriate
5 staffing ratios there and the need to really go after
6 landlords that are bad actors that are discriminating
7 against voucher holders. We also spoke about the
8 right to counsel and the need to fully fund right to
9 counsel is another tool to prevent people from
10 becoming homeless, you know, in the first place. And
11 then we got to kind of, you know, to the vouchers,
12 and, you know, we-- And I say this, because many
13 years ago, you know, I was the recipient of what was
14 then the JIGITS[ph] program, and the JIGITS[ph]
15 program was kind of like the first FHEPS program, and
16 there was a lawsuit. I believe it might have been
17 Legal Aid that sued the City for families that were
18 on public assistance that were not receiving enough
19 money to pay for rent. And as part of the JIGITS[ph]
20 program, I received a small-- it wasn't a subsidy; I
21 think it was a credit that was attributed to the
22 landlord for the cost of my-- my shelter. And I am
23 eternally and forever grateful to that program.
24 because it allowed me the opportunity to have a roof
25 over my head and the heads of my children, and not

1 have to worry about that, right?, while I tried to
2 figure out the rest of my life and go to school, and
3 you know, just figure things out.

4
5 And so I think that, you know, we take for
6 granted the number of individuals in New York City
7 that actually needs subsidized housing. I mean you
8 hear debate all the time of, "You're building
9 affordable housing for who?" And I think that that's
10 coming from the percentage of individuals and folks
11 that really need subsidized housing, because their
12 income is not changing for whatever circumstances.

13 And you know, and sometimes people have
14 disabilities and are not able to work, you know. And
15 so we introduced this this package of bills, because
16 we wanted to ensure that, one, we were getting at
17 individuals by changing the eligibility. We were
18 getting to folks that were at the shelter-- at the
19 courthouse ready to be evicted. Because the criteria
20 right now says, "Well, you have to be in the shelter
21 in order to qualify." Well, why? If we can keep you
22 in your apartment that you already have, and save the
23 added expense of housing you, right?, which is way
24 more expensive, and save you, you know, the trouble
25 of having to look for an apartment, then that sounds

1 like a reasonable thing to do, right? It sounds like
2 common sense legislation. The 90-day rule waiver,
3 you know, was done because we feel that in this
4 housing crisis, right?, while we're taking executive
5 privileges, that one of those executive privileges
6 should have been to eliminate that rule so that we
7 were doing everything possible to get those families
8 in and out as quickly as we could.

9
10 And so I really wanted to put that out there
11 because I don't want there to be the sentiment of
12 it's, you know, us against them, and this is what
13 it's become, right?, tit for tat. And at the end of
14 the day, this is not about us. This is about those--
15 those individuals that we're trying to help.

16 And so my question to you is, how-- We know we
17 have over 40,000 people in shelter, New Yorkers. How
18 many are we moving out, on average, on a yearly
19 basis, even-- even during the last six months. Like
20 how many families actually exiting the system?

21 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So thank you, first of
22 all, for having us, and, you know, Councilmember, you
23 know, it's been really a tough year for all of us,
24 right? The asylum seekers coming in, these
25 unprecedented times. I don't have the numbers by

1 month right now with me, but we can certainly come
2 back to you with that information, and the
3 Administration would make sure we circle back with
4 that information by month, because I don't have that
5 with me today, and I don't want to go on the record
6 with something that's not true. So I will come back
7 to you with that.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, because my concern is
10 that the asylum issue is going to be an ongoing
11 situation. It's not going to resolve itself
12 overnight. And so we can't really control that,
13 right?, as much as we have control over what we do in
14 our city with the resources that we have that New
15 Yorkers qualify for. And so what is DHS doing?
16 Because if-- if that package of bills is an
17 impediment, then what is the alternative? What is--
18 How is-- How is HP-- I'm sorry, George, not you. How
19 is DHS working to move folks out of shelter? Because
20 right now the length of stay-- the average length of
21 stay is running a couple of years.

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah. So one of the
23 things that I can say right now is that, you know,
24 nearly 150,000 New Yorkers have left shelter since
25 the implementation of CityFHEPS in 2014. That's

1 63,000 households that we've helped to move to
2 permanency. And so for this fiscal year, we have
3 connected a record number of households to CityFHEPS.
4 And we are on track to outpace the number of
5 households connected to CityFHEPS in prior years.

6 And so I think that we have, from July to April
7 2023, a record number of households with CityFHEPS
8 vouchers, and we are going to be on pace to outpace
9 the number of households connected to CityFHEPS in
10 prior years. So we are making progress there.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But how are we doing in terms
12 of staffing? I say this, because just a couple of
13 weeks ago, we had an individual calling the office,
14 had a CityFHEPS voucher, got an apartment, the
15 processing, you know, time was just so arduous that
16 they lost the apartment because the landlord could no
17 longer afford to wait for the City to you know,
18 process the documentation. And that's, you know, one
19 of several cases that I personally, you know, know
20 about. And that's a problem, right? How are we
21 addressing that?

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So I first-- You know, we
23 have been working to fill vacancies. We're doing job
24 fairs. We're using other modes of putting out our
25

3 vacancies, such as LinkedIn, which we haven't used in
4 the past. So we're making ourselves very visible to
5 get additional staffers on to us. So we have been
6 making progress there.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, but my concern, again,
8 is-- is primarily around ensuring that we're moving
9 folks out. And if we're not appropriate--
10 appropriately staffed, you know, then we need to
11 figure out how we pivot and how-- You know, I mean,
12 we had a nursing shortage not too long ago, you know,
13 some of our hospitals and unfortunately, not to-- not
14 something that I'm proud of, but we had to go and
15 outsource nurses. We have to bring them in. We have
16 no other choice, right? This is an emergency. And I
17 think that the idea here is that this is costing us
18 so much money, and there is no real end in sight.
19 And without all of the pieces of the puzzle kind of,
20 you know, fitting together (and that's all of you)
21 then one cannot move without the other.

22 And DHS is really pretty much the centerpiece
23 here, right? We have not been successful in trying
24 to get folks, you know, to-- to address those
25 hindrances, right, those little nuances that I spoke

1 about earlier that are good keeping folks in the
2 system far longer than we anticipate.
3

4 And I also want to add that I did bring this up,
5 and I think that this is a conversation for HPD. But
6 we, you know, we have identified-- You know, the City
7 identified-- the newspaper identified, you know,
8 well, I think it was like almost over 30,000 or
9 40,000 registered as you know, vacant, rent
10 stabilized units, we could be working with DHCR, you
11 know, working with the State to try to identify those
12 landlords, to try to figure out how to, you know,
13 incentivize some sort of a relationship where that's
14 mutually beneficial here, right?, where we can bring,
15 you know, they can rent to families in shelter.

16 And I-- I want to also add that not, not
17 everybody doesn't shelter qualifies for CityFHEPS,
18 right? We have people that are working. We have
19 people that, you know, have other sources of income.
20 What is the percentage of folks that qualify for
21 CityFHEPS?

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I'll come back to you with
23 that, Councilmember. But the reality is, as you
24 said, not everybody qualifies. There are other ways
25 that people exit from our system. And we do have a

1 relationship. We work well with HPD on looking at a
2 variety of ways of people exit the system. So it's
3 not just CityFHEPS. It's multitude of ways that that
4 does happen.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Yeah. What is the
7 vacancy rate at HPD now? Because I know that, you
8 know, Commissioner Iscol you know, kind of talked
9 about, right?, "We have a fire. We have an
10 emergency." Usually what will happen is that the Red
11 Cross will come in, and then they'll place families
12 for three days, and then they'll give you a referral
13 to go into shelter. And, you know, but they go into
14 the-- the HPD shelters, not the DHS shelters, which I
15 hear great things about. But what is the capacity of
16 those sites now?

17 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: The HPD shelters?

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

19 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: I'll get back to you
20 on the specific number, Councilmember Ayala, but we--
21 we work really closely with ARC as well to kind of
22 augment and supplement. So it was-- the first step
23 is, you know, there's a fire. We work with ARC to
24 put folks in a hotel for a few days, you know, and
25

1 then we work with the tenants in the hotels to make
2 sure they're-- they're placed in HPD shelters.

3
4 So the three fires Commissioner Iscol was talking
5 about, we're actually successfully working with those
6 folks to get them room in our shelters right now.
7 There's capacity for them. But you know, this is
8 kind of a very fluid thing. People come, people go.
9 So I'll get you the most current number when-- when I
10 get back to the office.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Great. But I really
12 would love to know what the number of mobiles is.
13 And any-- any policy internal policies that, you
14 know, DHS is working on to try to, you know-- I
15 mean, like, listen, I am very hands on, but I'm a
16 little bit, you know, self-diagnosed OCD, and I will
17 be sitting at home every night trying to figure this
18 out from every single angle. Like-- Like, nobody
19 would be going home, because this is that important.
20 It is, you know-- We need to get this right. This is
21 going to be a part of, you know, our history. And we
22 want to make sure that we're on the right side of it.
23 So we don't-- You know, I don't expect that we're
24 always going to be agreeing on every aspect of the
25 work that we do. But I think that it would really

1
2 make everybody's life a little bit easier if there
3 was a little bit more communication. So I think that
4 in those cases where we do have to make
5 accommodations that may not be ideal, that you know,
6 that you form a relationship with the Councilmembers
7 and say that. Because I think when I get a phone
8 call and people telling me, "Hey, you know, this is
9 what's going on." I, you know, I understand that,
10 right? Unfortunately-- And this is a reality, I got
11 most of my information from Room 9 these days. And
12 that shouldn't be the way that we govern, especially
13 when we are saying we want to be helpful. You know,
14 if you don't let us in one way we're going to come in
15 anyway, and it's not going to be pretty. So you
16 know, we let's try to figure this out. Because I
17 think that there's a lot of work that we can do.

18 I want to recognize that we've also been doing my
19 Councilmembers Riley, Restler, and Brewer.

20 Councilmember Hanif has a couple of questions and
21 then we are going to-- Yeah, then then we will turn
22 it over to Councilmember Restler, followed by
23 Councilmember Brewer.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Coming back to
25 the Respite Centers, Commissioner Iscol, I just want

3 to get some clarity. Is it possible moving forward
4 that the Respite Centers will be used to house
5 families with children in congregate settings?

6 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: That is absolutely not our
7 intent.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Not-- So that means
9 that as you're looking for facilities for families,
10 you are absolutely avoiding having to put families in
11 congregate--

12 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: As much as possible.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I mean, as I have always
15 said, you've heard it here before.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No, and I appreciate it.

17 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Everything is on the table,
18 but it is absolutely not our intent.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: It is what-- it is what we
20 want to keep here.

21 COMMISSIONER ISCHOL: And we are everything in
22 our power to avoid that.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. We deeply
24 appreciate that, particularly, because myself and
25 others were really concerned last month about the
Gramercy site, and families being placed there. And

1 then are there specific priorities you're showing two
2 children? Could you walk us through just the scope
3 of services for children partic-- between the ages
4 of toddler to elementary school, middle, and older
5 students?
6

7 DR. LONG: Yes, I'll take it. Even past the--
8 before the toddler stage too, we've actually had a
9 few hundred women at our HERRCs alone that have
10 delivered babies since they arrived in New York City.
11 So we have a "Welcome to New York City" package that
12 we give them. And then at the HERRCs, we have
13 everything. (As a father of a two-year-old and four-
14 year-old, there's a lot-- a lot you need.) But we
15 have them sign a safe sleeping arrangement with us.
16 They get a pack-and-play that is appropriate for kids
17 less than two. They get everything that they need to
18 take care of infants, and then through being a
19 toddler, things like that.

20 So I would say our care really starts with-- with
21 women that are coming to New York City pregnant.
22 Also when they're coming to New York City with
23 infants. And then carrying forward for a through
24 there, I think one of the things that we've learned,
25 on day one, (I think you've heard me say this before)

1 when we opened our first sites, we didn't have DOE on
2 sites. We weren't-- weren't enrolling kids in school
3 immediately, because we're still trying to figure out
4 how we're reconnecting people to different places
5 across the country, things like that. But I remember
6 the first time we got (and this has become a core
7 thing that we've done to really materially improve
8 the lives of children)-- when we first had the first
9 DOE representative on site, there was a line around
10 the hotel, at the Ro Hotel. And since then, DOE has
11 been an incredible partner, enrolling thousands of
12 kids at our HERRCs alone (and I'll turn to
13 Administrator Carter and the DHS side in a moment)
14 immediately into school.

16 And you see the effect when they run to school
17 buses every morning. Again, you see kids that
18 formerly experienced trauma coming to New York City,
19 experienced anxiety, depression, a variety of other
20 things, but now when they're getting on the school
21 buses, they have smiles wrapped around their faces.
22 It's because we've enrolled them in the school. It's
23 because on site we have mental health care workers,
24 we have medical care on site, we're giving them
25 vaccines, we're protecting them, and they feel

1 protected, and we're plugging them into longitudinal
2 care to.
3

4 At Bellevue, we've created a fast track, if you
5 will, for asylum seeking children so they are getting
6 all of the healthcare including mental healthcare
7 that they need.

8 So we've learned a lot along the way. enrolling
9 kids in school, I think is one of the most important
10 lessons we've learned. I'm proud to say that we've
11 done it thousands of times now, and that's changing
12 thousands of lives. I'll turn it to Administrator
13 Carter for DHS.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And just a follow up for Dr.
15 Long.

16 DR. LONG: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: The services that are on site
18 are specifically the HERRCs. Are there similar
19 services for youth in the Respite Centers? I just
20 wanted to...?

21 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We don't have youth in the
22 Respite Centers.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay, good. So that's a good
24 clarification.

25 DR. LONG: Yup.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: For the youth in HERRCs,
3 there are specific sort of mental health services,
4 options, and then maybe other programming in addition
5 to school, that are made available to young people?

6 DR. LONG: Absolutely. And a couple of examples
7 are: We've been fortunate to have the Girl Scouts,
8 for example, bring their troop to enroll our kids in
9 a-- you see a smile on my face. And it really is a
10 powerful scene, the support that's created when the
11 Girl Scouts come in, and then they start to do
12 projects together. They're even getting, I think
13 it's called their-- it's not agriculture, but botany
14 badge, I think, by doing planting around the
15 Roosevelt Hotel, a different hotel, to beautify that
16 space, and just again, become part of the community.
17 It's all--

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So that's really-- that's
19 really wonderful. I just visited a school in my
20 district, the Cyber Arts studio Academy, which has
21 welcomed many middle school-- high schoolers where
22 asylum seekers, students, and the arts program has
23 now been sort of transformed, just de-emphasizing
24 English, and really emphasizing artistic talent.

1
2 And the video they shared with me, it was just so
3 inspiring to really hear from students, entirely in
4 Spanish, just articulating how high school and having
5 this arts program has really supported their
6 attendance, and healing, and their journey in finding
7 a support-- group of friends, a supportive group
8 friends.

9 DR. LONG: It's great to hear.

10 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you. And I'm
11 actually going to start there, as he talked about
12 that art piece. We have had some private
13 partnerships. NYU actually comes in to our sites,
14 and do art for both mothers and children. And one of
15 the things that we find is that art is very helpful
16 in relieving and expressing trauma. And so we've had
17 an opportunity to do that.

