

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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February 28th, 2020

Start: 10:30 a.m.

Recess: 3:36 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
16th Fl.

B E F O R E: STEVEN T. LEVIN
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Ritchie J. Torres
Vanessa L. Gibson
Rafael Salamanca Jr.
Barry Grodenchik
Robert Holden
Antonio Reynoso
Brad Lander
Mark Treyger

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

Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner
Department of Homeless Services

Danielle Emory, Director
People and Animals Living Safely Program
Urban Resource Institute

Kareem Walker, homeless individual

Peter Melvin (on behalf of)
Co-Chair
Consumer Committee of the Continuum of
Care

Halle Chu (on behalf of)
Gail Brewer
Manhattan Borough President

Eric Adams (on behalf of)

Craig Hughes, Supervising Social Worker
Urban Justice Center

Susan Stetzer, District Manager
Manhattan Community Board Three

Michelle Vila Gomez, Legislative Senior
Director
ASPCA

Murica Azoff
Community Engagement Program
ASPCA

Kathy Nazari, Board Member
Voters For Animal Rights

Harold Moss, Director
Beacon of Hope
Catholic Charities

Giselle Routhier, Policy Director
Coalition for the Homeless

Josh Goldfein
Legal Aide Society

Eric Lee, Director of Policy and Planning
Homeless Service United

Deborah Burkeman, Senior Staff Attorney
Public Benefits Unity and Shelter
Advocacy Initiative
NYLAG

Julia Oaken, Affordable Housing
Specialist
Brooklyn Defender Services

Raji Edayathumangalam, Forensic Social
Worker
New York County Defender Services

Lauriel Madonna Moore, homeless

Marilyn Galfin
Voices for Shelter Animals

Steve Gruber, Director of Communication
Mayor's Alliance for New York City's
Animals

Ali Feldman-Taylor (on behalf of),
President
Voters for Animal Rights

Adita Burncrandt, Executive Director
NYCLASS

Linda Mann, NYC Resident

Maureen Medina, Social Services Worker

Marian Koenig, Animal rescuer

Caitlin Balogula, Psych student

Casey Reardon (on behalf of)

Diana Rose

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone check. Today's date is February 28th of 2020 on the Committee of General Welfare recorded by Stephen Sudowski.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning, everybody. My apologies for being late. There was train problems. Good morning and welcome to this hearing of the New York City Council's Community on General Welfare. Today the committee will examine Outreach NYC and barriers to shelter for those experiencing homelessness. And the committee will be hearing legislation which addresses accommodating pets in DHS shelters and improving access to rental assistance voucher programs. In November 2019, the de Blasio administration announced a new initiative, Outreach NYC, to address street homelessness by training 18,000 city employees across five agencies, including the Department of Sanitation, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the fire department and the Department of Buildings and the Parks Department on how to use the 311 app in all of its platforms to submit service requests related to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The submitted service request will be filtered through the newly

established joint command center which is the interagency partnership lead by DHS, NYPD, and other relevant city agencies to address the unsheltered homeless on the subway. Interagency staff will analyze trends, triage requests, then prioritize and deploy multi agency responses, as appropriate. The committee seeks information on how this initiative has helped to assist with outreach and moving barriers to shelter for New Yorkers who are experiencing homelessness and what the allocated resources for this initiative consists of. Two of the bills before the committee today, Intros 1483 and 1484, aim to reduce barriers to shelter by better accommodating those experiencing homelessness with pets. DHS-run shelters don't currently except pets, despite successful models from around the country that facilitate co-sheltering with animals. The experience of homelessness is traumatic and challenging enough. And the prospect of parting with a pet shouldn't be a contributing factor to such hardship. The committee will also hear Into 1902, a bill that expands access to case management support for anyone who receives an assessment and who is believe to living on the street. The current process

to receive case management is confusing, at best, with many of those living on the street believe that they must be cited a certain amount of times by an outage worker to receive case management. Another bill we are hearing today, Intro 1903, will reduce the amount of time that those experiencing homelessness on the street need to receive case management services in order to be eligible for certain rental assistance programs. I hope that the four bills that I am sponsoring today will get us a little closer to removing barriers to shelter and permanent housing for those living on the street and I hope that we can identify other areas where concrete steps can be made to get people indoors. I want to thank all of the advocates that are here today for sharing-- in particular, individuals that have experienced homelessness for sharing your experiences and I want to thank representatives from the administration for joining us today and I look forward to hearing from you on all these critical issues. I would also like to acknowledge Council member Bob Holden is here and we expect other members of the community to be joining throughout the hearing. And I'd like to thank committee staff

Amenta Kilowan [sp?], senior counsel, Krystal Pawn, senior policy analyst, Natalie Orlis [sp?], policy analyst, Frank Sarno, finance analyst as well as my staff, Johnathan Boucher, my chief of staff, Elizabeth Adams, my legislative direction. And now I'll turn it over to counsel to the committee to swear you in.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to Council member questions?

PANEL: I do.

LEGAL COUNSEL: You may begin.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Good morning, Chairperson Levin, and members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Molly Park, first deputy commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services. Joining me today is Erin Drinkwater, deputy commissioner for intergovernmental and legislative affairs for the Department of Social Services. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today about Outreach NYC and our comprehensive Home Stat Program. Outreach NYC is one element of the recently announced

six-point action plan to end long-term street homelessness in New York City over the next five years. This administration is proud to be leading the nation in efforts to end long-term street homelessness and we welcome this opportunity to discuss components of the journey home. In November, Mayor de Blasio announced the launch of Outreach NYC, a new citywide multiagency effort to help homeless New Yorkers across all five boroughs. This initiative builds on historic investments in Home Stat to mobilize thousands of frontline agency staff to request outreach assistance via 311 when they observe individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The goal of Outreach NYC is to help more unsheltered New Yorkers transition off the streets and subways into transitional and permanent settings. By training staff to submit service requests for outreach assistance, city agency employees are engaged as essential partners in our ongoing 24/7 365 day outreach effort by helping us deploy targeted homeless outreach teams in real time. So far, the city has trained 500 staff from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, largely environmental health inspectors, 500 staff from the

buildings department, building inspectors, 1100 parks workers, 300 community service associates, 500 maintenance and operations supervisors, and 1000 Department of Sanitation supervisors and 1500 FDNY staff including 11,000 fire fighters and 3000 EMTs and paramedics to submit service requests through 311. Outreach NYC builds on additional enhancements to street outreach announced over the summer. All service requests, including those from Outreach NYC, are routed to the city's joint command center, managed by DHS and NYPD, where interagency staff triage requests, prioritize and deploy multiagency responses as appropriate, and analyze trends with the goal to provide collaborative assistance to the more challenging cases involving high needs individuals. Through Outreach NYC, DHS, DSS, and our sister agencies are leading by example to help our homeless neighbors to make the journey home. These engaged city employees contribute to the utilization of new resources such as the joint command center, a new approach that increases operational and outreach efforts. The JCC deploys additional DHS outreach workers to address the most challenging cases of unsheltered homelessness. These cases involve high

need clients who often face the most significant and overlapping challenges, including mental health diagnoses and substance misuse. The joint command center brings relevant agency experts to the table to develop tailored approaches to engage each individual based on their unique needs. Home Stat outreach teams are coordinating with agency partners to address the needs of a specific subset of individuals who are confirmed to be experiencing long-term unsheltered homelessness, are known to outreach teams, and meet a set of designations such as service resistant or medically vulnerable as an indication of greater need requiring more interagency expertise. Through a close collaboration with partners, including the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Health and Hospitals, we are developing targeted interventions on a case-by-case basis to make the breakthroughs that encourage these individuals to finally accept services and transition off the streets and subways. As I testified, too, last month, under the journey home, a strategic plan that encompasses the operational structures of the joint command center and Home Stat, we are investing in housing, mental health and medical services for

more unsheltered individuals, as well as enhancing outreach resources to deliver more urgent and rapid responses to unsheltered individuals in need. Our current strategies have helped more than 24,000-- Sorry. 2450 individuals come off the streets and into transitional programs and permanent housing since the launch of Home Stat in April 2016. By marshaling new and critical resources, the journey home planned well increase safe haven capacity by opening 1000 new safe haven beds, create 1000 new low-barrier permanent apartments by working with partners across the housing and social service sectors, deliver new health resources to people where they are, providing treatment through street medical care and behavioral healthcare and building the trust needed for clients to come inside. Provide coordinated rapid outreach response through the street homelessness joint command center, leverage state-of-the-art outreach technology to better connect clients to those services they need to transition into housing, expand diversion and outreach in our subway system. Further, the journey home planned builds on the nation's most comprehensive street outreach program, the Department

of Homeless Services' Home Stat initiative, with outreach teams canvassing the five boroughs and engaging New Yorkers who are unsheltered 24 hours a day, seven days a week every day of the year. Through Home Stat, hundreds of highly trained to not-for-profit outreach staff, including license social workers, canvas the streets proactively engaging New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness. Outreach workers offers services and assistance while working to gain trust with the goal of addressing the underlying issue that may have caused or contributed to street homelessness in order to ultimately help these individuals transition off the streets. Home Stat also provides aftercare services, continuing to work with individuals as they make that transition to ensure that they get the supports they need to remain in housing and off the streets. Since 2014, the city has re-doubled the outreach efforts through Home Stat. We have tripled the city's investment in street homelessness programs from approximately 45 million to more than 140 million both for the additional investments for the journey home, tripled the number of safe haven beds dedicated to serving street homeless New Yorkers citywide since 2014. As

of this year, there are approximately 1800 beds dedicated to street homeless New Yorkers operating citywide. Tripled the number of outreach staff from fewer than 202,014 10 now nearly 600 through the journey home planned that builds on the doubling of outreach staff through Home Stat. Bill the city's first ever by name list of individuals known to be homeless and residing on the streets to improve delivery of services to help them come off the streets. Outreach teams now know approximately 1800 homeless individuals by name and actively engage another 2400 individuals encountered on the streets to determine whether they are homeless. Increased joint outreach efforts with the operations with the NYPD and partner agencies, such as New York City Health and Hospitals, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the FDNY emergency medical services, and the Department of Parks and Recreation to engage more New Yorkers and offer more supports. The journey home builds on these investments adding another 100 million in annual budget authority, bringing the total to 240 million. Among other initiatives, the spending will increase by 1000 the number of a number of safe haven beds dedicated to

serving street homeless individuals available to Home Stat outreach teams, bringing the total of these beds to 2800 citywide and will provide permanent housing for 1000 New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness by creating a new low barrier permanent housing model to meet clients where they are. Home Stat works by building trust person by person. Our outreach teams remain focused on persistent, proactive, positive engagement, offering services and supports to New Yorkers in need 24/7, 365 days a year. Accepting outreach efforts, including services that will help homeless New Yorkers transition indoors from the streets or subway is voluntary. And, in accordance with the New York State Mental Hygiene Law, street homeless New Yorkers cannot be involuntarily moved from the streets unless they are posing a danger to themselves or others. Unsheltered individuals around siding underground often face a complex layer challenges and may be resistant to accepting services, but our teams remain undeterred in their efforts to help them transition off the subways. To that end, Home Stat outreach teams have access to licensed clinicians who work with clients on the street providing ongoing case management and assess

each individual for immediate risk and crisis during each encounter. Psychiatrists perform psychiatric evaluations on the street as needed, helping understand and better meet the individual needs of each street homeless New Yorker, substance use resources, including ability to immediately connect individuals to detox and other rehabilitation programs, and are trained in Naloxone administration. There are two bills that are pre-considered at today's hearing. The first would amend the administrative code of the city of New York in relation to the provision of case management services for homeless individuals. Experienced outreach teams from not-for-profit service providers canvas the five boroughs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year as part of our citywide efforts to identify and engage individuals who may be homeless, encourage them to accept services, and ultimately help them transition off the streets. With no one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness, the by name list and enables Home Stat outreach teams to more effectively engage each of these individuals on a case-by-case basis, person by person basis, directly and repeatedly. Outreach teams meet individuals

where they are and evaluate the immediate and root causes contributing to their homelessness. Nearly 600 not-for-profit outreach workers are engaged in developing the unique combination of services that will enable individuals to transition off the streets and build the trust in relationships that will ultimately encourage these individuals to accept services. In their ongoing efforts to offers services, supports, and a helping hand, Home Stat teams have access to licensed clinicians who work with clients on the street, provide ongoing case management, and assess each individual for immediate risk and crisis during each encounter. Psychiatrists who perform psychiatric evaluations on the street as needed, substance use resources. We support the intent of this bill, but we want to make sure that the requirements of the bill do not result in a return to a one-size-fits-all approach that does not work. We look forward to working with the sponsor. The second pre-considered bell would amend the administrative code of the city of New York and relation to rental assistance eligibility requirements for New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness. In the journey home, released just in

