

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND
WORKER PROTECTION

----- X

March 19, 2025
Start: 11:36 AM
Recess: 2:25 PM

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor - Hearing
Room 2

B E F O R E: Harvey D. Epstein,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu
Shirley Aldebol
Joann Ariola
Chris Banks
Gale A. Brewer
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Kamillah Hanks
Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Chi A. Ossé

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

Sam Levine, Commissioner of the Department of
Consumer and Worker Protection

Michael Tiger
General Counsel, Department of
Consumer and Worker Protection

Carlos Ortiz
Chief of Staff, Consumer and Worker Protection

Elizabeth Wagoner
Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Labor Policy
and Standards

Winston Berkman-Breen
Student Borrower Protection Center

Lilia Tosen
President and CEO of Access Justice Brooklyn

Rebecka Cook-Mack
Staff attorney in the Employment Law Project at
the Legal Aid Society

Paul Sonn
National Employment Law Project, NELP

Tito Sinha
TakeRoot Justice

Magdalena Barbosa
Catholic Migration Services

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

Elizabeth Joynes Jordan
Make the Road New York

Mohamed Attia
Street Vendor Project

Gustavo Ajche
Worker Justice Project

Lydia Galapa

Matthew Schedler
CAMBA Legal Services

Miriam Clark
NELA New York

Camara Jackson
Elite Learners, Inc

Bhairavi Desai
New York Taxi Workers Alliance

Zara Nasir
People's Plan NYC

Melat Seyoum
NYC Network for Worker Cooperatives

Catherine Murcek
Samamkaya Yoga Back Care

Nilbia Coyote
New Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE

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

Genesis Gonzalez
Center for Family Life

Zubin Soleimany
New York Taxi Workers Alliance

Christopher Leon Johnson
Protect Deliveristas

Marrisa Senteno
National Domestic Workers Alliance

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. This is a
3 microphone check, Committee on Consumer and Worker
4 Protection. Today's date is March 19th, 2026, in HR2,
5 recorded by Taisha Sherman.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, ladies and
7 gentlemen. Welcome to the New York City Council
8 hearing for the Committee on Consumer and Worker
9 Protection. At this time, I'd like to remind
10 everyone to please silence all devices, and at no
11 point may you approach the dais.

12 If you wanna testify at today's hearing, please
13 see a Sergeant at Arms at the back of the room to
14 fill out a testimony slip. Chair, we are ready to
15 begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: [GAVEL] Hi, good morning,
17 everyone. Um, uh, and welcome to the 2027 Fiscal
18 Budget Hearing. My name is Harvey Epstein, and folks
19 who don't know me, really, I'm honored and privileged
20 to Chair the Committee on Consumer Work Protection.

21 You know, I'm really glad that, you know, I have
the, the Commissioner here and the staff. I want to
thank my colleagues, uh, you know, Councilman Ossé
and Hanks for joining us today. And we're going to

2 really review the budget process and look over kind
3 of these budget issues and the budget items.

4 You know, the budget we've seen today, the DCWP
5 budget, it's \$74.7 million, about \$38 million in
6 personnel expenses, supporting 484 budget staffers.
7 A slight decrease from Fiscal Year '26 budget, um,
8 which was \$75.1 million and also \$38 million— \$38.6
9 million for other personnel expenses.

10 Well, a lot of topics we're going to be
11 discussing today, hopefully with the, the panel here
12 and the people who are testifying around the ability
13 for this Department to seek restitution for workers
14 and protections and for consumers, you know, talk
15 about the vacancy rates, uh, in the agency and what's
16 happening there and how important the work that the,
17 this agency does, provide financial support and other
18 support for people in this community.

19 Uh, it was really critical that we understand how
20 we can be helpful here to the, to the agency to make
21 sure that it really connects up with consumers. You
22 know, I wanna thank the work that you've done so far.
23 You know, it's only been a little over 2 months since
24 you've been in this role, and I know, uh, you, ah,

2 and the Commission has done a lot of work to advance
3 the rights of workers and consumers.

4 I really look forward to a really robust
5 engagement here on this process. I want to thank the
6 Committee Staff, uh, you know, Finance Division, uh,
7 Glenn Martelloni, Dan Kroop, uh, Chima Obichere, and
8 the Legislative Division, Sarah, uh, Swaine, and
9 Natalie Meltzer for the work, as well as my team to
10 help this hearing happen today. And then I would
11 like to ask the Committee Counsel to please swear in
12 the members of the Administration.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Good morning.
14 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
15 nothing but the truth before this Committee, and to
16 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

17 PANEL: I do. I do. I do.

18 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you and, uh, you can
19 begin with your testimony.

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: Thank you, Chair Epstein, and
21 thank you, members of the Committee on Consumer and
Worker Protection. My name is Sam Levine,
Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker
Protection. Today I'm joined by our General Counsel,
Mike Tiger, and my Chief of Staff, Carlos Ortiz, and

2 our Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Labor Policy
3 and Standards, Elizabeth Wagoner. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to be here today before this Committee to
5 testify on the critical work of our agency and its
6 budget for Fiscal Year 2027.

7 DCWP is the nation's leading municipal
8 enforcement agency charged with delivering economic
9 justice. DCWP leverages its authority to bring New
10 Yorkers real economic relief and protect them from
11 predatory, deceptive, and unconscionable practices
12 that violate their rights as consumers and workers.
13 This includes pioneering cutting-edge protections
14 such as the city's Consumer Protection Law, Protected
15 Time Off Law, Fair Workweek Law, and delivery worker
16 laws, including the minimum pay rate for delivery
17 workers.

18 Through licensing more than 45,000 businesses in
19 over 45 industries, DCWP ensures fair competition and
20 a level playing field for responsible businesses that
21 are an integral part of New York City's vibrant
communities. DCWP also provides essential services
such as free tax preparation for individuals and
families, as well as tax prep services for
self-employed workers and small businesses, and

2 one-on-one financial counseling to ensure that New
3 Yorkers keep more of what they earn and can plan for
4 their futures.

5 We are committed to making sure New York City is
6 a fairer and more affordable place to live. I'm
7 incredibly honored to be entrusted with leading DCWP
8 in its next chapter under Mayor Mamdani's
9 Administration. Under my tenure, I promise that DCWP
10 will be a champion for New Yorkers, and our mission
11 to deliver economic justice to consumers and workers
12 across our city will be stronger than ever. I look
13 forward to being a close partner with this Council,
14 and I thank you for your work passing historic
15 legislation and supporting the work of our
16 department.

17 Today, I'll provide the Committee with a fiscal
18 overview of our agency, our successes over the past
19 year, and our path forward continuing to build a
20 fairer and more affordable city for all.

21 So starting by talking about our budget. For
Fiscal Year 2027, DCWP's Preliminary Budget is
approximately \$73.4 million with an authorized
headcount of 484 and an active headcount of 425. Of
this active headcount, only 387 are actually

2 dedicated to DCWP's work. Last year, our team
3 conducted more than 52,000 inspections and 1,230
4 investigations on behalf of consumers and workers,
5 securing \$47.5 million in real economic relief for
6 New Yorkers.

7 Our financial empowerment centers helped nearly
8 10,000 clients with free one-on-one financial
9 counseling, and our NYC Free Tax Prep program
10 completed more than 110,000 tax returns for New
11 Yorkers. We are beyond proud of the work that we
12 have accomplished this past year, and with Mayor
13 Mamdani standing beside us, we are looking forward to
14 being able to accomplish even more for the City of
15 New York.

16 Since our Landmark Consumer Protection Law was
17 passed more than half a century ago, we have used our
18 authority to safeguard the rights of New York City
19 consumers and have focused our efforts on securing
20 economic relief, protecting New Yorkers from
21 deceptive and unconscionable business practices,
ensuring that New York City is a fair marketplace for
all businesses who comply with the law.

Last year alone, DCWP returned more than \$3
million to New York City consumers, and we're

2 continuing this work aggressively. Just this year,
3 we've announced major lawsuits against businesses
4 exploiting and cheating New Yorkers, seeking millions
5 in penalties and restitution for aggrieved consumers.
6 Our case against Extra Space takes on the business
7 of, of, uh, takes on the business for their false
8 advertising, bait-and-switch tactics, and clear
9 violations of our Consumer Protection Law, for which
10 we're seeking at least \$5 million in penalties and
11 restitution. We're also seeking nearly \$20 million
12 from Radiant Solar for its deceptive and illegal
13 schemes that drove up utility costs for New York
14 consumers.

15 Finally, we've taken legal action against 3 major
16 employment agencies CMP, Golden Rose, and Eleni's for
17 systematically exploiting economically vulnerable New
18 Yorkers with illegal advance fees. This action has
19 already led to almost \$1 million in restitution for
20 New York job seekers so that they can feed and house
21 their families, and we're going to continue this
work.

In the last year, as the Council knows, our
mandate grew, and we worked to establish new and
innovative protections for consumers across the 5

2 boroughs. Last June, we implemented Council Member
3 Ossé's historic FAIR Act banning costly forced broker
4 fees and ensuring prospective tenants have clarity on
5 other fees related to the apartment rental.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Great Bill.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I agree, Council Member. I
8 agree. We also implemented Speaker Menin's Safe
9 Hotels Act, creating stronger standards for consumers
10 and workers at hotels. Uh, this implementation
11 highlighted the efficiency of our licensing customer
12 service, with licenses being approved in only 2 days
13 and in-person wait times being an average of only 4
14 minutes.

15 In support of small businesses, we worked with
16 Speaker Menin on the enactment of a DCWP license
17 reform package, which eases regulatory burdens and
18 modernizes requirements for small businesses across
19 the city. And we advocated strongly in favor of the
20 package— of, excuse me, of the passage of the street
21 vendor reform package, allowing more of our city's
smallest businesses to operate in compliance with
city laws.

In the Mamdani Administration, DCWP has already
taken aggressive and innovative measures to leverage

2 our authority to ensure that New Yorkers have a
3 fierce protector in city government. Under- under
4 this Mayor, we announced the adoption of the
5 strongest prohibition on hotel junk fees in the
6 United States, which will prep New Yorkers traveling
7 outside the city and those visiting our city from
8 facing unexpected and costly fees when traveling.

9 Just last month, we announced the publication of
10 the Stopping Harassment and Intimidation and Ensuring
11 Lawful Debt Collection rule, the SHIELD rule, a new
12 debt collection rule that provides New Yorkers with
13 the nation's strongest protections against debt
14 collector harassment.

15 That rule far surpasses the protections afforded
16 by federal regulations and delivers
17 first-in-the-nation innovative protections related to
18 the collection of medical debt. In this new era of
19 accountability, we will go further than ever before
20 to crack down on deceptive, predatory corporate
21 practices like junk fees and onerous subscription
traps. Predatory industries have been put on notice:
comply with the laws of New York City or face
consequences.

2 Just yesterday, Deputy Mayor Su officially
3 launched the city's Junk Fee Task Force, which we are
4 co-chairing and we are excited about the potential to
5 develop more groundbreaking policy to stop these
6 practices that are directly undermining affordability
7 for New Yorkers.

8 And Mayor Mamdani's Rental Ripoff Hearings have
9 been a major step in identifying the key issues
10 affecting renters in our city, including onerous and
11 costly fees such as the broker fees that Council
12 Member Ossé targeted with the FAIR Act. This is all
13 to say that we are here to deliver economic relief
14 for consumers who have been wronged and we have sent
15 a clear message that preying on New Yorkers will come
16 with severe consequences.

17 I also wanna talk about our groundbreaking worker
18 justice initiatives. DCWP has been and will continue
19 to be here to ensure that workers across the city who
20 come— can come to our office and that we can set the
21 standards for worker rights and labor standards
across the United States. Our cutting-edge worker
protection laws not only establish greater stability
in workers' schedules, incomes, and employment, but

2 also ensure that workers are treated fairly and with
3 dignity.

4 When companies violate workers' rights, we
5 prioritize monetary relief for workers and hold
6 employers accountable to the fullest extent of the
7 law. Last year was a historic year for our worker
8 protection efforts. With this Committee, we passed
9 laws to strengthen existing protections, and we
10 delivered a record-breaking \$44.4 million in
11 restitution to more than 24,000 workers through
12 enforcement, through enforcement of our cornerstone
13 workplace protection laws. This includes the biggest
14 worker protection case in New York City history, a
15 landmark \$38.9 million settlement against Starbucks
16 for violations of our Fair Workweek Law.

17 As you all know, DCWP is a national leader in
18 developing and implementing cutting-edge labor
19 protections— excuse me, cutting-edge protections to
20 raise labor standards for workers across industries.

21 In 2025, we strengthened our cornerstone
workplace laws while advocating for protections in
new industries. With the help of Council Members
Nurse, Gutiérrez, and Abreu, we expanded our delivery
worker laws, strengthening protections relating to

2 tipping and pay transparency, and expanding the
3 minimum pay rate to grocery delivery workers and
4 other existing protections to all contracted delivery
5 workers. We also worked closely with Council Member
6 Krishnan to pass much-needed deactivation protections
7 for delivery workers and for-hire vehicle drivers,
8 securing stability and employment for tens of
9 thousands of hardworking New Yorkers. With the help
10 of labor partners and Council Member Hudson, we
11 fought to enact the Aland Etienne Safety and Security
12 Act, which will provide security guards that help
13 keep us safe each and every day with better pay and
14 benefit standards.

15 And just last month, our protected- excuse me,
16 our strengthened protected time-off law went into
17 effect for 4.3 million New York City workers,
18 requiring an additional 32 hours of unpaid time and
19 expanding the reasons that employees can take time
20 off, including childcare, workplace violations,
21 public benefits hearings, and more. The law, as well
as our February benchmark report, represents a
standard for worker rights and stable schedules that
the rest of the nation can look to as a model.

2 This is just the beginning. DCWP has already
3 made great strides in 2026, taking on businesses and
4 major corporations that exploit their workers. We
5 recently announced a major win against a creative
6 production company, Splashlight, for violations of
7 our Freelancers in Free Act, where we secured
8 \$500,000 for freelance workers who were cheated of
9 their hard-earned payments.

10 At the start of the year, we released a report
11 that revealed the corporate greed of businesses like
12 DoorDash and Uber exploiting and cheating their
13 workers out of \$550 million with design tricks that
14 made it harder for customers to tip.

15 In January, we announced a lawsuit against the
16 delivery app Motoclip for egregious violations of the
17 delivery worker laws. And through our team's
18 efforts, we were able to get thousands of wrongfully
19 deactivated delivery workers their jobs back, and we
20 secured nearly \$5 million in restitution. But we are
21 not stopping there, because thanks to the City
Council, DCWP will be delivering even more for
workers in the months and years to come.

We are working to implement laws that expand
worker protections and improve labor standards for

2 workers. None of this could have been achieved
3 without the relentless efforts of workers, advocates,
4 and this Council, and DCWP looks forward to these
5 continued partnerships and doing even more this year.

6 We are also committed to setting New Yorkers up
7 for financial success. Over the course of the past 2
8 decades, DCWP is committed to— has been committed to
9 supporting New Yorkers across the city by helping
10 them reach their financial goals. Our financial
11 empowerment work has impacted hundreds of thousands
12 of New Yorkers and their families through vital
13 research, educational research, and direct services
14 that help them take control of their financial
15 health.

16 As part of the affordability agenda, we wanna
17 help ensure that New Yorkers are able to keep more of
18 their hard-earned money and they're not being ripped
19 off by junk fees and other, uh, exploitative conduct.
20 Each year, New York City Free Tax Prep saves New
21 Yorkers tens of millions of dollars in tax prep fees,
uh, for expensive paid filing services while ensuring
New Yorkers can keep the entirety of their tax
refund. DCWP's trusted providers across 141 tax prep

2 sites provide free professional tax preparation
3 services to thousands of New Yorkers.

4 Last year, our program helped file more than
5 110,000 tax returns through NYC Free Tax Prep, saving
6 nearly— saving clients nearly \$40 million in
7 preparation fees and maximizing their refunds and
8 access to valuable credits like the Earned Income and
9 Child Tax Credit.

10 This year, we're aiming to grow these savings,
11 all while cracking down on exorbitant charges and
12 deceptive practices that too often, uh, characterize
13 the tax industry. We have already cracked down on
14 predatory tax preparers who use junk fees and
15 deceptive practices to exploit the people of the
16 city, and we are accelerating enforcement, deploying
17 inspectors across the city to ensure tax preparers
18 are following the law.

19 New Yorkers can say goodbye to fees without
20 sacrificing qualities by using NYC Free Tax Prep. We
21 will ensure that you can claim every credit you're
entitled to. We're also very proud of our financial
empowerment centers, which offer New Yorkers free,
confidential, one-on-one financial counseling
sessions with trained financial counselors. These

2 sessions help individuals and families achieve their
3 financial goals and make a huge difference for
4 households by addressing savings, banking, credit,
5 and debt, including student loan debt, and much more.
6 Since their inception, financial empowerment centers
7 have served nearly 100,000 clients, increasing their
8 savings by a total of \$15.4 million and reducing
9 their debt by more than \$130 million.

10 In 2025, we expanded our financial empowerment
11 centers to 8 New York City Health Hospital and
12 MetroPlus Health sites giving us the opportunity to
13 serve even more New Yorkers and provide vital
14 resources to assist constituents manage their money
15 amidst the affordability crisis we are all struggling
16 with.

17 Mhm. We also announced our Financial Literacy for
18 Youth initiative, expanding financial and consumer
19 education to the youth and family of our cities and
20 helping to set them up for success. Through this
21 initiative, we will bring financial educators to New
York City public schools and youth-serving programs
developing a healthy- a financially healthy
environment for students and their families.

2 Let me conclude with this: the Mamdani
3 Administration has made clear that more than ever
4 before, DCWP is committed to delivering economic
5 justice for all New Yorkers and making New York City
6 a fairer, more affordable place to live and work. We
7 will protect New Yorkers by unleashing consumer
8 protections against corporate greed, strengthening
9 cornerstone protections for workers, and bringing
10 economic relief to— and financial health to New
11 Yorkers and their families.

12 DCWP wants New Yorkers to know with full
13 confidence that whether you're a worker or consumer
14 or household looking to improve your financial
15 health, you have a champion and a passionate ally in
16 city government.

17 I would like to express my sincere appreciation
18 once again for the opportunity to testify today and
19 the incredible work that DCWP does every day.

20 We are eager to carry forward the torch of Mayor
21 Mamdani's affordability agenda. We look forward to
partnering with you all in this new era of economic
justice for the people of New York City.

Lastly, I would like to thank my team at my side
and, and behind me, uh, for the support they've shown

2 me from the moment I have stepped into this role just
3 a couple months ago. In short order, our team has
4 taken major steps to redouble our efforts to protect
5 workers and consumers from exploitation and bringing
6 economic relief to countless New Yorkers across our
7 city. As the Administration moves forward with an
8 ambitious vision for economic justice, I am confident
9 that together we will transform the city into one
10 that is fairer, more affordable, and more just.

11 I thank you, and I look forward to answering your
12 questions today.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much. I, I
14 wanna acknowledge that, uh, Council Member Brewer and
15 Council Member Lee have joined us. Uh, oh, and
16 Council Member Ariola is on Zoom. Okay, so she's on--
17 I'm like, I don't see her. She's on Zoom. All
18 right, thank you. Uh, so just, I know my colleagues
19 have a lot of questions, so I just want to take a few
20 off the top. Um, so I've heard from the Mayor
21 numerous times over the last 3 months that we were
going to double the budget of DCWP to try to expand
its resources and its reach. And I'm wondering, um,
over what time frame do you expect that doubling to

2 happen, and when will we see anything in relationship
3 to that?

4 SANUEL LEVINE: Well, thank you, Chair Epstein,
5 and thank you for your steadfast support for our
6 work, and congratulations, of course, on Chairing
7 this Committee. Uh, Mayor Mamadani did make that
8 commitment, and I can tell you we are in ongoing
9 conversations with the Mayor and with City Hall about
10 our needs for the coming year. Uh, it is absolutely
11 the case that the Council has passed groundbreaking
12 new laws that we are charged with enforcing. Uh, OMB
13 has worked with us to identify significant new needs
14 in order to enforce those laws.

15 You know, in terms of the actual timeline, those
16 conversations are ongoing, but we know that the Mayor
17 inherited a massive fiscal crisis from Eric Adams,
18 and there really is an all-hands-on-deck effort to
19 try to address that while continuing to fulfill the
20 mandate that we've been charged with.

21 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So I just, uh, ah, hmm, so
the answer is it's unclear, but I know we have, have
a lot of needs and we can go through all those and we
will today. But, um, it's a little disappointing to
see a budget that's a reduction in the budget,

2 potentially a reduction in your headcount from what
3 the proposed budget- the, what the actual budget was
4 from last year. Uh, is there something within side
5 DCWP that determines that you need less staffing than
6 you needed in the past?

7 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, it was a preliminary
8 budget, as you know, Chair Epstein, and, you know,
9 conversations remain ongoing with, uh, the, with City
10 Hall, with OMB. Um, you know, when the Council
11 passed groundbreaking laws like for-hire vehicle
12 deactivation, OMB did identify significant new needs
13 for - for DCWP to make those laws a success.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: When you say new needs, you
15 mean additional staffing support?

16 SAMUAL LEVINE: Additional- exactly, additional
17 staffing support and those conversations remain
18 ongoing for the exec plan to ensure that we can
19 enforce those laws effectively.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right, and I know you've
21 listed off 10, 12 different things where it's going
to require additional needs of staffing. Um, I just
want to just flag that as a, you know, as a, a large
concern that we have, that we're giving you a lot of

2 authority, and I'm not sure the staffing levels meet
3 those needs based on what I'm hearing today.

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I can— oh, go ahead.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: No, so your headcount, uh,
6 it's 484, but the actual active headcount is 425.
7 Can you explain the difference there?

8 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, it's essentially, Council
9 Member, what's going on is a number of our lines— I
10 believe it's about, uh, 58 of our authorized lines,
11 38 of our active lines, and 20 of our vacancies are
12 actually funded by DOHMH. We don't control those
13 lines. Uh, they - they work with our licensing
14 centers. Um, but those lines are not in consumer and
15 worker protection.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So, uh, so 387 is your
17 actual in-consumer worker protections, people
18 actually working in your agency?

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: I believe the active— Carlos, do
20 you wanna— fill in for right now.

21 CARLOS ORTIZ: Uh, that's— let me confirm one
moment, Chair. It is, um, that's correct 387 are
dedicated to DCAP's work.

SAMUEL LEVINE: Right.

2 CARLOS ORTIZ: Uh, I think just, you know, just
3 to-

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Sorry, I'm so sorry. No,
5 go ahead.

6 CARLOS ORTIZ: Just to clarify, I'm, uh, so it's
7 48- 484 total authorized headcount for the agency,
8 but as the Commissioner mentioned, 58 of that
9 authorized headcount is DOHMH-funded lines. Uh, and
10 then within those DOHMH-funded lines, that, er, there
11 are 20 vacancies, which, um, represents, uh, if you
12 put it all together, about 30% of our total vacancies
13 in the agency.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That's through D-D-OHMH and
15 they're funded through your agency?

16 CARLOS ORTIZ: We receive an intercity grant to
17 fund those 58 lines, and they are responsible for
18 DOHMH licensing and permitting. Uh, for example,
19 food service establishments, uh, is one. Um, ah, er,
20 that, that's their - their role at the agency.

21 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right and the 387 from the
425?

CARLOS ORTIZ: Those 387, um, uh, those are the,
the active headcount. I mean -

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: That's a - a team effort here. I
3 believe 387 is as of January 2026. Um, for FY27, the
4 authorized headcount will be 484. For FY26, the
5 authorized headcount was 475. Uh, so we're talking
6 about different time frames here.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So you continue, uh, into
8 the future fiscal year, you're still saying of the
9 headcount who are going to be working on DCWP work,
10 what number will that be based on the proposed
11 budget?

12 CARLOS ORTIZ: Currently- currently the
13 Preliminary Budget has us at 387 active for working
14 on, on, on this, uh, on these issues, um, on DCWP
15 work.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: 387 and of that, can you
17 break down how many of them are forward-facing,
18 consumer-facing, uh, individuals.

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah, give me just a moment,
20 Council Member, to get you the, uh, to get you those
21 numbers.

SAMUEL LEVINE: So essentially we have, uh, just
to give you a little sample of it, our general
counsel, which handles a lot of our consumer
protection work but also is legal counsel for us, uh,

2 has a total of 83 active, uh, licensed, uh, let's
3 see, given your question, OLPS, which is a worker
4 protection unit-

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: 83 active lawyers?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: No.

7 MICHAEL TIGER: No, that's- it's a whole suite of
8 different workers, like our consumer ser- sorry about
9 that, Chair. Um, it's a whole bunch of different
10 types of staff. For example, our consumer services
11 unit, which is the intake and mediation arm of the
12 agency.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right?

14 MICHAEL TIGER: All non-lawyers, all competitive
15 civil servants. That's within the general counsel
16 division. So that's a couple dozen people and we
17 have other functions. There are a couple dozen
18 lawyers within the general counsel division that are
19 doing consumer protection enforcement and legal
20 counsel work for the agency.

21 SAMUEL LEVINE: In terms of lawyers -

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Can I just ask - how many
lawyers do you have who are working inside the
agency?

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: In terms of lawyers who can bring
3 cases to get money back to workers and consumers,
4 it's shockingly low. We have about 20, uh, 20 or so.

5 MICHAEL TIGER: I think if you combined the
6 lawyer- the enforcement lawyers in OLPS and the
7 enforcement lawyers doing consumer protection work in
8 the General Counsel Division, it's a little over 40
9 attorneys.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And just in the General
11 Counsel's Office, how many?

12 MICHAEL TIGER: Um, I think between 20 and 25.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So you have 20 to 25
14 lawyers to uh, represent everyone who's come to you
15 across New York City on any affirmative litigation
16 you're doing?

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: To- sorry, to confirm, so it's 20
18 to 25 lawyers for consumer protection.

19 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Consumer protection.

20 CARLOS ORTIZ: 18 attorneys for worker
21 protection. So we're talking about 40 total, 40
approximately, across these two areas. Now we have
other attorneys in our agency. They are not working
in these enforcement efforts. They have other roles
such as legal counsel working on contracts.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah.

3 CARLOS ORTIZ: Um, so that's the breakdown. I'm
4 also happy to give you a breakdown of each division
5 if that's helpful.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I would be— it would be
7 helpful because you just— good. No, we just talked a
8 lot. I mean, think probably just on Councilman Ossé's
9 Fair Act, you might need 20 to 25 lawyers, you know,
10 just, just, just on the cases that may need to be
11 brought just on that one provision of law alone. And
12 so I want to flag this as consumer protection issues,
13 not to mention all the workers' rights issues that
14 we're talking about feels to me, you know, as someone
15 who was at one point a practicing lawyer, when we
16 have 8.5 million New Yorkers and we're seeing
17 hundreds of thousands of potential complaints, that
18 we are putting your agency in a very difficult
19 position to be able to represent New Yorkers to
20 their, the, the, their fullest extent. I know you
21 wanted to add something. No? Okay.