18 But to start in terms of other programming that
19 we have: Like Dr. Long said, every family that comes
20 with us who are pregnant or have children, we do show
21 them a safe sleep video, "Life to Love"[?], and
22 they're signing that they see that making sure that
23 they have a crib or a pack-and-play. We're making
24 sure that we do unit inspections, that the children
25 are sleeping in cribs on their backs. Moms who have-

1
2 - are first-time moms (we work with Department of
3 Health and Mental Health) to have folks coming in to
4 make sure their work with the moms around having
5 newborns, and making sure that if there's post-- post
6 trauma, you know, postpartum depression, that they're
7 working with them around that.

8 We do work with H + H, you know, in terms of any
9 kind of services that the children, moms, or other
10 individuals may need, we do have that. We do with
11 the Department of Education. They are on our sites.
12 They come and visit to make sure children are
13 connected to schools, as well as after-school
14 programming.

15 This Summer, there is Summer Rising through the
16 Department of Education that the children can access,
17 and they have signed up for that. Every space is,
18 you know, has been signed up for and that, you know,
19 asylum-seeker children have been, you know,
20 completely using that.

21 It's also for the children that we have summer
22 camps. They're doing that locally. And some of our
23 providers are doing programming for the summer. And
24 so we have a variety of-- for young children that's
25 happening with us now.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. Coming
3 back to Commissioner Iscol. Do you believe that
4 there should be any minimum standards in place for
5 emergency housing?

6 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Um...

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And if yes, what are those
8 parameters that you all-- you consider?

9 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I would need to circle back
10 with my team and come back to you. I mean, look,
11 again, I'll say this, you know, I've said it before.
12 The health and safety of the folks in our care is the
13 utmost priority. We have a lot of-- of standards in
14 our Coastal Storm Plan. As I said, we've invited
15 Legal Aid Society, Department of Health and others to
16 come through the sites and sort of help figure out
17 ways that we can improve what we're doing there. You
18 know, but again, I think that there's just the nature
19 of emergencies is such that sometimes you have to
20 make really, really hard choices.

21 And I think when you look at the number of
22 locations we are operating these Respite Centers, not
23 a single one of them, I would tell you is the ideal
24 place to be doing any of this. But it's what we have
25 available. And I think we're doing a remarkable job

1 with what we have considering we don't have support
2 from the federal government.
3

4 You know, emergency management number one is when
5 you have an emergency and the local jurisdiction has
6 precedence until they are out of resources, and they
7 turn around and ask for the help from the State, they
8 turn around and ask for help from the emergency--
9 from the federal government. I can't think of
10 another emergency where the local jurisdiction has
11 turned around to hand off the football and asked for
12 help, and we have not gotten it.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Mm-hmm.

14 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: And considering those
15 constraints-- You know, even those constraints aside,
16 I am blown away by the job that this city has done
17 over the last year.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sure. And again, I want to
19 extend our gratitude as we've done. But it would be
20 wonderful to hear from you just what you think are
21 some of the minimum standards. And I-- I know you've
22 underscored health and safety, but I'd like to know
23 how you define health and safety.

24 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I would be happy to have
25 that conversation with you. I think my concern,

3 again, is oftentimes, especially with an
4 unprecedented emergency, there's no precedent for it.
5 And in those cases, you know, without knowing what
6 you might have to deal with, what are those-- what
7 are those minimum standards that might have to be
8 overcome, provide a bare minimum of just a bed and a
9 place for people to stay out of the elements, right?
10 And so I think it's a longer conversation, but we'd
11 love to have that for you.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'd welcome that longer
13 conversation, but want to make clear that New York
14 City has a responsibility, and at every crisis
15 moment, at every political upheaval and roller
16 coasters, this city has stood strong, and it is why
17 we are a cornerstone for where people want to live,
18 and make community, and it's why we are the city that
19 we are right now.

20 And so I think as much as you've been emphasizing
21 that we're in this unprecedented crisis moment, we
22 equally have a responsibility to show what it looks
23 like to offer dignity. And that's really the premise
24 of the two bills that, you know, I'd love to further
25 engage the administration about, because we want to
be able to have protections that don't undermine and

1 erode our right to shelter mandate, while
2
3 acknowledging that we are in an unprecedented time of
4 welcoming many, many families and individuals who
5 really have no other options at this moment.

6 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: And I would just say that I
7 think this city has stood incredibly strong during
8 this unprecedented crisis.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. Absolutely. And
10 then I wanted some clarification: You use the words
11 "subject to suspension" in reference to Intros 942
12 and 943. Are you saying that if the Council were to
13 pass these bills, the Administration would pass an
14 executive order to override them?

15 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: What I'm saying is, is that
16 if there was an emergency that occurred, that it
17 would be likely that the Mayor would issue an
18 emergency declaration that would suspend that
19 legislation, so that we could flexibly respond and
20 meet the basic needs of New Yorkers.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really disappointing.
22 And I mean, we would like more communication about
23 the expansion of the Respite Centers or as more
24 HERRCs get created, and welcome the-- the, I don't
25 know, if they're now bi weekly, or once a month, the

1
2 updates as to how many people are in the city's care.
3 The last update had, you know, nine HERRCs. And--
4 and to get the updates from HPD, on the Upstate
5 facilities, I mean, that was really informative.
6 And, you know, I think the Council is really
7 dedicated to ensuring that these other municipalities
8 have the similar detainer protections that New York
9 City has. As folks go to other parts of the state,
10 they are more at risk of being stopped by ICE, and
11 the collusion between ICE, and local law enforcement
12 and deportation. And so we really want to be
13 thoughtful. And I-- You know, George, it's the first
14 time I'm meeting you here. And I've heard such
15 incredible things about you from my colleagues. I
16 would welcome a longer conversation about the-- the
17 piece that is the Upstate piece. And of course,
18 we've heard from some of our providers who have been
19 doing some legal services work and the incredible
20 community partners that are making sure that our
21 neighbors in Buffalo and Albany are showing up in
22 open arms and countering the-- the anti-immigrant
23 rhetoric that is also coming from the leaders of
24 those municipalities.

1
2 And then, my final question before I go to
3 Councilmember Brewer: What steps does the
4 Administration think that Councilmembers who are
5 committed to improving conditions for recent arrivals
6 should be taking right now aside from lobbying for
7 more state and federal funding, which we have done,
8 and suggesting sites in our district, which we have
9 also done. I've sent several emails of I have
10 proposed locations, and I know that the Admin is
11 identifying whether it fit-- whether the locations
12 fit within the parameters, and the lease piece is
13 particularly important too that I've learned about.
14 What else would you suggest of this?

15 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah, thank you. I love
16 that question. So, you know, the Administration has
17 been very clear in all of our conversations with
18 electeds and otherwise, that the things that we need
19 help with is seeking greater support from the federal
20 government, as you said, workforce authorizations for
21 this population. That is truly the exit strategy.
22 In addition to that, finding sites. You know, the
23 RFP has existed that the EDC put out since I think
24 January. In addition to that, if there were sites
25 that meet your requirements in terms of bathrooms,

1 numbers of showers, that you think we could safely
2 house 250 or 300 people, if the City Council wants to
3 put together a list of 8 or 10 of those sites, I'm
4 happy to send my team out this afternoon to go start
5 looking at them.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Excellent. Thank you.
8 Councilmember Brewer? Oh, I want to recognize we're
9 joined by Councilmember Rita Joseph and Pierina
10 Sanchez, and Moya online.

11 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.
12 Quick question. First of all, thank you for the
13 tours and for the access. Much appreciated. I think
14 I've been to most of the HERRCs and certainly some of
15 the emergency.

16 Number one: Councilmember Ayala asked: Why
17 can't there be more help, collaboration, and
18 coordination? So let me give an example. When you
19 come to a community, particularly with the single-
20 room occupancies around the city, or hotels that may
21 not have extra space. My suggestion would be before
22 you arrive, even if it's, you know, a day's notice,
23 what are the nearby faith-based, and what are the
24 nearby nonprofits? Because what happens is, you got
25 the-- I love the guys from the National Guard but

1 they're from, you know, Upstate. And I love the, you
2 know, DHS staff, but they're from the Bronx. They
3 don't know nothing about Manhattan, just like I don't
4 know nothing about the Bronx. So you've got to be
5 able to have that information in advance. Let me
6 give an example why.
7

8 Obviously we want to try to get some kitchens,
9 because people want to cook. We can do that.

10 Number two: Space, because the SROs don't have
11 any space. So therefore if we want to have NISE
12 come, or if we want to have an OSHA class, or
13 whatever, we need space. So to have that available--
14 Otherwise we're scrambling to make sure it exists. A
15 suggestion. Number two. In other words, what are
16 you doing along those lines?

17 Number two: Delivery bikes. That's how
18 everybody's getting around, in the neighborhoods
19 anyway. And I'll bet it's going to happen in Albany,
20 Buffalo, and everybody else. Dr. Long knows this
21 problem. I've got 45 delivery bikes in front of the
22 SRO. That's a problem. But I don't know where
23 they're going to put them. I don't know where else
24 we're going to put them. Meanwhile, you got
25

1 neighbors complaining. So what are we going to do
2 with the delivery bikes?
3

4 Number three: I know TPS. I've been talking
5 about working papers since day one. Crystal Price
6 can't get them. Hakim can't them. Et cetera. It's
7 up to the President. We don't have them. But there
8 are some, I mean, Nicaraguans, Haitians, et cetera.
9 They do get them.

10 So my question is: What are you doing with those
11 in the system, everybody, who has that group that is
12 eligible for TPS? How are we helping them to get a
13 job? There are some. I've run into them.

14 Number three: I want to know how many people are
15 getting health insurance.

16 Number four: I have to give my friend, Mr.
17 Restler, credit, because he talked about in the paper
18 the other day supportive housing and NYCHA. I am
19 concerned about the supportive housing. He has a big
20 number. So it's all his credit. But how quickly can
21 you go from "here" to his supportive housing?
22 That's-- Those are my questions. What's the
23 timeframe for doing that? And that will be
24 particularly DHS, and those who are from New York.
25 Thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you, Councilmember.
I'm going to take a couple of those questions. The
last one, around supportive housing and NYCHA:

Supportive housing is HRA and DOHMH (so I can't
really speak directly to that-- You know, I can't
really give that) and NYCHA. So we'll come back and
have those particular agencies really speak to that.

The-- You know, one of the things that happened
this last year, with the numbers of people coming in:
We opened a ton of sites. And you know, it's been
hard for us to get staffing for the providers to
really be a part of these sites. And so I am
operating sites with just temporary staff, overtime
staff, National Guardsmen. But as they get staffing
on, we're rolling them back.

So I would-- You know, those temporary staff that
we have, they are from the Bronx and Manhattan. That
type of thing is what I have, at this point, we are
pushing to get providers on board, but it was so
quick-- and as-- You know, we thought this was going
to be, "You'll be there for six weeks, and the
provider will take over." In this sector, that
hasn't happened, because we can't find the staffing
to do that. So it has slowed down.

1
2 But what we did find is that now we have two--
3 we have one temporary agency that's really now having
4 some staff there, that's not, you know, kind of
5 rotating out. So they can actually learn the
6 neighborhood, know what's in the community, be able
7 to direct people to do that, and make connections.

8 So we're working to be able to kind of work
9 around that. Because I do know that it's hard. You
10 know, I wouldn't go to Bronx at all. You know-- I'm
11 from South Brooklyn. So, you know, trying to figure
12 out how do we do that?

13 So, you know, I hear that. We'll figure out as
14 we move forward how to do that. But I do think
15 there's some opportunity for us to be able to do
16 that.

17 You know, the supportive housing, faith based,
18 making those connections: You know, absolutely,
19 we're making connections with our faith-based and our
20 community partners. You know, we've been working to
21 do that for the last year to do that piece. But in
22 terms of opening so quickly, when we started that it
23 was really a quick, you know, turnaround to be able
24 to do that. Do you know any of the other questions?

1
2 DR. LONG: Yeah. Hi, Councilmember Brewer. Um,
3 I think there's three questions I'll share some
4 thoughts on here.

5 The first was about the delivery bikes: So
6 actually, I'll add on one thing to Commissioner
7 Iscol, what he said a minute ago about how you all
8 can help us: One [BELL RINGS] (and we're out of
9 time). One key way that you could help us is exactly
10 what you're doing now, giving us feedback from the
11 communities, as you know, goes a really long way. I
12 remember when we fir--

13 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: That's easy.

14 DR. LONG: It's easy, low-hanging fruit, but it's
15 very impactful. And I'll give a quick example of
16 that. At the Watson, when we moved into that
17 community, I myself met with several community
18 members that lived across the street, implemented all
19 of the changes they recommended, and things got a lot
20 better at the site. So let's do the same thing. I
21 know your team is actually coming to the tour
22 tomorrow at the Upper West Side dorms. So let's
23 figure out the solution for that together. I think
24 it's a great example.

1
2 Your second-- the second question I wanted to
3 quickly talk about is the different ways in which you
4 can start to work.

5 So as everybody knows, there's the 765 Work
6 Authorization Form, but then there's other things
7 like TPS or Temporary Protected Status that would
8 enable you to work potentially more quick quickly.

9 So working with MOIA, that's the type of
10 information that we're seeking to gather now, and why
11 we've created the idea of the Arrival Center:

12 Because before the Arrival Center, we didn't have one
13 unified place where we were able to ask the same
14 questions, collect the same information, figure out
15 who needed what type of legal support, things like
16 that.

17 So with the Arrival Center, we can now collect
18 that information working with MOIA on what the right
19 questions are.

20 And then also, as I'm sure you saw, the new
21 Application Assistance Center, which will be at the
22 Red Cross. That will be how we can triage people
23 into that to get what-- depending on what they're--
24 where they are in the asylum seeking and work

1 authorization process, getting them connected in the
2 right way.
3

4 So you're thinking about it the same way we are.
5 I think it's going to be an ongoing, important part
6 of our work that we should stay in touch about.

7 Third thing is I'll give you a concrete answer on
8 this: You asked about health insurance enrollment.
9 So at my sites, which of course is the Health +
10 Hospitals HERRCs, the Arrival Center, and my team at
11 the Navigation Center, we just surpassed 12,000
12 people that we alone have enrolled in health
13 insurance. And as a doctor, you know what I'm going
14 to say: That, to me is 12,000 lives potentially
15 saved.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Madam
17 Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Councilmember Sanchez?

19 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much chairs,
20 and good afternoon to-- to the entire city team. I
21 first just wanted to start with an acknowledgement
22 and a thank you for the earnestness with which you
23 all work, and you are continuing to work on this
24 crisis, you know, that is facing our city, this--
25 this really difficult challenge that is before us. I

1 think it's just always important to acknowledge that,
2 you know, everyone is working so hard, and the heart-
3 - our hearts are in the right place.

4
5 And that's actually, you know, I have a sort of a
6 statement and a question. Because that heart is in
7 the right places is where I want to kind of like,
8 focus today. And that is this Council passed
9 legislation, you know, two weeks ago now, that is
10 trying to make our shelter system more efficient, you
11 know, the FHEPS voucher eligibility, the 90-day rule.
12 And I just want to share a statement today that I
13 hope that the Mayor and that the Administration, that
14 the Mayor will sign, and that the Administration will
15 implement, these measures that are really meant to
16 make our systems more efficient. And it's really
17 important to say that, you know, we are tackling the
18 same issue we are we are coming from the same place,
19 and we're trying to serve the same people. And I
20 just really want one appreciate that and want to just
21 over-emphasize that, you know, we are we are trying
22 to make the systems that we have today more efficient
23 so that we can serve more individuals, you know,
24 coming into our city, and stabilize our-- our
25 communities that that need that stability.