December, we reiterated our policy that a shelter stay is not a requirement for unsheltered individuals working with outreach teams to qualify for rental assistance. From the moment our teams engage individuals experiencing street homelessness, they are working to identify the root causes of homelessness and what customized approach will get that individual connected to care and services. This includes pathways to permanent housing, which might include rental assistance, supportive housing or a new low threshold model as a first step to bring someone inside. We look forward to working with the sponsor to ensure the needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness are provided the resources necessary to get back on their feet. Again, we want to make sure we are not re-creating a one size fits all approach. We think that our current policy, in terms of eligibility for rental assistance, strikes the right balance, particularly as we bring on additional safe haven and other permanent housing resources. And, of course, shelter is always offered and available to bring people inside at any point. In addition, we urge that the focus at this time continue to be on the developments

and Albany where there is broad support in the legislature for home stabilities support that would provide significant funding for state rental assistance to prevent and alleviate homelessness all across the state. And as we testified last week at a council hearing on other legislation, we need to be laser focused right now on addressing 1.1 billion dollars proposed state cost shift to New York City for the Medicaid program and 102 million dollar state cost shift over two years to New York City for the TANIF and EAF programs. All of which would limit significantly our ability to sustain our existing programs, let alone develop new ones. The other two bills being considered today relate to the accommodation of pets in shelter. Introduction 1483 would require the agency to develop a plan to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families in the shelter system while introduction 1484 would require reporting on the placements of pets whose owners enter homeless shelters. We applaud the intent of both of these provisions. It's been our long-standing policy to permit service animals as needed. Regarding pets as distinguished from service animals, we appreciate their importance in people's

lives, particularly the support and stability they provide. At the same time, we must be mindful of the physical limitations of the haphazard shelters system we inherited where many locations may not be effectively designed for pets and recognize that the one-size-fits-all of the past doesn't work. That's why we issued our turning the tide plan and modernize our open-ended request for proposals to transform our shelter footprint, develop new approaches, increase the options available to those we serve, and raise the bar on services we provide. We encourage our not-for-profit partners to propose innovative new shelters and safe havens based on the real time needs clients may be experiencing on the ground, including pet friendly locations. We have been actively encouraging our partners to propose pet friendly sites. We will continue working with partners to find a way to accommodate the various specific needs of clients with respect to pets. Outreach NYC is just one example of how we use every tool at our disposal to help New Yorkers in need get back on the path to stability. Homelessness is a moral challenge for our city that demands everyone's attention and action. As public servants, we all wear one uniform

and are working collaboratively to identify unsheltered New Yorkers and mobilizing resources to help. Through Home Stat, strengthening engagement, building trust, and providing more pathways off the street, DHS continues and builds on our efforts which have already helped more than 2450 New Yorkers come off the streets and subways and into the transitional programs and permanent housing. With compassionate frontline public servants acting as additional eyes and ears, helping our Home Stat teams further target their outreach, and meet people where they are, we remain squarely focused on taking this project further. Thank you and I would be happy to take your questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

UNIDENTIFIED: Am I allowed to--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No. No. Sorry.

UNIDENTIFIED: Well--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There's a time for public testimony after the administration testifies. And if everyone has public testimony, they should fill out a slip with the Sergeant-at-arms. Okay. Thank you, Commissioner. I want to start with what

has worked in the past. So, this administration in 2014-2015 worked with the federal government at the time to reduce the number of veterans who are on the street to functionally zero. Can you speak a little bit about that process and what worked there?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. So, that was, I think, much like the efforts that we have with street homelessness now. A very extensive interagency effort that was really focused on, really, person by person services. So, at that time, with veterans, we were working very closely with the veteran's services team. Also with HPD. You know, a slew of other agencies. The healthcare agencies to try and identify who needed services, what housing options were available at them, similarly to as we're doing now. We were experimenting with new housing models. We are able to use supportive housing. We are able to use the existing affordable housing stock for people who didn't need the same kinds of intensive services. But, at the end of the day, people arrive at a state of homelessness through many different paths. There is very-- People have very specific and personal needs and so we need to marshal all the city to, but we also need to work with

clinical partners to make sure that we are addressing people where they are.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But what specifically was the most effective part of reducing the number of veterans on the street? I mean, what was the real catalyst to make that work? Because veterans, like any other population, may have individual challenges. It was done within a relatively short period of time and so it was probably showing success probably within a few months of the program being rolled out. So--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So I think there are two things that I would call out. One is that there were and are resources that are specifically available to veterans, right? So the VASH [sp?] section eight vouchers, for an example, are an incredibly important tool that is specifically targeted to veterans as per federal regulation.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Just to fill us in, what is a HUD VASH voucher?

COMMISSIONER PARK: It is a form of a section eight voucher that is specifically available to veterans. To be honest--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How is it administered? Can somebody get a VASH voucher from the street?

COMMISSIONER PARK: They need to be connected to both a Housing Authority that has an allocation of VASH vouchers--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER PARK: and to the Veterans Administration. I believe, although we can confirm this, that they are specifically available to people who have been honorably discharged, as well.

ERIN DRINKWATER: That's correct.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, that is a subset of veterans.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

COMMISSIONER PARK: But it is an important resources that is available specific to veterans.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course.

COMMISSIONER PARK: The Veterans Administration also provides a range of services that are available, obviously, specifically to veterans. So, I think the resources that were veterans specific had a lot to do with it. But I think the other piece

that was really important-- and this is where I think we do absolutely see parallels to what we are doing with streets, it is a very senior focused, from City Hall down, and that involved multiple agencies with everybody bringing their resources that they have available to the table. You know, that is what it takes to solve a problem that is as nuanced as homelessness is and I think that is what you are saying with the approach to street homelessness now.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that all the veterans that got placed in a permanent housing through that initiative receive a HUD VASH voucher?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No. It wasn't 100 percent VASH.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you know what--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't off the top of my head. We can follow up with you on that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And, I'm sorry. Just, but in order to receive-- so a HUD VASH Belcher is a section 8 voucher, so it pays fair market rent?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It is permanent, so it's not time limited.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's administered through NYCHA?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Both NYCHA and HPD have had VASH allocations over the years.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Some are administered by HPD. Some are administered by NYCHA.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: By the same offices that administer other section eight vouchers?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And they are able to be accessed-- Does somebody have to move into a shelter for 90 days in order to receive a HUD VASH voucher or can they receive it from the street through case management services on the street?

COMMISSIONER PARK: They can receive it on the street which, to be clear, is also the case with the city vouchers that have nothing to do with VASH. You do not have to come into shelter to receive the city voucher.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. For a city [inaudible 00:24:35] voucher, you do not have to be in shelter?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, with regard to journey home, I just want to go through the individual bullets here. And this is what's going to be bringing the overall budget for street outreach to 240 million a year?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And there was 45 million in FY 14?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So the first bullet is increase the safe haven capacity by opening 1000 new safe haven beds. The current number of safe havens is 1800 and operation?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Safe have is stabilization beds. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And can you just, for the record, identify the differences or the similarities between those two models?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Safe havens are specifically contracted facilities that are dedicated to people who have experienced street homelessness. They have a quiet intensive service model. Stabilization beds are paid for via the outreach

contracts and have slightly lighter touch services. The emphasis at this point is on building the safe haven capacity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm. And stabilization beds are often in other types of facilities? So--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: YMCA and--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: and Greenpoint--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: stabilization beds.

YWCA in downtown Brooklyn is stabil--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how many stabilization beds are there?

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's included in the 1800. We can get back to you with the split.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But the difference being that stabilization beds could essentially be contracted? You know, if there is an SRO out there, which, obviously, there's not that many left, but if there are SROs, those SROs can be

contracted. Those stabilization beds could be brought on through a contract--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: whereas safe haven has to be built out as a safe haven, right? Or it has to be--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's a full site.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. So, to expand on the distinction a little bit, that stabilization beds are a shorter-term resource. They may be a piece of an existing facility using the building that is more or less already appropriate for those kinds of residential use. A safe haven where contracting for a minimum of a nine-year period to use the building as a safe haven. It generally does require construction to do it and, very often, the building is starting as something quite different. So, for example, we are converting the yoga studio to a safe haven. So that involves quite a lot of construction on that one.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm. So, then, the timeline for those 1000 beds in safe haven, what are we looking at?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The first project will come online in May and we have a steady pipeline after that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: To be completed--?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Over the next couple of years.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. By 2024?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I would expect so. Yes. I will caveat that construction schedules are sometime subject to change, but, yes. I would expect to be done by then.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now, how does DHS look at safe Haven as a model when it-- As a form of resource allocation or capacity in terms of-- Essentially, safe havens are not the most efficient from a management perspective use of square footage, basically. That is two people per room and you need a lot more space to have 1000 safe haven beds than 1000 beds and a congregant setting. Is that right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. Safe havens are typically smaller, so you would have more-- 50 beds in a particular facility. As you know, the dorms are smaller. It's two, three, four people per room and sometimes including single rooms. It's a

service intensive model. So, yes. They are not--
From a strictly economic perspective, they are not
the most efficient model, but we have found that they
are very important to helping very vulnerable
individual walls come off the streets and we think it
is an important part of the capacity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And what is it
about safe havens that people are more inclined to
take up? I will tell you that, when I talk to people
that are experiencing homelessness on the street or
in the subway, and I ask them if they want to go into
shelter, they usually say no. And if I ask them if
they want to go-- If that includes a safe haven,
though usually say, well, yes. They will take a safe
haven placement if available. So why is that? Why
do people want to go into a safe haven and not into
the regular congregant shelter?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Safe havens have
somewhat fewer rules. You don't have a curfew, for
example. They have smaller dorms per-- You know,
smaller number of people sharing a room. As I say,
in some cases, there is single rooms or two or three
people and a single adult shelter. It's a few more
people per room. It is a smaller setting. Hands

people prefer smaller settings. We offer a large system. There are about 58,000 people in shelter on any given night.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER PARK: That does not include the safe Haven numbers. We work very hard to make sure that our shelters are high-quality. We have invested more than a quarter of 1 billion dollars in this administration and improving services and shelters, specifically.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Annually?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. So, investing in shelter quality and investing in the services and the physical condition of our shelters is something that we have absolutely put our money where our mouth is. For a specific population of people who have a long-term history of street homelessness, safe havens are the better model.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I spoke to a man outside of Grand Central a couple months ago. I asked him how long he had been on this street. He had been on the street for about 10 years in multiple locations. I said, have you interacted with outreach teams? You said hundreds of times over that. And I

said, would you go into safe haven? And he said, yeah. I would go into safe haven. So why the what a man like that not being a safe haven if he is been out on the street for 10 years and would take the placement?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Um--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, I know it's a hypothetical. As a hypothetical there, why would that be the case?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I think people are facing a lot of very complex challenges and I think, when you are talking about somebody who is been on the street for a decade, they have been failed by multiple governments stones over that decade. And I think finding a moment where they are going to trust income inside is challenging. We want to be there when they to find that. When that moment does occur. That's one of the reasons why we think it is so important that we have a broad outreach perspective, but a dozen have been always and I think the same way it is-- I can answer hypothetical question. I think that individual is also answering a hypothetical question that, yes. And concept, they would be willing the common side to a safe haven. Whether or

not their distrust of experience of government, when that moment actually occurs, I can't speak to that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think that that is something that--

[background comments]

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. Yeah. As my colleague pointed out, we're very proud that we have increased the safe haven capacity by about three times. We usually have a couple of vacancies on any given night. We don't necessarily have a vacancy in a specific location. One of the things that we are trying to do is make sure that, with this increase in capacity is make sure that we have the right vacancies in the right place. Just because somebody does not have a home to go to it night does not mean that they are not connected to a particular community, so were trying to make sure that we have safe havens in a representative sample of communities so that an individual can be in the neighborhood where he or she feels comfortable.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And what's your average nightly vacancy for safe haven beds?