18 CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, if I could— I mean, I think,
19 uh, I appreciate, um, the sentiment around that
20 because I think, I think everybody on this dais
21 believes that the work of this agency is absolutely

2 critical for New Yorkers. And I think it speaks
3 volumes, uh, to, to what particularly Mike and Liz
4 and other folks at our agency have been able to do
5 with these resources, the concrete, uh, outcomes in,
6 in tens of millions of dollars in economic relief. I
7 think, um, you know, it's why I believe that pound
8 for pound, we're the best agency in the city, uh, and
9 more resources, we could always do more.

10 SAMUEL LEVINE: And I'll- if I may add very
11 briefly, Chair, um, I have done consumer protection
12 enforcement at the state level, at the federal level,
13 my, my, my whole career. Um, it's just in my third
14 month here at DCWB. This is the leanest enforcement
15 operation I've ever seen. Um, it is a tribute to
16 Mike and Liz that we can deliver so much for the
17 city, but there is no doubt we are lean and mean, uh,
18 and we are stretched. There's- there's no doubt
19 about it.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right, I, I know, uh,
21 Councilman Ossé has to leave, so I want to give him
an opportunity to kind of weigh in with some
questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair, and thank
you, Commissioner, for your testimony. I wanted to

2 follow up on some questions I had the last time we
3 had a hearing together, um, and it's around rideshare
4 slash delivery app services and, and surcharges. A
5 concern that often comes up for constituents and New
6 Yorkers abroad, um, is that some rideshare and
7 delivery apps charge these surcharges that don't seem
8 to make sense. Uh, New Yorkers are- are left in the
9 dark on what fees they're actually paying when these
10 apps, uh, implement these surcharges. Uh, prices on
11 apps like Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash can vary from
12 order to order.

13 While this may be a TLC issue for rideshare apps,
14 I want to know if DCWP is working on anything to
15 address this, especially -uh, anything regarding to
16 potential price gouging and fee transparency?

17 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I think this is an
18 excellent question, Council Member, and what I will
19 say is that my big fear is that what consumers are
20 experiencing with Uber and Lyft, where they don't
21 know how much something's gonna pri- how much
something's gonna cost, and they get hit in fees, and
it changes throughout the day, and two people sitting
in the same building going to the same destination
end up with totally different prices, my worry is

2 that this is the future of pricing. That what is
3 happening at Uber and Lyft could happen in our
4 grocery stores, our hardware stores, uh, when we're
5 shopping every day. So I can tell you, A, what we
6 are doing is leading the city's aggressive effort to
7 crack down on junk fees. Uh, we had our first task
8 force meeting yesterday. We passed the hotel fee
9 rule. We continue to work on that. We're sending
10 warning letters.

11 Um, but I can tell you that we are also very
12 interested in working internally about the next
13 generation of pricing abuses. Whether that's dynamic
14 pricing where people walk into a grocery store and
15 the cost of eggs rises from when they go from one
16 aisle to the next, or whether it's surveillance
17 pricing where companies are using our personal data
18 to try to set prices as high as they can, the most
19 that we're willing to pay. I think it's really
20 critical that as the federal government really just
21 says, industry, do whatever you want, we're, you
know, we're, we don't care, we're not going to bring
law enforcement, that New York step up and protect
these basic principles that New Yorkers should know
how much something is going to cost before they pay.

2 I, so I think that's critical and if anything, we
3 have to go broader than Uber and Lyft across the
4 economy to make sure these pricing abuses can't
5 become entrenched.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: I appreciate that answer.
7 My office is working on drafting legislation around,
8 uh, transparency around, uh, surge pricing, um, as
9 well as regulation around surge pricing. So we would
10 love to work with, with you all on, on what that
11 legislation looks like and would love your support
12 and potentially getting it, uh, passed.

13 Another question that I want to ask is, you know,
14 a more convoluted issue, but deed theft is a
15 prevalent issue in, in my district and across, uh,
16 the city where there's a high number of Black
17 homeowners who are preyed upon, uh, by different
18 companies that aim to steal their deeds. One of the
19 ways that deed theft happens is that you have
20 individualized targeted outreach with predatory
21 intentions. These are bad actors posing as real
estate or financial experts, and vulnerable
homeowners like seniors or those facing financial
hardships and liens often rely on these experts, uh,
and as a result can lose the deeds to their

2 properties. And while deed theft is more commonly
3 seen as a Department of Finance issue, in my view it
4 falls in the category of malicious business. Uh,
5 what is DCWP doing, if anything, to hold these bad
6 actors in real estate and financial scams
7 accountable? And how can constituents take action
8 with DCWP when they're approached by a deed theft
9 scammer.

10 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I, I absolutely, um, sorry,
11 I could not agree more, Council Member. I think if
12 anything, malicious business understates what the
13 problem is, especially the type of scheme you're
14 describing. What I'll say is we are very engaged in
15 helping people protect their homes, protect their
16 equity. We just brought a major case against Radiant
17 Solar, which was a company that was ripping off New
18 Yorkers around solar installation. When we see
19 instances of deed theft, and I'll have Mike add to
20 the— our general counsel add to this, the fact of the
21 matter is it's not just the Department of Finance
issue, it's often a criminal issue.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Sure.

SAMUEL LEVINE: At the end of the day, we are a
civil law enforcement agency, but we routinely refer

2 cases to district, district attorneys, uh, for
3 criminal prosecution. My general view is that given
4 the egregiousness of the kind of conduct you're
5 describing, the best approach is to put these guys
6 and people, I should say, behind bars. But I'll let
7 Mike, uh, add to that.

8 MICHAEL TIGER: That's right. I mean, there are
9 a lot of different flavors, as you— of what is
10 classified as deed theft. As you're, as you're
11 referring to, uh, Council Member. So I think we can
12 approach this in a collaborative effort across all
13 the different enforcement agencies. As a first step,
14 always, you can always reach out to us, mhm, and talk
15 about that. As, uh, the Commissioner mentioned, we
16 have relationships that we have cultivated with the 5
17 District Attorney's Offices. So if we think this is
18 something that is best for criminal enforcement, we
19 can talk to the Economic Crimes Bureaus in these
20 different District Attorney's Offices. We don't want
21 to give people the runaround, but we want to actually
be able to work with your offices to, to help your
constituents find out what the best route is. If
it's something that's best for us to enforce under
our consumer protection law or deceptive business

2 practices law, we want those types of complaints, and
3 we encourage you and, and your colleagues to submit
4 complaints online or through 311, and we want to
engage with what you're seeing.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Chair, can I ask one more
6 question? I promise I'll be brief. Um, you know, I,
7 I wanna thank you, Commissioner, uh, and your agency
8 for your commitment to upholding the Fair Act and
9 ensuring that the bad actors that are landlords and
10 brokers are held accountable. And since the passage
11 of the Fair Act, broker fee complaints have dropped
12 from 50 complaints a week to 25 a week. Uh, but what
13 can your agency do to ensure those numbers continue
14 to decrease? And what resources does DCWP need to do
15 that work? And how much will it cost? Um, again, we
16 are here to advocate for more funding for you. So I
17 know you could do a lot more with more, but, um, any
18 specifics would be really helpful for us.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, I appreciate that, Council
20 Member. What I'll- I wanna start by reiterating what
21 you said. Um, complaints have fallen, uh, far fewer
complaints we get actually involve, uh, uh, broker
fees. Many of the complaints we get are from New
Yorkers warning us that they might- they have heard

2 about a friend who's been charged a broker fee,
3 things like that. I really believe that this law is
4 making a meaningful difference in increasing the
5 accessibility of housing, uh, without any-

6 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: I told you guys it was a
7 great bill. I told you it was a great bill.

8 SAMUEL LEVINE: Right, and many, many, many of
9 the, uh, predictions of doom, uh, have, have
10 certainly not come to pass. If anything, this is
11 making- you know, I paid a massive broker fee when I
12 moved in my most recent apartment. Many New Yorkers
13 can't afford to come up with 15% of their rent. Um,
14 uh, in terms of what we are doing, um, hmm, we know
15 that there are brokers out there trying to evade the
16 protections of the Fair Housing Act, whether it's
17 saying to renters, you know, we're not going to
18 advertise any broker fees, but, you know, come to our
19 office, we're going to make a deal. Um, there are a
20 lot- we are very concerned about essentially black
21 market, off-the-radar transactions.

22 That is one reason we are making a concerted
23 effort to hear from more renters, not only by driving
24 complaints from 311 into our office, which, as you
25 know, we are, but we are now doing renter ripoff

2 hearings. We just did our third. We have another in
3 Manhattan next week but we're hearing from thou- I
4 don't know how many tenants- we're hearing from many,
5 many tenants about all sorts of, for lack of a better
6 word, shady practices we are experiencing. And we
7 are very committed to working with you, whether that
8 means clarifying the scope of the Fair Act to close
9 these loopholes. Perhaps it might require amendment.
10 We would work with you on that. Perhaps it requires,
11 uh, you know, mhm, continuing the 50+ cases we have
12 in OATH right now and sending a message to these
13 landlords and brokers that this conduct is
14 unacceptable.

15 All options are on the table. You asked about
16 resources and trying to move quickly. You wanna talk
17 about that?

18 CARLOS ORTIZ: I was gonna say one thing about
19 the rental rule of hearings that, you know, we under
20 the Mamdani Administration-

21 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Council Member, we have a
lot of other questions up here.

CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, we have some legislative
ideas too that we're happy to share. That's-

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you.

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: More, more resources would allow
3 us to bring more enforcement.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Of course. Thank you,
5 Commissioner.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Uh, I, I wanna- I can-
7 Council Member Hanks, uh, I know she's got some
8 questions, so I'll turn to her now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you, Chair, and, uh,
10 thank you, Council Member Ossé. Happy belated
11 birthday, and you had a profoundly amazing bill that
12 we passed. Um, so thank you so much, Commissioner,
13 for being here. Um, the work that you're doing is
14 supremely important, but, um, I am, I'm always here
15 to rally for the, uh, the 5th borough.

16 Um, so we just want to ask a few questions. So
17 DCWP's work, you know, spans inspections,
18 enforcement, actions, complaints, um, mediation, the
19 restitution for harmed consumers and workers. And in
20 Staten Island, this role is especially significant
21 due to the borough's reliance on small businesses and
service sector employment, where issues like wage
theft, deception, deceptive contracting, and
predatory financial practices may be harder to detect

2 due to lower density and fewer enforcement
3 touchpoints.

4 And, you know, I really appreciate, as part of
5 your testimony, letting us know, you know, how many
6 enforcement officers compared and I know it's 8
7 million people and I'm asking about Staten Island,
8 but we do want to know, uh, what specific consumer
9 protection and worker right violations are mostly
10 reported in Staten Island and how does DCWP tailor
11 enforcement on those issues and how does DCWP ensure
12 that Staten Island residents are aware of their
13 rights under laws such as paid safe and sick leave
14 and, and fair work week protections?

15 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, thank you, Council Member,
16 for that question. Let me just start by saying my
17 colleague's gonna see about pulling up the complaint
18 numbers in response, but I just want to make clear we
19 are about protecting consumers and workers, but
20 protecting small businesses is a key part of our
21 mission too, whether it's making sure licenses are
easy to obtain, whether it's reducing fines and fees,
whether it's educating small businesses about the
laws they need to follow, whether it's ensuring a
level playing field for small businesses. And I

2 would just add, Council Member, and I, I bet you've
3 heard about this all over Staten Island. Small
4 businesses are being scammed too. Small businesses
5 are being defrauded too. They're being ripped off
6 too. Uh, and the reality is our consumer protection
7 law is limited in that regard, but small businesses,
8 I think, need— I'm very happy that my former
9 colleague, First Deputy Kenny Minaya, is now
10 Commissioner of Small Business Services.

11 Small businesses need a champion in city
12 government too. That's what we are trying to do
13 every day. Um, and we see it as, as core to our
14 mission. I'll see now Carlos can talk about some of
15 our complaint data.

16 CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, I would, I would say that,
17 you know, we don't, um, we have specific efforts in
18 Staten Island with respect to outreach. Um, uh, we,
19 I think we, we, we, our targets are for, um, at
20 least, uh, 100 events in Staten Island, outreach
21 events in Staten Island, um, per year. Um, and we
also additionally, uh, we do small business outreach
in the borough every year as well. Uh, this includes
small business walks with local Council Members too,
to meet one-on-one with businesses. Um, and the last

2 piece I'd mention, you know, 'cause it came to me
3 very discreetly, your point about low-density
4 boroughs and how they could— how we could address,
5 for example, worker rights issues there.

6 One manner is just by our proactive investigation
7 posture we have when we receive a complaint. So, uh,
8 when we receive a complaint from a business, uh, a
9 worker right complaint, uh, we'll make sure we take a
10 look at the entire business and also if they have
11 locations in other parts of the borough or locations
12 across the city. It's a way for us to maximize our
13 efficiencies and effectiveness of resources, uh, to
14 make sure even if it's a low-density borough where we
15 received a complaint, that we're able to really
16 spread the, spread the scope of that investigation.

17 MICHAEL TIGER: Let me just say, as a proud
18 Curtis High School alum— yeah, go Warriors— um, I
19 just said -

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: We brought him here just for you,
21 Council Member.

22 MICHAEL TIGER: Just, I would say, um, that we
23 take this very seriously when we're looking at
24 complaints. We're looking at all 5 boroughs. We
25 want to make sure that we're spread— we're spreading

2 love all over the city and make sure that we're using
3 our resources as much as we can across the entire
4 city. And I think, uh, uh, we have a rental ripoff
5 hearing, uh, coming up at IS 49, um, in a couple of
6 weeks. Yeah, so we definitely look forward to
7 hearing from Staten Islanders about what's going on
8 on the ground at that hearing.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you so much, and
10 thank you, Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. Uh, uh, now
12 I'll turn to Council Member Lee.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi, good afternoon. Okay,
14 it's afternoon, um, and I'm so sorry, I, I was in
15 such a brain fog yesterday when I saw you guys
16 walking in, so I, I, I did not give you your due
17 flowers, and so I'm very apologetic, but congrats,
18 Commissioner Levine, and of course we love Carlos and
19 the rest of the staff, so thank you so much.

20 Um, and just really quickly, because I was
21 trying— going back to the numbers, because I was
really trying to follow along as, um, uh, Chair
Epstein was going through the vacancies and the
positions, because so we, we, uh, on our side we had

2 63 vacancies and 421 active as of end of January, but
3 you said the most recent numbers are 4- 387 active?

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: I'm gonna ask- Council Member-
5 Staff. Go ahead.

6 CARLOS ORTIZ: I, I can take that. I think what
7 we were trying to communicate, and perhaps it was not
8 successful, was, um, was, um, the amount of staff
9 dedicated to DCUP work and the amount of staff
10 dedicated to DOHMH work.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right.

12 CARLOS ORTIZ: So, uh, I think your numbers are,
13 are for the most part, they're, they're accurate for
14 the time period they're taken in.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay.

16 CARLOS ORTIZ: Uh, overall it- maybe if I can try
17 to be clear, uh, from our end, it's, uh, 484 is the
18 authorized headcount. We have approximately 60
19 vacancies. Yes, and then from that 484, 58 of those
20 lines, uh, that's DOHMH.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and just outta
curiosity, because I know that, um, even, even in the
programs we had, where we ran the senior centers,
like the DOHMH piece where the food handler's license

2 and all these other things were, were a big holdup
3 in, in moving things forward.

4 So, just curious to hear how your conversations
5 have been going with DOHMH in terms of timeline, how
6 long it takes to get those through, and how that
7 impacts maybe some of your work.

8 CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, um, I would say, I, I think
9 I'd have to, I'd have to circle back my colleagues at
10 DOHMH in terms of their, their, their metrics. I
11 know for us, our- our wait times are about 4 minutes
12 for each client and then additionally 2 days for
13 processing applications.

14 I think, you know, the policy of- of putting all
15 these agent licensing functions within one agency,
16 it's from a Giuliani era really.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right.

18 CARLOS ORTIZ: Um, uh, I think there are some
19 inefficiencies there, um, particularly when it comes
20 even from like a constituent perspective of who am I
21 exactly interfacing with here.

Um, that said, you know, we, we try, we
coordinate as much as we can, uh, uh, with DOHMH to
make sure that we're delivering as much as we can for
New Yorkers.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, great, thank you. And
3 then just, uh, switching gears a little bit to Chief
4 Savings Officers.

5 Um, so I'm assuming that you guys still have the
6 same 1.5% mandate in FY26 and 2.5% for FY27. Um, so
7 just wanted to- I mean, I know the proposals are due
8 tomorrow, but wondering if you could share some areas
9 that are being evaluated. I know we gave you more
10 work, so that's the other issue too.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: I appreciate it, Council Member.
12 Um, our original Chief Savings Officer is now the SBS
13 Commissioner, but we have a new Chief Savings
14 Officer. Um, ah, you know, our discussions with OMB
15 and with City Hall are ongoing about those savings,
16 so I don't wanna get ahead of them.

17 But I can tell you we have identified savings.
18 Um, but they're no easy solutions here, Council
19 Member. We, as, hmm, it's a theme at our hearing,
20 we're stretched very thin.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Mhm, hmm.

SAMUEL LEVINE: But you know, we, we, we were
given that mandate and we're following it.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Where have those areas been?
3 I'm even curious because I feel like we've given you
4 a lot of extra stuff on your plate.

5 So just curious where the savings have been
6 found.

7 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, I can say generally,
8 because again, I don't wanna get ahead of City Hall
9 on this, but we're examining every contract we have.
10 We're examining every corner of our org chart. We're
11 examining every, every line. Uh, we're trying to
12 find savings where we can. Um, it's not easy. Um,
13 and again, you know, when you, when you hear our top
14 line budget, and I'm so glad you asked, uh, my Chief
15 of staff about DOHMH, it elides the fact that many of
16 our lines are actually not in our control.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right.

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: So that's— that cannot be touched
19 by any of these savings. So it is a challenge for
20 us, but we're working with City Hall to meet it.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and, um, the services
like enforcement and licensing that protect New
Yorkers, um, will those be held harmless?

SAMUEL LEVINE: I hope so, Council Member. I,
you know, that's going to depend, of course, on the—

2 do you mean with the savings target specifically, or
3 with the exec plan and the budget for the coming
4 year.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right, okay and, um, uh,
6 what efficiencies might DCWP implement to reduce
7 costs while maintaining the enforcement levels, which
8 I know you're looking at again, so?

9 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I, I can just say, Council
10 Member, it's- it is a challenge. We staff our cases
11 very leanly. We- we've talked about how we can
12 reduce our backlog, for example, of worker protection
13 cases. We're certainly taking an aggressive posture
14 with companies where we're saying, you know, we're
15 not going to let negotiations drag on. If you, if
16 you, uh, don't give us the information we need and we
17 believe the law is being broken, we're going to
18 court. But going to court takes cost too, so I'm not
19 going to pretend it's been easy, Council Member but
20 again, you know, we, we are doing what we can and,
21 you know, looking between the cushions.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Oh.

SAMUEL LEVINE: I would say as well that, you
know, over the- over the past 10 years, I believe we
had a net headcount increase of, of, of 10 or so,

2 approximately 10. Um, so it speaks to throughout
3 that time we've had to strategically readjust our
4 resources. We've had to become leaner and effective
5 with what we have. Um, it's something the agency I
6 think has been able to— we've excelled at it, you
7 know, based on the outcomes we put together.

8 All that said, again, there's, there's mandates
9 coming. These mandates are super important to us and
10 to, and to our allies and we want to make sure that
11 we are, we're making the best case, uh, or putting
12 the best foot forward on those.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: And hopefully you'll find
14 change and not gum, old gum in the cushion, in
15 between the cushions, like what my kids find but -

16 SAMUEL LEVINE: Every nickel counts.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: If I could just ask one more
18 question, Chair, sorry. Um, so just on the revenue
19 generation side, um, the most of the— obviously the
20 revenue is through fines and licensing. However, the
21 revenue for FY27 expected revenue is \$1.3 million
lower than they were in FY26 budget adoption, and
just wanted to know what the reason was for that
decrease and if the revenue might increase, um, the
need for expense cuts.

2 And lastly, this is just like a personal, um,
3 interest of mine is, have you guys also looked into
4 the possibility of using AI and tech to, you know,
5 help with some of these fee collections and reducing
6 outstanding penalties? Um, I, 'cause I've been
7 talking to folks that are doing this work in other
8 municipalities and cities across the nation. So I
9 was just wondering if that's something that you all
10 are looking into as well.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: Uh, so much there. I think I'll
12 try to keep it brief, Council Member. This is a
13 really thoughtful question. On, on revenue, I want
14 to get back to you on the targets.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Sure.

16 SAMUEL LEVINE: The reality is we target
17 conservatively and then generally exceed our targets.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: Certainly if we have litigation
20 success this year, that we're likely to exceed our
21 targets, but we will get back to you on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay.

SAMUEL LEVINE: I'm glad you asked about AI and
tech. This is something we- we do believe we can

2 find more efficiencies by using more technology.

3 That does require OTPS money.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yes.

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: To implement these systems. Uh,
6 you know, we have, you know, we've worked with OTI
7 well in the past. They continue to support us. Uh,
8 there are also permissions we need to use AI, um, but
9 we are absolutely- we could not do our minimum pay
10 rate cases without the systems we have to track pay
11 across a different delivery app. So implementing
12 tech tools has already made our agency more
13 efficient, and we really do want to redouble that,
14 but it takes money to save money.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah.

16 CARLOS ORTIZ: I mean, I would add too to the
17 Commissioner's point, I know that, for example,
18 leveraging data scientists in our investigations has
19 really taken our- our work out of an analog era and I
20 know with the Commissioner, we're already thinking
21 about how do we spread that, how do we spread that,
22 that idea to other parts of our agency. And again,
23 going back to becoming lean and efficient still.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right, yeah, some- I was
25 joking with someone this morning, sometimes I feel

2 like we're still operating on DOS. Hmm. It's like
3 old school. Thank you.

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: I registered for this hearing on
5 carbon paper.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Oh, I, I, I'm not sure.
7 Mhm.

8 MICHAEL TIGER: On mimeograph, like, you know.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Awesome. Thank you, Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. Council Member
11 Brewer.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. So
13 if, uh, can you, like, I don't know what you have to
14 do it now, but could you divide up? This is what the
15 health inspector, the hotel inspector, the vendor
16 inspector, are they all cross-trained? Because you
17 don't have that many. I mean, if you think of all
18 the folks, you have so few to do all those jobs and
19 so is it cross-training?

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, thank you for the question,
21 Council Member. Um, they are cross-trained, but I- I
22 don't think every inspector is trained for every
23 industry. So for example, we have 48 field
24 enforcement staff, or 48 inspectors essentially. Um,
25 we have 22- let's see, let me answer it this way. We

2 have 14 for petroleum license qualification, we call
3 that special enforcement, 24 for tobacco, which as
4 you know is a, a major problem.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Very well.

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: Uh, 6 for operations, but I
6 don't- either one of you should weigh in.

7 CARLOS ORTIZ: That's correct. I would say
8 that's the correct breakdown, and the 48 Uh, field
9 inspectors are really the, the cross-trained ones.
10 They're the ones out there doing patrols and doing,
11 uh, uh, response to complaints.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So they could do vendors,
12 they can do hotels, they can do-

12 CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, we no longer do vendor
13 enforcement.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You don't do vendor
15 enforcement? That's sanitation, sanitation.

15 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So they can do hotels,
17 they can do-

18 CARLOS ORTIZ: The 48 can do hotels. Um, that's
19 correct.

2 MICHAEL TIGER: Or yeah, or any of our license
3 categories or any other of these businesses for
4 consumer protection laws.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, go ahead and then
6 24, tobacco. I know that-

7 CARLOS ORTIZ: 24 tobacco, which is partly funded
8 by the state as well. Um, and then, uh, as the
9 Commissioner mentioned, 14 for special enforcement.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay and then 6
11 operations. What does operations mean? Just
12 general?

13 MICHAEL TIGER: I believe that's processing the
14 summons and -

15 CARLOS ORTIZ: Processing some-

16 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, just quality checking,
17 making sure that things- because, you know, we issue
18 these summons as they go to OATH.

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: Reporting and data analysis
20 process.

21 MICHAEL TIGER: So just making sure everything
gets streamlined.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and only OATH or
the Department of Finance knows if anybody pays their

2 fees, right? Because nobody seems to pay. That's
3 the general-

4 CARLOS ORTIZ: Can you speak to that?

5 MICHAEL TIGER: Well, I mean, I'm sorry, can you-
6 only, I'm just- I did a report with IBO a while ago
7 finding \$2 billion unpaid. That was a few years ago.
8 I'm trying to get another report. So what I'm saying
9 is you don't know if people pay. That's up to Oath
10 to assign and then for-

11 MICHAEL TIGER: Well, Oath issues the decision.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct and then finance
13 is supposed to collect.

14 MICHAEL TIGER: Well, we actually do some
15 internal collections.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, you do.

17 MICHAEL TIGER: We send out an initial letter and
18 then um, if they don't co- if we don't get, um, the
19 penalties or the restitution paid through, um, our
20 internal collection processes, then we work with the
21 Law Department.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So you don't- so finance,
because finance for other agencies does the
collection, but in your case you do the collection?

2 MICHAEL TIGER: At least at the inter- at the,
3 um-

4 CARLOS ORTIZ: The initial stage.

5 MICHAEL TIGER: At the initial stage.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

7 MICHAEL TIGER: And we- I'm sorry, the Department
8 of Finance does not do our collections directly.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, that's interesting,
10 okay.

11 CARLOS ORTIZ: We collected approximately \$16
12 million last calendar year.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: \$16 million. And do you
14 have- do you know how much you didn't collect, or
15 that's not categorized?

16 SAMUEL LEVINE: No, we don't have that with us.
17 Some, uh - uh -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Could you let us know?
19 Because I know you try. It's just the people who
20 were in the, uh, it's- I don't think the ones from
21 the cannabis store, uh, paid a penny. Just FYI. Um,
the other issue was just on page 6. I didn't know
what your numbers might be. That's obviously my
bill. I care about it. You have done a great job.

2 I didn't know if you had a number for what has been
3 paid on that or how many people have been-

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, let me-

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Not doing the right
6 thing?

7 SAMUEL LEVINE: I appreciate that, Council
8 Member. I'll turn it over to our wonderful OLPS
9 Chief.

10 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yep, we sure do. Um, in
11 Fiscal 2025, um, we- er, rather in calendar year
12 2025, we had 525 complaints.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Wow.