1
2 And so my question today is really with respect
3 to the HPD HERRC. So I just want to focus on that.
4 Can you-- Hello. Hello, Mr. Sarkissian. Um, can you
5 just share a little bit specifically about the
6 Jefferson HERRC? What are some-- some major
7 differences between Jefferson HERRC and maybe other
8 sites that we-- other HERRCs that we have? Are there
9 private areas for medical consultations and services?
10 And are there separate areas for accessing services
11 that may require disclosing sensitive information?

12 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yes. So the first
13 question: The services that you'll find at 455
14 Jefferson in Bushwick are the exact same services,
15 Councilmember, you'll find it all of the H + H
16 HERRCs. You know, folks have a roof over their head.
17 They have three meals a day. They have medical
18 service. They have laundry service, case management,
19 social services.

20 As far as the medical services, there is a
21 private area. We have 24/7 medical services on site
22 with a nurse practitioner that can help folks. We
23 also have private areas for folks to meet with some
24 of the caseworkers, if they have sensitive
25 information that they need to share. So it's the

1 exact same model, staffing, and integrated system
2 that you'll find in-- with the H + H, folks.

3
4 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much. Um,
5 is there any difference in who is administering the
6 services? City agencies, service providers, any--
7 any notable differences?

8 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Well, we contract
9 with a company named Garner, that, you know, this is
10 kind of what they do. They push into disaster zones
11 and kind of setup, shelter, food, and medical
12 services. This is-- This is their thing. So we're
13 contracting with them. They're operating 455
14 Jefferson. They have subcontractors they're working
15 with. They're working with a company name Level Up
16 that's a medical service provider in the
17 neighborhood. So they're physically in the building,
18 doing the work. And they've contracted with other
19 folks for security, and food, et cetera.

20 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. And how does
21 that compare to some of the Upstate sites that were
22 being discussed earlier?

23 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah. Exact same
24 service is actually, just a different company. I
25 mentioned earlier, the company for Upstate is DotGo.

1 They are a mobile medical services provider that has
2 a lot of experience doing kind of HERRC type work
3 here in the city. And so folks upstate get three
4 meals a day. They get-- You know, they get medical
5 services when they need it. They get access to medi-
6 - sorry access to social services, case management,
7 laundry services. Everything we do in Bushwick, we
8 do at all our Upstate sites.

10 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: All right. Thank you.

11 Just a final question: How do complaints get
12 filtered to HPD and the agencies from these sites?
13 How do we know how we're doing?

14 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah. So we have
15 folks. We have actually six dedicated staff that are
16 in charge of kind of the operations of the sites. So
17 they're-- they're actually reading all the reports,
18 and communicating back to the contractors.

19 You know, we get morning and afternoon reports.
20 And in those reports, if there's incidents, anything
21 that kind of pops up, we'll review it and we'll call
22 the site operators and-- and ask them a few more
23 questions like, "What happened there?" Why was, you
24 know, "Why was there an involuntary discharge?"
25 "Please let us know more about the incident." And we

1 do site visits as well, to kind of connect physically
2 with the spaces.
3

4 DR. LONG: Can I add one thing onto that too?
5 One thing that's refined the HERRC program, which is
6 true at the Jefferson site, true at our ten other
7 HERRCs, and true, of course, what we're doing upstate
8 is-- we've gotten a lot of surveys of our guests to
9 ask them what their experience is, how they're
10 accessing different forms of care.

11 And one that may seem minor, but actually has
12 been really important to us, because guests tell us
13 it is very important, is the type of food that we're
14 serving at all of our different sites.

15 So we've had this interesting challenge of-- with
16 the diversity of populations coming to us, what types
17 of food would people that are coming here from
18 Venezuela and from Senegal both want to eat, if we're
19 serving one meal? No better way than serving
20 everybody there and asking them: What would you
21 want? What do you want? How do you rate the meals
22 that we've had so far? So it turns out things for
23 example-- nobody likes roast beef, myself included.
24 Everybody likes Italian food. And we've-- on the
25 specific menu, line by line, we do door knocking

3 surveys to see what people want with their
4 experiences, and in particular, to refine the menu
5 that we have at all of our sites. And that's-- I
6 think your-- your question is really important about
7 how we've improved the HERRC program overall.

8 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Great, thank you. Thank
9 you so much. Thank you Chairs for this important
10 hearing. And we want to collaborate. From the
11 Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, on-- on to the rest
12 of us, we want to be collaborative. So open-- open
13 spirit here. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sorry, we're waiting for
15 Councilmember Restler.

16 We are always multitasking.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Sorry. You're lucky
18 you're not the Parks Department right now. Sorry.
19 So at some point, Bushwick Inlet Park is going get
20 built, and it will be joyous. But today, we're
21 talking about more important things. And I really
22 just want to thank our really extraordinary Chairs,
23 Councilmember Hanif and Councilmember Ayala for their
24 leadership.

25 I have a number of different questions. I'll try
to cover as much as they give me latitude to cover.

1 Just firstly, I want to thank you all for joining us
2 today. And while I think you've heard concerns,
3 frustrations about the city's response, I, you know,
4 appreciate and respect each of you as professionals
5 and know that you and your staffs and the folks that
6 you've hired are doing their best in a difficult set
7 of circumstances. So I just want to thank you for
8 your hard work.
9

10 Just first question for Administrator Carter:

11 Over the last year, how much is the DHS census
12 increased?

13 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Good question,
14 Councilmember. Our census almost has doubled.

15 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Doubled. And yet, Mayor
16 Adams has imposed a 2.5% PEG, a severe PEG that will
17 dramatically limit stretched DHS services despite
18 taking responsibility for twice as many people. That
19 makes negative logic to me. Could you help in any
20 way explain how DHS is going to serve twice as many
21 people with notably fewer resources?

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So Councilmember, you
23 know, we have had an unprecedented crisis. The Mayor
24 has been clear that that has really been difficult
25 for the city to absorb. We haven't gotten much help

2 from our other, you know, state and federal partners.
3 And so the city has taken on a lot of that cost. And
4 so that PEG is--

5 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: There's well over a
6 billion dollars in state and federal aid. There
7 should be more.

8 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: -- and so, Councilmember--

9 COUNCILMEMBER ERSTLER: But that's separate and
10 apart from why the Mayor is choosing to cut DHS. I
11 just am deeply disappointed and concerned. And I'm
12 hopeful that Speaker Adams will be able to get these
13 funds restored in the budget negotiations.

14 I have a just a couple of questions on data,
15 because I find it confusing to track what is
16 happening across the purview of all these different
17 agencies to report to multiple different Deputy
18 Mayors. It is confounding.

19 So today I'm just going to go down the line:
20 George, how many asylum seekers are in HPD control,
21 or are under-- under HPD purview?.

22 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: So we have 2,350
23 asylum seekers.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 2,350. And can you break
25 that population down like Administrator Carter

1
2 graciously does for us every day by single adults,
3 adult families, and families with children?

4 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: I'll get back to you
5 on that, but almost all of our asylum seekers are
6 single adults or adult families. We have a few
7 families with children in hotels in New York City as
8 well. I'll get you that number in a second.

9 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Ted, Dr. Long, nice to
10 see you.

11 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Oh, sorry. Sorry.
12 Real quick. Real quick.

13 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Oh, please.

14 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: So-- So we actually
15 have 1,100 families with children in our downstate
16 hotels.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 1,100...?

18 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Families with
19 children. In down-- in our downstate hotels.
20 Correct.

21 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: In hotels that are under
22 HPD purview?

23 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Correct. Correct.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So that 1,100 families
25 with children is separate and apart from the 2,350?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE Jointly with the 129
COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

2 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: No, no. It's
3 inclusive of it.

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: That doesn't make sense.
5 2,350 was the total number of households.

6 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: No, no. The--
7 Sorry, the 1,100 are families with children. The
8 total number of people that are in families with
9 children.

10 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Got it. So 300-odd
11 families.

12 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Not independent
13 households.

14 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 300 to 400 families
15 roughly.

16 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: Yeah, roughly. Yeah,
17 yeah.

18 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So half of your
19 population is FWCs...

20 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: A little less than
21 half, that's right.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Half is adult families
23 and single adults.

24

25

1 Dr. Long could you provide a similar breakdown
2
3 for us in the same total number and breakdown of
4 those three populations if you might?

5 DR. LONG: Yes. So in our H + H HERRCs, which
6 are 10 HERRCs today, we have 12,593 people. Breaking
7 that down by population: Under five, 1,540, five to
8 seven--

9 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Are you able to break it
10 down in the way that Administrator Carter does, just
11 for comparison across the board? She does single
12 adults, families with children, and adult families?

13 DR. LONG: I can do all of that. It might be-- I
14 have all of the data literally in front of me. But
15 maybe we could send an email later today just to-- so
16 I don't have to peel through it right now?

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: It would be very helpful
18 to have that breakdown by population. We've been
19 trying in our office. We've reached out to many
20 folks across administration to just get a hard number
21 on the asylum seekers, numbers of families with kids.
22 And it's in part because as you can see, across
23 multiple agencies, it's been challenging to receive
24 direct answers. So we can get an email from you
25 today, Dr. Long, with that information?

DR. LONG: So the exact question-- Because I just want to make sure I'm answering it correctly, is the number of households with families with children at one of my 10 sites?

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: The number of families with children, the number of adult families, and the number of single adults.

DR. LONG: The numbers of families with children, households: 2,800. Adult families: 839. These are households-- or family households.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Yeah, I gotcha. This is-- this is the number of households, not number of people.

DR. LONG: Correct.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Got it.

DR. LONG: And then single adults, which are obviously single, so household doesn't apply, 1,393. I can break that down by individual--

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: No, no. You're fine. That's-- That's helpful. Thank you.

DR. LONG: You're welcome.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Administrator Carter. I know that it gets a little complicated, but can you

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE Jointly with the
2 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

132

3 provide the numbers for asylum seekers that are
4 within DHS care, similar breakdown?

5 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yes. You said-- and now
6 I'm nervous, because, you're like, we do it all the
7 time.

8 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So, you do a daily census
9 report. It's very helpful and we appreciate it.

10 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I'm just, you know-- you
11 know. As of-- I think this is as of 06/20--

12 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay, that's good enough.
13 That was my sister's anniversary.

14 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Okay. Families with
15 children: Just over 60-- almost 6,700, with 6,690.
16 Single adults: 485. Adult families: 981.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Say that last one for me
18 again? I'm sorry.

19 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Adult families: 981.

20 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 981. So 981 adult
21 families, 485 single adults, and I heard 761 families
22 with children?

23 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: 4,885 single adults.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 4,485. That is an
25 important distinction.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: 6,690 families with
children.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: That's families with
children? I'm sorry for being so dense.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: 6,690.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 6,690. And does that
include your total DHS population includes asylum
seekers and non-asylum seekers?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: This is asylum seekers
only.

COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay. So-- Okay, that is
very helpful. Thank you for providing that data.

The next set of questions I have relate to-- Oh,
is it okay if I keep going for two more minutes?

Chairs? You're not angry with me? You'll kick me
when I...? Hurry up. Hurry up. I'm hurrying up.

Okay, I got a few questions on disabilities and
then I'll move out.

So briefly: How can our HERRC system accommodate
people with disabilities if they are reducing the
accessible capacity they have? If we-- How are-- I'm
concerned about the HERRCs' ability to accommodate
people with disabilities. We've been told that you
can't serve people with disabilities and Respite

1 Sites. How are they being screened? Are we
2 confident that we're meeting all of our ADA
3 requirements and serving people with disabilities
4 effectively?
5

6 DR. LONG: Yeah. Great question. So part of the
7 premise behind having the Arrival Center is so that,
8 again, we can ask the same questions which include
9 disability questions and disability screens in one
10 place, and then figure out where the most appropriate
11 place to send you from the Arrival Center would be.

12 So, as you just said, if you're a person living
13 with a disability-- Well, in particular, let's say
14 it's a mobility impairments, you're not going to go
15 to one of the respite sites. You're going to go to,
16 for example, it could be to one of my-- one of my 10
17 HERRCs.

18 And then the way that process would work is we're
19 identifying if you are a person living with a
20 disability, that's one question, and what the nature
21 of your disability is. And then where we see where--
22 we see where your needs can be best met within the
23 system that we have. We do that every day. And we
24 did have the opportunity. I know, our colleagues are
25 here from the Legal Aid Society, and that we're going

1 to be going on another tour tomorrow to see our new
2 two new HERRCs.
3

4 But I would say based on feedback that Legal Aid
5 Society has given us, we've refined that process over
6 time. And that's been part of the inspiration of
7 having the Arrival Center to make sure that we ask
8 the same questions to everybody upfront in the same
9 way.

10 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you. And then
11 lastly, I'd just like to ask about move-outs. We, in
12 the DHS system traditionally start talking about
13 housing on day one, right?, and start trying to find
14 housing solutions for people from their very first
15 stay, first day in shelter.

16 I am deeply disturbed by the ever-increasing
17 number of units that are in city's-- in the city's
18 control that are vacant: The eight-fold increase in
19 vacant NYCHA apartments, the steady increase in
20 vacant supportive housing, and frankly, many other
21 forms of housing that are vacant in New York City
22 that we are not managing effectively as an
23 administration.

24 I imagine that you all do regular meetings with
25 Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom and other leadership--

1 members of the leadership team here at City Hall.
2 Why are we not focused on housing solutions in those
3 meetings? Why are we not throwing resources at
4 speeding up the renovations and occupancy of our
5 public housing developments and supportive housing
6 developments as a part of the solution to this
7 crisis? These are resources that are fully within
8 the control of Mayor Adams.
9

10 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Councilmember Restler,
11 like I said, you know, earlier when you were actually
12 not in the room--

13 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: No. I heard you say it.
14 It's HRA. I get who's at the table, but you're--

15 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Okay. So-- Right. So I
16 think-- so I think we're going to make sure that
17 we'll have the administration come with some-- with
18 some answers.

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate it. But
20 this is the thing: You all are the folks that they
21 decided to send today to represent how we're
22 addressing the asylum seeker crisis. These are
23 housing resources at our disposal, housing solutions
24 that can help us address capacity. I'm disappointed
25 that you all can't speak to what we are doing to

1 ensure full, expedited occupancy of the city-- the
2 permanent housing resources that are in our control.

3
4 CHIEF OF STAFF SARKISSIAN: I can-- I can chime
5 in Lincoln. So, you know, from HPD's perspective,
6 we've been working this past year, you know, like--
7 you know, Commissioner Ahmed Tigani, and a bunch of
8 his folks have been like meeting almost weekly with
9 industry folks to speed-- to think about reforms we
10 can make to our process, to speed up placements,
11 particularly homeless placements.

12 And so they've actually made a lot of progress
13 over the-- over the year. We can have a specific
14 sit-down with you--

15 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I would welcome it. I
16 was really disappointed to see HPD cut \$14.7 million
17 from their budget on Supportive Housing this year due
18 to Mayor Adams budget cuts, just as I was
19 disappointed to see the Mayor cut funding from
20 NYCHA's Vacancy Readiness Program. If we don't fund
21 these-- these initiatives, we can't activate the
22 housing. If we don't fund the staff at your
23 agencies, then we can't process the applications.