[background comments]

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's less than one percent. We do have some, but not a lot. We absolutely need capacity and we are committed to building it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Now, is as part of the 90 new shelters or is this a separate--

COMMISSIONER PARK: No. These are separate.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So then 1000 beds, 50 beds a safe haven is 20 new safe havens on top of the 90 new shelters?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Give or take. 50 is an average. There will be some that are a little bit smaller, some that are a little bit bigger, but yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm. And have you sketched out the siding plan for that and how that will work?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We're looking particularly in areas where there is-- where we know there is a need based on where unsheltered individuals are. I think--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER PARK: we're particularly interested in near end of line subway stations which tend to be a place where there are higher numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, but we are working very closely with our providers to identify sites. And we do have a strong pipeline at this point.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Okay. If there are any sites in my district, by all means, please--

COMMISSIONER PARK: We will absolutely be in touch. I appreciate that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Moving on to the low barrier permanent apartments, is there a model yet?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Where working on it. I'm really excited about it. I think what we heard from a lot of people was that supportive housing is a fabulous model. As you know, I come from the housing background. I'm very committed to supportive housing, but there is also some real process to get into supportive housing. You have to have a fair amount of documentation and paperwork that might not be the right option for everybody, so

we are thinking through what that would look like. I think we expect that it will be-- we will be able to provide medical services for those who need, that we are going to be able to-- and it will not have the same level of, you know, documentation of psychiatric disorder or substance use disorder--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 2010 E--

COMMISSIONER PARK: that is required for the 2010 E.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. So, no 2010 E?

COMMISSIONER PARK: That is what we are planning at this point. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And are there state or federal resources that could be available?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We will look at every couch cushion. At this point, this is something that we are trying to figure-- we're working through city funding mechanisms.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So no tax-exempt financing or--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I think it would actually be counterproductive to try and use the low income housing tax credits because that would then

just be taking resources away from supportive housing. The goal to the low barrier is to be additive to the stock.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And the 1000 units. What's the timeline there? You have to develop a program, put out an RFP, see what works--

COMMISSIONER PARK: We will be releasing an RFP for the spring, but we are trying to-- we are looking for--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: An RFP for all 1000 units?

COMMISSIONER PARK: For the model.
Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Have you been in touch with-- Who do you anticipate responding to this? Homeless service providers or housing providers?

COMMISSIONER PARK: There is a universe of not-for-profits that fill both of those spaces and, I think, we're talking to them, but I think we are-- and we've been working very closely with the development and advocate community and continue to--

we continue to do so, welcome input, happy to talk to others.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you have a concept paper out?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Were working on that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So happy to talk to you--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If an RFP goes out this spring, concept paper has to go out--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: now.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Very soon.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. All right. I look forward to seeing that.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: New health resources for people where they are. So, this is the question. I've been talking to the street outreach teams. I asked a street outreach team once, what do you think should be improved about this whole system? And they said that they send people from Grand Central over to Bellevue who have a medical

condition. They go through Bellevue. They go through the process of Bellevue in the May circle right back out and go back to Grand Central and then they get sent-- If they get sick, they are sent back to Bellevue. These are people with chronic conditions. Then there is a, you know, constant back and forth. And they said that the coordination with Health and Hospitals is very lacking.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. A couple of things in there that I'd like to respond to. So the funding in the journey home action plan is to increase the contracts for our outreach providers so that they can expand the medical services that they provide direct lay on the street to clients. So, all of our outreach providers will have the ability to do, you know, obviously, not complex medical procedures, but provide basic medical care to people without having to require that they come into the hospital. Most of them have some degree of that ability already.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Like NP's or--?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: With, you know, doctor's supervision and psychiatric access, as well. So that exists. It's not consistent across the different contracts, so the desire here is to both expand and make consistent across all the different boroughs and underground. Coordination--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]
Sorry. Just that that is you've gone through the funding requirements for that to make it competitive. And the one thing that we hear a lot is that, you know, for social workers, it's very difficult to track social workers to do work like that is because it's not a very lucrative avenue for somebody with the social worker degree.

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's very challenging work. We certainly understand that. We've been working closely with the outreach providers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER PARK: The existing contract outreach providers to model out what the initiative would look like.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You may want to also talk to like Hunter School of Social Work and--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: you know, make sure
what--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know, talking
to institutions that are graduating people with
social [inaudible 00:40:12].

COMMISSIONER PARK: Helpful suggestion.
I also want to address the coordination with H&H.
That's been something that has been very important
and we have focused on the lot-- excuse me-- over the
last few months. We have built very strong
relationships with the H&H emergency room and the JCC
so that we are working very hard to make sure that
when somebody is discharged from H&H, that we aren't
discharging them to the street. That we are getting
them to whatever indoor facility is appropriate. A
safe have shelter, a drop in center, whatever.
Whatever is the best option for that individual.
That last thing I just do, however, want to point
out, is that Grand Central is not covered by DHS
contracts.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. And I
[inaudible 00:40:55].

COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, yeah.

Outside is.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. But--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, yeah.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Within Grand
central. I just want to be clear.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I don't know
whether this was inside or outside Grand Central
because it was like right on the sidewalk. I think
it was the BRC staff. But I think that that's--
Well, that presents a different challenge which is,
if DHS is not doing the contract inside areas where a
large number of people are in the subway-- You do
the subway.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We do the subways.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You just don't do--

COMMISSIONER PARK: The transit
stations, the-- Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Penn Station?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Penn Station and
Grand Central are subject to MTA oversight. They
have contracts of their own, but they are not

directly administered by DHS. So I just want to be clear about that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Is there a meeting of the minds?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We absolutely collaborate with the MTA. There's regular meetings. We coordinate. Obviously, we have some of the same providers in those systems, so we are-- we talk. We resource, but--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So BRC has an MTA contract and a DHS contract?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: But the city has gone-- As we had just been talking about, the city has invested a lot in expanding contracts and expanding the resources that our contractors have to get people off the streets. The state is still where they are.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I've heard of an idea of having an FQHC somewhere located in midtown. Is that something-- that is specifically designed or available to people who are living on the street

in and around the midtown area. Is that something that DHS would see as helpful or beneficial?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to explore with you. Yeah. Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So there is a provider that it come to me about it, can make sure that they're talking with you?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Please.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And then, are you familiar with it was just a paper put out by NYLAG about the need for medical respite. Medical respite beds.

COMMISSIONER PARK: I haven't seen the paper. I'm happy to take a look at it. It is something that we are thinking and talking a lot about. I think, you know, medical respite is a term that means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. So--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

COMMISSIONER PARK: And, given that I haven't read the paper, I'm not sure exactly which meaning we are using right now.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So there is a consortium with NYLAG and Montefiore and a few other

hospitals that, going back to the previous term. So, in the 15-19 term-- 15 to-- Yeah. Whatever it was. Last term.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They did a lot of work in terms of advocacy, but the paper that they just put out was in line with that work and the Speaker at the time, when he was the Health Chair, had a bill into require the city to provide medical respite shelter beds for people with chronic conditions that need them. What we are hearing is from hospitals that they are discharging people with chronic medical conditions into drop-in centers, into congregated shelters or, you know, people might end up on the street because-- for people that they, otherwise, their only other option is to keep them in the hospital, but they are not acute enough to be admitted any longer.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They often do keep people longer in a bed just because. So these are conditions like dialysis, heart conditions, cancer. Things that require oxygen tanks. Things that require oxygen tanks. So things that do need some

type of medical, ongoing medical, care. You know, the kind of care that Medicaid would cover under a home health care, you know, contract or provider and, but if you're homeless or in a congregate setting, it's certainly not appropriate for somebody to be receiving, you know-- recovering from chemo therapy sleeping on a cot in a, you know, a room with 40 other people.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Just to be clear, that is not the model that we use in our current shelters. We do have dorms, they are congregate, but they are not 40 other people, but, yes. I don't disagree with you. I think this is a need that we have heard, as well. We have an Office of the Medical Director. They work very, very closely with H&H to make sure that, when discharge does happen, that it is happening to an appropriate facility. I think, is there more that can be done? There is absolutely more that can be done. I think we need-- This is a place where I think we need more options for long-term residential settings. You know, that kind of model that you're talking about is almost a nursing home kind of setting. There are very few options there.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, yes and no. I mean, so, for example, Communal Life does have a number of beds that are providing that type of service right now, but what we hear is that there's a need for an increased capacity. So--

COMMISSIONER PARK: If--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I would certainly recommend reaching out to NYLAG which has done a lot of the work on this.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Helpful suggestion. It's something we're thinking about and I will follow up.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Because it's kind of one of those things that I have like-- I was working on this last term and I only have a year and a half left, so I want to get this addressed before amount.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Great.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With that, I'll turn it over to Council member Holden and then I'll come back with questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair Levin. I have a few questions. And, by the way, thank you for your testimony and your efforts, but I

just wanted to bring up some issues and try to get some numbers. You said that you tripled the outreach from 2014. Do you have 600 individuals on the outreach?

COMMISSIONER PARK: it's close to 600.