14 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Um, and we were able to, um,
15 uh, close 288 investigations. Opened 305
16 investigations, um, and in total we collected, um,
17 \$4.5 million for workers, um, just under the
18 protected time off law or paid sick leave law, um,
19 and \$407,000, um, in civil penalties.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, thank you very
21 much.

CARLOS ORTIZ: And Council Member, I would add,
since you were able to successfully pass that bill,
uh, \$3- \$34.6 million in fines and restitutions
delivered to over 77,000 New Yorkers.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Just as long
3 as de Blasio doesn't get credit, I'm fine.

4 CARLOS ORTIZ: We'll make sure.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I get— I deserve the
6 credit on that one. Um, the other question is,
7 there's a lot of— you— I guess on the list of— for
8 the 48 would be those who are messing up the
9 scheduling. That's still an ongoing issue, you know,
10 when you get told that your schedule is changing
11 quickly. Um, that's a law that we passed, so I'm
12 just wondering, is that also something that is a
13 constant, um, challenge? Because I do get a lot of
14 complaints still about people's scheduling. Go
15 ahead.

16 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yeah, so the 48 staff are
17 actually in our field enforcement division. Um, the—
18 it's the Office of Labor Policy and Standards that
19 enforces the Fair Workweek Law. Um, we get a lot of
20 complaints too. Um, our enforcement of that law is
21 broader than ever. Um, many of the complaints we get
are alleging issues that don't just affect one person
but affect the whole workforce. When we get a
complaint like that, we open a workplace-wide
investigation, um, often a citywide investigation to

2 look at every, uh, store under that corporate
3 umbrella. Um, we've had a great deal of success
4 settling those cases, um, collecting money for
5 workers. Um, in Fiscal 20- or rather in calendar
6 year 2025, we've collected, um, Let's see, \$3- \$39
7 million just under the Fair Workweek Law for workers,
8 which we distributed to, um-

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is it- does it send a
10 message that they shouldn't be doing it, or do you
11 just continue? In other words, is it- that should
12 send a message.

13 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yeah, we definitely see
14 compliance improvements. You know, we have had some
15 companies where we're then looking a second time, you
16 know, because we get complaints, um, which is bad
17 news and good news. Um, the good news is it's
18 better. It might not be perfect, but it improves.
19 Um, so we do think our enforcement is making an
20 impact. There have also been independent researchers
21 that have studied this and found that New York City,
um, nationwide among Fair Workweek law jurisdictions,
is doing the best in actually improving scheduling
protections, um, for fast food workers.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Congratulations because I
3 know I still get complaints, so I appreciate that.
4 Just finally, with FIFA coming and the- the boats
5 coming in July, um, that's gonna be a lot of hotel
6 challenges, I assume. In other words, are we doing
7 extra, maybe through NYC Tourism, that people can
8 complain? There'll be a million, I assumed, visitors
9 here, etc. You get the issue. So how do we handle
10 their complaints? Because they don't- may not know
11 what to do about complaining.

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, thank you, Council Member.
13 As you know, we are, we are licensing hotels now.
14 It's been a big part of our agenda to make sure not
15 only the New Yorkers aren't getting ripped off by
16 -when they travel, but that -people don't come to the
17 city and find-

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct and we'll have
19 many visitors, we hope. Strongest in the nation
20 hotel junk fee rule. You were there for the
21 announcement, uh, we announced a couple months ago.
Uh, we have, um, enforcing Safe Hotels Act to ensure
there's not illegal subcontracting, to ensure the
safety and cleanliness in the hotels. Uh, we
continue to receive consumer complaints. Uh, Mike,

2 do you wanna talk a little bit about our additional
3 efforts in this space?

4 MICHAEL TIGER: No, I think that- I think you've
5 hit, like, sort of the key points. I mean, we're
6 always- we're very attuned to the fact that we're
7 gonna get an influx of visitors here. We definitely
8 care about, like, you know, making sure not just the
9 New Yorkers are protected, but tourists coming to the
10 city are protected.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's why I am asking.

12 MICHAEL TIGER: So first, as always, if any - if
13 you're hearing anything on the ground-

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I'm just saying, are
15 you working through NYC Tourism for the- so that they
16 have this as- I mean, they have many issues on their
17 agenda, but would they have this on their agenda?

18 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yes, we - we are in communication
19 with New York City Tourism, um, and we're also
20 closely working with HANEC and HTC as well to
21 leverage those communication channels with workers
and consumers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay and then just
finally, one more question. This- now, I know
seniors getting scammed. I get complaints all the

2 time. I don't know if that's you or if that's FTC in
3 your old job and my mother-in-law's job, but I was
4 wondering what— is that something that is on your
5 radar or is that state and federal?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: It's absolutely on our radar. In
7 so many jobs, it should be Facebook's job. It should
8 be Google's job. I mean, what drives me crazy—

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The telephone too, the
10 telephone.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: Absolutely you know, what drives
12 me crazy about this is reporting now suggests
13 Facebook is earning 10% of its ad revenue is from
14 scams, from— and they know it and they're not doing
15 anything about it because federal law protects them
16 from liability for scams perpetrated on their
17 platform.

18 So there are limits to how much state or even
19 federal agencies can do here, but we are absolutely
20 committed as part of our education efforts, our
21 financial counseling efforts, our enforcement
efforts, when we find fraud, we attack it. When it's
criminal, as I was saying to Council Member Ossé,
who's no longer here, we'll refer it to our criminal
partners. We work with the AG all the time. But,

2 you know, candidly, Council Member, this problem has
3 grown so massive.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Huge.

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: I mean, the number of complaints,
6 I'll just say, to the FTC emanating from social
7 media, primarily targeting older people, went up 20-
8 something like 20-fold over the last decade.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, I, I- you see it, you
10 get it.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They complain. I- they
13 come to my office. They've been ripped off 19,000,
14 30,000 constantly.

15 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, no, a, a, absolutely and
16 candidly, the upstream solution, the way you avoid
17 playing whack-a-mole with this problem, in my
18 opinion, A, is education, making sure people have the
19 tools to avoid these scams, and B, is for social
20 media platforms to take more responsibility.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.

CARLOS ORTIZ: On the education piece, last year
we- we conducted 619 outreach events. Uh, my goal
for this year is to get that to about 730. So we're

2 saying about 2 events per day for, for the calendar
3 year.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you Council Member
6 Brewer. I want to acknowledge Council Member Aldebol
7 and Krishnan are with us and Abreu, and I- I wanna go
8 to Councilman Aldebol for questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Yeah, I think you
10 answered my question because I was gonna ask you
11 about, uh, your education efforts both on the
12 consumer side and the, you know, worker protection
13 side. Um, you know, can't enforce, uh, enforce laws
14 if people don't know about them and don't know where
15 to go to, you know, make a claim. Um, so I, I wanted
16 to know, um, and again, we want to advocate for more
17 staffing, uh, certainly in, uh, not only the area of
18 enforcement but the area of education, which is also
19 extremely important, is if we want to enforce, uh,
20 this legislate- well, this legislation to protect
21 workers and consumers.

And particularly, you know, to, um, uh, Council
Member Brewer's point, you know, a lot of seniors in
my district are being you know, um, are affected by,
uh, a multitude of, of scams, um, including, you

2 know, deed theft. And, you know, are there plans to
3 do, you know, more education, you know, maybe working
4 with the Department for the Aging, uh, to ensure that
5 seniors are, you know, uh, being advised of, you
6 know, their rights and you know, uh, scammers. And
7 is— this is a multi-part question, I know it's a lot.
8 Um, and, uh, whether or not, uh, you, uh, have a list
9 of, you know, contractors who are known, you know,
10 violators of, of, you know, of the law and who are,
11 you know, uh, to —so that people know who not to, uh,
12 contract with.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: Thank you, uh, Council Member. I
12 think, um, so, uh, approximately 620 events last
13 year, uh, reaching, uh, 75,000 New Yorkers. Um, I
14 think the breakdown is kind of half and half between
15 consumer protection and worker protection. Uh, it's,
16 it's a, it's a team, small team, 5 people. I like to
17 think they're the best outreach team in the city
18 though, because they burn a lot of shoe leather. Um,
19 our model is to really plug into community-based
20 organizations and their ongoing meetings, membership
21 meetings.

Whenever you have a meeting, we are gonna be
there to go, um, uh, as a way to get out there and to

2 every- be, be broad and deep with our outreach. Um,
3 with respect to deep theft, you know, I- we
4 coordinate closely with the Department of Aging, for
5 example, on their booklets, um, that provide
6 educational resources and, and referrals over to our
7 financial empowerment centers.

8 We also coordinate closely with HPD's homeowner
9 help desk as well, which really helps address a lot
10 of these, the theft issues too. Um, and in the, the
11 home improvement contractor space, you know, I think
12 we have done a lot of work over the past few years,
13 and I can maybe toss it over to Mike about this, um,
14 revitalizing how we, uh, disburse restitution through
15 our trust funds and other enforcement work.

16 MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, we- we have a, uh, home
17 improvement contractor trust fund that, as, uh,
18 Carlos mentioned, we've revamped the sort of, uh,
19 operating rules under. So now that, uh, you can- we
20 have a more streamlined process where you can get up
21 to \$20,000 in relief without having to file a case.
And we also increased the cap if you do file a case
in civil court, how much you can, uh, get from the
trust fund.

2 We also have a home improvement contractor wall
3 of shame on our website. Um, that's for repeat
4 violators of unlicensed home improvement contracting.
5 It's very important for consumers, and we make—
6 that's something, an educational point we really try
7 to get out to consumers, that they should check our
8 website which has a license lookup function to see if
9 their home— the home improvement contractor they're
10 considering hiring is licensed by us, because you get
11 a lot more protections under the law if you hire a
12 licensed home improvement contractor.

13 And so if you go to our website, you'll see the
14 most recent bad actors as far as unlicensed home
15 improvement contracting, just sort of responding to
16 your question, Council Member, of, like, where are
17 the bad actors? That's at least one, um, sliver of
18 the pie where we actually do have something on our
19 website.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you and I— we're also
joined by Council Member Banks on Zoom. I want to
turn it over to Council Member Abreu.

COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Thank you, Chair. My
question is, Commissioner, does the Mayor's Office of

2 Management and Budget still have a 2-in-1
3 out-of-hiring requirement implemented for DCWP's
4 hiring policies?

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: Uh, at the moment, yes, Council
6 Member.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Huh. Um, I, so this is
8 not- I thought they were supposed to be all gone.
9 What happened? Why this is not- why isn't the DCW
10 being- why are you being subject to this?

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, we have- we got, uh,
12 savings targets by OMB. Um, um, we're in discussions
13 with OMB about those cuts. My understanding is if
14 and when that's- when that is resolved, uh, the
15 2-for-1 will be lifted. But Carlos, do you want to
16 add more details on that process?

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: No, that's, that's 100% correct,
18 Commissioner. We, um, we have- we're under 2-for-1
19 until we identified our savings targets.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: I, I mean, I'm shocked to
21 hear that your agency is being subject to the 2-to-1,
and I'll tell you why. Uh, you know, the Council's
done- obviously passed legislation that you're going
to be tasked with enforcing. Uh, for instance, um, I
passed a package of bills on, on tipping

2 transparency, pay transparency, something I've worked
3 very closely with WJP on. Um, how do you— I would
4 imagine you need more resources to implement these
5 laws, is that correct? Or do you think you have the
6 headcount necessary to implement those laws?

7 SAMUEL LEVINE: No, it is true, Council Member,
8 that OMB identified the needs for your legislation
9 and others, uh, with respect to how we can
10 effectively implement these laws, and there are
11 significant additional needs. I can go through them
12 if that's helpful.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: I mean, in addition to
14 that, the Council also passed a slew of bills led by
15 the Street Vendor Project to expand licensing for
16 street vendors. We expect those licenses to be out
17 the door as soon as the law requires, and it sounds
18 like this hiring policy— this 2-for-1 hiring policy
19 is severely limiting your ability to do your job.
20 What is the— what is the ask that we need to make
21 from this Administration to help you do your job
between now and exec?

22 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, we're committed to full,
robust implementation of the street vendor license
expansion. I was proud to— our Administration

2 reversed the previous Administration's opposition to
3 that bill. We were happy to see the Council override
4 the veto. But it is the case, as you alluded to,
5 that, uh, the fiscal impact statement for the license
6 expansion identified 26 new lines uh, that DCWP would
7 need to implement it effectively.

8 Um, we are— we are having ongoing conversations
9 with OMB, with City Hall about how, uh, those needs
10 might be reflected in the exec plan. But, you know,
11 whatever happens, we are committed to making this a
12 success.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: It's not whatever happens.
14 We need the resources and so our job is to make sure
15 that you have those resources. I like to know how
16 much money you need to do it.

17 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, the fiscal impact statement
18 put forward with the legislation identified 26 lines,
19 \$3.1 million in FY '27, \$2.5 million in out years.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: How many worker rights and
21 consumer rights attorneys—

CHAIRPERSON ESPSTEIN: Just to clarify, that's
for just that one bill?

SAMUEL LEVINE: That is just for street vendor
licenses.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That's 26 for just for
3 street vendors, not to mention everything else what
4 we did, right?

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: Correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So what is the overall— can
7 I use that?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Yeah, please.

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: What is the overall
10 increase in staffing that you would need according to
11 OMB to cover all the laws that we've passed?

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: If, if you include the laws that
13 were passed in 27— what year is it? 26.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yes.

15 SAMUEL LEVINE: Um, 302 new lines um, and, uh, I
16 can give you the breakdown of, hmm, but 302 new lines
17 s.

18 CARLOS ORTIZ: That's— Chair, I think these,
19 these, uh, these fiscal impacts are available on, uh,
20 City Legistar, so we're happy to forward you over the
21 PDF.

COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Is it your position that
you— you have to enforce these laws?

SAMUEL LEVINE: Absolutely.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: And is it also your
3 position that you need the resources necessary to
4 enforce these laws?

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yes. And - but, but I also want
6 to be clear, we recognize the city's in a budget
7 crisis. Whatever our- the allocation is, we're going
8 to do our best to enforce these laws effectively.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: I think we need DCWP to
10 get it- the resources that you need. I know that you
11 can't- I know there's some limitations on what you
12 can say here today. I have no limitations. I can
13 say whatever I want. Sort of like Gail. Nah, I'm
14 just kidding. Um, Gail always says what she wants.
15 But seriously, we need to get you the resources that
16 you need and we need to get all those lines that-
17 that you need to do your job.

18 The advocates in this room from WJP to DRUM to
19 the Laundry Workers Center, to WJP, I think I already
20 said that, and everyone else, like, we, we are
21 committed, uh, to this issue and again, we want you
to do your jobs. Thank you.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: Thank you, Council Member.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: You catch her like that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: No, I just, I just, I
3 think I, I want to add, like, I think we would need a
4 breakdown of where the need is for increased
5 headcount, like how many lawyers do you need? How
6 many, you know, education folks, you know, on the
7 ground do you need? Because I, I think I, I, and
8 again, I'm going to emphasize how important it is
9 for, you know, workers and consumers, small
10 businesses to be educated on what their rights are,
11 where they can go, uh, to make a complaint, uh, what
12 resources are available to them. And because they're
13 just- folks are not gonna- the law is not going to be
14 enforced if people don't know- know about it and, um,
15 so I would like to hear more about how much do you
16 need, you know, uh, on the education side as well,
17 um, to, uh, to have a fully functioning agency that's
18 gonna be able to do, do its work appropriately?

16 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, we appreciate that, Council
17 Member. Um, certainly with respect to the laws that
18 were passed, there are publicly available fiscal
19 impact statements. I'll give you a couple of the
20 highlights. For-hire vehicle delivery deactivation
21 was estimated to require 170 lines, delivery worker
deactivation 34 lines, street vendor license

2 expansion 26 lines, delivery worker expansion 14
3 lines, and, and on and on. Um, I believe that these
4 estimates do include the resources necessary to do
5 outreach around these laws. Um, but it is also the
6 case that since these laws were passed, um, the Mayor
7 has issued significant executive orders, uh, charging
8 DCWP, for example, with leading a citywide- all of-
9 whole of government crackdown on junk fees, directing
10 DCWP to lead a crackdown on subscription traps,
11 directing DCWP to co-organize the rent-a-ripoff
12 hearings.

13 We're excited about this. We've never had a
14 Mayor, in my opinion, as relentlessly as committed to
15 consumer and worker protection but the needs for our
16 agency continue to grow. Um, and that is reflected
17 in, um, um, I think all of our testimony today.

18 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank, thank you. Uh, uh,
19 Council Member Krishnan.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thanks so much, Chair
21 Epstein. Good to see you Commissioner, First Deputy
Commissioner, and team, as always, and appreciate
your work and our conversation so far about all we
can do together for protecting all of our workers and
small businesses and drivers.

2 I wanted to follow a couple questions. Some of
3 them kind of follow up on, on the conversation we
4 were just having, which is, um, as you well know,
5 separate and apart from the street vendor package, we
6 passed historic legislation to protect, uh, Uber and
7 Lyft drivers in the city, overrode the Mayor's veto,
8 uh, to do that. And, you know, this has been the
9 biggest issue facing drivers in the city since the
10 medallion crisis. But the biggest question now is
11 going to be ensuring and I know we've had
12 conversations about this and appreciate your
13 partnership and you mentioning in your opening
14 statement too. Um, I would love to get a better sense
15 of what are the resources you all need, um, from a
16 dollar standpoint? I know you just briefly touched
17 on it, but if you can give a little bit more detail
18 about what are the resources you need from a dollar
19 standpoint, um, to implement this, um, from a
20 staffing standpoint, what kind of staffing are we
21 talking about? Um, and what is the plan, uh,
currently, um, to, to, you know, separate from the
staffing needs, how are we gonna start working
together to implement it? And I know you all share

2 the same goal that we do on it, so it's just a
3 question of making it happen together.

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, I think, Council Member,
5 let me just start by saying the— how critical this
6 legislation is, which is why we supported it. I have
7 spoken to, and I know you have too, uh, Uber drivers,
8 or, you know, I don't remember specifically Uber, but
9 rideshare drivers who wake up one day and they can't
10 log in. They've been deact— now, deactivation is
11 sort of a technical term, but it means they lose
12 their livelihood. They don't know why. They had no
13 due process. There's nowhere really to go, no one to
14 call, uh, they don't know what to do and then there
15 are downstream consequences. Maybe they're being
16 peddled out predatory lending products. Maybe now,
17 uh, you know, they're being affected by scams. Um,
18 so this is a major crisis facing thousands of workers
19 throughout our city and the laws that the Council
20 passed around delivery worker deactivation and a
21 for-hire vehicle are not only a necessary corrective,
but in my opinion, a national and international
model.

Um, that said, they do require significant
resources according to analysis, uhm because we are

1 anticipating a significant volume of complaints. As
2 you know, there's a look-back period, so within the
3 first year, I believe anybody who's been deactivated
4 6 years prior— so we're expecting a flood of
5 complaints from, from the jump. Um, what OMB has
6 estimated, uh, is that a for-hire vehicle would
7 require 400— excuse me, 170 lines. 4.2 million in FY
8 '27, 23 million in out years. Uh, delivery worker
9 deactivation, 34 lines, 1.3 million in '27, 5 million
10 in out years. And Liz, if you'd like to weigh in
11 sort of how we're thinking about implementation, with
12 the caveat that this is gonna be very resource
13 dependent.

14 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yeah, I would just, um, add
15 that, you know, we are already looking at, you know,
16 rulemaking and some of the sort of internal work
17 that, um, would be needed to make these protections
18 real. But, um, you know, without resources, we're
19 unable to do things like, um, create the complaint
20 interface on our online complaint filing portal, um,
21 you know, have systems to track how many cases are
coming in, and then obviously investigators and
attorneys to take the cases, talk to workers,
interview them, investigate, uh, what's the real

2 reason for their deactivation, what's the evidence,
3 did the company do an independent investigation to
4 um, into the circumstances that led to the
5 deactivation. Was it an algorithm or a person who
6 made the final decision? All of these core
7 protections that the law creates, um, you know, we
8 obviously need, um, people to be able to, to, to
9 handle all of those, um, cases for workers.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And I, you know, I
11 think that's something we should give— I mean, of
12 course, first and foremost is going to be the funding
13 piece and making sure that we have that in place.
14 And, you know, you have our full commitment here in
15 the Council to, to work with you all to ensure that.
16 Um, I know it's obviously a top priority for- for
17 City Hall and our Mayor too.

18 Um, but, you know, but I think that's where the
19 rubber really meets the road, is to make sure we get
20 those resources in place. Um, what I, I look forward
21 to is working with all to do so. I know your
22 commitment. You've got a great team here, a great
23 First Deputy Commissioner that, uh, as a constituent
24 as well, and worked very hard on this issue with me
25 for a very long time. So I know the- the will is

2 there. Um, and let's, let's figure out how we can,
3 we can make that happen. It would be great to have,
4 as Council Member Aldebol mentioned too, just a
5 breakdown of these different programs that we've
6 passed that are priorities for both of our— both of
7 us, you know, what, what the needs are specifically.
8 How have the conversations been with City Hall, uh,
9 on that front in terms of making sure that, you know,
10 we— as we move to executive budget, these programs
11 get the funding that we need?

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: I think the Mayor has made very
13 clear that this is a significant priority for him. I
14 mean, since his time in the Assembly, of course, he
15 stood with us when we returned \$5 million to, uh,
16 underpaid deliveryistas, um, and also got 10,000
17 workers actually react— er, ah, hmm, eligible for
18 reactivation.

19 Um, in terms of the budget, you know, those
20 conversations are ongoing, but, you know, it is
21 certainly a matter of public record that I think the
city is aware of that there are significant needs
that have been identified for successful
implementation of these laws. Uh, but those
conversations are ongoing.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Great, good to hear.

3 And then look forward to- to more data on that and
4 more conversations. On another note, um, you know,
5 shifting more to the immigration context, um, a big
6 issue that we are seeing in neighborhoods like mine
7 in Jackson Heights, on Roosevelt Avenue and around
8 there too, um, are a lot of individuals who are in
9 desperate need of help, but, you know, notarios or
10 others engaging in immigration fraud, um, which, uh,
11 is happening more and more, and I'm hearing more
12 about it too.

13 What, what are the number of complaints that DCWP
14 has received on that issue? Um, how have you all
15 taken action and what are your plans going forward
16 to, to, to help address it?

17 SAMUEL LEVINE: Oh, thank, thank you, Council
18 Member. We just want- we just want to make sure we
19 get you the right numbers here. Um, so with respect
20 to- let me just start by saying, for as long as I've
21 been in consumer protection, immigrants face- and I
know everyone here knows this- unique
vulnerabilities. And this year it is worse than I
have ever seen, worse than our allies on the ground
have ever seen. Given many people- many immigrants

2 feel they can't report scams to government. Many
3 companies unfortunately feel emboldened to rip off
4 their workers because they can threaten workers with
5 retaliation through ICE or otherwise.

6 One of the things we are hammering over and over
7 every meeting any of us does is if, if you wanna file
8 a complaint with us, go, go through your- go through
9 Make the Road, go through, uh, New York Immigrant
10 Coalition, whatever it is. You don't- if you don't
11 wanna give your name to us, that's fine. Go through
12 a group. We'll hand- we'll take in the complaint.
13 We'll reach out. We'll do the investigation. We
14 want people to be able to file complaints without
15 fear of retaliation.

16 Um, with respect to the number of complaints, uh,
17 we had 30 complaints in 2025 compared to 46 the
18 previous year around immigration services providers.
19 Um, and what we're seeing is that a lot of these
20 scams are moving online, which makes year-over-year
21 comparisons quite challenging. I don't know if
either of you wanna add anything to that?

MICHAEL TIGER: No, of course, this has been a
priority for several years for us. I mean, I can say
that every single complaint, uh, coming from an

2 immigrant goes to the highest levels of, uh, our
3 consumer protection enforcement attorneys, and we
4 look at each one individually. To reinforce what the
5 Commissioner says, uh, we— you can submit complaints
6 anonymously, you can submit it through an advocate,
7 we— whatever makes sense for an immigrant to be able
8 to get information for us. We wanna make that happen
9 and so we can talk to 'em.

10 We actually have a case currently pending at
11 OATH, the Office of Administrative Trials and
12 Hearings, against a notario who has, uh, repeatedly
13 been preying on the Ecuadorian community in Queens.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Mhm hmm.

15 MICHAEL TIGER: So this is something that we do
16 face significant systemic challenges given where we
17 are in 2026, but something that we are very dedicated
18 to continue to work on and try to find the best
19 solutions. And when we get immigrants who are
20 willing to talk to us, we will take action.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I would appreciate
that.

CARLOS ORTIZ: I would add to Council Member, to
your point about what we're doing. Uh, we're also,
uh, er, in the midst of, uh, citywide sweeps of

2 immigrant- of notarios, fraudulent, fraudulent
3 immigration service providers. Um, we've also
4 dedicated some OTPs as well to digital advertising to
5 try and meet these consumers where they are, to the
6 Commissioner's point about a lot of this stuff moving
7 on digital. And we also plan to be, uh, starting up
8 some in-person outreach as well, uh, in April leading
9 into July.

10 MICHAEL TIGER: Just, and just one, uh, final
11 point for the entire Committee, um, like, we have two
12 buckets of laws that we can actually enforce. We
13 have the consumer protection law, which applies to
14 all businesses, no matter the subject, but we have
15 very specific laws that this Council has passed for
16 immigration service providers and we supported a bill
17 last year that actually increased the penalties, um,
18 for violations of the immigration services provider
19 law. We have a lot of great materials online uh, for
20 Immigrant Bill of Rights, um, that can give
21 information to all immigrants. And I know, uh,
Carlos's team has, like, they're out on the field
spreading the word about that.

So I just wanted to sort of just make sure
everyone knows what the tools are in our arsenal.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I appreciate that and I
3 would just say, you know, in closing, I think, you
4 know, I think two, two things are on my mind. One
5 is, um, I think, Commissioner, you, you're right to
6 point out that a lot of this is shifting towards
7 digital you know, fraudulent, uh, services being
8 advertised online. So DCWP figuring out ways to be
9 more present digitally on social media to do so.

10 The other issue, obviously, and you all know well
11 too, you know, we just had a hearing in, in, in my
12 Oversight Committee about, uh, the sanctuary laws and
13 the city's compliance with them. One of the main
14 things that I hit on there too was when the sanctuary
15 laws aren't complied with, they make immigrants feel
16 afraid to come forward to government for any kinds of
17 services.

18 And so maybe one thing we can think about too is
19 partnering together in Jackson Heights, you know, and
20 then Queens, um, to do, uh, events so that you are
21 out there in the neighborhoods with us, letting
people know that you're there to assist, to combat,
um, immigration fraud, um, and other kind of, you
know, uh, fraudulent behavior that we're seeing that
could, you know, um, exploit, uh, vulnerable

2 communities in this moment right now. And that might
3 be a way, uh, to make sure that what DCWP is doing,
4 those efforts get out there more too.