24 I really think that we are really wasting money
25 in very expensive emergency shelter solutions to meet

1
2 the needs of asylum seekers, instead of making the
3 right short-term investments to maximize permanent
4 housing for people who are in shelter. So thank you
5 very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, I have a few more
7 follow ups and then we will close out. Thank you so
8 much. So I wanted to understand the intent of the
9 request to have the consent decree be rewritten to
10 include a provision that allows the city to suspend
11 right to shelter when the city lacks the resources
12 and capacity to establish and maintain sufficient
13 shelter sites. I know you might respond that there's
14 a pending litigation and may not be able to share
15 comprehensively responses to my questions, but I
16 would like to just put it in the record, in case you
17 do have anything to share about the court filing.
18 Why did the Administration file this request?

19 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: You are right. So we're
20 not lawyers at the table, and so we really can't
21 comment on ongoing litigation. Um, but you know, the
22 City does not want to end the right to shelter. And
23 so we're going to refer questions around litigation
24 back to the Law Department. We're not able to answer
25 those questions here today.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. So would it also
3 require a lawyer to be present if I wanted to know,
4 if the Administration achieves its desired impact or
5 outcome from the court, what policies it would
6 specifically change?

7 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yes. It's the same
8 question, right? It's-- We're-- You know, at the
9 table here, we're not the folks to answer those
10 questions. So we're going to refer you to the Law
11 Department.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. And then the
13 Mayor signed Executive Order 402, which again
14 suspended the right-- parts of the right to shelter.
15 What actions has the administration taken that,
16 absent Executive Order 402, it would be otherwise
17 prohibited from doing?

18 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So counselor, what I will
19 say is that, you know, over the past year, the
20 administration has really worked tirelessly in the
21 unprecedented crisis, right? No one predicted we
22 would be here a year ago when I sat here, right? So
23 we were here a year ago talking about the crisis that
24 was beginning at the time, and how we were responding
25 to that. But, you know, the demand and the way we

1 responded to this emergency and to this crisis really
2 shows that the Administration and all of us at this
3 table have really acted humanely. So you know, we
4 are continuing to work with those who are coming to
5 us, even when all of us, you know, the City is, you
6 know, strained at this point, so-- Right? So we
7 continue to treat every person who comes to us with,
8 you know, with dignity and respect.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I understand that. And I
11 don't want to fight that. And I think over and over
12 throughout the last several hours, we've acknowledged
13 the amount of work the Administration has put in to
14 welcome asylum seekers, and applauded the work of
15 city workers and the agency partnerships. But that
16 didn't answer my question.

17 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah. You asked a question
18 earlier that I've been thinking about. And that's
19 about standards of the cent-- of these-- these
20 facilities. And I've been thinking about it. And I
21 think this sort of gets to your question now. And,
22 you know, yes, there should be standards. I don't
23 think they should be legislated. And I think the
24 intent behind some of these things that you're asking
25 about right now, is just to provide us the

1 flexibility, we need to respond to this unprecedented
2 crisis. And that's really what-- what we're looking
3 for with the different Executive Orders, with some of
4 the Emergency Declarations. It's just that
5 flexibility for us to be able to respond as best we
6 can during this unprecedented crisis.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I understand. I think I'll
9 have to double down on the fact that, you know, the
10 first panelist who spoke from the Legal Aid Society,
11 shared that there had been other attempts to override
12 or pull away from the Right to Shelter Decree and
13 have failed.

14 And so we don't want the unprecedented
15 consequences as a result of what could be the
16 reality, when we erode the city's right-to-shelter
17 Foundation.

18 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: And I would say, and I've
19 said this before: Actions speak louder than words.
20 I think the actions that this city has taken over the
21 last year to house, what?, nearly 70,000 or 80,000
22 people shows that we're committed to providing
23 shelter to people.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. No one is
25 setting you're-- no one is saying you're not. What

2 we are debating here is that folks shouldn't need to
3 walk out of a facility to take a bath or to take a
4 shower. And so that remains the conversation of
5 today. And we look forward to continued--

6 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah. Those are short term
7 facilities, right?

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: --engagement-- they haven't
9 been short-term facilities. Folks are-- Well, if
10 you want to tell us--

11 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: They are-- they are places
12 that-- they are places that we have solved for the
13 showers and--

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I would appreciate if you're
15 not talking over me. Could you share what the
16 minimum stay has been for a family-- for folks at the
17 Respite Centers that don't have showers on site?

18 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The minimum stay or you'd
19 like for the maximum?

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: The minimum and maximum.

21 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: So the average right now the
22 average stay is about two weeks. The intent was
23 always just a few days. That's not where we are with
24 this unprecedented crisis. And again, almost all of
25

1
2 these facilities now have showers on site, or a
3 shower solution for the folks that are staying there.

4 We also prioritize at the sites that don't have
5 showers, getting those people out into other
6 facilities as quickly as possible for that reason.

7 But again, if the City Council, if yourself would
8 like to provide us a list of 8, 10, 12 places that
9 meet your standard that we can move into, I will have
10 my team look at them today.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Falling back on telling us to
12 provide those, when we have consistently shared with
13 you all, we are just trying to do our work here in
14 ensuring that we are centering dignity, because it is
15 the Administration's role in-- in conducting the
16 operations of housing. And so right now, while we've
17 extended ourselves, and await the updates and the
18 conversations, the briefings that happen, for a
19 stronger partnership. But I will not accept that for
20 folks that need to walk out of a facility to take a
21 shower is the best that we can be offering folks at
22 this moment.

23 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: It is better than people
24 sleeping on the street.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And we don't want that. We
3 absolutely don't want that, which is why we don't
4 want to erode our city's Right to Shelter Decree.

5 And then finally, I'll just add that if-- if, in
6 your definition, short-term is two weeks-- Is that--
7 Is that what you're saying? That a short term state
8 is two weeks?

9 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The hope was a couple of
10 days. That's not where we are. We're out of space,
11 Councilmember.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No, I get that. I'm just
13 trying to understand this sort of concept of, "This
14 is a short-term stay, versus this is a longer-term
15 stay."

16 COUNCILMEMBER ISCOL: It's as short as possible.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Well, that is all the
18 questions we have for now. And we will be following
19 up. I think we have more questions than we came
20 with. And I deeply appreciate your frankness, your
21 honesty, and the continued work to ensure that every
22 asylum seeker in our city is treated with dignity.
23 Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Thank you.

25 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER:

1 DR. LONG: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

3 COUNSEL: Next we'll be hearing from New York
4 City Comptroller Brad Lander.

5 [90 SECONDS SILENCE]

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin good sir.

7 COMPTROLLER LANDER: Ready when you are.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We're ready.

9 COMPTROLLER LANDER: Okay. Good afternoon. And
10 thank you Chairs Hanif and Ayala for calling this
11 important hearing on the oversight of the emergency
12 shelters and Humanitarian Emergency Response and
13 Relief Centers, or HERRCs, that have been opened over
14 the past year to address the influx of recent
15 arrivals in New York City. This is an important
16 hearing and I appreciate your finding the time to do
17 it.

18
19 New York's Right To Shelter is a longstanding
20 legal obligation that makes New York city a safer,
21 more humane place for people without a home of their
22 own. You know the history so I'll skip that part of
23 my written testimony. But I do want to point this
24 out: Today, the Right To Shelter distinguishes New
25 York City from our peers when comparing the rate of

1 unsheltered homelessness. Los Angeles County, which
2 faces similar challenges with housing affordability
3 has an unsheltered homeless population of about
4 48,000. New York City by contrast, officially 3400,
5 unofficially probably about double that sleeping on
6 the street. So 70% of LA's homeless population lives
7 unsheltered. Less than 6% of New York's homeless
8 population are unsheltered. Other cities similarly:
9 San Francisco 57% of homeless San Franciscans
10 unsheltered, sleeping on the street. Phoenix 56%, Las
11 Vegas 51%. Again, New York 6%. That's what the
12 Right To Shelter does.
13

14 And let's be clear, when individuals sleep on the
15 street instead of in shelter, they're more likely to
16 struggle with drug addiction and untreated mental
17 illness, more likely to remain chronically homeless,
18 and more likely to die. That is the difference that
19 the Right To Shelter makes. And I don't doubt that
20 every single individual here in New York City, as
21 well as in those other cities don't want people
22 sleeping on the streets. But eroding the Right To
23 Shelter almost inevitably would lead to more of it.
24 It is a mistake. We don't need to do it. And we
25 should not do it.

1
2 Now, to be sure providing shelter to asylum
3 seekers is a massive undertaking that stretches the
4 city's financial and logistical capacity. So we must
5 continue to demand, and work strategically to ensure
6 that the state and federal government step up to meet
7 their obligations and provide their share of the
8 funding required. As everyone agrees and knows here,
9 the obligation under international law to provide
10 people the opportunity to safely seek asylum is an
11 obligation of the federal government. So we will not
12 let up in demanding that Washington allocate the
13 necessary resources and working strategically to make
14 that happen. And of course, the federal government
15 should show leadership in expanding temporary
16 protective status and making it possible for people
17 to achieve their work status and work authorizations
18 sooner.

19 And at the state level, I really believe that the
20 Adams Administration is failing to seize what seems
21 to me a fairly clear opportunity. Rather than
22 seeking to circumvent the New York state
23 constitutional requirement to provide safe and
24 dignified shelter, the Mayor should work with
25 advocates to appeal to the court to clarify that the

1
2 New York State Right To Shelter, found in the state
3 constitution applies to all municipalities and
4 counties in New York State. Again, the right to
5 shelter: It's not found in New York City Law; it's
6 found in the state constitution. So it can't only
7 apply here. And with that alternative approach to
8 the court on Right To Shelter, the other 57 counties
9 across the state would legally share the obligation
10 with us at that point. The state government would
11 surely step up with more resources, and we would have
12 more allies in Washington as well.

13 In the meantime, though, we can't wait for
14 Washington and Albany, given the urgency of the
15 challenge, New York City must continue to move
16 forward both prudently and compassionately. So I
17 want to thank both of you and also Councilmembers,
18 Bottcher, Hudson, Lee, Narcisse, Schulman, and
19 Stevens for putting thought forth a thoughtful
20 package of legislation that seeks to uphold the
21 city's critical Right To Shelter, ensuring the city
22 emergency shelters meet basic habitability
23 requirements set forth in the Callaghan Consent
24 Decree, and that push the city to improve conditions

1 and services across all of those fragmented shelter
2 systems.
3

4 And let's be clear: The city should as each of
5 you, many of you said, and was evident in
6 Councilmember Restler's testimony, avoid creating an
7 even further fragmented system of shelter and support
8 services subject to different regulatory standards,
9 managed by different city agencies, and ensure that
10 there's a basic habitability standard and level of
11 care for any individual and family seeking temporary
12 refuge in our city's shelter system.

13 Look, I have admiration for every person on the
14 prior panel, for all of the agencies that are doing
15 this work, and for every one of their staffs. But
16 their personal dedication and hard work doesn't mean
17 that it makes sense to have five separate shelter
18 systems for asylum seekers. We need one coherent
19 system that's pulling all our effort in a more
20 coordinated and strategic way.

21 Finally, but actually, most urgently, we must
22 turn our attention toward helping recent arrivals
23 apply for asylum within one year of their arrival.
24 Once they file that asylum application, so long as
25 they do it within that one year timeline, even if

1 their hearing is not scheduled for years, they
2 nonetheless become eligible for work authorization in
3 six months. This is, without doubt, the fastest and
4 most cost effective way for the city's-- for the city
5 to help families seeking asylum get on their feet,
6 become able to provide for their families and move
7 out of shelter. Better for them. Better for the
8 city budget.

10 Yet, according to a recent survey by Make The
11 Road New York, 93% of respondents have not been able
12 to get any legal assistance or start the application
13 process. And that's not surprising since over 99% of
14 the city's spending on asylum seekers to date has
15 gone for shelter and related costs like food and
16 security, with far less than 1% on legal and support
17 services.

18 So yesterday's announcement by the Administration
19 of a new effort to connect new arrivals with pro bono
20 legal assistance is a very welcome start. Pro se
21 clinics can empower newcomers by providing them the
22 information on the US immigration process,
23 eligibility requirements for asylum and work
24 authorization, and advice on how to complete relevant
25

1 application forms. Again, a very welcome
2 development.
3

4 But we must act with much more urgency and much
5 more funding if we're actually going to rise to the
6 challenge. If we don't act thousands of families
7 will go past their one-year deadline for filing their
8 asylum applications while they're in shelter, which
9 is to say they will go out of status and become
10 undocumented while remaining residents of the shelter
11 system. So it is critical for the City Council to
12 insist that the Administration add the resources
13 necessary (\$70 million as chair Hanif and I and
14 others in the room have advocated) to the FY 24
15 budget for outreach pro se clinics and expanded legal
16 services. By adequately funding both legal advice
17 and full legal representation, the City can enable
18 legal service providers working in partnership with
19 pro bono assistance of the firms announced yesterday
20 to serve the widely varying needs and capacities of
21 individuals navigate navigating our sadly Byzantine
22 immigration system.

23 It will make an extraordinary difference to those
24 families. And again, it is the best way to help
25 people get out of the shelter system. This is not

1 only the most-- and again, without competing with
2 other New Yorkers, for housing subsidies. It is
3 valuable to expand CityFHEPS for sure, but the
4 fastest and most efficient thing we could do is help
5 folks file their-- their applications so they could
6 get their work authorization. It's not only the most
7 compassionate path, it is also the most cost
8 effective one.
9

10 Thank you again to Chairs Ayala and Hanif for
11 your leadership on these critical issues. Thank you
12 to everyone who's working on the Administration side
13 to meet our obligations under the Right To Shelter.
14 Thank you to the advocates in the room who fought,
15 and won it, and have worked tirelessly to preserve
16 it. We look forward to continuing to partner with
17 all of you to advocate for the resources needed to
18 respond with the compassion and care that asylum
19 seekers deserve, and with the competence and prudence
20 that the crisis requires. Thank you very much.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No questions from me. But
23 thank you so much for just articulating the most
24 important priorities pertaining to our Right to
25 Shelter Decree, and also the funding necessary to

1 ensure that every asylum seeker eligible is on track
2 with their applications. And you're absolutely
3 right: The announcement is a very welcome start.
4 And yet, we still need to work harder and put in the
5 full investments to ensure that everyone is accounted
6 for. So thank you so much for--

8 COMPTROLLER LANDER: It's so convenient that it's
9 budget negotiation time, when it'll be
10 straightforward to put those resources in the budget
11 and really be rowing together. Thank you very much
12 for convening this hearing. It's always-- always
13 very good to be with both of you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

15 COUNSEL: I'd like to announce that translation
16 services in Spanish are available for anyone who
17 needs it. If you need it, please speak to one of the
18 sergeants. El servicio de traducción en español está
19 disponible. Si necesita este servicio, por favor
20 pregunta al Sargento.

21 I will now be calling up members of the public to
22 testify in panels. All testimony will be limited to
23 three minutes.