Just to clarify, most of those are contracted outreach providers. We work with a number of nonprofits and they are the ones that have the majority of the staff.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So how many will be out tonight in the subways? Just how many teams?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, the subway is about a third of all of the outreach. I can get the exact number on that. We have outreach above ground, as well, of course, and then so-- and it is 24/7, so if you are talking about the overnight shift, I think it will be in the range of 50 or 60 people, but that is something that we can clarify--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing] 50 or 60 people. And I'm concerned that, you know, very-- You can come up with all these programs and catchy phrases and names, but were not seen the results on the ground. I know that you will say otherwise, but I'll give you some examples. My wife

rarely takes the subway. She takes the express bus from our home in Queens because we really don't have subways. Right? We have to take a bus to the subway. So my wife takes the express bus and pays for the hour and a half or so commute that takes-- that's about seven miles away from her job in Manhattan. So, she has to pay extra for the-- It's not your fault, but she pays extra. We pay extra because she wants to avoid the subways. So the other day she took the subway because we had a family function and she had to get on pretty quickly. Her commute, half hour by subway, she ran in the two situations. One, a homeless gentleman gets in the car, start screaming at all the women. Going up to them, don't look at me. Screaming in on their faces. And you can't arrest me. You can't do anything to me. Don't look at me. Screaming in their faces. She got out of the car. She goes into another car because there would seem there is a seat and got hit with there was a number of homeless sleeping in the car. This is rush-hour nobody was in the car, so she had to get out of that car. She never takes the subways, but every time she does, there is a situation. Now, you may say that, you know, we are

out there, but the fact that we're not seeing the difference-- I don't believe anything DHS says anymore. I don't because we're not seeing the results and we haven't seen the results. With all the programs that you have actually laid out here and we're sick of it. We're sick of-- You know, I don't know how many psychiatrists are in the subway. How many psychiatrists are with the teams that are out there? Because you say it's-- they have to voluntarily accept unless they are posing a danger to themselves or the public.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Now, does this guy pose-- This is today's paper and the Daily News. Does this guy pose a danger to the public? Have you seen this?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I've not read the article.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah. Well, maybe you should think of 151 times he was arrested in four months and he's in a shelter. The people around him are saying he talks to himself. He screams at himself. He screams that other people. And I don't want you to address this individual because I know

you can't, but we are seeing this over and over again. No one is red flagging these individuals. And the question I have is, posing-- It's very subjective. Posing a danger to themselves or others.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, let me start by saying that, since the start of-- Since 2016 when Home Stat was launched, we have moved 2455 people off the street into and permanent placement. The majority of them into permanent housing and some of them permanently in the shelter. Right? So, I would--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. You can--

COMMISSIONER PARK: counter the--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: throw numbers at me--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I would like to--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: and I'll throw numbers--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I would like--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: at you.

COMMISSIONER PARK: to counter-- I would like to counter the argument that we are not getting results because I to think that we are working very hard. Our outreach partners are working

very hard to make sure that we are providing a pathway off the street.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: To take the subways?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I do. Everyday.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. Have you encountered situations where you felt threatened?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You haven't?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The-- I--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You haven't? Wait a minute. You haven't felt threatened on the New York City subways?

COMMISSIONER PARK: By a person experiencing homelessness? No. I don't think I have.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Wow.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Have I felt threatened?

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You're probably the only New Yorker.

[background comments]

COMMISSIONER PARK: Where I would like to go-- where I was going to go with this is

straight homelessness, homelessness in general is a function of very complicated macroeconomic forces. Right? We're talking about the state of the housing market. We are talking about the state of criminal justice policy. We are talking about the state of mental health policy. We are talking about growing income inequality. All of these things affect the number of people experiencing homelessness whether it is straight homelessness or homelessness within the shelter system. Right? So, I want to say that the fact that there are still people experiencing Street homelessness is not a function of the success or lack of success in the outreach teams or DHS' work. We have more to do. That's why we launched the journey home action plan. It is the most aggressive plan in the country to address long-term Street homelessness, but I do think it is incredibly important that we replace this problem in the context of the larger forces that we are dealing with. With respect to your question about when an individual is a danger to themselves or others, this is a determination that has again made by a licensed medical professional. So, I could the-- Generally, in most cases, when this does happen, one of the nurse says that works

with the NYPD, but it can also be one of those psychiatrists working with the outreach provider. It could be an H&H doctor. It has to be-- That has to occur--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So the outreach team doesn't have a medical person, a qualified medical person, to do that?

COMMISSIONER PARK: On--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: They have to go to another step?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, if I could finish what I was saying--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, you never answered my original question. A psychiatrist--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm working on it.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No. Psychiatrists. How many psychiatrists are working--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't have that exact number. We can get back to you with that one.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right.

COMMISSIONER PARK: No. Not every outreach team has a psychiatrist with them. As much as that might ultimately be desirable, that would be an incredibly challenge lift in the-- particularly

in the context of the state budget cuts but we are looking at. What we have is the outreach teams work closely with the city outreach workers and with the NYPD. When an individual is identified in crisis where there is a concern that that individual is a danger to themselves or others, a licensed medical professional, one of the nurse says, a doctor, a psychiatrist, makes that determination and then, with the PD-- this can only-- Removal can only happen in conjunction with the PD. That individual is transported to a hospital for assessment. It's not a decision we'd take lightly. We also need to respect people's civil liberties, but we need to do it when we feel like there is a moment of crisis.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So how many individuals-- and I know you probably don't have the number off hand, but I'll ask it anyway. How many were involuntarily removed and given shelter because they were actually-- they pose a danger to themselves. It was determined that they posed a danger to themselves or the public?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't have exact numbers, but I just want to clarify. Nobody is involuntarily moved to shelter. If there is an

involuntary removal, they are taken to a hospital for an assessment.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Shelter is voluntary.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Fair enough. Fair enough. So, can we get that number? How many were involuntarily and how many times was Kendra's Law applied, which was a tool where we can get them medication, we can get them help? And I know last time you said we don't-- we really don't do that very often, but there is Kendra's Law for a reason.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: It is state law on the books that can help individuals, you know, because you can petition the courts to have them take their medication on an outpatient basis. And if they don't take their medication, as they continue to pose a danger to the public, they can be committed, which they should be.

COMMISSIONER PARK: I want to emphasize that the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness, whether it is straight homelessness or

sheltered homelessness are New Yorkers who have fallen on hard times, right? We--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Listen. I don't need the soapbox. What I need is answers to questions. Individual questions that I'm asking because we're not seeing a difference. A lease from my perspective. I took the subway. When I take the subways, I always see an issue. Always see it. Almost every trip that I take there is an issue with the homeless and I keep seeing money and being put toward it. I see efforts. You know, a lot of money being put up for. I see that BRC is not doing what they're supposed to be doing and that's not me. That's the State comptroller. The notes also Scott Stringer. That's a number of individuals. I see so many not-for-profit that are not doing their jobs and, yet, the Department of Homeless Services is clueless to it.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, I think, with respect to the BRC and the state comptroller's audit, I think this ties back very much to the point that I was just making about the larger factors that are driving the trends in homelessness. One of the things that the comptroller called out was the extent

to which BRC had or hadn't affected the total number of people that were on the street at any given time. That is a number that we, DHS, had determined was not an appropriate metric for the contract because homelessness-- The number of people experiencing homelessness on any given night is a factor of all the macroeconomic factors that I laid out already and I think it is, frankly, beyond the capacity of one individual not-for-profit organization to solve census problems by themselves.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, let me-- So if I scream at-- I'm a homeless man. I walk into a sub then I screamed at people in people's faces and I yell at them and I said, don't look at me. Don't look at me. Then I start doing that. Do I pose a danger to the public? I mean, I know you are not a-- If you're going to say, well, I can determine that because it's on an individual basis, but would you say that that is posing a danger to the public?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The determination of who is posing a dangers or others needs to be made by a licensed medical professional and I am not--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right. But do we have guidelines for that?

COMMISSIONER PARK: It is a medical diagnosis and the guidelines, the state law states that it's danger to self or others as determined by a licensed medical professional. To bring them in for a further assessment to determine what their medical needs might be.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah. Because I want to know how many people are brought in to a medical facility from on an individual night. Like if we can get that number, because whatever is being done, if the person just keeps refusing-- because they don't want to go into a shelter and you said that there is a one percent vacancy rate on the safe havens.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: One percent. That means there is very little and sometimes you are full.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: If we can get a metric on that like how many times that we didn't have enough space and safe haven-- Which I think, with 1800 beds and all the number of homeless out

there, we should have a lot more than 1800 and we should fill a lot more than 1800.

COMMISSIONER PARK: And we agree with you. We are adding another thousand beds.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right. So, if you can get-- You know, I asked these questions and I always hear that you're going to get back to me and then nobody gets back to us and that is an ongoing problem with DHS. It's the least transparent agency out there. I've been saying this over and over again. It's very frustrating when children's care center with huge contracts are almost 1 billion dollars has to be taken over and DHS takes a year to actually go to DOI with this. There's a number of issues that I feel-- Kendra's Law is not being used in a of. That posing a danger to themselves or others is not being used. We hear from EMS workers that they get yelled at by hospitals because they take the homeless there, so we are hearing it from providers. We are hearing it from the home was themselves who say the food is horrible. They don't want to go into the shelter. I don't want to going to dormitory style shelter, and I don't blame them. And we need-- Obviously, we need more affordable

housing demand more supportive housing and more transitional housing, which we are not seeing enough of in this administration. It's six years in. It's just not happening. So, I think we're at a point where New Yorkers are fed up and we need to see some action and not just programs that-- New programs that are just out there. Let me just get to the faith-based because the Mayor announced that that we are in the faith-based programs we're supposed to see more and more organizations get involved. How many to date? Has that been successful?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. We've had a tremendous response to the faith-based community. We are very grateful to them. They've been bringing us sites. We are assessing them. Several of the site in our preliminary pipeline come from the faith-based organizations and we look forward to further working.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: How many have opened up in the last month or so? I mean--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, safe havens almost entirely depend on construction--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Faith-based.

COMMISSIONER PARK: to be able to be ready to go. So there is a time period between the

planning stage and opening. So the first of the new safe haven capacity opens in May. That is actually not a faith-based site, but we have a robust pipeline coming.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, can you get us a number of how many new faith-- because I had-- Two years ago, I mentioned more faith-based. I have a number of buildings that are empty from faith-based organizations that we should be utilizing. I've told the Commissioner that is over and over again. He opened up one in my district and that's it. 15 beds. And I said it's only-- Now, we can do it 24 seven and were still waiting. So, I don't really see any urgency on DHS. The offer still exists. If the Commissioner will come out. I think the Commissioner is ducking me since I got on the Committee. I haven't seen him. But I'd like to have-- invite him to my district so I can open up smaller shelters for individuals, mostly men, which the community will accept. And we have faith-based organizations willing to accommodate them, but it is not happening.

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'd like to think that as a 20 year veteran of city service, I can

offer some content here. I apologize that the Commissioner is not available.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. That helps a lot. However, what I would like to see-- And let me just go-- Can I go one more question?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There's nobody else here. So--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right. That's right. And I was here early. Let's just talk about the pet friendly shelters. Are there any?

COMMISSIONER PARK: At this point, we do not have any shelters that accept pets. All of our shelters accept service animals and emotional support animals. We have RFPs on the street for both shelters and safe havens that allow and encourage pet friendly proposals. I think, from what I've heard, there are some coming our way, but it is-- I don't have anything that I could--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing] When was the RFP? How long has it been out there?

COMMISSIONER PARK: These are rolling RFPs. I don't have the exact date. The safe haven one is due to be refreshed. We will be releasing that. We have done outreach to providers. We have done-- We have actively solicited proposals. You know, I do want to emphasize that this is not-- As I have said in my testimony, this is not a place where we are going to have one-size-fits-all solutions, both because much of the real estate that we have inherited is not going to be appropriate for animals. You know, it might not have outdoor space. It might not have the right kinds of layouts, but mostly because, while pets are incredibly important for some individuals and we do want to recognize that, there is going to be other people with either allergy or trauma issues related to animals.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No. I understand that one size does not fit all and we understand that. However, if you ask providers to offer pet friendly-- I mean, have been a year?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. So it's been a year and nobody's like come forward because it's not a priority, right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are happy to work with our providers. It is important that the person-- the organization actually running the shelter on the day-to-day basis has the same engagement and places the same importance on the animals as they do on everything else, so we want to make sure that the providers are the ones leading the charge on any particular site.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Does a provider get anymore money for have, you know, pet friendly shelters?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The contract rates are negotiated based on specific types of services provided at the shelter, so if--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, if a family becomes homeless, what happens to their pets?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We will work with individuals and families to make alternative arrangements. We have absolutely done that. The rates that we see of surrendering of pets are very, very low.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, it goes to somebody else in the family? I mean, they don't go into shelters, then?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Not unless they are support animal or an emotional-- or a service animal. Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. Thank you, Chair. I may have a second round if-- Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council member. Sorry. Just want to get back to the faith-based question for a second here. So I distinctly remember being added announcement with Mayor de Blasio in 2014 or 15 in the blue room with a bunch of religious people about faith-based beds and shelter. And it was this big announcement and we were very proud to announce this partnership with our faith-based partners. And then, nothing ever happened with a and then, when I asked like a couple years ago, like maybe two years ago, like 2018, hey, what's the story with all those faith-based beds? Whatever happened to that? They said, ah, we don't want to do that. We went away from that model. We don't want to do the faith-based. So, now, we're now saying we're going it is faith-based. We announced it like the first or second year of the administration.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, I think a couple of things have changed since that initial

announcement. One is the way have a much more robust process and team for developing capacity. They are able to work-- faith-based organizations are not real estate developers, for the most part. They don't--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They have a lot of real estate.