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: We- we are deeply committed to
6 this work and we'd be very happy to partner with you
7 on that, so.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank you,
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you, Council Member.
11 Um, so I just wonder if maybe that breakdown is
12 really going to be helpful for us. Um, you know, I
13 know Council Member Abreu talked about, um, the- the,
14 ah, the- the laws we passed around protecting
15 people's work weeks. What do you feel like you have
16 enough staffing right now to cover the needs that are
17 out there and the complaints you're getting, or do
18 you need- do you, as OMB say, you need additional
19 lines there?

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, there is a backlog right
21 now, Chair, uh, around our worker protection cases.
It is a 6-month backlog. And what that means is
that- and, and this is certainly not for
inefficiency. We- I, again, I've, I've worked at a
number of law enforcement agencies. This is the

2 leanest, meanest team I have worked with. Um, but
3 the fact of the matter is the case— you know, we are
4 very proud when we can go out and announce, say, \$5
5 million back for workers, whether it's fair work
6 Fair Work Week, or \$5 million for minimum pay. But
7 many times these are workers whose— where the
8 violations occurred years earlier, where companies
9 have been sitting on their money for years, and we're
10 just getting work. And for— for low-income, middle,
11 even middle-income workers, they can't afford to be
underpaid and then get a check 2 or 3 years later.

12 So I don't know if, Liz, if you want to add any
13 additional topics to that.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Can I just say, on the
15 6-month backlog, you mean from beginning to, to
16 review the case.

17 SAMUEL LEVINE: Liz, do you wanna describe the—

18 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yeah, that's exac— that's
19 exactly right. So from the date the worker files a
20 complaint to when, um, we have an investigator
21 available to start investigating it, it's currently 6
months and that's just a huge explosion in complaint
volumes that began in Fiscal 2024, but, um, really

2 accelerated in January of this year with the passage
3 of the new laws and new laws going into effect uhm.

4 CARLOS ORTIZ: I would, I would just clarify one
5 point. The- the workers receive communications
6 immediately from the agency, and then that
7 communication outlines to them their expectation of,
8 of wait time.

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, and I appreciate that
10 they're getting communication, but if you're a
11 low-wage worker and you're waiting 6 months until the
12 investigation begins, I mean, you may not even have
13 that job anymore. You- you know, people who are in
14 deep economic straits may not even live in that same
15 place anymore and so, if it takes 6 months to begin
16 the complaint, then you need to investigate the
17 complaint. And I'm sure- I don't know how many-
18 what's your average timeline to- for just those
19 complaints? I assume it's a few months, right?

20 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Um, yeah, especially when
21 the- our most impactful cases, um, you know, can take
some time, right? Because once we do the interview
of the worker, um, and we learn that it's a systemic
issue that affects a lot of people, um, you know,
those are our highest-dollar cases in the end, um,

2 but do take usually about a year on average to, to
3 complete. Um, so it, you know, it, it is something
4 that we deeply worry about internally, um, and
5 obviously want to move those cases forward more
6 quickly.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And I assume that with
8 additional staffing, that backlog will go away, am I
9 right?

10 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: All right, so right now
12 we're talking to people who are at workplace
13 violations, they're going to wait potentially a year
14 and a half to 2 years before they can see some
15 redress, especially on the larger cases. The
16 population- there's a lot of turnover in low-wage
17 worker, you know, once you're working at McDonald's
18 and there's turnover.

19 So even finding those people a year and a half
20 later might be really difficult. Is that correct?

21 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Um, it could be, you know,
we- we do have very good systems for finding all
workers or finding as many as possible. It's our
practice in our workplace wide cases to get an
employee contact list from the company, um, and send

2 text messages and emails to all workers who worked at
3 the business to gather information about violations.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right.

5 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Um, but obviously our- we, we
6 expect that our response rates would be higher with,
7 with a fresher list.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And what is your current
9 response rate when you send them? Obviously we all
10 get text messages and emails from people we think is
11 fraud. We talked about all these scams a few minutes
12 ago. How do they know it's actually coming from you
13 versus some, you know, hey, you're entitled to money,
14 you know, call us. I mean, most people probably
15 don't respond to that, you know.

16 ELIZABETH WAGONER: You know, we- we get much
17 better response rates than we used to get when we
18 would just call a phone list. People actually do
19 seem to enjoy, you know, text messaging with our
20 investigators and filling out the survey that we
21 send. Um, um, so, you know, we feel good about our
system reaching more people than ever before.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So what is your response
rate for kind of these larger cases?

2 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Oh, it varies by case, it can
3 be 10%, it can be 30%.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Is it— so is that on
5 average between 10% and 30% response rate?

6 ELIZABETH WAGONER: That's, that's quite rough.
7 You know, I didn't pull the numbers before this
8 hearing. It's anecdotal, but it's about what— that's
9 about what it is.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So the majority of workers
11 are not getting back to you?

12 ELIZABETH WAGONER: I would say that we feel good
13 about those response rates, really. Um, it— it does
14 give us a very clear sense of what's going on in a
15 business and a workplace-wide case.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I appreciate that,
17 but if we're talking about a 10 to 30% response rate,
18 that means either 90 or 70% of people are not
19 responding, right?

20 ELIZABETH WAGONER: That's true. A lot of people
21 don't wanna say anything negative about an employer.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, or maybe they don't
know it's you and they can't prove it's you, so they—
like, we ignore some things because we don't know
what it is, you know?

2 ELIZABETH WAGONER: It could be.

3 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah.

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: But, Chair, if I might add, and
5 Liz, correct me if I'm wrong, that is in terms of the
6 response rate to shape the- the scope of the
7 investigation. At the end of the day, if we find
8 workplace-wide investigations, we would still aim to
9 distribute redress to 100% of the affected workers.

10 ELIZABETH WAGONER: That's right, everyone gets
11 money.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And how do you find
13 everyone if they don't respond to you?

14 ELIZABETH WAGONER: We have, um, a lot of
15 different ways of doing that. Um, so at the end of a
16 case, we'll get from a company, um, an address list
17 and an updated, um, email and phone list. Uhm, we
18 then usually may- it's usually by mail that the
19 checks go out, um, although in some cases we'll do
20 direct deposit if we have the bank information from
21 the employer.

Um, we then, um, have systems for, um, any checks
that aren't cashed or deposits- or rather deposited,
um, to call everyone who didn't deposit their check,
um, to email everyone who didn't deposit their check.

2 Um, and although I don't have sort of check deposit
3 numbers here, percentages, they're very high. Um,
4 um, they're, they're very high. We get most money to
5 people who are owed money.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. According to
7 OMB, for the delivery workers law expansion, what
8 addition— how many additional lines do you think you
9 need?

10 SAMUEL LEVINE: For the -

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: For 1135 delivery workers?

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I just want to confirm.
13 Yeah, I know, but I want to go ahead, Carlos.

14 CARLOS ORTIZ: I was gonna say, I think, um, it
15 was, uh, it was 23 lines, and I think we received 9
16 lines in the Preliminary Budget.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, so you needed 23, you
18 got 9, so you're 14 short.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: It's a— there's a 34.

20 CARLOS ORTIZ: Did you say delivery worker
21 expansion or delivery worker deactivation?

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Worker expansion?

SAMUEL LEVINE: Oh, oh.

CARLOS ORTIZ: Yes, so now we're at 14.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And how about deactivation?

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: So delivery worker deactivation
3 is 34. For-hire vehicle deactivation is 170.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That's what you need or
5 that's what you're short?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well-

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: According to OMB, what do
8 they think?

9 SAMUEL LEVINE: That was the estimated need.

10 CARLOS ORTIZ: That was our initial estimate.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Compared to what you got,
12 how many did you get?

13 CARLOS ORTIZ: Oh, wait, that's still in the
14 process of this Executive Budget turn.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So you have none right now?

16 CARLOS ORTIZ: That's correct.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so they said 34, OMB
18 said 34?

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: OMB said 34, but I- I do just
20 want to note that the Preliminary Budget, as I
21 understand, was based on new laws that were passed in
'26. The deactivation laws were passed, of course,
in '27 by an override.

So those we expect would be- those needs we
expect would be reflected in the exec.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And just for the for-hire,
3 uh, Uber, Lyft, uh, expansion, what do you think—
4 what's OMB think that additional lines you might
5 need?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: 170.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So 170 lines that are
8 currently not budgeted for, right?

9 SAMUEL LEVINE: Correct.

10 CARLOS ORTIZ: Correct, similarly, as the
11 Commissioner mentioned, you know, those went through
12 a veto. The Council thankfully overrode that veto,
13 and now we've submitted, um, those needs, uh, for the
14 Executive Budget.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And, um, how about the
16 security guard minimum wage? Kind of where do you
17 have— according to OMB, have sufficient staffing
18 there?

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: Uh, the- the- the fiscal impact
20 statement for that bill identified a need of 41
21 lines.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: 41 additional lines that
you don't have right now.

SAMUEL LEVINE: That's correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I know Council Member
3 Krishnan talked about the immigration service
4 providers and kind of the fraud going on there. Um,
5 is— can we determine if they needed— according to
6 OMB, need additional lines there?

7 SAMUEL LEVINE: What was identified was one
8 additional line.

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That's OMB's
10 identification.

11 SAMUE LEVINE: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And, uh, licensing for
13 self-storage warehouse. I know you brought some
14 self-storage litigation earlier this year.

15 SAMUEL LEVINE: That's exactly right, though that
16 was of course under our consumer protection law
17 rather than licensing. In terms of the licensing,
18 uh, 6 additional lines, and there's also some OTPS
19 for the IT back office.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And that street vendor
21 expansion, what do you think you might need for
22 additional lines there as well?

23 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, that's significant.
24 That's, uh, 26 lines.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, so that's how we got
3 to your number earlier, the 300-

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: Correct.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: -Odd lines that you need.

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: There were a couple others, so
7 there was protected time off, which was 5 lines
8 according to OMB. Um, I'm trying to think if we
9 missed it. I think that was the only one we missed.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, these are not your
11 estimates, these are OMB's estimates, right?

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: I think we worked with OMB on
13 them.

14 CARLOS ORTIZ: That's correct, that's part of the
15 hearing and, um, and final aging process, um, these
16 are submitted on the Council's website.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right and then, uh, I wanna
18 talk about funding that you use to fund
19 community-based organizations who are really doing
20 the good work in the city, talking to immigrant
21 communities, making sure that people understand what
the laws are. Can you tell us right now how much
funding is available for educating street vendors on
their rights and responsibilities?

SAMUEL LEVINE: Let's see.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That you, you allocate
3 directly from, from your agency?

4 ELIZABETH WAGONER: I don't know-

5 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think that would, that would,
6 that bucket of work would fall into, uh, I believe
7 SBS. Um, uh, they- they have the new division of
8 street vendor support, right? Um, uh, which I, um,
9 that's one piece for that.

10 Um, but we're working closely with SBS and, and
11 Health and, and DSNY to make sure that the city's
12 efforts around street vending are coordinated.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so, but so, to sound
14 clear, while you're- you have responsibilities to
15 oversee this law, at this point there's no resources
16 going from your agency to help street vendors
17 understand the law, be educated on law through
18 nonprofit organizations who are working with street
19 vendors?

20 CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, so the street vendor
21 expansion piece, that- that takes effect in January.
We've already begun conversations with stakeholders,
including Street Vendor Project, about implementation
of that law. That includes outreach, for example, on
potential waitlists that are gonna be going out. Um,

2 we anticipate also, um, uh, developing outreach
3 notices and materials for that. But, uh, but I think
4 it's gonna be an all-hands-on-deck action for this.
5 Uh, could include SBS, Office of Mass Engagement. We
6 need to hit the streets. We need to reach people
7 where they are, um, uh, to make sure that people take
8 advantage of this.

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I understand. Uh,
10 yeah, I appreciate the work that the agency is doing,
11 but also we, you know, have a dedicated group of
12 nonprofits who might need additional resources to
13 collaborate with you. I'm wondering what resources
14 have been set aside in this proposed budget to
15 provide the support that those nonprofits need to
16 help educate the- the community?

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think, I think the money would
18 go through SBS and not through us. We've requested,
19 uh, resources for implementation of the licensing,
20 uh, phase. Uh, SBS is, I think, b-but, by the
21 Council's legislation is, is designed now to provide
the support. Um, whether that's, uh, OTPS for
partners, I, I'm not sure. Uh, certainly I think
they've also received resources, um, for, for PS,

2 but, you know, I would really defer to them on this,
3 on this question.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I have- and so -on delivery
5 workers, you know, obviously I'm wondering, obviously
6 there are nonprofits who are collaborating with
7 delivery workers, making sure they understand what
8 the rules are of compliance. I'm wondering what
9 resources, uh, you have that fund those nonprofits to
10 do the kind of community education we think is
11 necessary to educate the workers.

12 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think, um, uh, we- our contracts
13 relate to financial empowerment providers. We offer
14 2 particular programs, or I should say now it's- it's
15 3 particular programs, um, uh, um, in our budget.
16 Um, that's, uh, financial empowerment centers, about
17 \$4.7 million, free tax prep, also about the same
18 amount and, um, we also have a new initiative related
19 to financial literacy for youth.

20 Um, but those are where our contracts are. Um,
21 uh, I know there are other contracts that the city
that provide legal services to workers. I believe
those are with HRA. Um, uh, that is certainly very
important. I think we, we have all long- we have
long thought that, uh, um, organizations like Legal

2 Aid Society, for example, play an important role in
3 supporting our worker groups. Um, but yeah, that's
4 how our contracts are focused on financial
5 empowerment.

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: And I would just add very
7 briefly, Chair, um, true. Uh, it is also the case,
8 of course, that we work very closely with WJP and
9 other champions for worker justice, um, who not only,
10 uh, who refer a lot of cases to us, who, who do
11 outreach to workers about the laws. I don't think we
12 are funding them directly in any way, uh, but they've
13 certainly been a critical partner to the successful
14 enforcement of these laws.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I, I do appreciate
16 that. I know how important these nonprofit partners
17 are. I just would also add that I know how important
18 it is for them to have resources to be able to, to
19 educate and help, uh, make people understand that
20 these laws exist and to get into communities,
21 especially in limited English proficient communities.
These community-based organizations are really a
critical part of our city infrastructure. Uh, and I
just would hope that we would, as we move forward in
this process, the Administration would consider what

2 resources might be necessary to ensure that th-that
3 we can do this successfully as well in the agency,
4 but also out in the community at large.

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: Certainly, certainly.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Um, I know, uh, Council
7 Member Banks, um, was trying to Zoom in, and because
8 of some quorum issues, he can't ask questions. So
9 I've been empowered to ask questions on his behalf.

10 Um, so, uh, on small business support, in his
11 district has a high concentration of small
12 immigrant-owned and legacy businesses. What
13 resources in the Preliminary Budget are dedicated to
14 helping those businesses comply with DCWP regulations
15 without over-penalizing, particularly for older
16 business owners who may need additional support
17 navigating compliance requirements?

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, we- we do quite a- a bit on
19 this, Chair. Uh, we do educational events with
20 business-focused stakeholders. We work with BIDs.
21 I've met with BIDs, Chambers of Commerce. Uh, we've
already, I think, been in talks with the consumable
planning events. We do business education days. We
conducted 17 in 2025, where we connected with over
1,000 businesses across the 5 boroughs. Um, we are

2 aggressive on social media, newsletters, direct
3 mailings to educate businesses. We're very proud of
4 our VIP inspections, which I would love to do with,
5 with any one of you, with, for new licensees to
6 receive an educational inspection, um, from an
7 inspector so that they know what the expectations
8 are.

9 Uh, we, you know, I, I can't underscore it
10 enough. We want small businesses to thrive. We are
11 not out there trying to play gotcha. We have a job
12 to do, but in the first instance, we would love for
13 small businesses to understand their obligations,
14 comply, and if we can be better partners, we
15 certainly will.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you.

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: I'm fortunate to, to, to do some
18 of these VIP and business education days with Council
19 Member Banks. Um, they're great. They're one-on-one
20 moments for us to interact with the small business
21 community and just to echo the Commissioner again,
like, we would love to do that with anybody here at
the dais today.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I'm sure all of us will be
3 happy to take out- take you up on that offer. I
4 know, uh-

5 CARLOS ORTIZ: When it's a little warmer, maybe.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, it's fine out there.
7 Um, ah, so, you know, I think this is- there's a
8 particular population. I think Council Member Banks
9 is talking about kind of older, uh, business owners.
10 I'm wondering if you're doing anything that's
11 targeting that population, because if you've been in
12 business in a neighborhood for 30, 40, 50 years, and
13 you've been doing what you've been doing and it's
14 been successful, you may not spend a lot of time
15 thinking through what the changing laws are, how you
16 keep up. Like, is there any kind of targeted
17 outreach to that population?

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I know, I think that's
19 right. I mean, one of the very exciting things about
20 this new Administration is all the, you know, great
21 outreach we're doing through, you know, TikTok and
Instagram and online. But the reality is, for a lot
of small business owners, it's better to show up in
person and I think especially for older small
business owners, it's better to show up at their

2 door, again, not to conduct an inspection in the
3 traditional sense, but in the case of our VIP
4 inspections to educate people.

5 So I think the best thing we can do for older
6 small business owners really is showing up. Um, an
7 email might not work. TikTok video probably isn't
8 gonna work, but showing up with real people saying,
9 maybe a Council Member too, we're here to support
10 you. We're here to make sure you understand this is
11 the sign, you know, you need to post. Uh, that's
12 something we love to do. Uh, and I think for older
13 business owners especially, I think that is where you
14 get the most responsiveness.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So I feel like this goes
16 back to that resource conversation. It sounds like
17 we- we'd love to do this more and maybe this requires
18 some additional resources to be able to do a more
19 robust engagement with older businesses. But I don't
20 want to speak for Council Member Banks on that, but
21 it sounds like it's really great that we're doing it
and the more we can do, the better it is to prevent
bad things from happening to good businesses.

SAMUEL LEVINE: That's a very good way of putting
it, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Uh, can the Department
3 provide data on consumer complaints regarding-
4 originating from the 42nd Council District and how
5 those complaints are being prioritized and resolved?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: What was the last thing you said?
7 I'm sorry.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: From his district, the 42nd
9 Council District. He would like a summary of
10 complaints from his district.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: I don't have those available at
12 hand, but we- we can get that data. I have the total
13 number of complaints, which is about \$30,000 last
14 year, mostly-

15 MICHAEL TIGER: For the city.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I mean, Council
17 Member Banks said \$30,000.

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, a very complaining
19 district. Now, \$30,000 for the city, uh, we can get
20 him specific information.

21 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I'm sure other people
would love to have it too.

SAMUEL LEVINE: We're happy to send to them.

CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah, I would love to share that
as well.

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: And I hope all of you know, I
3 imagine, there really are no wrong doors with respect
4 to your constituents if they have complaints. You
5 can call us, you can write us a letter, you can— they
6 call 311, you go through—

7 The best system for us internally is to go to
8 nyc.gov/consumers or nyc.gov/dcwp and file a
9 complaint but any way we get it, we'll process it and
10 we'll try to mediate it and get people their money
11 back.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Great uh, so Council Member
13 Banks introduced, uh, Intro 1231 of 2025 last
14 session, requires tax preparers to provide consumers
15 with clear itemized statements on charges and fees,
16 but before and after services provided.

17 Um, and then so it was driven by, uh, people felt
18 like they didn't get transparency in pricing on, on
19 that. Are there other industries similar to tax
20 preparation where fee transparency remains a concern
21 for DCWP?

22 SAMUEL LEVINE: Uh, I'd be hard-pressed to
23 identify industries where fee transparency is not a
24 concern, uh, for DCWP. I think tax is especially
25 problematic. In— in a previous life, I— I sued

2 TurboTax and H&R. It's not just small-time scammers
3 on the corner. These are large publicly traded
4 companies ripping off low-income taxpayers who should
5 be entitled to free tax prep, are told they're gonna
6 get free tax prep, and then 3 hours into the process
7 learn they have to pay a \$75 fee. And we know that
8 this is happening from publicly traded multinational
9 companies all the way down to corner stores that are
10 ripping people off.

11 So we- we're doing a sweep of inspections around
12 free tax prep, but there are other industries, and
13 unfortunately they are industries that prey on the
14 people who are already the most vulnerable. We've
15 done a sweep recently of employment agencies. These
16 are folks who are searching for jobs who are being
17 charged exorbitant amounts for services they can do
18 for free. Uh, we've done a sweep of, uh, er, grocery
19 stores to make sure people aren't getting ripped off
20 there.

21 We are really looking- used car dealers, where
we've seen a lot of problems. We've been sending
inspectors all all over the city. Um, so there are
unfortunately a lot of industries that are, uh,
tricking people about prices and fees, and that is

2 why we're proud to lead and be implementing the
3 Mayor's efforts to crack down on junk fees
4 marketwide.

5 MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, and I do just want to
6 underscore, um, the reference to employment agencies.
7 We've brought several cases over the last year about
8 illegal advance fees being charged by, uh, employment
9 agencies. Definitely been a point of focus for our
10 work, um, very recently.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you and then many
12 parts of this district, residents and workers are
13 simply not aware of the protections available to
14 them. Uh, he's asking about budgets for community
15 outreach, language access, education campaigns for
16 consumers and business owners.

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: Um, I could say— just, sorry, I'm
18 thinking about the order of this. Um, our community
19 affairs team is, uh, 6 people strong. Um, uh, they
20 with— between themselves, they cover 7 to 8
21 languages. Um, uh, er, additionally, we have OTPS
available to produce materials, and oftentimes our
materials are— are more than 11 languages that the
city requires.

2 Um, I would also note too that we get a lot of
3 support from our- our team across the agency. You
4 know, we have about 400, uh, staff members on our
5 team, uh, but they cover over 40 languages. Uh,
6 nearly 50% of our agency speaks a language other than
7 English. Um, uh, and so I think it's- it really
8 helps us to be very accessible to all diverse
9 language communities.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I know Council Member
11 Banks is interested in having more on-the-ground, um,
12 walkthroughs in his district, so I would ask if you
13 had committed to- to doing those?

14 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, absolutely, we'd love to.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Great, so you help them
16 with the business owners' education, enforcement
17 issues. And, uh, next, he wanted to make sure- he's
18 got a lot of street vendors in his district, um, and
19 he wants to know if there's, ah, funding available to
20 do outreach.

21 SAMUEL LEVINE: Asked an answer-

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Education. I feel like I
just heard this, that we would love more funding for
outreach and education for street vendors, um, and

2 partnerships. He mentioned Street Vendor Project,
3 support those efforts.

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: Indeed, yes, we- we support those
5 efforts.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, thank you. I, I
7 wanna talk to you about finally the student loans.
8 Um, you own partnership with Summer appears to
9 deliver some results. He wants to know kind of, er,
10 what data you have around Summer. Is it working? Is
11 it not? How many people are they seeing? What are
12 the impacts?

13 You know, they've had a decent, ah, foot-
14 financial footprint. I think it's \$3 million a
15 quarter, \$12 million for this past fiscal year.

16 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, that's right. Well, we
17 know that, uh, we estimate that 1.4 New Yorkers are
18 struggling with student loan debt and we serve them
19 in a number of ways. As you referenced, we have a
20 program with Summer, uh, uh, that has served, uh, I
21 believe thousands of New Yorkers have created
accounts, uh, including many city employees.

We do financial- our financial empowerment
centers offer student loan counseling services. More
than 9,000 people used our financial empowerment

2 centers last year. A couple hundred of them used
3 student loan services. We do a lot of outreach and
4 education around student loan services. We do
5 referrals to EDCAP too, and we, uh, we don't fund
6 them directly, but we will work with EDCAP closely.
7 And we appreciate, uh, Intro 177, your legislation
8 Chair, um, because I, I do think, given what is
9 happening in Washington and the prospect of
10 widespread defaults, uh, student loan defaults for
11 New Yorkers, we really do have to make sure these
12 efforts are coordinated and integrated to reach as
13 many New Yorkers as we can.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. Um, I'm gonna
15 go start round 2, and Shirley, you can go first.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Thank you, Chair. Uh,
17 I do have a question about revenue raising, and, um,
18 have you— you know, DCWP, uh, your enforcement
19 programs can, uh, raise revenue through fees and
20 fines collected from bad actors, and, um, you know,
21 has, has there been any analysis done about the
long-term revenue raising impacts, uh, of
shorter-term investments in, in the DCWP staff
budget?

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: Uh, good questions, and I'll do
3 my best and then turn things over to my colleagues as
4 needed.

5 You know, our goal is never fines and fees as
6 such. Our goal is a more fair economy, but often the
7 way you do that is through fines and fees. You have
8 to deter- you have to punish wrong behavior, you have
9 to deter it for others. In 2025, we collected \$15.8
10 million in fines and penalties. It's about the same
11 as in 2024.

12 Um, in terms of projection going forward, um, it
13 is the case that enforcement, our- our enforcement of
14 key worker protection laws can return millions of
15 dollars, not only to workers and consumers, but also
16 to the city treasury. Um, my understanding is that
17 our revenue targets for, I believe, the just for our
18 worker protection efforts are about \$300,000. We
19 regularly exceed that by at least an order of
20 magnitude.

21 Um, so I think we really are overperforming when
it comes- again, the goal is not revenue, the goal is
justice for our workers, but the reality is that does
lead to penalties that benefit the city treasury, uh,
far in excess of what OMB has targeted for us.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. Um, so I have a
4 couple more questions if that's okay with you.

5 SAMUEL LEVINE: Of course. So I want to figure
6 out if we can break down what's, what's the budget
7 for consumer protection and what's being budgeted for
8 worker protection, so we can figure out where the
9 balance is. I, I hear the- the \$387 is your total
10 lines, and I hear that you're having 20 to 25
11 lawyers, which is a big difference between 20 and 25,
12 and 15 to 20 lawyers.

13 So I'm wondering, do they overlap, or do they-
14 like, how does this break down? Are people
15 specialized in doing this work? You know, are the
16 lawyers specialized? Or, you know, I know we talked
17 a little bit about the inspectors having some
18 specialization.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I, I can give you a bit of
20 an overview and then my colleagues will jump in with
21 some more details. So we do our consumer protect- we
specialize basically in terms of our outward
enforcement work. We basically have two buckets. We
have work protection, we have consumer protection.

2 Um, Worker Protection sits under Liz's team at the
3 Office of Labor Policy and Standards.

4 Consumer Protection sits under Mike's team at
5 General Counsel. Um, hmm, the headcount for General
6 Counsel is at 83 active, but again, that's
7 over-inclusive in some ways because that's not just
8 the lawyers bringing enforcement cases. That
9 includes legal counsel.

10 MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, I think, you know, we took-
11 we talked about this like a little bit earlier, um,
12 that we have not a bunch of the non-lawyer units of
13 the agency are within the General Counsel Division.
14 So that's when we drilled down down before, and about
15 like the 20 to 25 attorneys that work on consumer
16 protection work.