24 Our first panel will consist of Chris Mann, Eric
25 Lee, and Anthony Feliciano.

1
2 MR. MANN: All right. Thanks so much. Good
3 morning, everyone. Thank you to Chair Hanif and
4 Chair Ayala and to the esteemed members of the
5 Committee on Immigration and General Welfare for the
6 opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is
7 Chris Mann, and I'm the Director of Policy and
8 Advocacy at WIN. We're the nation's largest provider
9 of shelter and services to families with children
10 experiencing homelessness. We operate 14 shelters in
11 New York City, and nearly 500 supportive housing
12 units across the five boroughs. Each night more than
13 6500 people call WIN home, including 3600 children.

14 WIN is working daily to mitigate the worst
15 homelessness crisis in New York City since the Great
16 Depression, but as part of that, as part of the
17 Mayor's PEG, DHS is proposing to cut the budget of
18 nonprofit providers by 2.5%, specifically telling us
19 to consider layoffs. These cuts would starve the
20 various system the city relies on to manage the joint
21 homelessness and immigration crises. We just ask
22 today that you oppose these cuts to ensure that
23 there's infrastructure left to implement the bills
24 being heard today.

1
2 WIN is proud to provide shelter operated by staff
3 who are all trained in trauma-informed care. But we
4 recognize that not all migrants in the city's care
5 are offered that level of support. Therefore, we
6 support Intros 942 and 943 that set minimum standards
7 for emergency congregate housing, and require the
8 notification of the right to be placed in a DSS
9 shelter. WIN is also a major proponent of additional
10 trauma informed care trainings and mental health
11 access, which is why we support Intros 1084 and 1095.

12 Further, in a recent survey of WIN clients,
13 families reported that one of their top policy
14 priorities would be improving the experience at PATH.
15 We're eager to support Intro 1072 to reduce the
16 required housing history to one year, a change WIN
17 has been advocating for that would greatly reduce
18 unnecessary barriers to shelter access. Spreading
19 information on life saving resources and investing in
20 prevention will also improve outcomes for families
21 experiencing homelessness, which is why we also
22 support Intros 1080, 1096, and 1064.

23 We need innovative reforms like the ones proposed
24 today, and look forward to seeing them passed. But

1
2 please, please oppose these cuts, so that we have the
3 resources needed to continue supporting families.

4 Thank you so much. And of course, thank you
5 again for the CityFHEPS bills. That's going to be a
6 game changer for our families. And just thank you so
7 much for your continued partnership with nonprofits
8 and WIN.

9 MR. LEE: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Eric
10 Lee. I'm Director of Policy and Planning at Homeless
11 Services United. Thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala and
12 Chair Hanif for holding today's hearing. I also
13 would like to echo my extreme appreciation to the
14 Council for passing the historic CityFHEPS package
15 two weeks ago.

16 The impact of the Council's heroic efforts to
17 pass that legislation will be diluted by the Mayor's
18 2.5% provider flexible-funding PEG, to all DHS and we
19 assume HRA contracted programs, which include
20 shelters, food outreach, safe havens, drop in centers
21 and home base eviction prevention programs.

22 Please join us in the fight to protect our
23 programs and hold strong against the Mayor's proposed
24 cut to homeless services. We need the Mayor to
25 understand that the city budget shouldn't be balanced

1 on the backs of the poorest New Yorkers. The budget
2 cut will hurt services and reduce staffing in
3 homeless shelters across the city. DHS is already
4 telling nonprofit providers to plan to eliminate
5 vacancies and collapse multiple job roles into one
6 position even before the final city budget
7 negotiations wrap.
8

9 These cuts will drive up case loads and eliminate
10 or reduce on-site shelter services like mental health
11 and clinical services. The City must prioritize
12 infrastructure and workforce investments for DHS, HRA
13 and nonprofit homeless services, and eviction
14 prevention providers in order to create a sustainable
15 path forward for newly-arrived asylum seekers as well
16 as more established New Yorkers.

17 The Council can lead the way out of this crisis
18 by including a 6.5% COLA for city contracted human
19 services workers, which would enable DHS shelters and
20 home based prevention programs to fill vacancies and
21 retain qualified experienced staff.

22 Homeless service providers are facing a
23 starvation cycle, unable to fill vacancies due to
24 stagnant wages while the city proposes clawing back
25 2.5% from personnel lines.

2 Regarding bills that are being considered today,
3 HSU supports Intro 942 to ensure that regulations for
4 900 and 491 apply to emergency congregate housing
5 facilities. We also support Intro 943 to provide
6 notification of Right To Shelter to households
7 entering those facilities. HSU supports Intro 1072
8 to reduce the qualified shelter history requirement
9 from two to one year for families with children in
10 shelter, making it easier for them to prove that they
11 are indeed homeless.

12 We appreciate the intent of Intros 1095 and 1096
13 to improve services and shelter. Reversals of the
14 2.5% PEG and implementation of the 6.5% COLA are
15 paramount to preserving and expanding onsite shelter
16 services.

17 And with regards to Intro 1064, we do have some
18 questions and concerns. But we'd like to work with
19 the council to understand both existing data sources
20 and ongoing oversight mechanisms to be able to get
21 the desired outcomes that the Council is seeking.
22 But as worded, we are concerned that there might be
23 administrative burdens for providers already
24 struggling with data collection. But we do agree
25 that there needs to be greater attention to the

1 overstretched prevention homebase portfolio. To that
2 end, we did talk with a number of a home-based
3 providers which operates 17 homebase locations. And
4 some of the things that we can share our that they
5 have case loads as high as 158-to-1 in some of their
6 programs, even though their actual contracted, ratios
7 average 34 to one.
8

9 So the average across sites is around 94-to-1,
10 but a number of them have 120 or 158-to-1 in one
11 location. So that just shows just how overstretched
12 they are trying to flex to meet the need in the
13 community.

14 These home-based programs also have an average
15 turnover rate of 43% within the last year, and an
16 average vacancy rate of 20% for their staff at the
17 moment. And a number of them have appointments that
18 are at least two months out for the next intake
19 appointment. Given that they just have that much
20 demand coupled with the high vacancy and turnover
21 rate. So we really want to be able to work with the
22 city to ensure that they can close the vacancies
23 within programs by enhancing their staff lines. At
24 the same time, the city should consider either
25 expanding programs or opening additional sites for

1
2 homebase to staff up to meet the increased need
3 within the community. Thank you for the time.

4 MR. FELICIANO: Thank you Chairpersons Hanif and
5 Ayala for the opportunity to testify today. My name
6 is Anthony Feliciano. I'm Vice President for
7 Advocacy at Housing Works. I will be brief--
8 briefer-- shorter than what I have in my testimony.
9 Housing Works offers our full support for the
10 initiatives to address our homeless crisis under your
11 consideration today. And in particular, we applaud
12 the Council for seeking to further codify the Right
13 To Shelter in New York City by amending the New York
14 City charter to establish single minimum standards
15 for all emergency congregate housing in New York
16 City, including the HERRCs.

17 Like most New Yorkers, we at Housing Works
18 strongly urge the Mayor to redraw the application
19 which seeks to undo more than 40 years of legal
20 protections for our city's most vulnerable, based on
21 unfounded and insupportable arguments that we can
22 simply ignore the Right To Shelter requirements
23 anytime those in-- in charge decide that the city
24 lacks the resources and the capacity to provide safe
25 and appropriate shelter.

1
2 Housing Works is confident that the argument
3 asserted by the previous Administration will fail as
4 a legal matter. What is most saddening and
5 unacceptable is that this effort to undo a
6 fundamental right to shelter seeks to pit
7 marginalized New Yorkers against other residents
8 experiencing homelessness.

9 In any event, it simply is not true that we
10 lacked the resources the capacity to meet current
11 needs. While we lack its political will. We urge
12 the Administration and Council to transform the
13 City's homeless response.

14 As a critical first step, we call upon the Mayor
15 to sign the full Council's package of comprehensive
16 CityFHEPS reforms. While Mayor Adams's Executive
17 Order last week was right to suspend the 90 day rule
18 for the voucher program, it has also included
19 problematic new worker requirements for adult-only
20 households, and falls short of the council's reforms,
21 which eliminate the rule that requires individuals to
22 stay in a homeless shelter for 90 consecutive days
23 before qualifying for the CityFHEPS housing voucher.
24 Housing Works on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers we
25 serve, and we also implore the City Council and the

3 Administration to exempt the Department of Social
4 Services, the Department of Homeless Services, DOHMH,
5 and community-based providers they fund from any
6 Programs to Eliminate the Gap, PEG, or any other
7 cost-cutting plans.

8 I will mention, and Ayala knows this very well,
9 Housing Works is chronically understaffed and under-
10 resourced, and both DSS and DHS face new challenges
11 posed by the increasing number of New Yorkers
12 experiencing homelessness, particularly communities
13 of color and immigrant communities. And we want to
14 make sure that that is changed.

15 Housing Works calls for \$2.5 billion in
16 additional new construction financing each year for
17 the first five years for apartments specifically
18 built for homelessness and extreme-low-income New
19 Yorkers, including doubled and set-asides in new
20 affordable housing, to adopt harm reduction
21 approaches that provide every New Yorker with safe
22 stable housing, including removal of police in those
23 efforts. Housing Works is been extremely pleased to
24 work with DHS on our MOCJ programs and want to
25 continue that program and move forward.

1
2 It is time to reduce the city's reliance on large
3 congregated facilities by renewing commitment to new
4 safe havens and single occupancy stabilization beds
5 for unsheltered homeless individuals.

6 A more effective homeless system must also
7 include funding to the creation of supportive
8 housing. I will cut it short, but I will say one
9 thing: I live in the lower Eastside, and we have one
10 of the Respite Centers. It is deplorable and
11 unacceptable, that in my neighborhood, someone has to
12 walk more than four blocks to get a shower done. It
13 is unacceptable. And to think that they can take
14 transportation is also unacceptable. And so that's
15 why I believe in what you're all saying in terms of
16 being more humane in this process and in these, these
17 initiatives.

18 The other aspect is: If we have not learned from
19 the pandemic-- I serve as co chair for the test-and-
20 trace for community-based organizations the whole
21 time during the pandemic. We have not learned that
22 having several agencies all working separately on
23 different parts of the issue did not lead us to the
24 recovery that we are trying to work on today. And so
25 again, we need to centralize and work better, and

1 work with our advocates and convince organizations
2 with solutions we've been giving for several years to
3 address the unhoused. Thank you.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, Chris,
6 Anthony, and Eric. We deeply appreciate all the work
7 you've been doing, and also just the advocacy in
8 support of the measures that the council has
9 presented. And thank you so much for raising the
10 issues about the proposed-- the Mayor's proposal to
11 cut the budget of providers, which is extremely
12 disrespectful and humiliating, particularly coming
13 after their defense as to why they need to be more
14 flexible and why they need to erode the city's Right
15 To Shelter Mandate. I mean, how does any of that--
16 It perplexes me. It doesn't make sense, particularly
17 because providers are going to be tasked with the
18 resources and taking care of folks who are coming
19 into the Respite Centers or the other shadow shelter
20 facilities that the administration is creating
21 without any oversight, without any oversight, and
22 they are really setting a dangerous precedent for our
23 city. And it is deeply shameful because so many
24 providers have been really providing the dignified--
25

1
2 or demonstrating what dignity looks like for the
3 individuals and families.

4 And so thank you for raising that that piece in
5 your testimony, and for further standing strong with
6 us as we move on the CityFHEPS voucher package,
7 because we know that the administration is not happy
8 about the Council using its tools, using its powers
9 to really support our newest families and to move out
10 families who've been warehoused for-- for years. So
11 thank you so much for your continued advocacy and all
12 of the direct service work that the organizations
13 have taken on, and the ways in which you've been
14 working with the Council to ensure that we know what
15 your needs are, and where we need to be putting our
16 fight forward.

17 So thank you. No questions for me.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Just a huge thank you from
19 me. Thank you guys.

20 COUNSEL: Our next panel will be Jenny Ortiz
21 Herrera, Marvin Fejado Gonzales, Julissa Pinto.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: For our interpreter, could
23 you share if you're going to be doing consecutive or
24 simultaneous?

1
2 TRANSLATOR: So yes. So what I did is I got
3 their testimony beforehand so I translated it--

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Perfect.

5 TRANSLATOR: So they're going to read it out loud
6 and then I'm going to read the whole version in
7 English.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Great. Thank you.
9 Excellent.

10 TRANSLATOR: We are ready to start with Yanni.

11 MS. ORTIZ: [SPEAKS IN SPANISH][THROUGH
12 TRANSLATOR:] Hello, my name is Jenny Ortiz. I'm 18
13 years old of Venezuelan nationality. I come to tell
14 you a little about myself and why I emigrated. As
15 you know, my country is going through a humanitarian
16 crisis and is facing a very difficult situation.
17 Based on this. I came to give my testimony of how my
18 experience was when coming to this country.

19 One of the main challenges I faced was crossing
20 many countries including going through the jungle of
21 Darien. This jungle is a place where you find
22 yourself with no way out. I spent many days inside
23 that place. It is a life and death situation. I
24 lived and witnessed many ugly things and misfortunes.
25 I had to see many people die. I had to help others

1 cross rivers, mountains, and swamps. I don't want
2 people to continue going through that dark place.
3 The American dream is for the brave. Not everyone
4 achieves the goal. Immigrating is not easy. It is
5 putting your life your dreams and everything you wear
6 one day in a suitcase and moving it to another place
7 a country far from your family.

9 I would like other young people to thrive and
10 have a better future. It is something that young
11 people ask ourselves daily, what will become of our
12 lives? What will be our destination? Whether or not
13 we will achieve our dreams.

14 I feel very proud to belong to the Covenant House
15 program. They have supported me a lot and made me
16 feel safe. They have helped me with my process.
17 Thanks to them I am studying, and I am very grateful
18 for this opportunity and for giving me a safe home.
19 I would like the government to support us with more
20 resources. There are many young immigrants who need
21 a work permit and Social Security in order to get a
22 legal job. I would like them to support us with food
23 stamps, vocational courses, and more support from
24 free lawyers so that our case can move faster and be
25 able to achieve some of our goals.

1
2 TRANSLATOR: She has something else that she
3 wrote. Is it okay if she reads it aloud? I didn't
4 prepare that translation, but I can do it on the on
5 the spot, if it is not a problem.

6 MS. ORTIZ: [SPEAKS IN SPANISH][THROUGH
7 TRANSLATOR:] Last, I want to point out that we need
8 to help from bilingual personnel when it comes to
9 mental health help. We are in the process of
10 learning English, because it is a very complicated
11 subject. To be able to express yourself is
12 complicated after all the traumatic events that we
13 have lived, and we share with a person that doesn't
14 understand much about our language. Through a
15 translator, some of the information is deviated. I
16 have also presented how some partners and some other
17 people, close people, because of a lack of help, and
18 because they cannot express themselves, they don't
19 have an opportunity to have a home and a hot meal,
20 and they have found refuge in the streets, in
21 alcohol, and in drugs. Thank you very much.