COMMISSIONER PARK: They do have a lot of real estate, but they don't necessarily, nor is it their job to have the expertise to work with the process.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I know a lot of religious people that have gotten really experience at--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] All right. Terrific. I'm happy to be wrong, but we have a much more robust team within DHS right now is equipped to go out, to do the site visit, toe work through the complexities of bringing a site online with a faith-based organization. So we are in a better place to be able to work with the partners. The other thing that I think is substantively different now is that we are particularly focused on safe havens, which as-- because they are smaller

facilities, they may be a better match than more general shoulder capacity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But it seems as if maybe we lost some time and, since time is-- Since nothing gets cheaper in this city, over time, we may be lost some opportunity as a result of that by, literally, going back to where we said we were going to do like six years ago.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are making terrific progress on the turning the tide plan. We have announced 68 new shelters, open 34. I don't think we've lost any time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just have to disagree because it's-- I mean, it's a little bit déjà vu. I mean, I was literally told we're not doing faith-based like just maybe a year or two ago. So, we could leave it at that, but it's--

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'll ask a couple questions about pets. Do we know how many people-- First off, there is a pet friendly shelter within the HRA system, correct?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Just one?

ERIN DRINKWATER: URI, as a provider, accommodates pets and their shelters. The one you are thinking of is PALS, which recently opened.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And do we track how many people-- Is it cold?

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's freezing in here.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can we raise the temperature a little bit?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we know how many people have turned or have opted not to go into shelter because of pets? Because they have pets they don't want to part with?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Almost, by definition, that's not a noble number because, if they don't come into our system, they're not part of our system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. But outreach workers could probably, you know? If somebody says I don't want to come in me, I've got my dog here--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Shelter, yes. Sorry. I was thinking about the larger system. With

respect to outreach workers and people experiencing street homelessness, we have absolutely worked very hard to make special accommodations for individuals and their pets. I would also say that it is our team's anecdotal impression-- and I will freely acknowledge that we don't have quantitative data on this, but that pets are a larger piece of the puzzle. You know, as I mentioned, we're talking about a population that is been failed by multiple levels of government over many, many years. There is a high level of distrust. The pet may be the approximate answer, but the actual issue is about wise somebody might not be ready to comment side is substantially deeper than that. That being said, we are actively soliciting proposals for pet friendly safe havens and, based on conversations that we have had with providers, these are preliminary, they are not yet something that I can talk about, but I am cautiously optimistic that we are--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great.

COMMISSIONER PARK: going to see proposals going forward.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how about family shelters? Because I, you know-- If you think

about, you know, a child, particularly during a traumatic time in their lives, could be very attached to a pet. And if they are finding themselves, you know, the prospect of losing that, that could add to that trauma. So if URI is able to do it in the HRA system, have we sought guidance from them how they make it work if they make it work? I mean, I'm assuming that it's not disastrous for them because they are still doing it.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We have absolutely solicited pet friendly proposals across the system. Talking to URI for some best practices is a good suggestion. We will take that back.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I'm sure they would have something to add.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: because, yeah. I do worry about, you know, pets are members of your family. I have two cats. If we went into shelter and I had to tell my daughter that we are giving up our two cats, like that would be very, very problematic. You know? Absolutely. It would be problematic for me. Be really problematic for my daughter. You know? So, yeah. I look forward to

working with you guys I'm getting to a good place on this legislation because I'd like to pass this quickly. Want to get back to the issues around sightings. What is the sighting policy when it comes to street outreach teams in New York City?

COMMISSIONER PARK: There is no formal sighting policy. As you note, on any given night, about half of the people experiencing street homelessness are experiencing long-term street homelessness and about half of them have a more-- are having a more episodic experience. Many they're going to come into shelter or they're going to reconcile with friends, family, and come back inside. That we have a lot of both Hope survey data and also the experience of outreach workers to back that up. We are--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay. So half the people are experiencing-- Would you say half the people that are experiencing street homelessness are chronically homeless and half are episodic? Is that how you would describe it?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. I mean, chronic is a very specifically term of art that I am

actively definitively trying to stay away from, but so long term is the term that I'm using, but, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: On any given night, that is the experience of what we see.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we want to make sure that we are directing our resources most directly to the people who are experiencing long-term homelessness. Because we want to encourage people to reconcile back with their families and their community is when that is an option. And because we always live in an era of scarce resources and we want to make sure we are directing them appropriately. That being said, our outreach workers have many years of experience, a lot of clinical expertise and we rely very heavily on the clinical expertise. Anything, you know, one of the things that I heard loud and clear when I was here last month then we were talking about the diversion program was the importance of making sure that we are approaching social services with a social service lens and respecting the expertise of clinicians. I think this is a really good example of where that happens. So,

when a not-for-profit outreach worker identifies some money that they feel like it is in need of services, they absolutely have the discretion to be able to get that person to the full array of DHS services.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. First off, I-- That breadth of clinical experience may or may not be there. In outreach, there probably plenty of outreach workers who, you know, don't have MSWs. Let don't have-- I mean, what is the starting salary for an outreach worker?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't have that with me, but--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm sure it's not 75,000 dollars.

COMMISSIONER PARK: The organizations come with a lot of expertise. Is there places where we can invest in training? Absolutely. We're working really hard with our--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]
Actually, I'd be curious to know how many social workers are weighted in the kind of chain of command at the-- This is [inaudible 01:17:13]

COMMISSIONER PARK: We can certainly get back to you with that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But I'd be interested to know because I was having a conversation recently just about the-- And this goes back to actually talking to please like Hunter because social work tracks kind of goes, from my understanding, goes in kind of different-- There's a few different directions. There is licensed clinical social worker and then another is through kind of administrator. Administrative. And so, having, you know, being in in a position of like being as street outrage social worker is not a very appealing career cores for a lot of people coming out of MSW programs. So, I'm just wondering how-- really what type of, you know? First, that's just one issue I wanted to bring up. But then, coming back to how we're-- There's a report by human.nyc, I don't know if you saw it, around sighting where what they are saying, talking to people, everybody knows that there's some type of sighting policy, but nobody knows what that sighting policy is because there isn't really a policy. But they know that they have to have sight. They know they have to be seen and that the resources available to them are somehow dependent on being seen some number of times that is not uniform across the board,

that may or may not apply to them and it is-- Like for example, if you are-- A safe haven bed is not available to you if you don't meet certain criteria, correct available to you if you don't meet a certain criteria, correct?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No. That's not correct. We absolutely work with our outrage providers to make sure that, if they have a client that they think is in need of a safe haven bed, that they-- we will try and get an individual in. Understanding it is--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If that person--

COMMISSIONER PARK: It is--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: has never been sighted before--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Well--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can't prove chronicity, can't prove long term--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, this is a place where this question of working with the outreach providers to say that this is an individual who needs that very scarce resource.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Who makes that decision at the outreach provider?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The organizations have a clinical supervision structure that they are-- You know, the front line worker is not going to be able to make that recommendation by him or herself. They are going to work with their large organizational structure. We work really closely with these organizations, talk on a regular-- the streets team talks on a regular basis with all the providers. We have been emphasizing very clearly that, if there is a client about whom they are particularly concerned, that we are absolutely willing to work with them to get them to get to the particular-- to the right resources. I do want to emphasize--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm worried about the opposite, actually. I'm worried about because that allows for a certain amount of arbitrariness, I'm worried more about the person that they say, for some reason, shouldn't qualify for the and what means of appeal, then, does a person that is living on the street have when they say, listen, I've been-- I'm down and out. I want to go into a safe haven. You're telling me I don't qualify, but I don't know

what the criteria is and I don't know who to appeal to.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, New York City has a right to shelter city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible
01:20:50]

COMMISSIONER PARK: Everybody has their-- For the record, New York City is a right to shelter city.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I know.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Everybody has the right to come inside. We do not have a sufficient safe haven capacity to bring everybody into a safe haven unit. We are growing our safe haven capacity significantly. If somebody absolutely wants to come inside, we encourage them to do so. We will work with them. If it's not a shelter, it's a drop-in center. It's a--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But a drop in--

COMMISSIONER PARK: There is--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: a drop-in center, you can't sleep in a drop-in center. You are sitting in the chair.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Understood, but there are many pathways to come inside. And, you know, if there is a client that you are thinking of in this conversation--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm not.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm thinking about a hypothetical client because I know that they are out there where they want a safe haven placement. They have no idea what the criteria. And what you're saying is that there is no sighting policy. Is there a definition of chronicity? Does the definition of chronicity have anything to do with it?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The federal definition of chronicity is nine months out of the last two years.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And does that have anything to do with safe haven placement?

COMMISSIONER PARK: That has traditionally been the definition for safe haven placement. We are--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But it's not now.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are working with providers to make sure that when they have a client

that does not meet that standard, but for whom they feel like this incredibly scarce resources important-- and I do want to emphasize that this is a scarce resource, right? We are adding the capacity. We think it's important. We are very literally putting our money where our mouth is, but to build back capacity. But if a client needs a safe haven bed for somebody that does not meet the federal standard, we will work with them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Now, does the federal standard have anything-- Like does it affect our rate of reimbursement on our beds?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We, unfortunately, do not get any reimbursement on our beds.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No reimbursement. Okay. So then we are not tied to that, which is-- That's actually--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] There's a handful of safe havens that do have a limited amount of federal funding in it. It's not our reimbursement the way that family shelter system works.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And that's not dependent upon meeting the federal definition of chronicity?

COMMISSIONER PARK: At this point, we have enough city funded safe havens--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible
01:22:55]

COMMISSIONER PARK: limited capacity that we can do this on the targeted basis. Everything with safe havens is going to have to be on this targeted basis because of--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible
01:23:03]

COMMISSIONER PARK: because we do have scarce capacity.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But when there is 2800 beds--

COMMISSIONER PARK: We will--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: that's not that scarce. That's like about, you know, how many individuals are on the street?

COMMISSIONER PARK: When we have 2800 beds, I think we will be in a much better place to be able to meet the broader need. I will say, you know,

one of the things that we are doing as we are building out our streets team and launching all the journey home initiatives is that we are assessing policies and procedures overall. We have a new deputy commissioner for the streets team. She is working very closely with all the outreach providers, working for best practices. And as this is something that we want to formalize, we will. Right now, we think that the respecting the clinical expertise and then not for profits is working relatively well, but there is always room to look for improvement.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I mean, that's, in some sense, that's a good answer that we don't get federal funding for these because then we are not necessarily-- We can make up our own criteria.