17 So just to serve- get- they're, they're
18 generalists. Um, they come in, they don't-

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: They do anything. They do any
20 kind of case. So they- in the consumer protection
21 lane, they do any kind of case.

MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, they may get a case against
a used car dealership, they may get a case against a
debt collector. Now, naturally, like in any
workplace, like in any regulatory enforcement agency,

2 you organically develop expert expertise and become a
3 subject matter expert.

4 So the people who do, who do well and, you know,
5 uh, bring excellent, like, used car cases, they will
6 naturally, um, have more used car cases. They
7 developed an expertise, and that's, like, organically
8 happens but we don't necessarily bring in attorneys
9 with specializations in the many, many, many
10 industries that fall in within DCWP's jurisdiction.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: I'll also just add briefly that
12 the- the majority of our OTPS budget is essentially,
13 the vast majority is essentially pass-through. So
14 our total OTPS budget for FY '27 based on the JAM
15 plan is \$36.9 million. Uh, \$12.7 million of that is
16 through Kids Rise. That's straight pass-through. We
17 don't administer it. Uh, \$7.6 million goes through
18 our youth empower- excuse me, through our financial
19 youth- excuse me, through our financial counseling
20 programs, including youth financial empowerment.

21 Um, \$5 million goes to nonprofits that do free
tax prep, \$4.1 million for our beautiful building
down the street, um, beautiful offices and then our
remaining OTPS budget to invest in the kind of
software, for example, we need to do worker

2 protection cases, tools Mike's team- Mike's team
3 needs to investigate consumer protection cases.
4 That's all under \$7 million.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you, very helpful.
6 Uh, we noticed that the revenue projections for
7 Fiscal Year 2027 are \$1.3 mill- million dollars lower
8 than the Fiscal, uh, in 2026. Is there a reason why,
9 uh, those revenue, uh, expectations are lower?

10 CARLOS ORTIZ: I, I think, um, I think we'd have
11 to circle back with- with OMB about those revenue
12 projections they have for us but to the
13 Commissioner's point earlier, we, we frequently
14 exceed our- our revenue targets.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Just a clarifying
16 question on that. Is that from the PMMR?

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: It'd be great to know why
20 they're lower and whose projections are lower, based
21 on- it sounds like you're doing additional
enforcement and we would expect that, that not to be
lower.

SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, we're, we're bringing more
than \$1 million in. Yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Great.

3 SAMUEL LEVINE: Oh, already in 2026, I believe.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Can I ask you about the,
5 the current vacancies you mentioned earlier? You had
6 60-odd vacancies and is your expectation that you're
7 filling those vacancies before the end of the fiscal
8 year or are those vacancies remaining vacant through
9 June 30th?

10 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, do you want to talk about
11 the vacancies and the- the challenges posed?

12 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yes. So, I mean, I think as we
13 mentioned earlier, currently we're in a 2-for-1
14 hiring. Um, uh, we, we work, you know, we've
15 submitted, uh, um, candidates for hiring and we work
16 through OMB on, on getting those, um, uh, fulfilled.
17 Um, if I could walk through the vacancies, I'd say
18 that, uh, 20 of those vacancies are in our, uh,
19 Department of Health licensing, uh, unit. Um, the
20 next highest-

21 SAMUEL LEVINE: Which we don't control.

22 CARLOS ORTIZ: Which we don't control. Ah,
23 that's a good point. That's what I was trying to get
24 to. I'm sorry. Uh, the, the highest, the highest
25 vacancies are in the Department of Health. We

2 coordinate with Department of Health on those
3 hirings, and we- we work at the direction to get
4 those in. Um, I think a problem is that those
5 vacancies end up being a part of our overall vacancy
6 reduction target. Um, so it does create difficulties
7 in terms of how much the agency needs to, uh, meet
8 for a project to eliminate the gap.

9 Um, but for the most part, overall, like, our
10 vacancy rate is, um, for our, for our DCP divisions
11 is fairly low.

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: And if I could just underscore a
13 point my colleague alluded to, you know, there are, I
14 understand, 20 vacancies right now for DOHMH. We-we
15 cannot close those vacancies. So when we get a
16 vacancy reduction target that includes DOHMH lines in
17 the target, that, um, that disproportionately falls
18 on consumer and worker protection because those 20
19 vacancies from DOHMH are untouchable.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, so of the 40-odd
21 other vacancies, are you planning to try to fill
those before the end of the Fiscal Year?

CARLOS ORTIZ: 100%. We wanna fill those, but
we're- but we will- we need to make sure that those
conversations with OMB are successful.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So is it like, you know, so
3 I'm clear, you've gone to OMB asking them for the
4 ability to hire and they've said yes on the 2-to-1
5 and then you're posted and looking for applicants?

6 CARLOS ORTIZ: So, um, I'm not sure. We are, we
7 are looking to hire. We- we interview, we make sure
8 we, we do our step of the process to hire people,
9 bring people in.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right.

11 CARLOS ORTIZ: Those hires are still subject to
12 the 2-for-1 rule.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right and so, and then
14 you've gone to OMB with actual names on the 2-for-1
15 rule saying, hey, we have these 10 people for these
16 20 lines. That we wanna hire and we wanna do it now.
17 Has that happened or are you just in some other
18 process? You've lost people. That's why you have
19 vacancies, right?

20 MICHAEL TIGER: I think it's, ah, er, ah, hmm,
21 mhm, like, you know, I mean, all over the lifecycle
of the hiring process. I'd say for virtually every
one of the vacancies, we have posted it across all
the divisions in DCWP and there are ones where we

2 have interviewed and that we have made a conditional
3 offer to, and we're waiting for OMB clearance.

4 There are ones where we are engaging in active
5 interviewing, and there are ones where we have just
6 recently posted the lines.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, so is your
8 expectation that we— you're trying to, uh, hire some
9 of those lines between now and the end of the Fiscal
10 Year?

11 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah, I think a great example of
12 this, of this life cycle of vacancies is we just
13 received 9 new lines in the Preliminary Budget.
14 Those are, you know, those are going up, those
15 postings, they have gone up.

16 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Right.

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: And so that's a vacancy, for
18 example, that's in the early steps of, —us actively
19 working to hire.

20 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Right, so we move as quickly
21 as possible to interview people, select a candidate,
get an accepted offer, and then at— that's the point
at which it goes to OMB for approval to actually
onboard the person. Um, so we're able to move very

2 quickly up until that point where we have someone
3 sign- waiting for permission to onboard.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So do you have people
5 waiting for OMB approval?

6 MICHAEL TIGER: We do.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And how many lines is that?

8 MICHAEL TIGER: I don't think we have that number
9 with us. We do have some. I just want to add to-

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Could you get us that
11 number?

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: Sure, yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you.

14 MICHAEL TIGER: Just, uh, to add to the, uh,
15 complexity, that's the rich tapestry of hiring in New
16 York City. Um, a lot of times what we're talking
17 about are the non-competitive lines, like for the
18 lawyers, but there are also obviously competitive
19 civil service titles where you have to call from a
20 pool.

21 So there's a whole different process for sort of
teeing up having a pool call that's unnecessarily
complex and goes beyond the scope of, uh, what we can
talk about today. But just to say there, we are
attempting through whatever the necessary route is

2 for hiring for individual positions, we are trying to
3 hire for those positions.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: It'd be great to know how
5 many of those are sitting at OMB and just waiting for
6 decisions. That would be great to know.

7 SAMUEL LEVINE: Sure.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Is your expectation,
9 Commissioner, that, um, with additional hiring you
10 could provide additional resources to the city
11 because the - the the fees and fines that may be
12 collected?

13 SAMUEL LEVINE: Absolutely, to say nothing of
14 millions of dollars for consumers and workers in
15 money they are owed.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Is it, is it your
17 expectation that without additional hires, New
18 Yorkers will not be able to collect those millions of
19 dollars in fees and fines?

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: It will mean a substantial
21 reduction in both the amount of back pay and
22 compensation we can get for workers, compensation we
23 can get for consumers, and, and, uh, effective
24 enforcement of the laws to protect marketplaces. So
25 yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so besides resources,
3 are there additional tools you think at this point
4 that the- the agency needs to be able to advance your
5 overall goal of protecting consumers and workers?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: I think, you know, one thing that
7 we are really striving to do is get the word out to
8 the people of New York that if they're being cheated,
9 whether it's on the job or at the grocery store or
10 wherever it may be, to come to DCWP.

11 We are getting- we've already seen a pretty
12 significant increase in the number of complaints in
13 2026. I think that's because of the great uplift
14 we've had from members of the Council, from the Mayor
15 about the important work we do.

16 So I do want more consumers and workers, more New
17 Yorkers coming in the door to tell us about what's
18 happening. Of course, our ability to actually
19 respond to those complaints will depend on resources.
20 I can also tell you particularly in, in particular,
21 you know, part of that is of course people, but part
of it also is systems, you know, we just did a hotel
junk fee rule. We don't have economists internally
who can estimate how much that's gonna save, which I
think is important for people to know. A data

2 scientist who can look at, uh, one of Liz's big cases
3 and figure out, you know, it can be hard to figure
4 out exactly how much a worker was underpaid across
5 many years.

6 Uh, we need really good data scientists to do
7 that. So it's not just about, no offense, the
8 lawyers. It's, it's, it's also about the data
9 scientists and economists who— to support our work.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I mean, speaking of—

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: No offense to you either—

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: All the lawyers in the
13 room, I sense we need a lot more support for your
14 agency in a lot of different ways to be doing that.
15 Can we talk about the— the student loan issue? Um,
16 can you talk about the contracts this company Summer
17 has, what data information you have from them, how
18 successful can we see they are so far, and when their
19 contract expires?

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: Um, I wanna— for some of those
21 more specific questions, I'm gonna defer to Carlos.
My understanding is that they contract with Summer
was entered into in 2025. Um, the, uh, er, I, I, do
you wanna get into sort of the budgeting, how it's
being budgeted, Carlos?

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Uh, maybe we— how many
3 people it's serving, you know—

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: We -we have that information. I
5 don't know if we can get it to you.

6 CARLOS ORTIZ: I don't know if we have that
7 information with us right now. I think Summer started
8 last year in May as a pilot program for, for
9 employees. The, the, the city employees, I should
10 say. The pilot was expanded in August, um,
11 significantly. Um, it's been— and it's also, um,
12 significant— expanded simply to residents across the
13 city. I'm sorry.

14 Um, I think since that time in August, we've been
15 evaluating how it's been working out for workers. I
16 mean, for, for city workers and for residents. Um,
17 it's something that, um, uh, we're looking into it.
18 We- we also recently put up an ad campaign around our
19 financial empowerment center services. Including,
20 uh, our nyc.gov/studentloans, uh, that links to
21 Summer too, uh, to make sure that we're connecting
New Yorkers with, um, uh, these services. Um, I, I
think we have taken a two-pronged approach, both in
my, uh, our website, but also our financial

2 empowerment centers, to be able to provide New
3 Yorkers with student loan debt assistance.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so with Summer doing—
5 they mentioned we were expanding the work in the
6 hospitals for financial empowerment, doing Uh, find
7 tax prep in hospitals and community-based
8 organizations. Is Summer doing that on the ground as
9 well?

10 SAMUEL LEVINE: No, those are community partners
11 doing that.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so Summer is just uh,
13 people have to go to Summer, or is it online?

14 SAMUEL LEVINE: It's an, it's an online portal
15 that people can go to.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, I think I would love
17 some more details about how many people are going
18 through that portal, how many people are getting
19 served, what the benefits of that portal are, knowing
20 that we have a very be, um, you know, a lot of
21 seniors and immigrants maybe not have access to that
portal, not know how to use it, and, you know,
questions of veracity of putting information in a
portal.

2 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, and I will just say, yes,
3 so there is that portal, and I, I think we could get
4 you those numbers, but we'll confirm.

5 Um, I will also say, and I really want to stress
6 this to people, our financial empowerment centers
7 provide student loan counseling. It's not on a
8 website. It's not a phone call. It is in person.
9 Personalized people can come in with their manila
10 folders full of papers and our financial counselors
11 will help them sort them out and set them straight.
12 I don't mean set them straight, but get them on a
13 path to financial well-being.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So just to— just so I
15 understand it, the additional, uh, funding for
16 Summer, what additive value does it have in addition
17 to what you're already doing then?

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, I understand that Summer
19 offers, uh, I believe they specialize in public
20 service loan forgiveness and income-driven repayment.
21 I believe they also do quality checks when people
submit applications. Um, but it is also the case
that our financial empowerment centers do provide
this service in person, um, to New Yorkers who— who
seek it out and we have great partners there.

2 CARLOS ORTIZ: It's a program that we're in the
3 midst of evaluating, and I think we're gonna come to
4 a decision about. Um, uh, what metrics— and we can
5 share this with Council too, um, but what, what
6 metrics, um, um, we can identify to help us make our
7 decision about the longevity of the program.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I'd appreciate that. Some,
9 you know, ongoing conversations around it. So on
10 tobacco enforcement, we've seen a real reduction in
11 tobacco enforcement. I'm wondering why that's
12 happening. Obviously tobacco is a problem, and, you
13 know, we in my district, we've seen a lot of uh,
14 illegal sales of tobacco. We've had the Sheriff's
15 Department go out numerous times to numerous
16 locations, and I'm just wondering, what do you— what
17 do you account for the reduction in that kind of
18 tobacco enforcement?

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: I'm gonna let, um, Mike jump in
20 in a minute, but my understanding is that there was
21 significant efforts last year with the Sheriff to
shut down a lot of illegal smoke shops, which has, I
think— so I think there was an unusual spike last
year, which might explain the reduction this year.
But Mike, why don't you add to that?

2 MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, we were, um, we
3 collaborated across agencies because there
4 definitely- we all saw it. There was a huge smoke
5 shop explosion, illegal smoke shop explosion in the
6 city. A lot of it, um, because of the rollout at the
7 state level of the cannabis licenses.

8 So there was a strong collaboration between
9 agencies. Uh, members of our Field Enforcement
10 Division, um, collaborated with the Sheriff's Task
11 Force um, to shut- to work on shutting down a lot of
12 these, um, legal businesses. And that's something we
13 continue as necessary to collaborate on.

14 Separately, we license, um, tobacco retail
15 dealers and electronic cigarette retail dealers, or,
16 you know, electronic vape shops. And we have our
17 independent legal authority too and we still continue
18 to have inspectors in the field issuing violations,
19 for unlicensed activity, issuing violations for
20 underage sales, and that continues apace.

21 Um, I don't think, um, we can get you the exact
22 numbers on that. That isn't- that is not divergent
23 strongly from prior- from prior years, although we'll
24 get you- we'll get you exact numbers on that. That's
25 something we're still dedicated- we're still

2 dedicated to doing. We're still sealing, using our
3 own independent powers, businesses across the city
4 that are repeat unlicensed actors of our, of, of
5 DCWP's licensing regime. So this is still something
6 that we are doing every day in the field.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah and good to focus on
8 that because we see a lot of these illegal activities
9 going on and legal cigarette sales and they get 2, 3
10 violations and they change LLCs but the same
11 location, same, you know, people. And so, you know,
12 we have the Sheriff Department come out time and time
13 and time again and this, the illegal activity is
14 continuing and we hear a lot from frustrated
15 neighbors.

16 MICHAEL TIGER: Absolutely. The LLC shuffle is
17 something that is pervasive across all enforcement
18 for all, all regulators. So it's - it's something
19 that we struggle with but again, we, um, I would say
20 even before the Sheriff's Task Force really kicked in
21 last, uh, last year or the year before, using our
independent sealing powers, we have been targeting
repeat unlicensed actors and that really actually has
shown some benefits.

2 One, it got some revenue back in the city's
3 coffers, 'cause some of them actually finally then
4 did pay the piper and agreed not to continue to
5 unlicensed sell, uh, tobacco or electronic cigarette
6 retail dealers.

7 And also, we've been thinking about how to use
8 our overall laws creatively to actually address these
9 issues. We actually brought an action in state court
10 last year that is still ongoing against, I think, on
11 Lenox Avenue, um, for a repeat recidivist unlicensed
12 actor.

13 We have powers under our law to go after the
14 landlord. So we sued the business and the landlord
15 and got a preliminary injunction against both of them
16 and still we're working on resolving that case right
17 now but the actual bad actor was kicked out. Uh, the
18 landlord had to agree, no, I'm not going to rent to
19 anyone who's going to do this bad stuff anymore and
20 we're working on resolving that case.

21 So it is definitely something, even with our
threadbare resources, it is definitely in our
portfolio of work that we think is important and
we'll continue to work on.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Well, we'd love to have you
3 come back out to my district for the multiple
4 locations that are doing all this illegal behavior.
5 We've done some walkthroughs in the past with DWP
6 staff. There's 3 right on 28th Street that we would
7 love to shut down. We've gotten the sheriff out
8 there multiple times, they issued multiple violations
9 including yours, and they still operate probably
10 right now. They're operating right now. Um, so
11 anything you can do to help us kind of get in front
12 of that, because obviously illegal tobacco and
13 illegal operations, we'd love to be able to shut
14 those businesses down forever.

15 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, happy to work with you on
16 that.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And just on those oath
18 violations, can you tell us how many Oath - what kind
19 of money we're getting from those, uh, illegal
20 cannabis and illegal tobacco? Like, what kind of
21 fines are we collecting in that?

22 SAMUEL LEVINE: So on, on tobacco and e-cigs,
23 cigarettes, in 2025, we collected approximately \$2.1
24 million for unlicensed activity, and that's based on

2 4,742 violations. I don't know, Mike, if there's any
3 additional data points to add to that.

4 CARLOS ORTIZ: I would just clarify that we don't
5 have authority to enforce over cannabis. We just—
6 our authorities situated within tobacco and
7 e-cigarettes.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so it's 4,000— over
9 4,000 unlicensed activities and aren't the fines up
10 to \$10,000 a day?

11 MICHAEL TIGER: No, um, they're not that high.
12 Again, I just— there are different, um, suites of
13 laws. The cannabis we don't directly enforce.
14 That's— so I think some of this sort of gets
15 commingled sometimes but for unlicensed activity for
16 tobacco retail dealers or electronic cigarette
17 dealers, it's \$100 a day. That can accumulate still
18 quickly when it goes— when it goes on for years and
19 there are, um, stiff violations for underage,
20 flavored tobacco, flavored vapes, the usual array of
21 misconduct that we're out there combating every day.
Um, the sort of ceiling that— that we sort of
reinvigorated a couple years ago that I referred to a
little earlier, that has really helped. We thought
it had a salutary effect on um, conduct in the field,

2 but also on getting money returned on some of these
3 penalties that in the past may have been just
4 ignored.

5 So, in 2025, I was just helpfully handed as a,
6 uh, to jog my memory, we sealed 57 businesses just
7 again using our independent DCWP suite of laws and
8 collected \$785,000 in penalties.

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, thank you. So, NYC,
10 uh, Kids Rise, the program, Um, um, how much you've
11 allocated in this, in the primary budget for Kids
12 Rise?

13 SAMUEL LEVINE: In the prelim, that's 12.6 you
14 referenced earlier, I believe. Yeah, what I
15 referenced earlier was 12.6 million. Was that from
16 prelim? Just gotta make sure.

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: That should be approximate. I'm,
18 uh, 12.7.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: 12.7 million.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And, and how many, how
21 many, uh, young people does that include?

SAMUEL LEVINE: My understanding of how this
works, and someone might have to correct me, is that
the budget assumes that every eligible kid is gonna
open an account. Um, so, uh, starting with about

2 \$100. So I believe the way it's funded is 100 times
3 the number of eligible new students.

4 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah and, and I would say that
5 this money is, is particularly, this is a
6 pass-through, uh, contract that we have. A lot of
7 the, the oversight of it, uh, I believe it, it, it
8 sits with the Mayor's Office of Equity and they- they
9 conduct a lot of the metrics collecting for that
10 program.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So, are you- just so I'm
12 clear, do we know if this is actually happening? Are
13 children getting these, these \$100? Is this
14 happening? Is it- how many students is it impacting?

15 CARLOS ORTIZ: As the Commissioner mentioned, our
16 understanding of the program, it's a, it's an
17 auto-enrollment program, but in terms of the metrics,
18 those are held by the Mayor's Office of Equity.

19 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So auto-enrollment by whom?
20 Like, how does a parent-

21 SAMUEL LEVINE: I don't think it's- I, I don't
know if it's auto-enrollment. I think an account in
theory is created for every student, and then a
parent needs to claim that account on behalf of
their- on behalf of their child.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So do we know if there are
3 unclaimed accounts? And are there-

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: There are many, there are many
5 unclaimed in my understanding.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so, how do we- like,
7 what role does the DCWP have to-

8 SAMUEL LEVINE: I think it's really-

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That those accounts get
10 claimed, did families know about it, and they get the
11 resources.

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: You know, I think it's a really
13 innovative program, but we really do not play a role
14 in the Administration of it, the promotion of it.

15 CARLOS ORTIZ: We don't administer the program.
16 It's really administered by the Mayor's Office of
17 Equity, where we hold a contract to pass through the
18 money to- to New York City Kids Rise.

19 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So once the money's gone,
20 you're not- did you take the money back?

21 SAMUEL LEVINE: It goes out.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: But if the money isn't
spent, where's that money go? Do you see it? It
goes back to the general fund.

2 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think we— I— we are happy to
3 connect the Council with the Mayor's Office of Equity
4 to answer some of these questions about how that
5 program, uh, is situated and works.

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: But to be clear, like, when a
7 parent wants to claim it, they don't go to us.

8 CARLOS ORTIZ: Yeah.

9 SAMUEL LEVINE: We're not the ones putting—
10 creating the— we truly play no role. It's, it's,
11 it's entirely ministerial, right?

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, thank you. And so
13 can I ask you a question? Does it make sense if you
14 are only the pass-through that it actually belongs
15 with you because you— I mean, I don't— like, if
16 you're not sure how successful it is or how many
17 families are enrolling and what the outcomes are, I'm
18 not sure what the money's doing here.

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: There's a— there's a reason, I
20 believe, we were charged with being the pass-through
21 that predates me, and I, I just don't know the
answer, Chair.

CARLOS ORTIZ: I believe probably when the— when
the program was first stood up, right? This probably
was during Commissioner Menin's time. There, there

2 was a reason for the contract to sit, sit with us.
3 Um, but as we've said, this now is administered by a
4 different agency. I think they're- so it's a
5 pass-through contract. Um, uh, and it does, you
6 know, ultimately does impact our target revenues for
our target pegs, so.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I, I would- I mean, I
8 would encourage if we could do a little deeper dive
9 on this just to figure out the efficacy of doing it
10 here and whether it's a little disjointed and what
11 makes the most sense, because if it's just you giving
12 money and then someone else is working allocating it,
13 I'm not sure your role is as critical, or maybe it
is, or if it is, maybe you should be playing a more
comprehensive role.

14 SAMUEL LEVINE: Well, I mean, I, I guess what
15 I'll say, Chair, is I just want to repeat something
16 Carlos said. Um, it is a ministerial role, you know,
17 it's up to the Council at the end of the day, I
18 believe, how, how the program is structured. Um, but
19 where, where it does affect us is when we get a peg
20 target. Um, my understanding is that money is
21 included in the denominator and that, as with the
DOHMH lines, is we, we cannot touch.

2 So when, when we, let's just hypothetically, if
3 we got a 1% peg target in terms of the actual impact
4 on consumer and worker protection, it's meaningfully
5 greater than 1% because a significant portion of our
6 budget, both OTPs and PS are lines and dollars we
7 don't control.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I appreciate that. That- I
9 recognize that. And this financial literacy program
10 you have for youth, and I'm wondering, you know, I
11 mean, I mean, you're in high schools, I assume?

12 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yes, let me just jump to my
13 information on our financial literacy for youth
14 program. Um, so we currently have 15 financial
15 educators assigned in high schools and districts
16 throughout the city. I understand we are aiming to
17 reach- yes, we're aiming to- we're partnering with
18 New York Public Schools to ensure that every student
19 has access to this kind of education by 2030. Um, so
20 we are- we, we do have a plan to expand the program
21 over the next 4 years.

22 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So 15 educators, 450 high
23 schools?

2 CARLOS ORTIZ: Well, the way the program is
3 situated, it's one educator per district and the- the
4 educators available for that district.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So no matter if the
6 district is a small district or a large district,
7 just one per district?

8 CARLOS ORTIZ: That's the, that's the aim,
9 essentially.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I appreciate that. Council
11 Member Adebol.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ADEBOL: Yeah, I'm, I'm going back
13 to, uh, vacancies again and filling of, uh,
14 positions. Um, so has the- your high- your rate of,
15 of vacancies due- just due to the, to the 2-for-1
16 rule or hiring freezes? Um, have you had any other
17 challenges in filling positions? And are there
18 particular roles or positions that are harder to
19 fill? And what strategies do you have to- to try to
20 fill those?

21 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think, um, you know, I think
the- I remember being here a few years ago and our
vacancy rate was around 5%. I think that was a kind
of a natural attrition rate that we had at work.
We're at that right now, essentially, if we're not

2 including the DHMH lines. You know, over the course
3 of the Adams Administration, we underwent hiring
4 freezes, we underwent two-for-ones. Those impact the
5 ability to fill vacancies. Um, as my colleague, uh,
6 Michael Tiger mentioned, there- there are certain
7 vacancies that are- they're revenue-generating,
8 they're very easy to hire. Some are subject to
9 two-for-one, some are subject to civil service
10 titles. Those have all different flavors of
11 difficulties in terms of hiring, some easier, some
12 not.

11 SAMUEL LEVINE: Um, and I, I would just add to
12 that, as a- as a lawyer myself who's been in
13 government enforcement a long time, we pay less than
14 other similar situated agencies. New York AG, for
15 example, which their lawyers are not getting rich,
16 but they're, they're getting richer than ours. Um, I
17 think that's true on the worker protection side as
18 well. That's obviously a challenge across city
19 government, but it, it is a significant challenge for
20 us both in recruitment and retention.

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: I think ultimately when we talk
20 about our, our low vac- lower vacancy rate, um, I
21 think, and, and also the challenges of, of, of, you

2 know, what, what, what people make, I think it comes
3 back to the, the work that we do and the fact that
4 the folks in our agency, they care about this work
5 deeply. And that's how you get an agency that's our
6 size performing and delivering results of that
7 magnitude.

8 Um, and we've always said that with more
9 resources, we can do more work and I think we all
10 believe this work is critical.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I want to turn your
13 attention to the solar, uh, Radiant Solar lawsuit.
14 Like, how many lawyers or staff on that case?

15 SAMUEL LEVINE: That's a Mike Tiger question. I
16 mean, we have, uh, 2 staff counsel.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And how many case- cases do
18 those 2 staff counsel work on besides the Solar
19 Radiant case?