22 MS. PINTO: [SPEAKS IN SPANISH][THROUGH
23 TRANSLATOR:] Hello, my name is Julissa Pinto. I'm
24 19 years old, of Colombian nationality, an immigrant
25 in this country. I want to tell you a little about

1 the challenges that I went through on my journey, the
2 help that I have received from the Covenant House
3 program. I want to comment a little about the help,
4 the resources we want, and if it can be-- and if we
5 can receive it from the government and mention that
6 some people like me need tutors.
7

8 To begin with, I want to tell you that really
9 everyone who emigrates does not do it to become rich
10 or hurt anyone. They just want personal improvement,
11 to thrive, fulfill their dreams, and help their
12 family. Immigrating is a challenge and in some
13 cases, it turns into quite an odyssey. The biggest
14 challenges I faced in the first place, packing a
15 suitcase, getting on a plane (in my case for the
16 first time) and arriving in a country with many
17 dreams, fears, and illusions and even so without
18 knowing that I was missing. I arrived through Mexico
19 and I turned myself in at the border. One of the
20 worst things I experienced was feeling afraid,
21 insecure, and intimidated again by the supposed
22 people who were supposed to protect me. I was
23 coerced, intimidated, and robbed by Mexican
24 immigration agents, and the so-called coyotes,
25 because really, if you don't pay a fee, so to speak,

1 the mafias can kidnap you, rape you put you into a
2 human trafficking ring, among other things. From the
3 moment I was helped by the United States Immigration
4 Authorities, I could feel a little more calm, and I
5 was able to sleep a bit. I lasted six days in what
6 is called "la heladera", a white tent, in which very
7 cold temperatures are kept. Good and bad treatment
8 from some people. Then from there, they directed me
9 to a Mental Health Center Detention in Texas in which
10 I was detained for one month, in which for me, I take
11 it as an incredible experience in which I shared
12 lived, cried, overcame, reflected, and made friends
13 with many people from other countries. We were
14 telling each other about our experiences, why, how,
15 when, and everything that they had to go through to
16 get to that moment.

18 If I start to tell you more about that process,
19 it would take me hours, and at some point in my life,
20 I will. I left this place with the credible fear
21 test after having commented all my stories to the
22 asylum agent. They gave me the green light. And
23 that's how I was able to enter this country.

24 I'm very grateful to Covenant House, it has
25 helped me a lot in my process. It has guided me,

1
2 listened so much to my mental health, and
3 emotionally, it has helped me with a little bit of
4 legal services with English classes, information
5 about programs, activities and resources that can
6 help me.

7 Speaking about the government, I would ask you to
8 help us a little more with the programs like Covenant
9 House and among others, donating money for legal
10 service providers throughout the city, more free
11 lawyers pro bono.

12 With this, I'm leaving you as an unknown in which
13 I want you listeners to reflect a little and
14 understand a little of the questions that I ask
15 myself every day, while I am doing my process, and I
16 submit my asylum case so that I can receive my work
17 permit and my Social Security.

18 From the day my application is approved, 150 days
19 are counted until more waiting for that to arrive.
20 Outside of that one has just arrived in the country
21 with little information, and that's for you to
22 account. I have been in this country for almost four
23 months, and I'm just going through the process of
24 sending my asylum application, plus six months of
25 waiting in which it takes time for the documents to

1 arrive. It takes a long time, in which some young
2 people choose to commit infractions of the law and
3 contribute to more informal illegal work and where
4 many immigrants are exploited.
5

6 Finally, and to finish I would like to help I
7 would like you to help us with tutors, tutors not to
8 help us financially. If not to help us a little with
9 a little guidance and support in our legal process.
10 I know that there would be many people who would do
11 it voluntarily. In advance, i'm very grateful for
12 the attention provided. I hope my message and
13 requests are heard and taken into account. Remember
14 that we are the generation of tomorrow and this is
15 for me, for you, and for the future. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [SPEAKS SPANISH]

17 MS. PINTO: [SPEAKS SPANISH] [VIA TRANSLATOR:]

18 Thank you very much.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, you want me to
20 translate that? Shahana didn't understand what I
21 was-- just basically just saying how proud I am of--
22 and how brave they are to be here today to lend a
23 voice to all of those individuals that are not able
24 to be here today and have yet not found their voice.
25 I know that what they went through, I can only

1
2 imagine was very difficult and traumatizing, and will
3 continue to be for a really long time. But I
4 appreciate the they took the time to be here today.
5 And I also offered my office as a as a place that
6 they can come and you know, volunteer their time, and
7 we can help you know offer them the work skills that
8 they need so that when that work visa comes in, they
9 can list our office as their first place of work here
10 in the United States. And you know, basically just I
11 have to step out because I have a press event across
12 the street but want to thank you all as well for
13 being here, and Councilmember Hanif for being, you
14 know, such a great advocate. Muchas Gracias.

15 MR. GONZALES: Hello, Councilmembers. My name is
16 Marvin Stephen. I'm 20 years old and today I come to
17 testify on my story. I came to the United States one
18 year ago. I had the privilege of arriving in this
19 country by plane, and it is a privilege, because many
20 people do not have that same opportunity. The United
21 States is a country full of opportunities. However,
22 the difficulties that many young people, children and
23 families go through to enter this country are more
24 than inhuman, from extortion, robbery, humiliation,
25 discrimination, to murder, rape, kidnapping, and

1 torture. These are some of the many things that
2 immigrants who decide to come to this country have to
3 live with. I have made several friends who have
4 crossed the border. Many of them embark on their
5 journey from South America crossing from country to
6 country, either by bus, hiding in cars, or sneaking
7 through the jungle. The vulnerability of these
8 people is very high, since they are exposed to the
9 unknown, and there are very bad people who take
10 advantages of this and commit serious human rights
11 violations. A 20-year-old boy, I met him in
12 Covenant. He told me how armed men and hooded men
13 tied him up in the jungle and raped the women in
14 front. Moments later, the Panamanian border army
15 arrived, and they confronted each other with shoots.
16 Thank god my friend came out unharmed.

17
18 That and many other horrible things happened in
19 the jungle, and all with the hope of reaching
20 American soil. I think Covenant House and all the
21 stuff of Covenant House for helping me, and helping
22 many young people. And I would like to make a call
23 to please help organizations such as Covenant House
24 that helps many young people to have a place to
25 sleep, this and many other aids that this type of

1
2 organization offers us, which allow us to revive the
3 hope of a better future for the society. Thank you
4 Councilmembers.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much to the
6 three of you for joining us at today's vitally
7 important hearing. We've been waiting to get some of
8 these important bills heard. And you were present
9 for the administration's remarks and responses to our
10 very tough questions, which we have not been getting
11 clarity around for many, many weeks.

12 But you'll notice that no one from the
13 administration is here to listen to your stories and
14 your experiences. And that speaks volumes to me.

15 Like Deputy Speaker Ayala, I am just proud. I'm
16 proud that you, despite the obstacles, and having
17 seen the violent terrain along the way, that New York
18 City was the destination for hope. That New York
19 City was the destination for you to have a dignified
20 life. That New York City will be where you will
21 become our next set of leaders on this side of the
22 dais. And that's the hope that this city offers.
23 And that is why we are so urgently in opposition of
24 this mayor's attempt to pull away in some of the
25 vital protections that have been in the city for

1 decades. What he is doing is unprecedented. It is
2 dangerous, and we will not allow it.
3

4 And so I thank you for testifying, because this
5 is such an important part of our fight. And you must
6 keep fighting. It is unfortunate that even after
7 arriving here, that you will need to continue
8 fighting to ensure that the protections that are here
9 for New Yorkers remain, and that our continued fight
10 will be to strengthen these protections, to make more
11 protections to ensure safety and dignity.

12 So I thank you for bringing your experience as
13 young people who deserve abundant joy and the radical
14 hope. Because this city offers that. This city
15 offers that to all of us. Thank you.

16 MS. ORTIZ: Muchas gracias.

17 TRANSLATOR: Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And a big shout out to of
19 course Covenant House. We see your work. We see the
20 impact. We see the impact echo some of the calls
21 that you've made around services that are in the
22 languages you are most comfortable with. And from
23 everything from vocational training, to employment
24 opportunities, to mental health services:
25 Absolutely, our advocacy has been rooted in language

2 access and Covenant House has been a part of making
3 sure that we expand.

4 MS. ORTIZ: [THROUGH TRANSLATOR:] Okay. Well,
5 she says that it would be great if they had more time
6 to testify and to share their experience.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. Absolutely.

8 MS. ORTIZ: [THROUGH TRANSLATOR:] Because it's
9 very good. Thank you

10 [MS. ORTIZ and MS. PINTO SPEAK TO EACH OTHER IN
11 SPANISH]

12 TRANSLATOR: Okay. And I want to thank someone
13 that is here in the back.

14 MS. PINTO: [THROUGH TRANSLATOR:] I want to thank
15 Adama who was the first person who directed me to
16 Covenant. And thanks to her, she opened a lot of
17 doors for me and helped me a lot in my process.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. We love Sister
19 Adama. And-- And what is so beautiful about the--
20 the ways in which the city is showing up is that
21 irrespective of our faith, of our racial diversity,
22 we want to make sure that every single newcomer has
23 the same protections as every New Yorker,
24 irrespective of their immigration status.

1
2 I'm our city's first Muslim women in the city
3 council, and to see a black Muslim woman lead on our
4 immigration reform fight is tremendously powerful and
5 remarkable. And that's the kind of solidarity and
6 collective advocacy and organizing we need. It can't
7 simply just be that the Muslim community is fighting
8 for its own issues, that the Latinx community is
9 fighting for its own issues. We have to bring these
10 issues together and show up for our fights. And so
11 when I see Sister Adama welcoming asylum seekers at
12 every corner of our city, that's what I see: The
13 hope that our communities show up for one another.
14 Thank you.

15 COUNSEL: Our next panel will be a virtual panel.
16 Once your name is called a member of our staff will
17 unmute you and you may begin your testimony once
18 Sergeant at Arms sets the clock and gives you the
19 cue. This panel will consist of Deborah Berkman,
20 followed by Medha Ghosh, followed by Beth Haroules,
21 followed by Chaplain Mandy Cohen.

22 Should I start?

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes.

24 MS. BERKMAN: Thanks very much. Chair Hanif,
25 Councilmembers, and staff. Good afternoon and thank

1 you so much for the opportunity to speak today. My
2 name is Deborah Berkman, and I'm the supervising
3 attorney of the Shelter Advocacy Initiative and the
4 Public Assistance and SNAP Practice at the New York
5 Legal Assistance Group or NYLAG. NYLAG
6 enthusiastically supports all the bills being heard
7 today, and we will submit written testimony on each
8 bill. But I want to focus on two bills that have had
9 a little bit less testimony. First, I'd like to
10 discuss Intro 1072. These reforms to the eligibility
11 process for DHS or Department of Homeless Services
12 family shelter are essential. In New York City, the
13 current application process for family shelter is
14 unnecessarily onerous and burdensome. When a
15 homeless family with children finds themselves in
16 need of shelter, they must present in person for
17 intake at DHS's Path Intake Center in the Bronx.
18 While there the family must provide a complete
19 history of all the places they have lived for the
20 last two years, as well as third party contacts or
21 documentary evidence to verify that the family
22 actually lived at those locations. Families must
23 even provide proof for periods of street
24 homelessness. The family is then given a pre-

1
2 investigative, emergency 10-day placement while DHS
3 attempts to again verify the provided housing
4 history. If the verification context provided don't
5 answer the phone, or if DHS cannot speak with them
6 within 10 days, then the family is found ineligible
7 for shelter, and the family must pack up their
8 belongings leave their shelter placement and reapply
9 for shelter.

10 Reapplying for shelter entails starting the
11 entire process from the beginning. By having family
12 return to Path, spend another 10 to 20 hours
13 completing a new application for shelter typically
14 identical to the one that they just did, and then
15 waiting on site for a new temporary shelter
16 placement.

17 While this practice has been briefly paused
18 during COVID, DHS has indicated that it is going to
19 begin this this process of reapplying in person very
20 shortly. But for now, all reapplication should be
21 occurring over the telephone. But because reapplying
22 generally can take up to 20 hours, applicants who
23 need shelter are forced to miss work and keep their
24 children home from school since there's no way for a
25 family to know whether they will be done in time to

1 actually pick their children up from school. Once
2 they have reapplied. The family is provided
3 generally with a new 10-day temporary placement while
4 they wait for their reapplication to be reviewed, but
5 that placement may not be in the same location as
6 their prior temporary placement. Since many families
7 have to repeat this scenario every 10 days, it's
8 nearly impossible for any family to plan commutes to
9 school, work, and daycare. Some NYLAG clients in
10 this circumstance have been subjected to ACS
11 investigations based on educational neglect, because
12 their children weren't able to attend school on a
13 consistent basis, both because they had to spend one
14 out of every 10 days in the Path office, and because
15 they were then assigned to a different location with
16 no way to get to their current school.

18 Also, families who are deemed ineligible for
19 shelter are not eligible for the programs that assist
20 homeless families' transition to permanent housing,
21 particularly the CityFHEPS rental assistance.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 MS. BERKMAN: May I just briefly finish? The
24 problem is extremely vast and most applications for
25 family shelter are denied. In fact, in April of

1
2 2023, only 39% of families who presented themselves
3 as homeless were deemed eligible. Intro 1072 is a
4 great first step to reform the process. However,
5 these changes don't go far enough. Further
6 legislation must be proposed mandating that in cases
7 where clients are unable to provide documentary
8 evidence or third party witnesses to verify their
9 housing, they should be permitted to self attest to
10 their residence at that location. Or, even more
11 logically, when a family presents and says they are
12 homeless, the city can choose to simply believe them
13 without subjecting them to an extensive fraud
14 investigation to prove homelessness.

15 Just very briefly, I also want to weigh in an
16 Intro 1096. Because public benefits eligibility
17 specialist and shelter are key to transitioning to
18 all permanent housing. It is very difficult to
19 transition out of shelter without public benefits or
20 a rental subsidy, which is itself a public benefit.
21 Shelter staff caseworkers, and sometimes even housing
22 specialists don't understand shelter residences
23 eligibility, particularly when those applicants are
24 immigrants. Immigrant eligibility for public
25 benefits is very misunderstood. So having a benefits

expert in shelter is critical to transitioning to permanent housing. Thank you very much.

COUNSEL: Thank you Next we have Medha Ghosh.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MS. GHOSH: Chairs Ayala and Hanif, thank you so much for holding this hearing and providing this opportunity to testify. My name is Medha Ghosh, and I'm the Senior Policy Coordinator for Health at CACF, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. As asylees, refugees, and migrants resettle to New York City, they carry with them an immense amount of trauma from the violent experiences of being forced to leave their homes. The city must work to ensure that asylum seekers can feel as safe as possible as they adjust to their life here. This is why CACF is in full support of Intro Bill 1095. That would require at least one mental health coordinator at any location where refugees, asylees, and migrants receive services from city agencies or providers upon their arrival in the city, as well as Intro Bill 1084 That would require DOHMH to develop training on trauma-informed care, and afford to those serving refugees, asylees, and migrants. As migrants navigate the city's health care system, and in

1 particular mental health care system, it is crucial
2 that their care is trauma-informed, culturally
3 responsive, and linguistically accessible. In
4 addition to our support of Intro Bill 1095 and 1084,
5 we recommend the following: Increase the number of
6 languages for translated signage and forums, and
7 ensure accuracy of translation by engaging community
8 partners in a translation review, invest in
9 community-led and community-based language accessible
10 and culture responsive mental health resources, and
11 prioritize a recruitment or attainment of
12 multilingual mental health care professionals to
13 ensure high quality care. Thank you very much for
14 your time.