COMMISSIONER PARK: To be clear, and I should have been cleared to begin with, there is some limited federal funding in the safe havens. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But not in a prohibitive sense. It doesn't prevent us from creating our own criteria.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We do have some flexibility within the confines of the fact that it

is a very scarce resource so we want to direct to the people most in need.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood. I just think that it's-- I am worried about the person that says, I mean-- They couldn't appeal. I mean, say there is somebody on the street. Let's use a hypothetical. In the street outreach workers says, you know, I put it up the chain of command and they said no. You know, you don't need it enough were something. Who do they go to? Who do they appeal to all?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So we do have a DHS ombudsman that accepts complaints of a wide variety. You know? We can--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] But how do they find the ombudsman?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We could think about ways that we can make sure that that information is widely available. I would also say that, you know, we very much respect to the work that the advocacy community does and that the elected officials to. We have certainly gotten some of these phone calls from your office about how do we connect

to client to services. So we do work very closely with partners to solve special cases.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I'm just not sure it's that special. You know what I mean? Like there's plenty. There's got to be people that like don't know an elected official that have--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] We do not have a formal appeal process related to safe havens. It's an interesting suggestion and we'll think about how we can do that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. We've been hearing this issue for a while and I just think that there's a-- I think that there ought to be some level of kind of standardization. One of the things about safe haven capacity is-- So, obviously, beds would open up if people were to be placed in permanent housing out of safe haven. What are the biggest challenges right now to DHS placing people out of safe haven?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Well, it's something we're focused on very closely right now and we've seen a big uptick in the number of people moving out of safe havens and into supportive housing. That's, in part, due to a specific

allocation of 1515 resources and also working with our partners from the state from the [inaudible 01:26:40] resources dedicated specifically to people experiencing street homelessness, but we are also working to facilitate placements into congregate supportive housing, as well. So, you know, just-- We have seen a steady uptick in those numbers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's scatter-- So, you meant scatter?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Both scatter and congregate, but we do think that it is something we need to do more of. We're working both on the supportive housing side, but also the low barrier model that we introduced as part of the journey home. I think it will be helpful there.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm. You know, I just did a little bit of math and you said you placed 2400--

COMMISSIONER PARK: 55.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 2455. But that's over four years and so I averaged it out. That's about two placements-- a little less than two placements a day. Do we have a target for the number of placements? Like our kind of rate of placement?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We don't have an official target. No. I actually think that that is-- that's a success, the 2455. We're talking about--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I don't know whether it is or not.

COMMISSIONER PARK: There's always room to do better. The fact that we have people on the street at all is something that we want to address. It's why we launched the journey home plan, but this is a population that's facing multiple hurdles to coming indoors that we really have invested in that and we do see this strong rate of people coming in and staying indoors.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I mean, going back to the first questions I asked which was why was the veteran's initiative successful-- And I think you realized this coming from HPD, housing is-- You know, the big thing there was those VASH vouchers. That's what made the difference because that got people into long term permanent housing. You know, and this gets into our whole conversation around fair market rent on vouchers and why vouch-- Why is a section eight voucher more appealing to a

land-- Why is it more effective? I went to a roundtable a couple weeks ago with RSA. I was, you know, with a bunch of-- 40 RSA owners. These are small building owners. I'd say more than half of the people around that table were women. More than half of the people around that table were people of color. 40 people. I asked, how many people around this table take section eight vouchers? You know, a bunch of hands went up. 10 or 12 hands. I asked, how many people around this table take city [inaudible 01:29:40] vouchers? And one hand went up. And that person complained about how it's administered. So, you know, the reason why the HUD-VASH works is because it's an effective voucher.

ERIN DRINKWATER: I think I want to point out something that's really important is that it's one instance where we have resources from the federal government. One of the reasons why we were able to bring that veterans number down was because we had investment at all levels of government.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

ERIN DRINKWATER: And that's critically important. It's why we're fighting for HSS. You know the story.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

ERIN DRINKWATER: But I don't want to not point that out.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely. 100 percent.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. And listen--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But I would just say this, you know, just as a-- You know, I do believe, and New Yorkers that are watching this on channel 74 that don't agree with me, feel free to email me or tweet at me about it. I think that New Yorkers are willing to put in their tax dollars to solutions that work. And in this context, the definition of what works is placing people into permanent housing, effectively, efficiently, on a large scale and I think that New Yorkers are okay with allocating their tax dollars, whether it's their local tax dollars, their state tax dollars, or their federal tax dollars in that. If they see that the number of people on the street go down because they're in permanent housing, not because they moved to New Jersey or Virginia, but because they are in permanent housing in New York City, I think that they

would, you know? And, again, if anyone on channel 74 disagrees with me--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm sure you'll--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: let me know.

COMMISSIONER PARK: hear from them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, this

administration has moved 140,000 people in the permanent housing, right? The city vouchers, through HPD housing programs, moving people into NYCHA housing, right, that is, obviously, inclusive of people who are in the shelter system. It is not specific to streets, but we have a deep commitment to moving people into permanent housing. We are absolutely investing into permanent housing. The only other thing that I would say is really just to agree with you is that as we were drafting the action plan, the journey home action plan, and talking to people, one of the really guiding forces was, you know, outreach is good, but you need places for people to go, right? So, we have 1000 new safe haven bands and 1000 units of permanent housing. Right? That is in a normative commitment. It's not one that we have made the form. It's going to be really

important. You know, this is administration that has the largest municipal supportive housing commitment that's ever been made. The 1515 commitment is tremendous. You know, I think there is a lot of efforts to creating new pathways for permanent housing. The city has certainly invested a lot of resources in it. I don't disagree with you that permanent housing is the end goal, but I think, to piggyback off of my colleague's comment, where we can do it in conjunction with other layers of government, it is very helpful.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes. HSS, I think, would be very helpful in this entire equation, so I encourage my colleagues on the state level to please support that. I don't have the assembly and senate bill numbers off hand, but they know what it is.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm very hopeful that that gets addressed in this legislative session, in the budget session, before the end of next month. Council member Grodenchik, do you have questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I apologize for-- I had another

committee commitment at the same exact time. So, I started with education. Good morning--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Is it still morning? Good afternoon, Deputy Commissioner Park. You know, I think that this city's commitment to people who are homeless, I don't even like to use that term, but it is without parallel. We are expending several billion dollars every single year and, at the Education Committee hearing I was at, we were talking about class size reduction and, while it may not be total analogous to homeless services, I remark there that I felt that we were on a treadmill. I've been in government in Queens County for over 30 years and we've been building new school seats for all that time and sometimes it's like trying to hit a moving target because people come and they go and I hear from principals of medium sized elementary schools. Their population can go up or down 50 or 100 students each and every year. And I've said this to Commissioner Banks, that I feel that we're on a treadmill. I travel almost every day on the New York City subways. I'm an E-line rider, generally. I've seen a great increase. And my information is

anecdotally, but there's no question that it's up. And I know we've had a hearing on that, but it just-- I think we need to take more beds. And I know that my colleague, Mr. Holden, asked something along these lines before. Wouldn't it be helpful if we had more psychiatric help on the streets? I mean, is that something that we should be investing in?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are investing in additional medical care. We are happy to look at ways that we can grow that, keeping in mind, however, the context of the, you know, potentially, devastating state budget cuts that are coming out way. So, I'm really glad we are able to lock in the increase in investment in medical care on the streets now and we can look at it going forward when we have a better, clearer picture of the state budget. I want to take a step back, though, and talk a little bit about numbers. On the families with children side-- Now, this is not street homelessness. This is people experiencing homelessness and staying in DHS shelters. The number of families with children experiencing homelessness is actually down. For the first time in decades, we have seen a reduction in that number. That's something that we have thought

very hard to do. It's both with the prevention efforts. I think just the beginning of this week, boy.

ERIN DRINKWATER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's been a long week with--

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: It's been a long month.

COMMISSIONER PARK: administration announced that evictions were down--

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Yes.

COMMISSIONER PARK: 41 percent. That's tremendous.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Great.

COMMISSIONER PARK: It also has to do with the city FHEPS vouchers. You know, I mentioned that we moved 140,000 people out of the shelt-- Largely out of the shelter system using various city tools including city FHEPS. So there's a lot that we've done and we've actually seen some-- We've seen progress on the families with children side. The adult census does continue to increase, unfortunately, and I think that is a reflection of a lot of those very macroeconomic forces that I was

talking about earlier. I think this may have been before you are able to join us, by you have widening income inequality, you have a real estate market that is-- You know, we lost 150,000 units of rent-stabilized housing over the last-- I actually don't know the time frame on that, but, you know, decade or so. We have, you know, a vacancy rate for low income for less expensive units that is in the neighborhood of, you know, one percent or even below one percent. We have, you know, so you have all-- State mental health policy. You have all these various factors that are outside the control of just New York City government that are shaping how we experience homelessness here in the city and I think it's really important to keep those in mind when we think about trends. So the fact that we are down on the family side, we are seeing fairly marginal increases on the adult side, it's not where we would like to be long-term, but it is absolutely progress.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: cab of the people that are living on the street in horrible conditions-- You don't have to go very far. You can go around the corner and see it right here. And it breaks my heart because, you know, it's not the way

that human beings, and a buddy, you know, should Liz. And I just wonder what percentage of those people, if we had homes to put them in? I mean, I know we are building in the city Council and the mayor have been working very hard on that. What percentage of the people do you think you could get off the street if we had, you know, suitable housing?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Great question. We certainly hope that the number is all of them. I do think, you know, people's issues are very complex. What we know when, of the any given-- Of the people on the street on any given night, about half of them are really episodically homeless. That they will come inside either into shelter or reunite with their families, with their friends on a relatively short order. For the other half that our long-term-- experiencing long-term street homelessness, it's a very complex array of issues. Safe havens are really good model. We are expanding safe havens. Supportive housing is a really good model. We are investing in supportive housing and lo-- the journey home action plan includes 1000 units of what we are calling low barrier permanent housing which has a lot of the services that might be similar to supportive

housing, but, excuse me, not necessarily all of the same documentation requirements because supportive housing, it's a fabulous model and I am not denigrating supportive housing in any way, shape, or form, but it does have some fairly significant documentation requirements to get in. So, we are innovating. We are trying to learn from experience and create new models. I do want to emphasize, because it ties to one of the bills that we are talking about today. Rental assistance is available for people experiencing street homelessness. You do not have to come into the shelter to access a City FHEPS Voucher. Whether or not an open market apartment is the right option for everybody, I think, is-- it will be a useful tool first. I think for more people, supportive housing is a better tool.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: All right.

And since the Chairman is not here, I'm going to keep going.

[Background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: You'll get your turn. I have been a champion, since I first read about it in the newspaper of Chair Andrew Hevesi's home stabilities support. Can you talk a

little bit about how my how is here in New York City?
I know it would, but I would like to hear your--
Since we are at budget time in Albany and we are
desperately been trying to get this done, I know we
have the Chair, also-- Chair Kruger-- is also
supportive of this and I know that-- We all know
that the key to a better life starts with your
apartment or your house and it ends there, too.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We couldn't agree
more that this is an incredibly important bill. I am
actually going to ask my colleague who has been
eating, sleeping, and drinking those to respond.

ERIN DRINKWATER: So, we certainly
appreciate your support. The bill that [inaudible
01:41:03] Hevesi supports would inject necessary
state resources creating a portable statewide
benefit. It would allow us to, then, also supplement
that benefit with city tax levy to bring the voucher
up to FMR, currently individuals receiving public
assistance. The shelter allowance associated with it
hasn't been increased, I believe, since 1986. So it
is a widely--

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: [inaudible
01:41:29] Yes. Go ahead.

ERIN DRINKWATER: inappropriate level to be considered. And so, the salon create, like I said, an additional resource from the state for individuals. It would be portable, so if an individual is residing in New York City and should choose to relocate the Nassau County, for example, or from Rochester moving around, they would be able to do so, unlike the city FHEPS voucher which would require somebody to maintain their housing in New York City only.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thinking. I'm going to turn this over to my colleague, Bob Holden.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, acting Chair.