20 MICHAEL TIGER: Oh, I mean, I don't have the
21 inventory committed to memory, but I mean, they
probably both have, uh, between 5 to 10 other
investigations of varying size. Yeah, I can't, I
can't commit that those specific attorneys are
working on that, but that's, I think, a lot of- yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And how many people do you
3 think this Solar Radiant case will impact, um, or how
4 many people do you think the potential fraud
5 impacted?

6 SAMUEL LEVINE: That's at least 370 consumers,
7 but those are just the ones I believe-

8 MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, I mean, those are ones we
9 were able to identify through people who came to our
10 consumer services unit, or we, you know, revealed
11 through documents that we obtained through, uh, the,
12 uh, pre-filing discovery process. But we've gotten
13 additional complaints that have come into the agency
14 since we filed the case. Um, that case is just at
15 its beginning stages as far as the actual litigation,
16 uh, which is right now pending for the Office of
17 Administrative Trials and Hearings. And I think um,
18 we'll definitely be able to report more as that
19 litigation continues.

20 SAMUEL LEVINE: And just to possibly forecast
21 where you may be going, I, I, excuse me if I'm wrong,
22 you know, this lawsuit which has 2 attorneys on it,
23 we are aiming to recover \$1.7 million in civil
24 penalties for New York City. I guarantee you their
25 pay combined is a lot less than \$1.7 million, and \$18

2 million in restitution for defrauded New Yorkers.

3 This is a very uh, return on investment.

4 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, So do you think there
5 are more examples of the Solar Radiant that are out
6 there that you have limited resources to?

7 MICHAEL TIGER: Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead,
8 Commissioner.

9 SAMUEL LEVINE: 100%, yes.

10 MICHAEL TIGER: Yeah, no doubt. I mean, this is
11 something that we're hearing from advocates on the
12 ground that we've heard from other regulators about,
13 especially solar fraud right now in the home
14 improvement contract. There's a lot of people that
15 are excited about engaging with green energy because
16 they understand what's going on all around us, but
17 that allows an opportunity for predation to occur.
18 And so it's really pernicious right now, people
19 offering very enticing-seeming opportunities for,
20 like, on the cheap, we will make you go green, and
21 then they are very bitterly disappointed.

22 So this is something that, yes, Chair, we would
23 love to do more work on if we had the resources.

24 SAMUEL LEVINE: And, and just in general, you
25 know, it's not like we're bringing cases against

2 every bad actor in New York City. We sued Extra
3 Space, we started getting a flood of complaints,
4 including at the Rent-A-Ripoff hearings, about other
5 providers in New York City. We're very strategic in
6 our enforcement. The reason we— you know, one reason
7 we brought the cases we brought is we want to and
8 need to send a signal to other players in the
9 marketplace but the reality is that, you know, we're
10 scratching the surface when it comes to how many New
11 Yorkers are being defrauded every day.

12 We're trying to sue big companies, get money back
13 to people as quickly as we can, um, but that does
14 require resources.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, and I want to flag
16 that you— I think you've seen an increase in worker
17 protection complaints as well, right? From 20— so
18 substantial increase, right?

19 SAMUEL LEVINE: Just in calendar '26, I believe
20 the numbers are going up quickly. Is that right,
21 Liz?

ELIZABETH WAGONER: Yes, that's right.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So what kind of increase
are you, are you identifying? What kind of increase
in, in cases?

2 ELIZABETH WAGONER: We're really seeing increases
3 across all of the, um, complaint categories. Um,
4 our, our 3 biggest complaint categories are protected
5 time off, uh, Fair Work Week, and delivery. Um, all
6 of those are up.

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Am I wrong to assume that
8 the - the more these cases go up, the more the
9 backlog of people having to wait to actually speak to
10 someone to manage the case will continue to go up?

11 ELIZABETH WAGONER: That's exactly right.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And so I, I don't wanna
13 harp on this issue, but it seems like a resource
14 problem, which is then really negatively impacting a
15 consumer and a worker problem.

16 ELIZABETH WAGONER: I think that's correct.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah. Uh, so I really do
18 appreciate all the work you're doing. Um, uh, so,
19 yeah, restitution, worker restitution. Do you see,
20 based on from last year, there's the- from '25 to
21 '26, do you see an increase in potential restitution
cases as well for workers?

ELIZABETH WAGONER: Um, yes. Um, 2025 was our
biggest year for worker protection restitution. Um,
a total of \$44.4 million, um, which went to, um, 24-

2 over 24,000 people. Um, you know, we are on track,
3 uh, currently to match that number. Um, we think we
4 could far exceed that number, um, with more resources
for enforcement.

5 CARLOS ORTIZ: And let's not forget either that
6 last year had, um, last calendar year had the largest
7 worker protection largest eviction settlement in the
city's history with Starbucks.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Right. Thank you for--
9 yeah, it's-- and we're gonna exceed that in additional
10 resources that will just continue to help workers. I
11 know we still need to spend a long time up here, so I
12 don't wanna go through every section. Um, uh, er,
13 hmm, mhm, like, you know, I mean, I worry here that
14 there seems to be a gap in between, um, inspections
and justice for people in the world, right?

15 So I'm wondering how we manage that gap because
16 people are seeking-- coming to us, coming to you,
17 seeking justice because they've been wronged and
18 hearing like they're waiting a year, year and a half,
19 maybe getting restitution, maybe not. Like, how do
20 we as a city kind of grapple with that in this moment
21 where we're, we're talking about affordability and

2 the crisis of affordability and these are the people
3 who are struggling the most?

4 SAMUEL LEVINE: Yeah, I mean, I think you need to
5 take a multi-pronged approach. Um, it's- in the
6 first instance, it's really critical that both
7 workers and consumers understand their rights and
8 obligations respectively, er, not respectively, the
9 other way around, that employers understand their
10 obligations, workers understand their rights.

11 That's one of the reasons, for example, when
12 protected time off, uh, came into force earlier this
13 year, when, uh, the new, some of the new tipping
14 protection laws came into force earlier this year, we
15 did a major outreach campaign to, we sent I think to
16 how many? How many employers did we send notices to?

17 ELIZABETH WAGONER: Over 55,000.

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: So we sent notices to more than
19 55,000. They're- look, most employers, I think, want
20 to follow the law. They need to make sure they know
21 what the law is. We also created an audit tool to
help employers identify whether they're complying
with the protected time off law sufficiently. So in
the first instance, the best thing we could do is
make sure that the law is followed. But at the end

2 of the day, there are always gonna be companies that
3 don't follow the law, and that does require sustained
4 enforcement, and sustained enforcement does require
5 sustained resources. This is not something an AI
6 chatbot can do. This is not something, you know, we
7 need lawyers who can go into court and take on big
8 companies, rep- with big law firms, with offices
9 downtown. Uh, we, we need, we need good people on the
10 other side of the table to bring those cases.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, 100% agree with you.
12 And I also would flag, and I think for me, I worry
13 about some of this underreporting is because, um,
14 people are scared of government. And in this moment
15 of a federal government which is creating fear across
16 our entire country, people become more scared of
17 government, and they really rely on community-based
18 organizations in their neighborhood who are working
19 with them, understand the issues and, and have been,
20 and been on the ground. And I think our obligation
21 to those organizations who are really going to help
all of us do our job better and providing sufficient
resources to them as well.

So-So I, I think- I hope as we move forward in
this budget process, um, the Administration will hear

2 our concern for those organizations and figure out
3 how we can get them the additional resources that
4 they need as well, in addition to the resources you
5 need to make sure we can do this well. Because, you
6 know, 8.5 million New Yorkers are relying on us all
7 to be there for them, whether the consumers, which
8 are all of us, and the workers who are low-wage
9 workers.

10 SAMUEL LEVINE: I, I, I could not agree more. I
11 mean, just to, uh, underscore the point further, a
12 decade ago, maybe a little more than a decade ago,
13 you know, part of the business model of so-called gig
14 work is that it's harder for workers to organize.
15 It's harder for workers to build power. It's harder
16 for workers to fight back against exploitation. They
17 know they're not union. They, the companies assert
18 they're not employees, et cetera. It's a whole
19 business model designed, I think, in many ways to
20 keep workers isolated.

21 And what the groups here described and the
Workers Justice Project do, is they bring people
together to build worker power. I started my work
many years ago in consumer protection helping with
tenant organizers, uh, fighting the foreclosure

2 crisis. We see a very similar dynamic here with
3 workers. We could not do the work we do. We
4 wouldn't even be aware of the problems that are
5 happening in these markets if it weren't for
6 organizations that actually stand up for
7 deliveriestas, stand up for rideshare drivers, stand
8 up for taxi drivers.

9 These organizations are critical to our work.
10 They're critical to the financial well-being of the-
11 of the people they serve, and they're critical to
12 putting a check on a model that was set up for
13 exploitation.

14 CARLOS ORTIZ: I, I wanna-

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: This is a perfect way to
16 end, Carlos. Come on.

17 CARLOS ORTIZ: I, I do wanna, I do wanna-

18 SAMUEL LEVINE: Nevertheless, he persists.

19 CARLOS ORTIZ: I, I, I echo what, what the
20 Commissioner said. Uh, but I, but I think, um, you
21 know, one aspect that I wanna make sure is, is out
there about these complaints, um, why complaints are
going up too and why people feel trust coming to us.
Because there's hypersensitivity to immigration
status and, and collecting demographic data, uh, and,

2 and building partnerships, the organizations the
3 Commissioner just mentioned.

4 But it's also because that we're delivering to
5 people concrete results. People getting results,
6 that's why they have trust now to come to us as well.
7 That's only reinforced by our advocate allies who are
8 here today. I'm looking forward to their testimony
9 too.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you all.
11 I know you've been here a long time. I want to thank
12 you all for your time and your testimony. I'm sure
13 we'll have some follow-up to, to, to keep going and I
14 want to thank my colleagues.

15 And let's— we have some panels, so let's let
16 people know where their panels are. I think— oh
17 yeah, uh, just for the panels, this is the first
18 panel.

19 PANEL: Thank you, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: So just so people know who
21 are waiting, wanna testify. You guys can go. You
22 good? You good? You just finished.

23 PANEL: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I just wanna— so the panels
25 that we have, so the— we have 6 panels so far. Um,

2 so, and hopefully we'll get through them as quickly
3 as we can. Obviously we'll have questions for them,
4 but I wanna flag this for people who know. Um, yeah,
5 Winston Berkman-Breen, Lilia Tosen, Roberto Mack and
6 Paul Xiong on the first panel.

7 Second panel is Tito Singh, uh, Magdalena
8 Barbosa, Elizabeth Jonas Jordan, and Rosanna
9 Rodriguez.

10 Third panel is Aaron Ianson, Ted Moore, Matthew
11 Schedler, and Miriam Clark. I just want to let
12 people know when you hear your name.

13 Fourth panel, Muhammad Attia, uh, Lilia, uh,
14 Kulipe, and Gustavo Achi, and fifth is Bobby Desai,
15 Carmen Jackson, and those are the ones we have.
16 Those are the first 5 panels. I wanna make people
17 know that, you know, you may be taking a little
18 longer, and I apologize that this is, uh, taking so
19 long.

20 Um, so now we're in the open hearing for, for
21 public testimony. Um, I just wanna make sure that,
uh, people- the witnesses are here to testify. Thank
you and just so you know, there's no video or
photography at the witness table, and, uhm you can't

2 present audio or video recordings at the, at this
3 hearing.

4 Um, and if you haven't signed up to testify,
5 please do. You can sign up in the back. Um, you can
6 submit written testimony and give it to the
7 Sergeant-at-Arms. You can also submit, if you don't
8 have submitted written testimony, you can do it
9 within 72 hours at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Um,
10 and we'll call our first panel. So thank you all for
11 being up here so quickly. Winston, Lilia, uh,
12 Rebecca, and Paul, and you guys can decide which
13 order you wanna go.

14 WINSTON BERKMAN-BREEN: Can you all hear me?

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, we hear you.

16 WINSTON BERKMAN-BREEN: All right, well, thank
17 you so much, uh, Chair Epstein, Members of the
18 Council and the Committee, um, for the chance to
19 testify and for the really important conversation we
20 just heard. My name is Winston Berkman-Breen. I'm
21 the legal director of Protect Borrowers, formerly
known as the Student Borrower Protection Center.
We're a policy nonprofit focused on household credit
and debt. I recently testified before this Committee
on the need for a strong consumer protection law and

2 a DCWP in light of the federal government's complete
3 abdication of its consumer and worker protection
4 mandates.

5 Uh, a few highlights from that testimony for
6 today: complaints from New York City to the federal
7 CFPB rose 63% from 2024 to '25 for a total of 184,000
8 complaints. Now, most of the state, however, saw a
9 rise of over 100% for that same time. Now, it can't
10 prove causation, but I would suggest that the reason,
11 uh, New York City saw a relatively lower spike is
12 because DCWP, uh, fills that gap more so than the
13 rest of our, uh, great state.

14 Um, I've included more data in my written
15 testimony that I'll submit for today, but I hope we
16 can stipulate for the purpose of this Committee and
17 hearing that DCWP's work is critical for all New York
18 City residents and workers.

19 I want to focus today on how successful it is
20 also, in addition to everything you've already heard.
21 So it's one of the only agencies in the city that
brings in significant revenue in the forms of
penalties and also puts real money back in New
Yorkers' pockets in the form of restitution. We've
heard testimony about the millions of dollars

2 returned to workers and consumers, so I won't— you
3 know, I'll spare you that litany, but it really is
4 impressive, especially relative to the other
5 jurisdictions that my organization works with. Uh,
6 DCWT— uh, DCWP protects us from abusive employers and
7 also from predatory companies that price gouge or
8 cheat us during crises like the current affordability
9 crisis.

10 For this reason, New Yorkers literally cannot
11 afford to underinvest in DCWP. Unfortunately, the
12 preliminary budget does just that. It's clear from
13 today's testimonies that the agency does not have the
14 staff needed to fulfill its existing mandates, let
15 alone to continue filling the void from the federal
16 government.

17 This year's proposed budget would ultimately
18 reflect an 8% funding cut, as the Chair mentioned in
19 his opening remarks. This, this really can't stand.
20 Making sure DCWP is fully funded and staffed is a
21 sound investment. For this reason, I urge the
Committee and Council to double the agency's current
budget.

Um, I would just note too, and I don't know how
this works in the budget process versus bargaining or

2 other things, but I think it's really important that
3 the Commissioner noted that the salaries are
4 relatively lower. Uh, I think for attorneys, and I'm
5 an attorney, it's - it's really hard to try to get
6 high-quality attorneys to come work for New York and
7 to live in New York and to pay them \$95,000 when
8 they're a decade out of law school or something like
9 that.

10 So, um, I would just appreciate that, that point
11 was made. So thank you for the chance to testify.
12 I'd be happy to answer any questions.

13 LILIA TOSEN: Thank you. Thank you for the
14 opportunity to testify. My name is Lilia Tosen. I'm
15 the President and CEO of Access Justice Brooklyn.
16 I'm here today to talk about a slightly different
17 issue, which is the access to justice gap that
18 affects consumer defendants, in which CTWP doesn't
19 have the resources to adequately address. AJB serves
20 low-income Brooklyn consumers borough-wide, but most
21 reside in neighborhoods in Central and East Brooklyn.
One way that we assist those clients is in the
Consumer Legal Advice and Resource Office, which we
call CLARO.

2 As many as 70 to 80 people seek assistance at
3 Brooklyn CLARO on any given day, which is a number
4 that's increased substantially since the pandemic.
5 Compared to 2019, in 2025, we have handled an
6 increase of nearly 40% in matters for consumer
7 defendants, rely on the same level of staff. The
8 increased demand far exceeds the capacity of the
9 Claro program. To ensure that they are seen,
10 consumers start arriving at the Kings County Civil
11 Court at 9 a.m., and we don't open our doors until 2
12 p.m..

13 As a result, the individuals who are forced to
14 wait are waiting in courthouse hallways until the
15 doors open. Many later comers will be waiting in
16 vain because we will not have space to see them. The
17 last time I visited Claro, we put a sign-up sheet for
18 50 people out first and 67 people signed up, and we
19 had to tell the people who signed up at 51 to 67 that
20 there was no way that we could see them.

21 We really invite the Committee to witness this at
Claro, to come any Thursday and to see not only, you
know, our clients, but also the constituents who are
there, and to hear about their challenges. Some of
these cases would be dismissed easily with even a bit

2 of advice and counsel. These include attempts to
3 collect on income that is exempt, such as Social
4 Security payments, default judgments that resulted
5 from improper service, and cases that are filed after
6 the statute of limitations has expired. Without
7 Claro, pro se consumers are largely left unaware of
8 their defenses and rights.

9 For example, while we applaud DC- uh, DCWP's new
10 shield rule against predatory debt collection, we
11 know that most consumers will never be able to know
12 about their rights or how to enforce them without
13 being seen by a legal services nonprofit like us.
14 The same is true for survivors of DV or IPV who have
15 coerced debt, which now has stronger protections
16 under state law.

17 To improve our capacity to address these
18 challenges, we're requesting the Committee's support
19 for our Speaker's Initiative request in the Fiscal
20 Year 2027 budget. And of course, we also support the
21 increase in the budget to DCWP.

REBECKA COOK-MACK: Good afternoon. My name is
Rebeka Cook-Mack. I'm a staff attorney in the
Employment Law Project at the Legal Aid Society.

2 Thank you for this morning, afternoon's hearing and
3 for the opportunity to testify.

4 The Mayor's Preliminary Budget cuts the DCWP
5 funding, and we call on the Mayor to reverse course
6 and double the DCWP budget to \$130 million as
7 promised during his campaign in the FY27 calendar
8 year.

9 The Mayor's vision for economic justice cannot be
10 achieved without fully funding the agencies
11 responsible for enforcing protections for everyday
12 New Yorkers. The Preliminary Budget cuts funding to
13 the portfolio that falls under the purview of the
14 newly established Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice
15 by over \$250 million. This is the same amount it
16 proposes increasing the NYPD budget by.

17 So we join Council in pressing for a budget that
18 reflects the critical enforcement role DCWP plays in
19 building an affordable and just New York City for
20 all.

21 DCWP is a partner with the Employment Law
Project. Employment Law Unit. We regularly refer
clients to them. For example, a while back, I
connected a fast food worker with DCWP. She called
Legal Aid's hotline seeking help when her hours were

2 cut and last-minute changes to her work schedule were
3 threatening her family's stability. She was
4 struggling to retain her second job, was worried how
5 she would continue to pay her bills, and was looking
6 for help. I helped her submit a complaint to DCWP,
7 which was investigated, and in the end, she was one
8 of the 15,000 New Yorkers included in the recent
9 \$38.9 million Starbucks settlement that will ensure
10 the company complies with our laws going forward.
11 DCWP made a demonstrative difference to her life.
12 DCWP is also a partner to the Economic Equities
13 Project at Legal Aid.

14 Solar panel scams, which we heard about today,
15 are endemic in parts of Queens and the Bronx. But
16 because of arbitration clauses in those contracts, it
17 can be very, very difficult to resolve them through
18 private litigation but DCWP is not confined by
19 arbitration clauses. And recognizing that synergy,
20 the Consumer Law and Bankruptcy Project was able to
21 work with DCWP to share the patterns we were seeing
and begin referring homeowners to the agency. And as
we heard, in January of this year, it brought an
action against Radiant Solar, one of New York City's
largest solar contractors.

2 DCWP is an important partner for everyday New
3 Yorkers. It enforces city laws, and in the absence
4 of federal enforcement due to the dismantlement of
5 the CFPB, it is more essential to the city's
6 consumers than ever, so we need to increase its
7 budget now.

8 DCWP's portfolio has expanded over the past year,
9 and it will continue to grow. It needs additional
10 staff to meet the mandates of our groundbreaking,
11 first-in-the-nation laws regarding the deactivation
12 of app-based delivery workers and rideshare drivers.
13 These laws require robust enforcement and regulation,
14 and as a blueprint for regulating gig economy
15 platforms nationwide, this legislation's success or
16 failure will have national implications.

17 We have a responsibility to workers here in the
18 city and around the country to vigorously enforce
19 these laws, so we join Council in calling on the
20 Mayor to fund DCWP in FY27 at a rate commensurate
21 with its import, and to add those 200+ lines, New
York City needs to do the deactivation work properly.
Thank you.

PAUL SONN: Uh, thank you, Chair and Members of
the Committee. Um, my— I'm Paul Sonn with NELP, the

2 National Employment Law Project. We're a national
3 workers' rights policy org headquartered here in New
4 York. We work frequently with the Council and with
5 DCWP.

6 Um, we recognize this is a tough budget year.
7 Most agencies are going to need to trim their budgets
8 and not expand them. But despite that overall
9 context, we believe there's a really strong case to
10 treat DCWP differently. We believe it's one of the
11 key places, um, in the city budget where strategic
12 investments make sense even in this environment.
13 You've heard many of the reasons that during the
14 excellent, uh, er, hearing that you, you held before
15 the panel now.

16 First, DCWP is one of the most crucial frontline
17 agencies delivering on the Mayor and the Speaker's
18 affordability agenda. You know, each year it recoups
19 many millions of dollars of unpaid wages and
20 restitution that goes right into, uh, families'
21 pockets, that's spent in local economies and
neighborhood businesses, boosting them as well. Um,
these are, you know, not abstract benefits, but
really vital, you know, lifelines for, for New
Yorkers.

2 Second, um, the Mayor and the Council have
3 rightly been proud about our nation-leading new laws
4 we passed just in the last, uh, in 2025 and early
5 this year. Um, there's been a whole slew of them
6 that are really cutting-edge protections. But as
7 you've also heard, the fiscal notes in those laws
8 have indicated that the agency needs more than 300
9 new staff at more than \$19 million just to cover
10 those new obligations, let alone the backlog of all
11 their other work.

12 Um, third, um, you know, DCWP, as you've heard,
13 is one of the rare agencies that actually— where
14 investment leverages a lot of additional money, both,
15 um, recovering money from New Yorkers that goes into
16 the economy and fees and costs for the city budget.
17 So it is a place, you know, there's a case for
18 treating it differently than other agencies for those
19 crucial reasons.

20 Fourth, it's, uh, enforcement of the laws is also
21 crucial for the uh, markets and the kind of business
environment in the city. Unless our laws are
enforced, you know, responsible companies that play
by the rules will be undercut.

2 And then finally, um, you know, DCWP is really a
3 tiny agency. You know, it's 1% the size of the NYPD.
4 The additional \$65 million to double its budget is
5 1/20th of 1% of the whole city budget. Truly a
6 rounding error. You know, there are a lot of places
7 where that- those additional revenue could be found,
8 even simply just trimming the, the proposed growth of
9 the NYPD but one way or the other, it's essential to
10 find it.

11 Um, we know you agree with us. Uh, your
12 excellent op-ed in the Daily News yesterday really
13 made the case, uh, Chair Epstein. So we hope, um,
14 the Speaker and the Mayor will find a way to make
15 that happen. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I really wanna thank you
17 all for all your work. Um, er, I don't know if you
18 knew this, but I helped start Claro over 20 years
19 ago. So I know how vital that is and how important
20 it is for consumers across the city, so thank you all
21 for your work, and I really appreciate it.

PANEL: Thanks.

19 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: We'll go to our next panel.
20 Um, Tito Singha, Magdalena Barbosa, and Elizabeth
21 Jordan. You wanna leave the bag? We can- is there

2 lunch in there or something, man? I don't know who
3 wants to go first. You guys wanna negotiate?

4 TITO SINHA: I'll go first. Uh, good afternoon,
5 uh, Chair Epstein and—

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: That's so funny.

7 TITO SINHA: And, and, and the Council Committee.
8 Uh, my name is Tito Sinha. I am the Director of
9 Workers' Rights for Take Root Justice. We thank the,
10 uh, Committee for the opportunity to submit this
11 testimony. Uh, we are here as members of the
12 Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative,
13 CILEC, which is a consortium of several New York City
14 legal service providers and CBOs, which, uh, Chair,
15 you, you founded or helped create, which we
16 appreciate.

17 We appreciated the calls earlier on to support
18 CBOs and workers' rights advocates. Along those
19 lines, uh, we're here to say that low-wage worker
20 support, uh, is the only dedicated city funding that
21 ensures that the city's low-wage and immigrant
workers have redress from workplace justices. In the
last few years, this funding has supported our work
in representing immigrant workers with claims of sick
leave violations, sick leave retaliation, and wage

2 theft before DCWP. We request that the Council renew
3 and increase low-wage worker support funding from \$2
4 million in FY '26 to \$3 million in FY '27. Low-wage
5 worker support funding has remained the same for
6 nearly 10 years, and an increase is needed to cover
7 increasing costs and the escalating demand for
8 services supporting immigrant workers.

9 In the last year, CILEC LSPs recovered
10 approximately \$6.3 million in unpaid wages and
11 damages. Since January 2020, Take Root has obtained
12 approximately \$4.5 million in settlements and
13 recoveries for workers. CILEC LSPs in the last year
14 have represented nearly 1,000 workers and conducted
15 over 50 Know Your Rights trainings.

16 Low-wage worker support funding makes this work
17 possible. We commend DCWP's robust enforcement of
18 the protected time off law um, and we commend DCWP's
19 investigators and counsel for working collaboratively
20 with us, um, to bring claims before the agency
21 because we believe our advocacy helps enforce the law
as well and helps improve the agency's, uh,
enforcement of those laws.

Um, so we support robust funding for DCWP.
However, this crucial funding has lagged behind other

2 priorities as well as the low-wage worker support
3 requiring last-minute saves each year to renew this
4 funding. And as, you know, the, the, the Committee
5 knows, cases are not resolved in one year. We need
6 funding that is multi-year.

7 So we respectfully request that this Committee,
8 uh, the Council demonstrate its ongoing commitment to
9 cities' low-wage and immigrant workers by renewing
10 and expanding low-wage worker support, uh, for
11 employment-related legal services from \$2 million in
12 Fiscal Year '26 to \$3 billion in Fiscal Year '27.
13 Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you for
15 giving me credit for doing it too. It was a couple
16 years ago.

17 MAGDALENA BARBOSA: Good afternoon, Chair
18 Epstein. Um, my name is Magdalena Barbosa. I'm the
19 Director of Legal Services at Catholic Migration
20 Services. I also really appreciate the testimony to
21 talk about the Low Wage Worker Support Initiative.
22 Again, as my colleague Tito mentioned, it is the only
23 dedicated city funding for employment legal services.
24 Um, when low-income workers experience wage theft,
25 when they experience workplace discrimination, denial

2 of paid sick leave, they often turn to trusted legal
3 services organizations, like CMS, like Take Root
4 Justice, like Make the Road New York, like Legal Aid
5 Society for free legal assistance.