15
16 COUNSEL: Thank you. Next we have Beth Haroules.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 MS. HAROULES: Good afternoon. My name is Beth
19 Haroules. I'm a Senior Staff Attorney at the New
20 York Civil Liberties Union. We are here today to
21 defend New York City's long standing commitment to
22 the right to shelter, object to planned budget cuts
23 to the critical services actually designed to reduce
24 homelessness, and oppose any attempt by the City or
25 its Mayor to scapegoat recently arrived migrants as a

1
2 cause for undermining the city's long tradition of
3 offering shelter to those in need.

4 This Council must ensure that the human rights of
5 unhoused persons, whether long standing New Yorkers,
6 or recent migrants seeking shelter here, are
7 respected. Since the Great Depression The New York
8 State Constitution has committed the city to
9 providing aid care and support of the needy as a
10 legal mandate. In a city of New York's size and
11 values, meeting the needs of our underprivileged
12 community members should be a moral imperative.

13 Unfortunately, the eight bills on today's agenda,
14 like the proposed city budget and the Mayor's
15 blueprint for reducing homelessness falls well short
16 of the vision and priority needed to actually address
17 a worsening economic and human rights crisis.

18 The city's continued practice of using the police
19 as the default response to nearly every social issue
20 has meant the defunding of New York's assessable
21 housing opportunities, public health infrastructure,
22 social safety net, educational services, and other
23 vital services that enable communities to truly
24 thrive. These bills fail to exercise the power the
25 Council possesses to address these longstanding

1 funding failures, and the NYCLU regrettably cannot
2 support them. Our testimony identifies some specific
3 problematic aspects of the bills presented as well.
4

5 Today's bills, as well-meaning as they are,
6 effectively are equivalent to the storied exercise of
7 rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Neither the
8 Mayor nor the Council have any coordinated holistic
9 plan for housing services or supports for unhoused
10 New Yorkers, whether they are longtime residents of
11 the city or more recent arrivals, such as the
12 migrants and asylum seekers who have arrived in New
13 York City adding stress to the city's already
14 inadequate shelter system.

15 Homelessness is not a new issue. Mayor Adams has
16 failed to address and made worse the plight of
17 unhoused New Yorkers. He's deployed NYPD to sweep
18 away unhoused people from the streets and subways,
19 has tried to consign unknown numbers of unhoused
20 Yorkers to forced treatment. Psychiatric
21 hospitalization has failed to address the affordable
22 housing crisis. He has issued his own
23 counterproductive emergency rules, amending the
24 CityFHEPS rental assistance housing program, has
25 defunded the accessible housing opportunities, and

1
2 now attempts to consign thousands of New Yorker's
3 into the gutter by seeking to undermine the Callahan
4 Right To Shelter.

5 There is much more work the Council could do to
6 ensure a dedication of resources. We heard today
7 about the capacity issue confronting the city. We
8 urge the speaker and council to exercise its
9 oversight to address the fact that there are enough
10 vacant apartments in the city's public and supportive
11 housing system to accommodate 15,000 people. These
12 empty units across the two systems combined could and
13 should be used to transition homeless New Yorkers out
14 of shelter and into the empty apartments, creating
15 capacity for migrants and asylum shelters.

16 Budgets are moral documents. When it comes to
17 the New York City's fiscal blueprint, the budget is
18 the opportunity to imagine--

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 MS. HAROULES: The current fiscal plan and the
21 bills proposed today are inadequate to meet that
22 challenge. We will be submitting more extensive
23 written testimony through the City Council's portal
24 today addressing both the Callahan issues, as well as
25 I noted, providing specific comments on the proposed

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188

2 bills. Thank you so much for having this hearing.

3 We stand ready, as we always do, to assist the
4 Council in improving the lives of all New Yorkers.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much. We
6 deeply appreciate your partnership and the tireless
7 effort to ensure that our city remains a sanctuary
8 city. Thank you. No questions.

9 COUNSEL: Thank you, our next panel will be an in
10 person panel and will consist of Hildalyn Colon
11 Hernandez, Dr. Xellex Rivera, Adama Bah, and Power
12 Malu.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We will be reading your
14 testimony. So I would like to ask you all to keep
15 your testimonies to the three minutes on the clock.
16 Thank you.

17 Good, can I start?

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Go for it.

19 MS. HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon. My name is
20 Hildalyn Colon, and I'm the Deputy Director of NICE.
21 We are an organization that actually receive asylum
22 seekers through our satellite office. Some of the
23 stories that we hear-- actually we hear is times a
24 thousand. That's approximately how many people we
25 receive in a given month that are coming in to the

1 city. So I understand some of the youth that was
2 here. We hear from their parents, their
3 grandparents, their uncles. We are here to support
4 the bills that are in the-- what have been mentioned
5 as the minimum standard that should apply to these
6 circumstances.
7

8 For many reasons, because this is what the basic
9 is going to help them many immigrants to start, they
10 come from zero. So if we don't have a minimum
11 standards that will help them to settle, that it's
12 going to make things impossible. What I want to
13 bring, something that probably have not been
14 mentioned, is the reality of many of these immigrants
15 will not qualify for asylum. We don't want to talk
16 about that, but that's the reality. So some of the
17 legislation that we're putting in place and to keep
18 the minimum will help them in the process for a
19 future that may not qualify some people for asylum,
20 but it kind of like provides them probably a space
21 for others that are coming through. And I know
22 that's something that a lot of people are not talking
23 about, but we are preparing for. And the other
24 aspect is: A lot of them they want to get out of the
25 shelter system. Some people-- But we need to invest

1 in workforce developments. Because even that they
2 have a temporary status, Social Security, they don't
3 have the skills, they will not be able to find a job.
4 If not, they will end up in construction, and they
5 were in the street where they will be exploited.
6

7 They do have a Social Security, but they're not
8 getting pay. They basically they're not paying in
9 overtime. They're not actually qualifying. They'll
10 probably end up in accidents or even in fatalities as
11 we saw a couple of years ago, where 21 people die in
12 the construction industry. And I don't think we want
13 to go for that.

14 I think there has to be a comprehensive
15 conversation. And I think that is the realities that
16 I think some of the Administration's are-- I think
17 are not looking and I understand there's limited
18 resources. But if we don't add this to the
19 conversation, we're going to end up in the same place
20 a couple of years from now, dealing with the
21 aftermath of how so many of these things were
22 manifest.

23 And what I will say that it is very different:
24 The Immigrant profile coming in has changed. We
25 usually before we used to see single men, that's not

1
2 the reality. We are seeing, what?, more women, more
3 people with families, right? So this multiplier
4 effect will have a long term issue about it. We want
5 to work with the City. The people are already in
6 shelters. They should communicate and work with us,
7 especially in Queens where we have the majority of
8 the shelters. The city have not have reached out to
9 be like, "Hey, come to the shelter, give them a
10 presentation, put them in the courses." And I think
11 many of the nonprofit's are willing to do that with
12 the City, the simple steps that I think that they can
13 take forward. Thank you.

14 MS. BAH: My name is Adama Bah, and I have been
15 actively involved in supporting newly arrived
16 migrants in New York City. Together with my
17 colleague Power Malu and our team, we great arriving
18 buses, arrange transportation for people arriving at
19 airports and all ports of entry, and ensure they
20 receive the assistance they need. In the past year,
21 we've helped thousands of people from all over the
22 world who are stranded without proper planning from
23 the city. Having personally gone through the asylum-
24 seeking process, I'm well aware of the challenges

migrants face when navigating a system that wasn't
designed for them.

Currently, my focus is on helping these migrant
overcome these challenges. I would like to emphasize
a few key points: The lack of communication, the
absence of expertise, and the wasting of millions of
dollars, and the failure to acknowledge other ethnic
groups in this migrant crisis.

The City needs to step up. Despite limited
funding, I have managed to support thousands of
migrants. Let's begin discussing the shelter. The
HERRC model has proven to be effective for migrants
and can serve as an example for service providing for
our homeless population. With the exceptions of
locations like the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal, and the
Respite Centers which are inhumane, it seems a city
intention makes it difficult to provide housing for
migrants, perhaps in the hope of discouraging them
from coming to NYC. However, migrants have been
coming to New York City for decades, and they will
continue to do so. By providing better support for
the resettlement we can alleviate the struggles we
currently face.

1
2 Unfortunately, on May 19, the city abruptly shut
3 down the service center at the Port Authority without
4 giving us a fair warning or providing an alternative
5 site for us to continue the social service. The City
6 refuses to address important issues related to DHS,
7 HRA, and reunification of family separated at the
8 border. Among other concerns, this has made it much
9 more difficult for us to advocate for migrants and we
10 have been informed that we are not welcome at HERRC
11 sites.

12 The current services are less responsive to
13 people's needs. Families are being separated because
14 the city does not extend families together. There's
15 a concerning situation where 18 to 21-year-olds are
16 housed with adults, despite having shelter options
17 for young adults. Furthermore, the OEM respite sites
18 are housing men and women together without any
19 privacy, negatively affecting our trans and LGBTQ
20 migrants and Muslim community.

21 It is crucial to have on-site advocates to
22 oversee and address these issues. Religious concerns
23 are not being adequately addressed, and we need
24 counsel to compel the Mayor's office to allow
25 advocates on site to oversee how migrants are being

1 treated. It is easy to take advantage of people who
2 are unaware of their rights. The majority of social
3 services are primarily catered to Hispanic migrants,
4 while not meeting the needs of black, white, Asian
5 and many other ethnic groups. We are more than
6 willing to work alongside with the city to address
7 this crisis. But when they attempt to take away the
8 right to shelter effects, not just migrants, but
9 everyday New Yorkers in need of shelter.
10

11 The Mayor's office has been implementing policies
12 and cutting budgets while blaming the immigrant
13 community. The only crisis we truly are facing is
14 the one failed communication and support of those on
15 the ground.

16 DR. RIVERA: Good afternoon protocol already been
17 established. I do want to thank everybody on the
18 council for their time today. I'm Dr. Xellex Rivera.
19 I'm the Chief Program Officer of Bronx Parent Housing
20 Network. I want to let everybody know that Bronx
21 Parent Housing Network is one of the providers that
22 assisted New York City with the expansion of opening
23 commercial hotels in New York City. I currently have
24 approximately 3500 asylum seekers since expanding as
25 of August, offering them services, wraparound

1 services, but it's more solution focused, which is
2 slightly different. So we tried to address all of
3 their needs, trying to find community resources,
4 legal services, food and nutrition services, HIV/AIDS
5 services, substance abuse services to try to offset
6 some of their concerns.
7

8 Being with the time restraints, I do want to
9 start-- or go off more on the recommendations that I
10 wanted to talk about because it does highlight most
11 of the things, if not all that other persons have
12 said prior to. We would like to encourage the
13 administration to use this moment as an opportunity
14 to address both crises: One being the asylum seeker
15 crisis, but also acknowledging that there are New
16 Yorkers that are also facing homelessness as well.

17 Both strategies must coexist if we truly want to
18 create a more equitable and better future of New York
19 City. We would like to emphasize that addressing the
20 homelessness crisis is not just about providing
21 individuals with a place to stay. It is also about
22 providing them tools and resources that they can have
23 a home and exit shelter without recidivism.

24 We want to applaud the Mayor for launching the
25 Promise New York City in January of 2023 that

1 provides undocumented families with access to
2 childcare services in partnership with community-
3 based organizations. This critical response
4 benefited more than 700 children. But unfortunately,
5 it does expire by the end of this month. Therefore
6 exposing or resurfacing this challenge for
7 undocumented families who rely on childcare to work.
8 Please acknowledge that the shelter system does not
9 allow for childcare or babysitting services while in
10 the shelter. Therefore, it limits your ability to
11 service them or allow your clients to get employment
12 to then offset their services.
13

14 So I appreciate the Council's commitment to
15 providing shelter to individuals facing homeless
16 insecurity. We continue to partner with community
17 leaders, government, and stakeholders to combat this
18 crisis. In the report, you'll notice that we do
19 agree with two of the legislations, but I did want to
20 go on record to say I want to continue to support New
21 York City in this effort. But there are some things
22 that we need to identify as ways or strategies to
23 assist those persons who are in need of resources.

24 Thank you.

1
2 MR. MALU: Hello, my name is Power Malu. I'm the
3 Executive Director of Artists Athletes Activists.
4 And first, I want to shout out this City Council for
5 all its hard work in supporting and echoing the calls
6 to action from people on the ground, organizations
7 that have been on the front lines, and you guys have
8 taken bold steps to push for new bills to be passed,
9 especially around the shelter issues that the
10 unhoused community has faced since before the
11 migrants arrived. Also shout out to the founding
12 members of the National Community Organizers Day,
13 which has been designated and co-signed by numerous
14 community leaders to take effect annually beginning
15 today.

16 Port Authority was used as the Intake Center for
17 over nine months. We were there to bridge the gap
18 and connect the dots. There are things that
19 advocates can do that staff members cannot do. This
20 is how we were able to help so many families in real
21 time. So many unaccompanied minors, LGBTQIA+,
22 community members, and women that were violated on
23 their journey here, or even once arriving to the
24 states and they were comfortable sharing that with
25 us.

1
2 At Port Authority, we began providing services to
3 migrants and continue to do so with our 24/7 mobile
4 helpdesk, where we do case management and follow ups
5 including but not limited to accompanying new moms,
6 or new moms to be, to their appointments and making
7 sure they have essentials for the baby as well as
8 getting the proper food to promote nursing.

9 The Mayor has asked us all to step up. And that
10 is exactly what we've been doing, even when faced
11 with pushback, which we're not clear where exactly it
12 stems from. But it happened so suddenly from one day
13 to the next when Port Authority shut down.

14 Since the move from Port Authority. We are still
15 greeting and welcoming buses, even though we were
16 told we're not welcome to be at the Arrival Center,
17 and we were not welcome to greet the buses anymore.
18 We actually get intel from grassroots orgs on the
19 ground, letting us know when the buses are heading to
20 our city. So we make sure we're there so we can
21 welcome to families with dignity. We continue to
22 advocate for migrants to make sure that they are
23 following up with their appointments, getting their
24 IDs, including driver's license and meeting with
25 lawyers and paralegals to support with asylum

1 applications. It is just way more difficult when we
2 have to do double work to find the families as
3 opposed to before when they knew where to find us.
4

5 It's time we unify our city and stop the divisive
6 tactics being deployed, making the migrants feel like
7 they are enemies of the unhoused community.

8 After further review, here's what we can do:

9 Pass 942. Minimum standards is absolutely necessary.
10 We've been told that the respite sites are temporary.
11 However, we have cases of several weeks, and up to a
12 month. where people have been there with still no
13 movement and no site for transfers. These places are
14 horrific. If minimum standards are in place, we
15 wouldn't have showerless locations where clients had
16 to go days without showering, and it wasn't until
17 some pressure was applied by advocates that they came
18 up with a solution. Not a good solution but a
19 solution.

20 We have migrants practically on top of each other
21 being treated as if they are in a third world
22 country. This is New York City and we need to do
23 better. How can you treat people so inhumanely,
24 piling them up and packing them in like sardines?
25 There are no right to shelter rules that apply to the

1 rescue sites, and so they pretty much get away with
2 mistreating the people.
3

4 When you have a mass of people trying to overcome
5 traumatic experiences without mental health support,
6 and no personal space, things can get hectic after
7 being in such an environment for a while. You're not
8 allowing them privacy to grieve for the ones they
9 left behind, or for the ones that have been detained,
10 and the ones that have lost their lives along the
11 journey. These emotions all get bottled inside and
12 with no real outlets become triggered when faced with
13 aggression and dismissive behavior by those staff
14 members tasked with assisting them.