[Background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I just want to echo what Chair Levin said about the faith-based opposition that I experienced. When I took office in January 2018, I mentioned in this to Stephen Banks, the Commissioner of DHS, that I have a number of locations in my district that are faith-based and they are willing. I checked with some of the pastors. I checked with some of the faith-based organizations. They were willing. Some of them are

operating soup kitchens already. Some are operating some pantries, food pantries. We have a very giving community and we have a lot of empty buildings, yet the commission are put up one obstacle after another. Faith-based couldn't work. He said, well, there are so many building department issues within the use of convents or schools. We tried that. It didn't work. Then he said-- Then I offered one location and he said, while-- First he told me, we need a minimum of 20 men. Then I went back to him and I said, I think I have one. And then he said, oh, it needs to be 40. For the men. I said, I don't think that church can handle 40, but they can handle 20. It's not cost-effective. It's not cost-effective. And you are only going to give them-- They're only going to be there at night. I said, well, that is a start. It's better than being on the street. It's not cost-effective. That's what he said. Back and forth. We went on a year with this. So, it's disingenuous to say that-- And then, all of a sudden, a few months ago, the mayor announced faith-based. We are here. We're doing it. Wait. Wait. Let me-- and it's going to be bigger and better when he did that in 2014. We don't know what

happened. He announced it then and we lost years of people being out on the street or people in shelters rather than smaller faith-based. Which, the faith-based organizations were willing to help out. That is their mission. To help the poor. They were willing, yet we've got barriers and obstacles. It wasn't cost-effective. So you rather have the homeless on the street than in a faith-based. And I still have a lot of empty buildings. And I still invited the Commissioner to come and visit. He opened up two sites. One, like I said, one in my district and I offered 24 seven because he said it's only at night. And I said-- He hasn't taken me up on that.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, Council member, it's absolutely true that some sites are cost-effective and some sites are not. As I mentioned, when we do a safe haven, it almost-- You know, in almost every circumstance-- I should probably actually say every circumstance-- requires construction. There is not such a thing really as an off-the-shelf safe have product. So we do a lot of work. When we--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [interposing] Stop right there. We just opened one without construction. I asked the City Council, the Speaker's office, to give me 35,000. We still haven't gotten it. He did commit to it, but there is-- without construction or volunteer or the church agreed to get volunteers. But we can do it without construction. But we'd rather them on the subways or we'd rather have them on the streets because it wasn't cost effective.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, let me, for the record, separate the different kinds of beds that we have. A safe haven is a dedicated facility that is designed-- that has been retrofitted or built for the particular purpose. It has a long-term contract, relatively long-term contract on it so that a not for profit will be operating dedicated services 24 seven in that building. The services are fairly intense and they are specifically for people experiencing street homelessness. The people may be there for short periods of time or long periods of time, but they are-- The facilities themselves are operating for-- you know, it's typically at least a nine year contract. It is a fairly intensive on-site services.

There are various other models. I mentioned earlier stabilization beds. These are short-term. We might open for the winter or something like that where a not for profit will rent some rooms at a Y, for example. And then we had some church based beds where volunteers in the church will have cots that are open overnight. Those have loose integration with DHS programs. We are very grateful for communities that do that, but that is, when we're talking about safe havens, I do want to emphasize that we are talking about service rich DHS contracted facilities that are in dedicated spaces. When we look at a site that is proposed for a safe haven, some of them are appropriate and some of them are not. We need to make sure that the amount of rehab that we can do is viable, from both a cost and, frankly, a feasibility and time perspectives. We are looking for accessibility concerns used to absolutely have people with mobility issues. So there's a lot of reasons why a building might or might not be appropriate for a safe haven, but, as I mentioned, we have identified several from faith-- that have been brought by the faith community. We continue to look

at others. And this is specifically in the safe Haven space.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right. Let me just touch upon Children Community Services. I know it's a sore point. It was initially a 359 million dollar contract to shelter homeless families in hotels and it was awarded in June 2017 to provide 1210 hotel rooms for families under a three-year deal. Seven months later, DHS expanded that contract to 2100 or so rooms for nearly 600 million. The city paid approximately 500 million already to them. As you know, they were raided-- Children's Community Services was raided on January 27th, 2020. This year. It was found out that your subcontractors that were connected to CCS, they used a network of, at least, six contractors that did not appear to provide supplies and services. One company was based in a vacant home. Then another office add a PO Box in Nassau County, and the third operator out of the Harlem apartment. Raided by the New York City DOI and federal prosecutors. The DHS waited until May 2018 to refer to this fraud to DOI. Despite referring this not-for-profit to DOI, DHS still awarded CCS two more contracts worth 21.3 million of

October 2018. Wonderful. Inspectors examined one hotel in the Bronx and five hotels in Brooklyn, but their exact locations were redacted in the report. The operations by CSS in both boroughs were hit with poor ratings. This is why people question DHS a lot. So, currently 11,400 New Yorkers live in 89 hotel shelters, a third of which-- 30 are run by CCS. Between 2015 and 17, the not-for-profit scored half a billion, more than half a billion, and homeless and shelter related contracts. You knew that the use of poor shelters, yet you still awarded-- You knew they were having problems. You knew they weren't doing what they were supposed to do, yet you awarded them another contract.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And so we're supposed to believe that all this is going to change and we're going to have these great, great outcomes when we hear complaints from, not only the people that won't go into the shelters, people that are in the shelters are complaining about a host of other things, that they are not getting the services they deserve, and yet we're supposed to believe that these

new programs that you are saying today are going to be wonderful.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, Council member, when I was here in front of this committee in December, I was asked whether any not-for-profit was too big to fail. My answer was no and I think they say is an example of that. When DHS staff spotted problems with the organization, they fly to them. We put that organization on a corrective action plan. When the corrective action plan didn't work, we flagged it to DOI. And have ultimately, we took them to court to get a receiver put in. I think, you know, the whole situation is certainly unfortunate, but it is also an example of DHS doing exactly what they set out on test spot a problem and rectify it.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And award them new contracts--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Uh--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: even though they were under investigation.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We actually have, during that time period, reduced to their footprint and refused to-- or award them additional contracts. They have brought us proposals and we didn't move

forward with them. I will say that we also didn't pay on millions of dollars' worth of invoices that they submitted. So, while, yes. They had very large contracts, they weren't paid on the invoices that were deemed suspect. This is all playing now-- This is going to continue to play out. There is a receiver in place. We need to continue to provide services to the families that are there, but we took action to make sure that the inappropriate behaviors on behalf of the CCS back office staff were dealt with. I will say the financial irregularities aside, I think it does not speak to the frontline providers and the services that were delivered by CCS frontline staff. We actually see relatively high rates of permanent housing placement and other metrics that we look at to assess provider performance. So we are addressing the CCS financial conditions and making sure that we are serving the families.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Wow. Okay. I could just say that, if this is an example of what is going on in the shelter system-- and there are many other shelters that aren't doing so great because we are hearing more and more about them, that I question the oversight of your agency, that this stuff was

going on for months and months and years and then we are raiding the shelters as poor and then you continue to give them contracts and you have them under investigation. But let's just, you know, leave that because that's still under investigation and more will come out as to your agency's response to this. But the bigger question is you continue to deny faith-based for years and nobody is held accountable for that. And then, all of a sudden, you announce that you are going to do faith-based, which I have mentioned before and Chair Levin mentioned the fact that he heard that you didn't want to do faith based. And many obstacles were put up. Now, we want to do them. I have, like I said, I want to schedule a tour with the commissioner. I have a lot of empty buildings. Many are in great condition. We have faith-based willing to do it. So, whether you want to call them safe havens or whatever you want to call them, they are going to house the homeless and we have them available, yet the Commissioner does not answer my calls when I call. I said I want to schedule things. I want to go out. I want to go on a tour. He doesn't answer it. I call his cell phone. I don't get a call back for weeks or months

and, yet, we still see the same thing going on. We still see homeless out there on the streets or on the subways or suffering. So I want you to make a commitment that somebody will come on a tour. I don't care if it is Stephen Banks at this point, but I want to show them the buildings or her the buildings or anybody you want to come out.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are happy to assess faith-based buildings for safe haven capacity.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: That's what I've heard. They're happy, but I never get an actual commitment. Period. The second thing, I just want to talk about the pet friendly locations and then I'll give it back to the Chair. When can we see a pet from the shelter?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, as I mentioned--

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No. No. No. Do you have a target? Because as you said, there's an RFP. They're out there and they've been out there for a long time because it's not a priority would DHS. And I know what my cat meant to me just passed after 19 years.

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And I know what even to my family. And I couldn't imagine-- Like Steve Levin said, he's got two cats. Many people have dogs and cats. We can accommodate them now in most of the shelters I would think, but you are not willing.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Actually, I would disagree with that. We are, of course, willing to work with providers. We are looking for proposals.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Nobody's doing it.

COMMISSIONER PARK: At the end of the day, interact on the ground services are provided by a not-for-profit organization. If the organization providing services doesn't feel like they are equipped to handle the challenges of animals, which might be cats and dogs, but also pets can include a much broader array of different animals.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [Interposing] Can you supply a letter that you sent to your providers asking them to voluntarily allow some pets in your shelters? Could you show me a letter--

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's in both of our RFPs.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No. The RFPs aside. That's a separate issue. Can you, the existing shelters that are open a day that are run by providers--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I believe my predecessor called every single one of the providers to solicit proposals for prep friendly facilities.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No. No. I'm asking a different question here. Voluntarily, without an RFP, just say, can your place, your shelter, take pets in this condition?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I have an executive director meeting on Tuesday we are happy to raise and at that point.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council member. Okay. Just a couple of follow up questions and then we'll let you go. So, did you get any feedback on the RFP explaining why providers might not be interested in the pets in shelter RFP?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't any concrete feedback, but we can talk to people.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, but nobody--
I'm sorry. Has anyone replied to the RFP? When did
the RFP go out?

COMMISSIONER PARK: This the rolling
shelter and safe haven RFP, so they've been out for a
while.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, you just added
language and around pets?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. And as I had
mentioned, I had heard from some providers who are in
the process of proposing on the safe havens that--
So I do expect to see some pet friendly facilities
soon.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's too early to
speak specifically.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If there's any
feedback about, you know-- If there's any feedback
coming that is about why a providers might not be
interested, that would be helpful to know.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Just a
little bit of clarity on the legislation. So, the

two pre-considered intros having to do with eligibility.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I was a little unclear. So, are you saying right now that an individual can access a city FHEPS voucher without entering into shelter?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do they have to have a case management case open?

COMMISSIONER PARK: They need to be engaged for 90 days with a case or car, but they do not have to come into shelter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And are people-- do people have a case worker on their first point of contact? That's our other bill here is saying that your first point of contact, you are eligible to have a case management case.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. So, I want to think about this one in the context of the looming state budget cuts. As I mentioned, I think expanding services when that is staring at us in the face is concerning. At any given night, I mentioned this a few times, that you have some people who are

episodically homeless, about half the population, and another half that are long term. I think, given that we want to encourage the people who are really episodically homeless to return to their communities, to reunite with their families, to maintain those connections, it doesn't necessarily make sense to actively start case management at that initial point of contact. But I think, along with the sightings conversation that we have, a provider, and outreach provider, has the discretion to determine when somebody needs to be on-- have an assigned case worker. So, if you encounter an individual and they encounter somebody and they are there first point of contact in, based on, you know, what appears to be health issues or substance use issues or something like that, the decision is made to put them on case load right away, they have the discretion to do that. If it is somebody, you know, who appears to be more episodically homeless, they are not required to do it on that first point of contact. And, frankly, I think, given scarce resources, that is an appropriate way of doing that. So--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And since these are not really concrete definitions. I mean, there is a gray area between episodically homeless and--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: long-term homeless because, at some point, somebody transitions from episodically--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: to long term. Nobody starts out long-term.