6 Many, um, low-wage workers cannot afford or
7 access legal representation from private attorneys.
8 And while agencies like the Department of Consumer
9 and Worker Protection enforce many laws, um, they do
10 not have jurisdiction to address all types of
11 workplace violations that many workers in this city
12 experience.

13 I would like to share just two stories of, um,
14 er, that illustrate the working conditions that many
15 low-wage workers face and how CMS was able to assist
16 these workers because of the funding from the Low
17 Wage Worker support initiative.

18 Recently, we resolved a case referred by the
19 Carroll Gardens Association. It's a domestic worker
20 advocacy org involving a nanny who worked over 50
21 hours a week without overtime pay. After
22 experiencing a medical emergency on the job, she was
23 terminated by her employer and was not paid for her
24 last 2 weeks of work.

2 Our attorneys acted quickly, advocating on her
3 behalf, and successfully negotiated a \$25,000
4 settlement within 2 months. With the collaboration
5 of another worker center, Catholic Migration filed a
6 federal lawsuit on behalf of a group of delivery and
7 kitchen workers employed at a restaurant on the Upper
8 West Side. The workers earned as little as \$3 an
9 hour and worked over 60 hours a week without overtime
10 pay. This case was recently resolved, um, for
11 \$50,000.

12 Um, it cannot go unnoticed that the city's
13 immigrant workers are now in an environment where
14 employers feel emboldened by federal immigration
15 policies to retaliate against complaining workers,
16 um, by reporting them to DHS or at least threatening
17 to do so to silence their voices.

18 These workers have the courage to stand up for
19 their rights, and they deserve to have legal counsel
20 to assist them in, in vindicating their workplace
21 rights and to protect them from illegal retaliation.

While we appreciate the Council's continued
commitment, um, for this critical initiative, we are
requesting increased funding for this initiative at
\$3 million in Fiscal Year '27. CMS and our partners

2 have received the same award for this work for nearly
3 a decade. During that time, the cost of carrying out
4 this work, including personnel and operating
5 expenses, have risen significantly. An increase in
6 funding will help ensure that our organizations
7 continue delivering this vital work and have the
8 resources we need to meet the growing costs.

9 Finally, I'm just gonna say that I join, um, my
10 colleagues in, in the disappointment in the Mayor's
11 Preliminary Budget that does not provide adequate
12 funding for not just, um, the Department of Consumer
13 Worker Protection, but also, um, the City Commission
14 on Human Rights.

15 Um, we need, um, these agencies to be adequately
16 funded in order for, um, the city to be able to
17 advance many of its priorities. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you.

19 ELIZABETH JORDAN: Good afternoon. Hmm. And, um,
20 thank you, Chair Epstein and, and Committee Members.
21 My name is Elizabeth Jordan. I'm Co-Legal Director
at Make the Road New York.

Make the Road is the largest grassroots immigrant
organization in the state, serving 30,000 immigrant
and working-class New Yorkers each year. With

2 community centers in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten
3 Island, we provide legal as well as health access and
4 adult literacy and educational services. The
5 low-wage and immigrant workers we serve across the
6 city face unique legal and workplace challenges
7 exacerbated by the unprecedented attacks we are
8 seeing on immigrants.

9 The Council's support for legal services for
10 low-wage and immigrant workers is more critical than
11 ever in the face of horrifying anti-immigrant attacks
12 and an uptick in immigration-related retaliation.

13 Our legal team represents hundreds of workers
14 each year to recover stolen wages, combat unlawful
15 discrimination, and enforce their rights to paid sick
16 leave and other basic protections. We outreach to
17 thousands of workers across the city and educate them
18 about their rights, ensuring that New York's low-wage
19 workers have access to free legal services advances
20 the affordability agenda by directly putting money
21 back into the pockets of low-income families,
preventing manageable issues from becoming
catastrophic, and reducing the need for expensive
public safety net services.

2 To share one, but a typical case, Claudia is a
3 grocery worker who came to us in 2023 with paid sick
4 leave claims and wage theft claims against her
5 grocery employer of 10 years and notebooks filled
6 with her notes from years of work.

7 We filed to recover her unpaid sick time and
8 wages with both DCWP and the state DOL. The employer
9 was frequently out of the country and went MIA,
10 claimed to have no funds to pay, and sought to
11 obstruct agency investigations at every turn.

12 Last year, both agencies reached settlement with
13 the employers for nearly \$25,000, and beginning last
14 month, Claudia received her first checks. Continued
15 support from City Council discretionary funding is
16 essential to maintaining and deepening our impact,
17 including the initiatives my colleagues have
18 mentioned— the Low Wage Worker Support Initiative.
19 We also request an enhancement of Make the Roads
20 allocation to \$362,000 in order to meet our increased
21 costs, and an overall increase from \$2 to \$3 million.
Um, under the Legal Services for Working Poor
initiative, we also asked the Council to renew
\$165,900 in funding for Make the Roads free legal

2 services, which includes, um, labor and employment as
3 well.

4 And finally, we request an enhancement of the
5 Speaker's Initiative funding to \$300,000 for our
6 wraparound services, which include workplace justice,
7 immigration, and housing legal services. The strong
8 enforcement of workers' rights protections by the
9 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection has been
10 essential to our work over the years to protect
11 immigrant workers in New York City.

12 The Preliminary Budget, if it adopted, would
13 reduce DCWP's funding and leave the agency woefully
14 under-resourced and unable to enforce the critical
15 protections for working New Yorkers that it is
16 charged with enforcing. The city should double
17 DCWP's budget, but at the very least must allocate an
18 additional \$14 million to DCWP for, uh, Fiscal Year
19 '27 and a baseline of at least \$39 million for out
20 years to ensure their ability to enforce key worker
21 consumer protections, um, that we heard about earlier
today.

Without meaningful and adequately resourced
enforcement, these protections are not real for
immigrant workers in New York.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much. Um,
3 can I shoot you a quick question? As on the, on the
4 both the Legal Services for the Working Poor and the,
5 the CILEC money, have you, have you asked the
6 Administration to baseline that funding?

7 ELIZABETH JORDAN: I don't, I don't think we've
8 had the, no, I don't think we've had the opportunity.
9 It's certainly something that our agency and others
10 would be very interested in.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, I would encourage you
12 to, and then, you know, please do reach out if I
13 could be helpful in that. Thank you.

14 ELIZABETH JORDAN: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you all.

16 PANEL: Thank you. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, and I started a legal
18 service with the Working Poor too, so. So Mohamed,
19 uh, Lydia, and Gustavo are next. And then after that
20 we have Aaron, Matthew, Miriam, and, and Ted Moore.
21 Okay, whoever's ready to go.

MOHAMED ATTIA: All right, I'll take a minute.
Um, good afternoon, uh, Chair Epstein and Members of
the Committee. I'm Mohamed Attia, I'm the
Co-Director of the Street Vendor Project at the Urban

2 Justice Center. Thank you for the opportunity to
3 testify today.

4 So glad that we don't have the timer so I can get
5 my 10 minutes. No, it's not gonna work. Okay, the
6 Street Vendor Project is-

7 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I'm timing you right here
8 now, so-

9 MOHAMED ATTIA: All right, sir, thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: There's 300 colleagues
11 behind you, I'm timing you.

12 MOHAMED ATTIA: All right, all right. Uh, the
13 Street Vendor Project is a membership-based
14 organization with more than 3,300 members. We strive
15 to support street vendors across the 5 boroughs, uh,
16 by providing direct services such as small business
17 consultations, legal representation, and access to a
18 wide variety of resources.

19 We also organize to build power to the vendor
20 community across the city and ensure that the- their
21 voices are heard and, uh, they have a seat at the
table at the end of the day.

Vast majority of our members are immigrants who
hail from across the globe. Given the diversity of
our membership, our services are offered in 7

2 different languages: Arabic, Bangla, English, French,
3 Mandarin, Spanish, and Wolof, uh, thanks to the
4 diversity of our small team.

5 We respectfully request that the Council
6 considers our funding applications for this Fiscal
7 Year since SVP is almost the only entity providing
8 education, outreach, and small business services to
9 the street vendor community in New York City. Street
10 vendors are non-traditional workers running the
11 smallest businesses in our city, and they need the
12 city's support to thrive.

13 Earlier this year, the City Council passed a
14 historic landmark package of legislations including
15 Local Law 54, for the year 2026 that will create a
16 total of 21,500 new licenses for street vendors.
17 11,000 of these licenses will go to food vendors as
18 supervisory licenses, a system that is still new to
19 the vendors community that has created a lot of
20 confusion with the existing system that has been in
21 place for decades.

10,500 of these new licenses will be offered to
merchandise vendors as general vendor licenses, a
substantial change to a 47-year-old law that a lot of
vendors don't know about.

2 We respectfully request that the City Council
3 prioritize creating a new initiative of \$5 million to
4 ensure sufficient resources to all non-traditional
5 workers across our city. Street vendors, delivery
6 workers, laundry workers, and many others need
7 support from the city to make sure that they are
8 aware of the new systems, protections, and laws that
9 the city has created. The laws and reforms are as
10 good as they are followed, and we have to do our part
11 to ensure workers are aware of the reforms taking
12 place so they can benefit from them.

13 We also urge the City Council to ensure that
14 there is adequate funding to the Department of
15 Consumer and Worker Protection this coming fiscal
16 year so they have the capacity-

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

18 MOHAMED ATTIA: Thank you. So we have the
19 capacity needed to implement the local law. Looking
20 forward to the next steps with the Council. Thank
21 you so much, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you.

GUSTAVO AJCHE: Okay, good afternoon, uh, Chair
Epstein and Members of the Committee. I, I, my name
is Gustavo. I'm a Co-Founder of Los Deliberistas

2 Unidos and worker organizer with the Worker Justice
3 Project, and thank you for the opportunity to testify
4 today.

5 So I'm here today to speak about 3 important
6 issues that we are calling the, uh, the Council to
7 significantly invest in this DCWP capacity to include
8 and double his budget of \$135 million in adding 400
9 inspectors, investigators, and illegal staff.

10 Second, we are here for, uh, asking for \$5
11 million to fund our workers' rights organizing and
12 education initiative.

13 Three, we, we are urging the City Council to, uh,
14 close loopholes in Local Law 1332, including
15 expanding the definition in the activation and cover,
16 uh, workers who temporarily lock out unlimited hours,
17 uh, are in a strict restriction and offer a job, and
18 punishment by apps who once prioritize their profit
19 and not our safety.

20 Over the past 5 years, the Los Deliveristas
21 Unidos and the Worker Justice Project, we have fight-
fought- fought and won 10 historic, ah, labor, ah,
labor protections for more than 8- 80,000 delivery b-
er, b- base app delivery workers. This includes
landmark, that standard of \$20.44 per hour in the

2 Just Cause protection that, uh, takes effect next
3 year in pay transparency law.

4 We are proud to have partnership with the DC, uh,
5 for, with, uh, City Council to pass this law, but our
6 focus must be making sure these are fully enforced.
7 At the time when the federal government was, uh, cut
8 funds in, on critical, uh, agencies in New York City,
9 Uh, New York City was a step up in passing historic
10 labor protection for workers like deliveryistas.

11 Now we must ensure that the city agency really
12 has the resources to enforce these rights. We are
13 asking for \$39 million for DCWP on the budget, uh, FY
14 '27. So this has the staff to fund this need to
15 protect, to protect workers and make sure the labor
16 rights was a fight for we are truly in force.

17 In addition, we are calling for \$5 million for
18 really launching what's called organizing and
19 education initiative led by the Street Vendors
20 Project, JOM, and Laundry Workers Center, and the
21 Worker Justice Project.

22 This initiative will be—

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired—

2 GUSTAVO AJCHE: Will keep, will keep their rights
3 filled in, will keep workers know their rights and
4 power life, uh, speaking out and organizing.

5 And finally, we ask the City Council to close
6 loopholes in local law 1332. In just cause
7 deactivation law passed by last year. We urge- we
8 urge the City Council to expand definition in
9 deactivation, including workers who have temporary
10 deactivation and reduced schedule to limit work
11 offers.

12 This investing will be changed a lot and help
13 hardworking New Yorkers live and work with dignity.
14 Thanks again.

15 LYDIA: Um, well, thank you so much for the
16 opportunity to testify. I wanted to say first, thank
17 you so much for championing, uh, many of our delivery
18 laws that we have in place right now. I think this
19 amazing Committee has been very supportive, and we're
20 super excited to, um, be able to work together with
21 the agency. And I also wanna say thank you so much
for highlighting the role of worker organizations in
the co-enforcement.

This past year, we have been very- working very
closely with DCWP to build a co-enforcement model

2 that is a true close partnership with worker
3 organizations. Um, and you highlighted something
4 clear. Um, we have a federal government that is
5 terrorizing our- our communities, creating fear for
6 workers coming forward to stand up for their labor
rights.

7 Now more than ever, the role of community
8 organizations like Workers' Justice, the street
9 vendors, is so critical to make sure that workers not
10 only know their rights, feel they can trust our city
11 government in making sure that they can continue to
12 organize. Um, and we strongly support that and agree
13 that DCWP's budget needs to be doubled. Um, and they
14 need double the amount of staff. Um, there is
15 numbers of probably more than \$100 million that
16 really does the agency what it needs but we are also
17 calling for, um, the City Council to fund worker
18 organizations? Because at the end of the day, it is
us who are gonna be on the streets, on the field,
19 building trust, making sure workers have the power
and are accompanied in the organizing process.

20 Um, but also I'm here to advocate. Um, I wanna
21 say, while we are so thankful that we passed a strong
Just Cause Protection for app delivery workers.

2 Unfortunately, the apps managed to leave a huge
3 loophole in 1332, which is the Just Cause Protection.
4 Um, right now the law only protects workers who are
5 permanently deactivating, leaving the door open for
6 app delivery companies like Uber, DoorDash to use
7 temporary deactivation, use limitation of their
8 scheduling and the number of offerings as a main
9 punishment when deliveryistas cannot deliver on a
10 realistic timeframe. We're hoping to pass further
11 legislation to close those loopholes, and also we're
12 asking for the support to make sure that some of our
13 key, key funding priorities are also funded.

14 One of them is \$4.9 million for our Day Labor
15 Workforce Initiative that funds a lot of our, uh,
16 workforce and workers' rights initiative, um,
17 throughout the city.

18 So I'm going to end it there, and I just wanted
19 to say thank you so much for your, uh, for being our
20 champion, for standing with the liberistas, and, uh,
21 we're looking forward to close work— keep working
very closely with City Council this year.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you, thank you all
for all your work, and I appreciate it, and for your

2 continued commitment to workers of New York City.

3 Thank you.

4 The next panel, Aaron, Ted, Matthew, and Miriam.

5 Thank you. How are you doing? You too. That's

6 fine. Whatever order you guys want to go. You wanna
7 go?

8 MATTHEW SCHEDLER: Is this on? Okay. Uh, thank

9 you, Chair Epstein, the Committee on, uh, Consumer

10 and Worker Protection, and the New York City Council

11 at large for their long-standing standing support of

12 the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition.

13 My name is Matthew Schedler. I'm the Supervising

14 Attorney in charge of the Consumer Law Project at

15 CAMBA Legal Services, one of the 5 members of the

16 coalition that includes Housing Conservation

17 Coordinators, Mobilization for Justice, Northern

18 Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and Take Root

19 Justice.

20 The coalition was created with support from the

21 City Council over 20 years ago to address the civil

needs of working poor and other low-income New

Yorkers whose income is slightly higher than the

poorest New Yorkers, rendering them ineligible for

free legal services.

2 The LSWP's services are critical to ensure
3 working New Yorkers maintain financial independence
4 and to help them preserve economic stability in
5 communities across New York.

6 In the Fiscal Year 2026, LSWP— the LSWP
7 initiative was funded, um, in the City Council budget
8 under legal services for low-income and working-class
9 New Yorkers totaling \$9,255,000 with each of the 5
10 coalition members receiving, uh, \$455,000.

11 In Fiscal Year 2027, CAMBA and the other members
12 of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition
13 are requesting \$600,000— a \$600,000 allocation from
14 the City Council, which includes a full restoration
15 of the \$455,000 allocated in 2026.

16 A \$200,000— er, \$600,000 allocation to each of
17 the 5 coalition partners would support critical legal
18 services and allow providers to deepen their impact
19 in the practice areas of immigration, consumer,
20 workers' rights, and benefits law. The impacts of
21 cuts, actions, and policy changes on the federal
level threaten the social safety net and puts working
poor New Yorkers at risk for immigration abuses,
illegal debt collection, the wrongful termination of
benefits, and other threats to their well-being.

2 We call on the City Council to make a critical
3 investment into legal services in Fiscal Year 2027,
4 including the Legal Services for the Working Poor
5 initiative. We continue to see the working poor New
6 Yorkers who can barely make ends meet facing
7 catastrophic consequences as a result from civil
8 legal— from a civil legal problem. Common problems
9 include not being paid for their work or not being
10 paid overtime, identity theft, freezing of a bank
11 account as a result of a collection lawsuit they did
12 not even know about, or being denied public benefits
13 to which they're entitled.

14 The consequences of these problems can lead to
15 other issues as well, including increased risk of
16 eviction or foreclosure. These working poor New
17 Yorkers can end up spiraling, spiraling downward to
18 join the ranks of the poor if they don't have access
19 to lawyers to assist them. Our legal services
20 organizations represent these new— these New Yorkers
21 across all 5 boroughs.

18 One example of the, uh, of our work is the case
19 of Mr. G, a client of mine. After a long search in
20 2022, Mr. G found employment in a job he enjoyed.
21 Unfortunately, this made him ineligible for the

2 public assistance he was receiving, and when his
3 landlord tried to raise his rent, he knew he could no
4 longer afford his apartment. He moved out at the end
5 of the lease, turning in his keys to the rental
6 office.

7 Years later, Mr. G found out he had been sued in
8 New York City civil court.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

10 MATTHEW SCHEDLER: Uh, you're not gonna hear the
11 ending.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Um, you did good.

13 MATTHEW SCHEDLER: It's a doozy.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah.

15 MATTHEW SCHEDLER: Um, but with that said, we
16 would ask you for the enhanced support to the legal
17 services for the Working Poor Coalition.

18 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: All right, thank you.

19 MATTHEW SCHEDLER: Thank you Chair Epstein.

20 Excuse me, can you— oh, gotta move in.

21 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah.

Thank you, Chair. Um, thank you all, Council,
analysts, everyone. It's been a long hearing, and
thank you for all your work, always. Um, I am here
to put into the record, because we have shared this

2 with the Mayor, First Deputy Mayor, with, um, Chief
3 of staff to the Mayor, um, Deputy Mayor Su. We
4 delivered a letter last week to them calling for \$130
5 million for DCWP and expansion of DCWP. UAW Region
6 9A led this letter along with 32BJ, um, HTC, um,
7 Teamsters 808 or 804, 808, a bunch of other labor
8 siblings, a lot of worker centers. And, um, this is
9 not known by the Council, so allowing you all to know
10 this as well.

11 Um, I don't need to get into the disinvestment of
12 DCWP. Our, um, Council Member Abreu actually got
13 into what I wanted to talk about on the 2-to-1
14 earlier today. Um, that we need to get rid of, um,
15 the savings officer for DCWP, that DCWP actually
16 brings in far more revenue than it actually could,
17 and if we expand it, it actually could be a revenue
18 generator for the city.

19 Um, our laws and the affordability agenda that
20 our Mayor has championed requires robust enforcement
21 and regulatory efforts. Our success as New York and
ensuring that we are a city that people will believe
in will have na- national implications, but also just
implications for everything. And so increasing this
budget, sound investment, enforcement, puts money

2 back into the pockets of working New Yorkers. It
3 makes sure that people have trust in government. And
4 so for all that, we're calling on the Council to call
5 on the Mayor for augmenting DCWP funding to \$130
6 million level. I'll leave it at that. Thank you
7 all.

8 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you.

9 MIRIAM CLARK: Is this on?

10 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, we can hear you.

11 MIRIAM CLARK: Great. Um, so thank you very much
12 for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Miriam Clark,
13 a former president and member of the legislative
14 committee of NELA New York. We're an organization
15 representing, uh, lawyers who represent the
16 vindication of employee rights. We've got more than-
17 hmm, thank you.

18 450 members in the state of New York, um, many of
19 whom practice in the city. So I submit this
20 testimony on behalf of NELA New York to call on the
21 Administration and City Council to fully invest in
the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to
ensure that it is able to fulfill its crucial mission
of protecting city workers, especially the most
vulnerable.

2 Um, so one piece of new legislation that I
3 haven't heard talked about today is the new right to
4 prenatal leave law, um, which is an incredible
5 advancement, probably unique in the country.

6 Um, but a 6-month backlog and an 18-month
7 investigation period renders that law virtually
8 meaningless. So if I got fired because I went to my
9 OB-GYN appointment, um, while I was pregnant, my
10 child is a year and a half old by the time there's
11 been any redress. I've long lost that job. Um, same
12 thing is true, by the way, with ESTA, another law
13 that I didn't hear too much talk about. Um, if
14 someone has been fired or they had to go to work
15 sick, 6 months later, 18 months later, it's— it— the
16 law becomes meaningless, which is so frustrating when
17 we know that City Council and advocates have worked
18 so hard to pass these laws.

19 Um, so I'm not gonna go over the data because
20 you've heard it from, um, the department itself. The
21 one thing that I wanted to point out that I thought
was troubling in the PMMR, um, was that the number—
this is the 2025 PMMR. The number of workers
entitled to restitution decreased from the first 4

2 months of Fiscal 2024 to the first 4 months of Fiscal
3 2025.

4 So that's actually going down while the laws are
5 becoming more and more protective. The amount of
6 workers actually being helped are going down. The
7 amount of civil penalties also decreased by 61% to
8 \$206,000. That shortfall continued into 2025.

9 So while the Department has been, I think,
10 rightfully hailed as small but mighty in the press,
11 it is not staffed by miracle workers. That's why the
12 Mayor during his campaign advocated for doubling the
13 agency's budget to \$130 million, which we also
14 strongly advocate for.

15 We recognize that in light of federal cuts,
16 difficult choices must be made, but they should not
17 be made on the backs of pregnant women who are afraid
18 they're gonna be fired because they went to their
19 OB-GYN appointment, or New Yorkers who have to come
20 to work sick because they're gonna get fired
21 otherwise.

22 So we therefore urge the Administration and City
23 Council to adequately fund the DCWP at the \$130
24 million level. And-

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

2 MIRIAM CLARK: One sentence. We urge the Council
3 to consider requiring that the civil penalties
4 connected by— collected by DCWP, stay with DCWP and
not go back into the whole city budget. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Yeah, thank you and that's—
6 that last one's gonna— it's a tough one for the city,
7 but I appreciate not wanting that money to roll back
8 in and to encourage the work of the DCWP. So thank
9 you, and thank you for all advocating for increase in
10 funding, and I encourage Legal Services Working
11 Board, uh, to talk about baselining that funding,
because I think that might be a long-term, really
12 helpful plan. I thank you all.

13 MIRIAM CLARK: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: And, uh, Bobby Desai and
15 Camara Jackson are our next panel. Thank you. Go
ahead.

16 CAMARA JACKSON: Good afternoon, Chair Epstein
17 and Members of the Committee. My name is Camara
18 Jackson. I am the CEO of Elite Learners, Inc. Thank
19 you for allowing me the opportunity to testify.
Elite Learners, Inc. is a New York City-based, uh,
20 community-based organization with a strong presence
21 in Brooklyn and partnerships that allow us to support

2 families across multiple boroughs. I don't know if
3 Council Member Banks is still on but we have 2
4 storefronts in his district, so very proud to be
5 here.

6 Um, through our community programming, including
7 our housing work with homeowners, we regularly assist
8 residents facing fraud and deed theft. Deed theft is
9 one of the most devastating forms of consumer fraud
10 affecting New York City homeowners. Victims are
11 often longtime residents, seniors, immigrants, and
12 families facing financial hardship who are targeted
13 by bad actors offering foreclosure assistance loans.
14 Um, they come in all forms. They offer
15 modifications, some offer quick cash deals. Many
16 homeowners do not realize they have signed documents
17 transferring ownership of their property until it is
18 too late.

19 Through our work at Elite Learners, homeowners
20 are— receive assistance. Um, we're able to connect
21 with them, we're able to navigate the process
required to challenge deed theft transfers. That
often includes coordinating with the Department of
Finance, the district attorney when fraud is

2 suspected, and helping families gather documentation
3 to pursue legal action for their homes.

4 This is the work we do on a daily basis. We help
5 families preserve homes that represent decades of
6 work and generational stability. It is through— it
7 is through our work we are asking for support through
8 our speakers' requests and discretionary funding to
9 continue. Prevention is just important. Elite
10 Learners also conducts proactive outreach to
11 community where homeowners are most vulnerable to
12 predatory actors. We help residents recognize
13 warning signs of deed theft, review suspicious
14 documents, and connect with trusted legal counsel
15 before doing anything.

16 For these reasons, we encourage the Council to
17 ramp up efforts to protect homeowners. Ensure
18 residents in your district have access to trusted
19 people, nonprofit organizations, and during and
20 before a deep death occurs. We are happy to be a
21 resource. Again, Elite Learners Inc., thank you so
much for having me.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you.

BHAIRAVI DESAI: Good afternoon, Chair Epstein.
My name is Bhairavi Desai. I'm the Executive

2 Director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. Uh,
3 we speak in full support of DCWP's request for a
4 proper budget.

5 Last year, and again, this year, as we override
6 the— you know, had to override the veto, we won a
7 historic bill, um, which was the result of the work
8 of a phenomenal champion in Councilman Krishnan and a
9 lot of blood, sweat, and tears from our membership.
10 We won the biggest, you know, protections against
11 unfair firings by Uber and Lyft.

12 Uber and Lyft would be considered the largest
13 employers in the city of New York. There are over
14 200,000 licensed TLC drivers in New York City.
15 About, um, 85% of them work just for these two
16 companies.

17 We serve collectively a million people every day.
18 About 85% of that work is from Uber and Lyft
19 dispatches. And, you know, these companies have
20 incredible power over the drivers. They're able to
21 fire you with the click of a button. This is a
workforce that spends \$60,000 to \$80,000 in
investments on the vehicle. With the click of a
button, when you're fired overnight, it means you're
not only left jobless, incomeless, but you're left

2 with a debt that can actually become generational
3 poverty.

4 And so when we're talking about the enforcement
5 of this law in particular, it, it, it's not just
6 about, you know, the model, um, bill on ending unfair
7 firings. It is absolutely a measure to end poverty.
8 And, you know, I think that's the key thing here in
9 so much of DCWP's work. The services, education,
10 information, these are all critical. Representation
11 is critical. These are all necessary protections for
12 the working class and the poor but we don't talk
13 enough about how much poverty is created by corporate
14 wrongdoing, you know, whether it's wage theft or
15 unfair firings.