15 We've had many of the asylees break down weeping
16 as they express what they're going through. The
17 asylees compare these recipe sites to detention
18 centers in Mexico and when they crossed the border.

19 We're all for 1084, in relation to creating
20 training on trauma informed care for persons serving
21 refugees, asylees and migrants. All mass hiring
22 going on in these facilities has yet to take into
23 account training staff on the importance of checking
24 their attitudes and behavior to reflect more and more
25 patients.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will you please wrap up.

3 MR. MALUNION: We get calls all the time about
4 how staff members at the shelters yell at migrants
5 and are either not willing or knowledgeable to
6 disseminate correct information. Where is the ample
7 training of the staff members? I've said this all
8 along: The crisis was not when the buses were coming
9 into the city. We the grassroots orgs stepped up in
10 a major way to pick up the pieces, fill in the gaps,
11 and the gaping holes while buses were coming in
12 droves last year. Then we had a break from the buses
13 for a couple of months. During this time, there
14 should have been more collaboration, communication,
15 and cooperation between the city and grassroots orgs
16 on the ground. There was anticipation of Title 42
17 getting lifted for months, the word that was spread
18 across the city was that there was going to be an
19 influx of migrants once it was lifted. We have not
20 seen that influx. The numbers are way less than when
21 Title 42 was in effect. The migrants have been
22 blamed for everything that's been going wrong with
23 the system before they arrived. The crisis is when
24 the grassroots orgs and advocates are not taken
25 seriously. And our hard work and solutions are

3 disregarded to later have them attempt to implement
4 with the wrong personnel. The crisis is in the
5 miscommunication, or the lack thereof, between
6 agencies tasked with setting up staff to help this
7 population. And I'll end it there. But I'll submit
8 my testimony later on.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. And of
10 course I hate to cut folks off. But we've got other
11 hearings and other meetings that we need to get to.
12 But we deeply appreciate your patience. I know
13 you've been here since the Administration's
14 testimonies and the back and forth that we engaged
15 in. So we deeply, deeply appreciate you taking the
16 time off to be here.

17 Thank you so much to Hildalyn from nice, Adama
18 and Power Malu, and Dr. Rivera, we deeply appreciate
19 all the ways in which you've demonstrated the power
20 and strength of New Yorkers who are committed to
21 ensuring that our immigrant communities know that
22 this is their home.

23 And Adama, thank you for the perspective of
24 lifting up the folks who have not been accounted for
25 in these conversations. And I know that in the
26 conversations we've had about asylum seekers being

1 moved to other parts of the state are black asylum
2 seekers and though-- and they've been sort of taken
3 into the-- into an ethos in municipalities that have
4 no protections and we know that at the intersections
5 of being black being an immigrant asylum seeker, not
6 having the language capacities, these folks are the
7 most vulnerable and precarious in whatever sector of
8 work they go into, and in every institution that
9 they'll be navigating as they figure out what their
10 life in the state looks like.
11

12 So thanks, first and foremost, for-- in every
13 conversation we've had and I've heard you speak in so
14 many places, just reminding us of what the full
15 picture of asylum seekers or our newest New Yorkers
16 look like. And I know that in particular about--
17 particularly about the folks who are Muslim, have not
18 had the-- and continue to not have the-- the halal
19 food options in shelters, or the-- the place to pray
20 in peace, and that our-- our faith-based institutions
21 have had to pick up and make makeshift shelter and
22 housing and needing to ask the community to
23 participate in a food train and provide meals per
24 meal for the day. And while that's really noble and
25

1 remarkable of our community, that is not a
2 sustainable system.

3
4 And there should be no reason why we are
5 segregating Black Muslims away from-- or black asylum
6 seekers away from the existing infrastructure.

7 I'm really glad also that in your testimonies,
8 you've highlighted just the-- just how deplorable the
9 Respite Centers are, and why we need to really push
10 against this Mayor's rhetoric around eroding the
11 Right to Shelter Decree, and why we need to have
12 minimum standards. There's absolutely no reason why
13 in the-- in the richest city in the world, that there
14 are people needing to walk out-- walk four blocks,
15 or-- or figure out a transportation to take a shower?
16 That-- I'm perplexed by that.

17 And-- And so thank you. Just I hope that in your
18 continued to work with asylum seekers, individuals
19 and families, that these are the conversations you
20 will continue to have, and-- and that the Council has
21 their back.

22 Dr. Rivera, thank you so much for raising the
23 PromiseNYC program. This council fought really hard
24 with our Comptroller to deliver the \$10 million. And
25 we are proud that the administration did so. But to

1 see that it hasn't been reinstated, renewed, is
2 really disappointing. And the Council is actually
3 calling for a doubling of that funding to really meet
4 the needs of many folks who were not able to-- to
5 garner the services. And you're absolutely right:
6 With facilities that don't have childcare options,
7 that don't have afterschool programming or sort of
8 other activities, we need to make sure that folks who
9 are now working parents, that are that are not
10 working, have access to childcare opportunities, and-
11 - and good quality childcare opportunities.

12
13 And at a hearing last week, which we hosted
14 jointly with the Women and Gender Equity with
15 Councilmember Tiffany Cabán, we heard from countless
16 mothers who were just like, "This was about my own
17 independence and confidence, while also being able to
18 work, and also knowing that my child was in good
19 hands, and had nutritious meals, and learned healthy
20 habits, and was also in a space for healing." And so
21 the benefits are abundant. And so we need to be
22 redirecting our resources to the programs at work.
23 And the Administration has said, "This is something
24 that works and we are proud of this program." So we
25 call on the administration again, in renewing and

1 doubling PromiseNYC because of the countless,
2 countless benefits.

3
4 And just in closing, it is still quite baffling
5 to me that the Adama, Power Malu, and others were
6 told you can't welcome asylum seekers. That is just
7 outrageous that you cannot welcome asylum seekers, or
8 you can't welcome them here, or the blame and the
9 rhetoric that-- because you all have been so
10 welcoming asylum seekers are coming to our city. I
11 mean, none of that demonstrates the values of our
12 democracy in New York City. And it is quite
13 shameful, that the Mayor has had to turn to that kind
14 of-- that kind of a narrative to pit communities
15 against one another. And I'm really proud that all
16 the advocates here have not fallen for that trap,
17 that one community is greater than another, that in
18 fact, we need to be calling for these services for
19 all the folks who need them.

20 And to your point for there to be a strategy that
21 doesn't say-- that doesn't exclude current New
22 Yorkers from the conversation. And so I deeply
23 admire your work. Thank you so much for testifying
24 and showing up all the time every single day. I know
25 that you are not thanked enough, so I want to make

1 sure that you-- you hear from me directly. Thank
2 you.
3

4 COUNSEL: Next we have Pedro Zambrano.

5 TRANSLATOR: Hello again, Councilmembers. So Mr.
6 Pedro and I prepared his testimony. So, I'm going to
7 do consecutive interpretation. He told me a story
8 that we believe you should hear for sure. Senor
9 Pedro?

10 MR. ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING SPANISH] [VIA
11 TRANSLATOR:] Good afternoon. Greetings to you all,
12 and to all the people who are here in this room. I
13 talked to you about what happened to me in the Cruise
14 Terminal in Brooklyn, in Red Hook, at night. I came
15 from an English class, and I was drinking some
16 coffee. I felt a little bad in my stomach, so I went
17 to the restroom. The moment I got there, I was
18 trying to look for a space. So I had to go to the
19 men's restroom, and I saw a person just looking at
20 me. Again, I saw this person was hanging, and this
21 person was about to die via mechanical asphyxiation,
22 strangulation. So I went up. I cried for help, for
23 people who were there to come to the place. And I
24 kicked the door open. I grabbed this person by the
25 legs. I suspended him up. Two other people helped.

1
2 They climbed up on the toilets. We were able to
3 unloose the noose, but he fit the noose in a way that
4 you cannot untie it. So we had to open it and then
5 pull him out where he got his head. If I didn't get
6 there, in that precise moment, in three or four
7 seconds, this person would have died. And this guy
8 was taken to a hospital later on. They took him to a
9 hospital, and he was put into psychological
10 treatment, because he attempted to end his life. Of
11 course, a person is not fine when you make an attempt
12 on your own life. I told the company that takes care
13 of us, Dugo, that's the company that takes care of
14 us, gives us cards, the MetroCards, people that are
15 in the social part, well, the general attention that
16 they give us in the shelter. So they told me that
17 they were going to help report, so I would have a
18 report of what happened that night, and they never
19 did. They never did. Not this company, not the
20 security company that was working that night.
21 They're in Jefferson, here in Brooklyn. So I felt
22 that the joke to me, because you always trust the
23 words of the Americans. So, I was fooled, like,
24 "Yes, yeah, we're going to do this for you," but at
25

1 the end of the day, they didn't do anything for me.

2 Do you understand?

3
4 And the thing, they ought to treat the immigrants
5 better, because sometimes, people from security, like
6 these security people in Brooklyn, some people aren't
7 well-behaved, but I know about other places in which
8 they have people that are not supposed to be in these
9 charges. They don't have good relationships, human
10 relations with the way they talk to you, a very
11 strong manner, like, "Okay, you're tolerated." And
12 you just pass the page. Do you understand.

13 But another thing is that-- that has been heard a
14 lot about this case in Brooklyn is that problems
15 there happen in the restrooms was problems with
16 religion. Like Muslims have their customs, and
17 Catholics, we have our customs. So a lot of people
18 got very angry because of the usage of the restrooms.
19 They wanted to have their own place to do their
20 thing, and everything is mixed up. So they need to
21 have their own place, and it is true. Because we
22 were very uncomfortable, and a lot of people got
23 angry. I respect everybody's religion.

24 Another thing is in the shelter where I'm staying
25 right now, in that shelter, I was there for 6 days

1 with the lights turned on. And this caused a nervous
2 system trauma, a lot of stress. I told them, "Turn
3 off the lights. Turn off the lights. I will unplug
4 the cable myself, or whatever." They said, "Oh,
5 we're going to look for engineers who can come." So
6 six days later, my blood pressure was-- the values
7 were very high.

9 And the food is very sweet. In my case, my
10 glycemic levels went up. It's too sweet. So they
11 should have nutritionists to improve the quality of
12 the nutrition because the food is too sweet and we
13 are not used to that. And I'm telling you, please,
14 take us into consideration, because I know of a case
15 about a girl-- there was this girl sleeping on the
16 street because she didn't have a place to go. She
17 didn't have a shelter.

18 So that's what I wanted to tell you. People
19 promise things but they never fulfil their promises,
20 and as a immigrant, it is very difficult to thrive
21 here, because that's the-- that's the key that opens
22 the doors to success, so it is very difficult for us
23 to take the steps. We know that everything has its
24 legal process, but we need to have more-- we need to
25 find a way to solve this as soon as possible, so that

1 the immigrant comes, and we can solve their problems.
2 So, in about two months the person is able to pay
3 their own rent, so the government does not have to
4 fulfill that responsibility, and this person that
5 needs that place, to give that person the place, so
6 it's not about continuing your life in the shelter,
7 because there's people-- I've seen people in the
8 shelters that have two or three places where they
9 sleep. They occupy beds that other people need, and
10 that is something that you see a lot. So I would
11 like you to check every shelter. If a person has
12 already a reservation for a bed in one place and then
13 in another, well nobody can be in two places at the
14 same time. That's what I have observed. And as a
15 immigrant, I came through the jungle. I traversed
16 six countries in order to get here, and I tell you, I
17 am thankful for the government. I thank the United
18 States of America, and to all the people that have
19 helped me, like the people that are here, the lady
20 that helped us, Mr. Power, they gave us a hand when
21 we came here. That's the reason why we have been in
22 several processes. They know the places I've been
23 to: Randall's, now I'm in Brooklyn, I'm in 220 next
24 to Madan Tucson, and 42nd and 7th Avenue.
25

1
2 So I would like to know, if this case, that I
3 helped this-- that I saved the life of a person, I
4 helped this person, I helped the company not to have
5 any problems, and they offered me something and the
6 promise was left in the air. Because when everything
7 is written, things are preserved, but words are not.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for your testimony.
9 We appreciate it.

10 Thank you for being here with us and sharing your
11 experience across navigating various shelters for
12 asylum seekers, and adding to the perspectives that
13 we've heard throughout this hearing, and many
14 hearings that this Council has hosted to better
15 understand this administration, the Mayor's plan.
16 The Council's role is oversight, and we completely
17 agree that the city needs to be doing better to
18 ensure that every asylum seekers needs are met, and
19 particularly those that you've highlighted with the--
20 with the resident who nearly took their life, and you
21 were there to support them through that. But they
22 need support services. They need the mental health
23 services to-- to have healthy coping mechanisms as
24 they heal during their stay in our in our city.

1
2 So there's much more to do and I appreciate that
3 you're here, and that you've been working with some
4 of our advocates to ensure that the city takes care
5 of asylum seekers. MR.ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING
6 SPANISH][VIA TRANSLATOR:] I wanted to tell you one
7 more thing. I wanted to make an observation about
8 the rooms. There are about 70 lights. What are you
9 doing with 70 lights in a room. There's 70 people
10 sleeping there. It's too much light for such a
11 place.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We can follow up about--

13 MR.ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING SPANISH][VIA TRANSLATOR:]
14 --office spaces. They were arranged to be office
15 spaces, and they keep the same lighting, so it has to
16 be less lighting.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We can follow up about the
18 specific shelter, and somebody from my team will take
19 down what specific shelters you're talking about, so
20 that we can inquire exactly what's happening with the
21 lighting condition.

22 MR. ZAMBRANO: MR.ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING
23 SPANISH][VIA TRANSLATOR:] Okay. Thank you so much.

24

25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. And I'd like to acknowledge that we've been joined by Councilmember Sheker Krishnan.

COUNSEL: We have now heard from everyone who's signed up testify. If we inadvertently missed anyone who would like testify in person, please visit the Sergeant's table and complete a witness live now. If we inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify virtually, please use the raise hand function on Zoom and I will call on you in order parents raised.

Seeing no one else, I would like to note that written testimony which will be reviewed in full by committee staff, may be submitted to the record 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair Hanif, we have concluded public testimony for this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much. We have learned a lot, and have many more questions for the Administration. This Council remains committed to protecting and strengthening our city's Right to Shelter Decree and ensuring that as the city facilitates housing for asylum seekers that they do

1
2 have minimum standards so that folks are not being
3 required to walk out of a shelter to take a shower.

4 Much more to come. I'm proud of the advocates
5 we've heard from, the countless organizations that
6 have testified and have shared their partnership with
7 us, and for all of the newcomers, from our young
8 people, to folks like Pedro for testifying this
9 afternoon and sharing their experiences, everything
10 from their migration journey to their treatment in
11 New York City, but also the hope that some of our
12 partners have been able to demonstrate: New York
13 City will always remain a sanctuary city. So thank
14 you all so much for joining us this afternoon for
15 this critical hearing. More to come from this
16 Council. Thank you

17 [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 June 30, 2023