16 And a robust DCWP I see as not only a vehicle to
17 right these wrongs, but it's absolutely a stop
18 measure against increased poverty in our city. And
19 so we need this agency to be properly funded. We
20 need an end to the austerity budget, which has
21 included, you know, um, not only cutting services of
the poor but also giving corporations a free hand.
And I think having a robust DCWP is really the
anti-austerity budget.

2 You know, lastly, I, I really just wanna say to
3 the Council as a whole, we need to tax the rich.
4 Like, all of this that we are talking about is
5 critical money. We can't do it-

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

7 BHAIRAVI DESAI: We can't do it without having
8 the courage and the vision to really make those who
9 are wealthy, both individuals and corporations,
10 finally pay their share because the budget holes the
11 Mayor's talked about is still not enough. We need a
12 bigger budget, and that can only come when all of New
13 York pays its share, particularly those that can
14 actually afford it.

15 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you both and- but for
16 Albany, we could do it. So we just need our state
17 legislators, which I know fairly well about, um, to
18 kind of put the resources in place and allow the city
19 to have more control over our taxing power.

20 So thank you, and thank you for the work that
21 you've done and continue to do for our, for drivers
across the city. Um, kind of just one quick
question. Do you, do you guys get HOP funding for
that, the work you're doing?

BHAIRAVI DESAI: No, we-

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Do you— have you applied
3 for state funding for the Attorney General for HOP
4 funding, or?

5 BHAIRAVI DESAI: Not for HOP.

6 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, all right, all right,
7 thank you both very much. I appreciate your work.
8 And next we have folks on Zoom, um, and Melat Seyoum
9 is the first person that you can unmute and begin.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: I don't know if you're
12 still there. I can't tell, but if— if you can
13 unmute. And next, we'll just— if - when you can, we
14 can, but let's move to Zara Nasir.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 ZARA NASIR: Oh, hi. Um, sorry, just collecting
17 all the things. Hey, everyone. Good morning, Chair
18 and Members of the Committee on Consumer and Worker
19 Protection. Thank you for the opportunity to
20 testify. My name is Zara. I'm the, um, Executive
21 Director of People's Plan NYC. We're a citywide
coalition advancing a more just and equitable, but
equitable budget.

Um, I'm here to t— today to speak about the
Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and its

2 role in holding corporate actors accountable as part
3 of a broader campaign that we're running called Make
4 'Em Pay, which is starting this year.

5 Right now, um, New York City, in our estimation,
6 is owed at least \$1.5 billion in unpaid penalties
7 from landlords, um, and also some corporations whose,
8 uh, violations harm worker tenants and, and small
9 businesses.

10 DCWP is responsible for enforcing some of the
11 most important worker consumer laws in our city, um,
12 from wage theft and paid sick leave to unfair
13 business practices. And it does a tremendous amount
14 of, um, work for what it costs. It's one of the best
15 bargains in the city, uh, but it's under-resourced.
16 And, um, you know, when enforcement is weak, that
17 means bad actors treat penalties as options, not just
18 the cost of doing business.

19 And so workers will lose wages, consumers are
20 exploited, um, you know, responsible businesses, um,
21 are also undercut. And so we're, we're calling on
the Council to support our proposal and, uh, help
push for the significant investments in DCWP. Um, we
echo other folks here who said, you know, DCWP needs
its budget doubled to \$135 million. We need to add

2 400 inspectors, legis- um, legal staff and
3 investigators. Um, you know, the department today
4 also named that they need additional resources and
5 this is really about deterrence, fairness, and
6 protecting New Yorkers.

7 It's part of a broader shift that we're pushing
8 for, which is real corporate accountability across
9 agencies and collections. Um, our campaign is
10 focusing on improving collections and imposing real
11 consequences for, uh, bad actors and we know that
12 some of the m- most important and effective
13 collection works happens at the agency level. The
14 agencies have far better collection rates than even
15 Department of Finance.

16 Um, and we really feel like corporations won't
17 change their behavior unless there are real
18 consequences. Uh, New Yorkers follow the rules every
19 day. When they don't, they're penalized.
20 Corporations should obviously follow the law too and
21 face consequences that are proportional to the harm
that they cause, especially when it harms, um, and
affects the health and safety and wages of New
Yorkers.

2 So we're proud to be joined in this campaign by
3 over 40 organizations and unions, including folks who
4 testified today like Worker Justice Project,
5 Brandworkers, and, um, the Coalition for Domestic
6 Workers, along with, uh, 10 and counting elected
7 officials in New York City, Council Members, um, and
8 we're obviously growing that number every day.

9 Uh, we appreciate the Council's partnership, um,
10 and look forward to—

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

12 ZARA NASIR: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much. And
14 is Melat there?

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 MELAT SEYOUM: Yes, thank you. Good afternoon,
17 honorable Chairperson and distinguished members of
18 the New York City Council Committee on Consumer and
19 Worker Protection. My name is Melat Seyoum, and I'm
20 the Director of Policy Advocacy and Strategic
21 Partnerships at the New York Network of Worker-Owned
Cooperatives, also known as NYCNOG.

We are the member-led trade association
representing worker cooperative businesses and
democratic workplaces in New York City. I'm here

2 alongside my colleagues from the Democracy at Work
3 Institute, Center for Family Life, Workers Justice
4 Project, and our advocacy council members
5 representing 10 other organizations that make up the
6 Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative,
7 WCBDI.

8 We are here asking New York City Council to
9 continue supporting expansion of worker ownership in
10 next year's budget and firmly into the future. Since
11 the inception of the initiative, we've created over
12 200 new worker cooperative businesses and over 1,200
13 new jobs that are not only providing higher hourly
14 wages, but also building wealth and assets for
15 individuals who are overwhelmingly BIPOC women and
16 immigrants.

17 We have seen firsthand how our initiative has
18 served to bolster our sector, strengthening existing
19 cooperative businesses and creating new ones. The
20 initiative partners have collectively worked to
21 create a comprehensive ecosystem of support for
worker businesses that not only ensures creation of
new worker cooperatives in low-income areas, but also
the technical assistance needed to sustain businesses
and create jobs, as well as the education and

2 outreach needed for communities interested
3 entrepreneurs and allied organizations.

4 We did a lot of work during the pandemic, early
5 years and beyond, to bring in over \$20 million in
6 grants and loans to cooperatives and keep them
7 afloat, and we did this with a \$3.7 million budget.
8 We are here asking City Council to enhance our
9 funding to \$5,097,0000 in order for our initiative to
10 double down on the essential long-term economic
11 recovery for worker-owned cooperative businesses that
12 we will need to claw ourselves out of this crisis.

13 We thank the City Council for the opportunity to
14 testify and hope that you will consider our budget
15 priorities and recommendations during this year's
16 budget negotiation process. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much, and I
18 really do appreciate the work of building more worker
19 co-ops, something that I was involved with back in my
20 old legal services days when we got that started. So
21 thank you.

MELAT SEYOUM: Thank you, Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Uh, the next person is
Catherine, uh, Murcek.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

2 CATHERINE MURCEK: Good afternoon, distinguished
3 Council Members, and thank you for the opportunity to
4 testify online today. My name is Catherine Murcek,
5 and I'm a worker owner at 2 co-ops here in New York
6 City, the Samankaya Yoga Back Care and Scoliosis
7 Collective and Oasis Solidarity Collective.

8 Um, we're members of NYCNOG. You already heard
9 from my colleague Melat, ah, which is a partner
10 organization in the WCBDI initiative, and your
11 support of our community of democratically run
12 businesses helps to protect and create jobs for
13 women, immigrant workers, and communities of color
14 across the 5 boroughs in a wide array of industry.

15 Thanks to City Council support, New York City has
16 more cooperatives than any other city in the US, and
17 I'm testifying today to urge you to continue to
18 support the great work of WCBDI, enhancing the
19 initiative's funding to \$5.09 million, and to also
20 support commercial rent stabilization to protect New
21 York City's workers and small businesses from
displacement.

The first co-op I joined, Samankaya, is a very
special little studio for therapeutic yoga in
Chelsea, with classes both online and studio. I'm

2 proud to say my 19 other worker owners and I have
3 been democratically running the studio together for
4 11 years in the same space the whole time. To make
5 yoga accessible to all ages and abilities, we use
6 specialized rope walls and equipment, which incurred
7 a lot of startup costs that we are still paying back.
8 Getting our business through the pandemic was a huge
9 challenge that forced us to close our physical space
10 temporarily and pivot to teaching online. But we
11 were able to get through it for two main reasons.
12 One, because we're cooperative, and two, because we
13 were lucky enough to have a reasonable landlord who
14 was willing to work with us.

15 As a cooperative, we banded together to decide as
16 a team how we would pivot, divide the labor, and work
17 together to keep the studio afloat while making sure
18 our teachers who most needed to work could keep
19 teaching online and make ends meet. We were also
20 grateful to have access to technical support from
21 WCBT partners and a couple small grants specific to
worker co-ops. This support provided pro bono legal
services with Take Root Justice to help us with the
negotiation of our lease, and NYCNO's Cooperative
Sustainability Fund, which allowed us to pay for

2 consulting sessions to help manage some communication
3 and distribution of labor challenges during the
4 transition and to strategize for the future.

5 NYCNOG's grant fund was also a huge support for
6 my other co-op, Oasis Solidarity Collective, which is
7 made of a diverse group of worker owners with the
8 mission of providing training and education on worker
9 worker cooperatives and meeting facilitation services
10 with an anti-oppression lens.

11 NYCNOG's grant fund allowed us to cover the cost
12 of a new website as we go through a rebranding
13 strategy. Even though both of my small cooperative
14 businesses are surviving, it's incredibly difficult
15 to thrive in this economic environment. It's a myth
16 that the pandemic reset commercial rents for small
17 businesses back to reasonable rates, and commercial
18 tenants have extremely limited protections from being
19 pushed kicked out by exorbitant rent hikes or
20 evictions, even when they've built a community around
21 their space and spent tens of thousands of dollars
building it out specific to their needs, as my co-op
has.

This causes the death of so many—

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

2 CATHERINE MURCEK: Um, just a moment— like, two
3 of the yoga studios I used to work for before they
4 sadly had to close because— because their landlords
5 were not so reasonable.

6 The system should not be based on the luck of the
7 draw and the whims of the particular landlord that
8 you end up work with. So all in all, to say, please
9 enhance WCU's funding to \$5.09 million, and please
10 support commercial rent stabilization to protect our
11 beloved small businesses from displacement. Thanks
12 so much.

13 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you for your time,
14 and thank you for the, um, letting us know how
15 important worker-owned cooperatives are, as well as
16 affordability for our commercial spaces. Maybe more
17 CLTs would help with that. Um, I, I wanna notice,
18 uh, um, Council Member Sanchez— P. Sanchez couldn't
19 be with us today because um, other commitments, but,
20 you know, I hope she was able to join.

21 Our next, uh, is Nilbia Coyote.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

NILBIA COYOTE: Good afternoon, Chair and members
of the committee. My name is Nilbia Coyote, and I am
the Executive Director of New Immigrant Community

2 Empowerment, NICE, located in Jackson Heights,
3 Queens.

4 I'm sorry, the noise— it's literally the 7 train
5 passing. For over 25 years, NICE has been a trusted
6 community organization and frontline responder for
7 New York City immigrant workers during our city's
8 most acute crisis. Our deep integration allowed us
9 to reach— to reach hard-to-reach individuals and
10 currently, NICE's core purpose is to intentionally
11 drive economic mobility and community integration
12 among immigrant families through our empowering
13 model, the Pre-Apprenticeship for Life and Work.

14 Today, we strongly, er, urge the Council to fully
15 fund the New York City Department of Consumer and
16 Worker Protection, DCWP, in the upcoming Fiscal Year
17 2027.

18 For communities, immigrant workers, women,
19 pre-apprentices, day laborers, domestic workers, and
20 survivors of labor exploitation, this agency is not
21 just an abstract one. It is a critical lifeline. It
represents one of the few institutions where workers
can safely report abuse, recover stolen wages, and
demand accountability without fear.

2 At NICE, we witness daily both the harsh
3 realities and the extraordinary, extraordinary
4 resilience of low-wage immigrant workers. Workers
5 come to us after enduring wage theft, unsafe
6 workplaces, sudden termination, and retaliation for
7 asserting their rights. We have heard a lot today.
8 Many are excluded from traditional labor protections
9 or silenced by fear tied to their immigration status.
10 Without strong enforcement from DCWP, these workers
11 are left vulnerable to ongoing exploitation.

12 At the same time, we know that enforcement alone
13 is not enough. Workers must also have pathways to
14 economic mobility, dignity, and long-term stability.
15 This is why NICE launched the Pre-Apprenticeship for
16 Life and Work. A comprehensive workforce development
17 model that equips immigrant workers with job
18 readiness skills, industry-recognized certifications,
19 professional ESOL, and critical life skills training.
20 Through our program, participants not only access
21 better job opportunities but also build the knowledge
and confidence to assert their rights in the
workplace and navigate systems that have historically
excluded them.

2 This is where the work of DCWP and
3 community-based organizations intersect powerfully.
4 When workers are informed, organized, and supported,
5 and when there is a strong enforcement agency behind
6 them, real accountability becomes possible. We have
7 seen firsthand how DCWP's enforcement of laws can
8 transform lives, but also recovering millions of
9 dollars in stolen wages, partnering with CBOs in
10 co-enforcement, and a big etc. we heard today.

11 At a time when immigrant communities are facing
12 heightened economic instability, rising cost of
13 living, and increasing fear driven by broader
14 immigration enforcement, the city must not retreat
15 from its responsibility. It must lead with courage.

16 Protecting workers is not optional. It is
17 essential to the health and future—

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

19 NILBIA COYOTE: Thank you. We respectfully call
20 on the Council to fully fund DCWP's enforcement and
21 outreach programs and expand investments in CBO's
worker protection and workforce development
initiatives. Thank you for your leadership and the
opportunity to testify.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much, and
3 thank you for the work that NICE does, you know, for
4 New Yorkers all over the cities. Um, Genesis
5 Gonzalez.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

7 GENESIS GONZALEZ: Good afternoon, Chair Epstein
8 and distinguished members of the New York City
9 Council Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection.
10 My name is Genesis Gonzalez, and I am an assistant
11 director at the Center for Family Life in Sunset
12 Park, a 48-year-old service organization dedicated to
13 providing vital sources to low-income families in
14 Brooklyn so they can thrive and build sustainable
15 futures.

16 I am here today to respectfully urge the New York
17 City Council to continue supporting the Worker
18 Cooperative Business Development Initiative by
19 allocating \$5.1 million in Fiscal Year 2027,
20 including \$675,000 for the Center for Family Life to
21 continue helping low-income families develop
cooperative businesses.

With continued support from the New York City
Council in Fiscal 2027, the Center for Family Life
will incubate a new worker cooperative in

2 administrative services, creating pathways for young
3 professionals to enter and compete in the service
4 economy while advancing their careers. We will also
5 provide 275 technical assistance services to existing
6 worker cooperatives to help them address
7 administrative challenges and remain operational.

8 In addition, we will offer 20 training sessions
9 in business administration, finance, marketing, and
10 industry-specific skills, enabling 400 participants
11 to strengthen their entrepreneurial knowledge.

12 Through these efforts, we also aim to create at least
13 15 new jobs in cooperative businesses.

14 These achievements would not be possible without
15 the steadfast support of the New York City Council.
16 On behalf of the Center for Family Life, thank you
17 for your time, consideration, and commitment to
18 economic equity. We respectfully ask for your
19 continued support in Fiscal Year 2027. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you. I appreciate
21 your— you and appreciate the work for Center for
Family Life, who I've worked with many, many times
over the years.

Uh, Zubin Soleimani.

2 ZUBIN SOLEIMANI: Uh, hi, uh, good afternoon. My
3 name is Zubin Soleimani, uh, with the New York Taxi
4 Workers Alliance. I'm a Senior Staff Attorney, uh,
5 and just wanted to, uh, really impress upon everybody
6 here the need for full funding of DCWP's initiatives,
7 especially with regard to the driver deactivation
8 protections.

9 So I think it's important to know just how
10 crucial, uh, these protections are because going
11 beyond, uh, you know, Council went, uh, built off of
12 its success with fast food but if you compare what
13 happens to a for-hire vehicle driver, uh, when
14 they're deactivated, it's not just the loss of
15 income, it's ongoing, uh, significant debts, car
16 payments, insurance that accumulate and cannot be
17 paid off while they're out of work.

18 So, you know, we passed- I think this is the best
19 driver deactivation protection framework in the
20 country. It's the best one on paper but it's only
21 gonna be as good as its enforcement.

Um, and, you know, I would note that other places
that have driver deactivation laws, uh, the laws
included funding for driver organizations to do these
appeals independently, ah, perhaps in an informal

2 way, and we rejected that model because we need real,
3 ah, solid, enforceable, ah, legal, ah, legal
4 structure here. And I think there- there are two
5 sides to this enforcement. There's a prosecution
6 investigation side, uh, and then there's the larger
7 framework which allows those prosecutions to be
8 effective.

9 Uh, the data reporting, the requirements, um,
10 that drivers receive notice in an adequate manner,
11 and to make sure that the companies are doing those
12 things. And I think, you know, on the one hand, uh,
13 you know, it was, it was really important to us, uh,
14 as we pushed this bill with, uh, Council Member
15 Krishnan, that there would be a private right of
16 action. And we think that a lot of cases would be
17 appropriate for a private action but there are always
18 going to be some cases, especially those that require
19 more of an investigative push, that are going to be
20 more appropriate for public action.

21 So on the one hand, it's important that DCWP has
adequate funding for their investigations and their
prosecutions, but that larger piece of compliance
with the, with the data reporting and the notice, uh,
and all of that is going to make it- that's necessary

2 even where drivers choose to go with a private
3 attorney, uh, to court or arbitration.

4 Um, so I, I, I think, um, I, you know, and I
5 just, I just, er, my experience— I've been here for a
6 long time. We've dealt with the city regulating
7 driver's behavior for a long time in the TLC context.
8 And I just, I think it's important to note that there
9 has never been a problem with the city fund— they're
10 looking at regulating whether driver behavior is
11 appropriate or not in the context— context of
12 punishing them. The TLC has an army of lawyers who
13 prosecute drivers. They move them quickly, uh, and
14 to, to just the level of minutia in which they punish
15 drivers has been, you know, in one year I recall I
16 searched the database, there were over 100 violations
17 for drivers using the wrong tone of voice. I, I, I'm,
18 I'm not kidding. I'm not making this up. It is a
19 discourteous violation for speaking in the wrong tone
20 of voice.

21 I represented a— a driver once who was charged
with an act against the public—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired—

2 ZUBIN SOLEIMANY: For using a nebulizer so he
3 didn't have an asthma attack and didn't stop
4 breathing in the car.

5 So we can always find the resources when it comes
6 to punishing this workforce. I challenge everybody
7 here to do the right thing and find the resources to
8 make it so that drivers who have been unfairly
9 deactivated have a stable life, a stable income, and
10 can remain at work when they get fired through no
11 fault of their own.

12 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Uh, thank you very much and
13 appreciate all your work, and I know how important
14 this is to all of us.

15 Um, Marissa Centeno.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. I don't know if
17 Marissa is there, but we'll go to the next one.
18 Christopher Leon Johnson.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

20 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Oh yeah, hello, my
21 name is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thank you, Chair
Epstein, for having this pre-budget hearing
committee. I want to make this clear that, uh, look,
um, I think that the city- I know that shout out to
Zohran Mamdani for being the guy that had the balls

2 to stand up to our, um, corrupt Commissioner Jessica
3 Tish to repeal decriminalization of deliveristas, but
4 he should have been repealed at on January 1st, 2026,
5 when he got sworn in as Mayor. The day- the- the
6 minutes after he rose his hand as Mayor, he could
7 have did that. Uh, we shouldn't wait 3 months to do
8 this but I will make this clear that, um, I think
9 that you, Mr. Epstein, need to step up to the plate
10 and make it to where that, um, like, the Worker
11 Justice Project gets at least, let us say, \$1 million
12 to help out the guys and gals who gonna be laid off
13 by Relay in the next, um, week and a half on April
14 1st, 2026.

15 Uh, what are these guys gonna do after April 1st,
16 2026, um, unless they go to Motoclick? I mean,
17 that's my thing. But I'll make this clear that, uh,
18 look, um, what needs to start happening more is this
19 need to be a thing of calling for the regulation of
20 the apps. I supported the deliverista Hub. I
21 understand we can put over the city, but if these
guys are in a situation where they can still be
deactivated, despite the fact that in summertime
there's gonna be, uh, unfair deactivation laws and it
can still be deactivated, not only for the

2 deliveristas, for the, for-hire app vehicles, put in
3 hubs and taxi stands and all stuff, does no justice
4 at all.

5 You have to— the City Council, starting this
6 Committee, has to be more proactive when it comes to
7 protecting worker rights. And I believe that the
8 City Council needs to make a letter um, and openly
9 condemning David Doe for selling out the, the, the,
10 the Tax Workers Alliance and working with Empower.
11 And I'll make this clear that I'm gonna hold— I'm
12 gonna condemn both, uh, Lidia Galapa and Mr. Ben
13 Bernas for not saying anything about Jessica Tisch.
14 They not, not one time in the past 3 months or even
15 the year prior called out Jessica Tisch for the
16 criminalization of deliveristas.

17 The— it's going to end on the 27th, but the
18 damage has already been done. Look at the cause of
19 the effect. A lot of guys have to go to court, lose
20 pay and stuff like that and you can say that, oh,
21 Relay is gonna, um, they're gonna be held
accountable, but what about the, the money that the
city should be paying these guys and gals back for
missing days out of work?

2 If I had it my way, I'll be suing the city on
3 behalf of deliveristas so they can get paid back from
4 the city for taking time off work for the unfair, uh,
5 for the criminalization, for them for getting
6 tickets, going to court.

7 Uh, if I had my way, but I think the City
8 Council, like I said, this going forward, uh, my, my
9 goal is right now is that, uh, Relay needs to be held
10 accountable. They should not be pulled off the
11 street like this. It is wrong for these guys to be
12 out of a job on April 1st, 2026 with nothing, nowhere
13 to go. And this is where, this is where you went,
14 where if Uber and DoorDash didn't wanna- they- you
15 couldn't get an Uber and DoorDash, that's where you
16 went.

17 So these guys may not have a job. So we can talk
18 about worker justice all we want, but my, my-

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

20 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Go forward and, um,
21 help all these guys with Relay. So thank you so much
and enjoy your day.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much. Next
is Christine Hines.

1 COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 221

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. Okay, so if we
3 don't see Christine, maybe CJ Hayes. Next.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

5 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: No CJ, maybe Brandon Lee
6 Clayton. Mhm. Okay, next maybe Ben Fuller Goggins.
7 Next is Alan without a last name. And last that I
8 have listed is Laidis Munoz. All right, we're trying
9 to figure out- we can get people unmuted.

10 Just a reminder, if people haven't signed up to
11 testify, we are close to the end of the hearing, so
12 we need to know that you're testifying. If you
13 haven't signed up and you wanted to- this is kind of
14 the end of the game now.

15 Yeah, I- I think we see someone raising their
16 hand. We're just trying to figure out what the
17 problem is getting them unmuted. So people who are
18 trying to get unmuted, uh, I think you need to be-
19 accept being upgraded to a panelist, and then in
20 theory you can be unmuted.

21 So if-if you've been asked to be upgraded and you
haven't done it yet. Okay, good. So, ladies, do I
go first? MARRISA? Or MARRISA'S first? MARRISA,
you ready?

MARRISA CENTINO: Yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Okay, go ahead.

3 MARRISA SENTENO: Hello, thank you to the members
4 of the Committee and Consumer and, uh, Worker
5 Protection for the opportunity to share my testimony.
6 My name is MARRISA SENTENO and I'm with the National
7 Domestic Workers Alliance. I'm here to t- today to
8 speak on behalf of the New York City Coalition for
9 Domestic Work to urge the City Council to double the
10 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection budget
11 to \$135 million to strengthen its enforcement
12 capacity and hire 400 investigators and inspectors
13 and legal staff.

14 The NYC Coalition for Domestic Work represents
15 nearly 250,000 nannies, house cleaners, and home care
16 workers who provide essential care and support to New
17 Yorkers. Our coalition comprises of ADHIKAR,
18 Caregivers Association, Damayan, Hand in Hand, uh,
19 the Domestic Employer Network, La Colmena, and
20 ourselves, the National Domestic Workers Alliance New
21 York chapter.

Organizations with memberships throughout the 5
boroughs, Domestic workers organized for decades to
win fundamental rights like minimum wage, paid

2 overtime, protections against discrimination and
3 harassment, paid sick leave, amongst other rights.

4 In fact, New York is the first state in the
5 country to pass a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights.
6 DCWP is responsible for enforcing some of those
7 protections such as paid sick leave. For a decade,
8 organizations that are part of this coalition, have
9 built a strategic and effective partnership with DCWP
10 um, and the Paid Care Division dedicated to joint
11 domestic worker outreach and education with
12 accessible Know Your Rights materials and trainings.
13 Rights are only useful if individuals are aware of
14 them and can exercise them.

15 To improve the working conditions of domestic
16 workers, it's essential that we continue to expand
17 our partnership with DCWP, especially given the
18 current national, ah, political climate and we've
19 become— and it's become even harder to reach
20 immigrant workers, in particular domestic workers who
21 work in isolated, uh, private homes and are more
likely to fear coming forward and reporting labor
rights abuses.

In addition, DCWP launched an innovative project
called the Mediation Program in 2022, which has

2 become a critical resource for domestic workers in
3 New York City, providing fair and accessible
4 effective pathways to resolving workplace disputes
5 and recovering unpaid wages, including unpaid sick
6 leave and other, uh, rightful earnings. We've seen a
7 successful, um, roster of workers who, uh, we've been
8 able to usher through this mediation clinic, um,
9 co-collaborate, and we have seen success in, uh,
10 wages recovered.

11 So, hmm, many domestic workers have effectively
12 used this program to recover their wages and secure
13 the benefits they're entitled to. It's important to
14 build up the DCWP budget to maintain and grow
15 enforcement programs, something we are very
16 passionate about here at NDWA. And with increased
17 funding, more domestic workers will be able to know
18 their rights and employers comply with their
19 obligations, access to remedies for labor violations,
20 and use services like, like the mediation clinic.

21 Uh, we have found DCWP and that collaboration to
be very innovative, forward-thinking, and we plan to
be, uh, collaborating.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

MARRISA SENTENO: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you very much. I
3 appreciate your testimony. Ladies, er, uh, you're
4 next.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

6 Um, thank you. Um, for my colleague Marissa
7 Senteno, just give the testimony and thank you so
8 much.

9 CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: All right. Thank you. Are
10 there any other witnesses in person or online who
11 want to testify? Seeing none, this hearing is
12 adjourned. [GAVEL]

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 20, 2026