COMMISSIONER PARK: There may be indications that somebody has a multitude of factors that is going to present challenges and that would be the case where a provider might say, this is the first time I am seeing this individual, but I have serious concerns and I am going to start case management right away.

ERIN DRINKWATER: I'll just say, I mean, this is a proposal that we are interested in working with you on. The underlying law has case management provision for individuals in shelter and I think it is really about striking the right balance. And so--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

ERIN DRINKWATER: we look forward to continuing the conversation.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay. Moving on to a different topic, I had actually spoken to a history outreach team a couple months ago and I asked them-- So the beginning of the winter. I said, so what do you guys need? This was a different outreach team than we talked about Bellevue. This street outreach team said we would love to be able to give people socks, a cup of coffee, a five dollar gift card, gloves, underwear. Says that they need like that. In but then I heard that that is actually entirely like prohibited. Like they can do that even if they wanted to do it. And is the-- What's the story on being able to, you know? A blanket. Somebody is shivering outside. Why can't we have street outreach teams have access to serve and essentials?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, our goal is really doing gauge people with systems. If we have somebody who is an appropriately dressed for the weather on the street, I think the real issue is how do we get that person inside and how do we solve the issue in the longer term rather than dealing with the

immediate? Somebody who is significantly underdressed on a very cold day, there is-- It is likely that the issue goes beyond the immediate to you have a blanket. So, really, our programs are oriented around trying to connect people to coming indoors. You know, on a very cold night when we are under code blue, there is a significant number of places where people can shelter that have to be open. We require that so that we are protecting people, but the ultimate goal is to really connect people with the longer term options.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you. This isn't me, Steve Levin, sitting in my lofty tower at 250 Broadway saying this. This is street outreach workers saying, we would like to be able to do this. And, to their credit Bombas, which is like this very popular sock company, right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I've heard of them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They donated like hundreds of socks to our office. Everyone in my office has Bombas in their bag to give to people because socks are a really, really, important essential. And dirty socks are, you know, lead to infection. Really, really essential piece of

maintaining a level of sanitarness. Personal sanitarness. So this isn't me saying this. I'm just actually reporting to you what a street outreach team said to me. So why not--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Understood.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, why not ask Bombas to donate like 10,000 socks and give them to-- Have boxes stockpiled at BRC and breaking ground and have them given out? If they want to.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Interesting suggestion. We will work with our philanthropy folks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Bombas is like-- For every pair of socks they sell, they like to donate a pair of socks. I don't know how that works from a business perspective for them, but--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Expensive socks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: good on them. They are nice socks. Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Chair, can I make one point while you--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER PARK: are thinking about your question? The who takes section eight versus who take city FHEPS, I do--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep.

COMMISSIONER PARK: just want to point out, for the record, that refusal to take city FHEPS is a source of income discrimination.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It is. Absolutely. Absolutely. And we are, actually-- We had a rally yesterday calling for the Commission on Human Rights to increase the number of attorneys that they have. Or the city to increase the number of attorneys that they have at the Commission of Human Rights because what we have seen in practice-- and this is coming from Neighbors Together, is that when somebody does have-- comes to them saying that the landlord says that they don't take vouchers, a simple call over there to the Commission on Human Rights and a call from Commission on Human Rights over to the landlord tends to rectify that situation without kind of longer litigation. So, if we can get more staff up there to be moved into that, that would be helpful in addressing source of income. The problem with city FHEPS is that there are, frankly, people cannot--

there are plenty times or people can't even get discriminated against because they can't even walk in the front door because the apartments rent is outside of the range of a city FHEPS voucher where it's not outside the range of a section eight voucher.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Certainly, there's a scarce supply of housing at the lower end of the rental market. We have been able to successfully move, you know, well over 100,000 people out of the shelters system with--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood.

COMMISSIONER PARK: city FHEPS>

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But have been talking about this for several years now. I sent a letter back and November. I would love our response before next November, if I can on this specific question on how many people have been placed. How many vouchers are out there that have yet to-- How many shopping letters? We don't even know how many shopping letters people are walking around with and how long they've had them.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, you know, I don't want to make a big stink about it, but I said

it like right before Thanksgiving. So-- With regard to street sweeps, we have seen, since 2017, an increase of 44 percent-- Or from 17 to 19, an increase of 44 percent in street sweeps and that is concerning because we don't-- What is happening to those people? Is there documentation as to what is going on with those individuals and where is that policy coming from and there is some concern that it is in response to some of the Trump administration's, you know, chest pounding about street encampments.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, street sweeps is not a term that we use, so I am not--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What do you use?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm not 100 percent sure, because I'm not sure what you're referring to.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Clearances or cleanings.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you. Let me start by saying we are, in no way, shape or form, responding to Trump administration chest thumping. To use your words. We work very closely with colleagues and other city agencies. If we identify an accumulation of belongings that is blocking the

sidewalk or otherwise causing problems, we notify the individuals involved. We give them an opportunity to move their things and then we will sometimes do cleanings. I don't have the numbers right in front of me, but this is part of larger outreach policy it is city driven. It is not driven by the Trump administration.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. A couple more questions here.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With regard to the joint command center, do we have data on how often NYPD is deployed through joint command center?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't have a specific stat to speak to that. I would say that the DHS staff and NYPD staff are out every night together. It is a regular occurrence that teams are out. The normal course of business, at this point, is that you have both DHS and NYPD staff in both the joint command center together looking at trends, locating that incoming data and those teams together are deploying resources onto the street, so it is, very much, coordinated effort.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: like to go there.
Can I go there?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The police commissioner just announced like at a breakfast or something last week about hiring-- They are going to hire hundred social workers or 70 social workers or something like that.

[background comments]

COMMISSIONER PARK: I think the nurses.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, nurses.

COMMISSIONER PARK: The nurses.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Nurses. I'm sorry.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. So, the housing outreach unit within the police, and I will certainly defer to them for more detail, but the housing outreach unit within the police department has had a couple of nurses for some time and they are expanding that. We are very pleased with that collaboration.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I mean these are what kind of nurses? These are RNs or what? I mean, what's the--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I mean, I'd defer to the police department on exact titles.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But was this a-- I'm just--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. Was very coordinated.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. It's just it's--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Uh--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Part of my frustration with this whole thing, this whole JCC and the whole partnership here is none of this was done with any knowledge from me. You know, I didn't know the first thing about this. I don't know where it came from. Like we trying to get this at the last hearing. I don't know where this came from. I know what the defined purpose is. I don't know. You know, this isn't a policy that came from, you know, a series of roundtables with providers and people that are there on the ground. This came kind of like out of some other place and I don't know what that please use, but it's not the normal place of kind of policy that we normally think of with stuff like this.

COMMISSIONER PARK: I mean, I would say we are actively informed by the outreach providers. We talked to them every day. You know, I mentioned the providers said we need more places to put people and we add in safe havens and permanent housing to the journey home action plan. So I think we have been talking with our partners in a very collaborative kind of way. With respect to the PD collaboration, you know, the NYPD has-- Obviously, their mission is to protect public safety and, and other administrations, the interpretation than that, as it relates to homelessness, has been very much about arresting people for quality of life crimes. I think or perceived crimes. I think what you see here is an attempt to take a different approach and to--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER PARK: And we really applaud that and we appreciate their cooperation.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm not really like impugning anybody's motives here. I'm just more thinking like, okay. Steve Levin. You the chair of the General Welfare committee for the last six years. What do you think? Giselle Routhier, policy director for Coalition for the Homeless, what do you think?

Judith Goldner at Legal Aide, what do you think? You guys have been working on this for six years, 10 years, you know? Like what are your thoughts on this? And nothing. Nothing. Not a single indication that like we had anything to say about the matter. And I am just-- It's strange because, you know, the NYPD doesn't know homelessness and I, you know, like I described only the best motivations to Chief Dolitori [sp?] And kind of what he's trying to do, so I get it. Just like, you know, a little bit of collaboration goes a long way.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Understand. And we are working very closely with them on training the homeless outreach unit when the police department. We are certainly looking to make that is a collaborative effort. And with the individual wall initiatives of journey home, there are active working groups with a wide variety of stakeholders on those.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But why the nurses with NYPD and not with the ERC or breaking ground or the street outreach team?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I think it's an and, right? You know, we are expanding the medical

services that they outreach providers have on top, as well, but it is-- So you see it on both sides.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But they're not going to be-- You know, where's the chain of command? I didn't know that NYPD had nurses, so I don't know what the chain of command is. Who do they report to?

COMMISSIONER PARK: They report to the head of the homeless outreach unit within the PD. But, again, I would prefer--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible
02:14:47]

COMMISSIONER PARK: to defer--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure. I'll have to ask.

COMMISSIONER PARK: specific just--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'll have to ask them. And what are they supposed to do? Like--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, they will go out with outreach teams, including with DHS staff. They will accompany contracted outreach providers, as well and they can make medical assessments and, you know, as I mentioned, in those situations of crisis, when they are there, because it is the police effort,

that is the place where, if somebody needs to be assessed, taken in for medical assessment, they are in a position to do that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So, I mean, is that to facilitate Kendra's Law? Is that what you're saying?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No. If an individual laws in a point where they might be a danger to themselves or others and we want to go--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, that's Kendra's Law, right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Kendra's Law is sort of an ongoing medication management. And I'm going to leave it at that level of detail because I am not the expert on that, but, if-- What I'm talking about is the requirement or the provision under the state mental health law where individual who is at a particular moment a medical professional in conjunction with the police department can take that person know a hospital for a point of assessment. That person might end up being admitted. They might end up not being admitted based on the clinical judgment of the medical professionals.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. They outreach teams are able to do that before. That's what they told me when they said we sent people over to Bellevue. To get assessed and then they go right back out.

COMMISSIONER PARK: The outreach teams can't require somebody to go if they are comfortable going. The PD--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: An NYPD nurse can say, you're going.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. Which, if at a moment where somebody is at a real crisis point, that is sometimes the right thing to do. It's not a decision we take lightly.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I'm not thrilled with that. Okay. I know you have to leave. Just one last question here having to do with-- Sorry. Bear with me here. Sorry. Just one last question about the 90 day caseload city FHEPS rule. Because that, as it stands now, that 90 days starts-- I don't know where the 90 day clock starts because the caseload question, case management services, is not a defined time when somebody receives that. That's, I think, oh why we are looking at first point

of contact. Honestly, anybody that is on the street showed like have, if they want, case management. I guess, maybe, we should put it that way and say, if you don't want it, you don't have to have it. If you're like, look. I'm only going to be homeless for the next slide two weeks, don't bother. Or I'm transient. Going to be sleeping on the couch. You'll never see me again. Don't bother. But if somebody was like, yeah. Like I want to get into some case management, they shouldn't-- Like why should they have to-- And then, to reach kind of a gauzy undefined, well, now you're long-term. You know, when is long-term or when is it-- There's a lot of discretion there within in--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, an--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And no appeals.

COMMISSIONER PARK: An outreach provider places somebody-- Or assigns a caseworker to an individual. 90 days later, they are eligible for city FHEPS.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

COMMISSIONER PARK: That aligns with the eligibility that exists within shelter and--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. No. I'm more talking about the starting point. The when somebody receives that case management, that actually is-- Now that I'm thinking about it, that is actually the-- That starts the clock. And whether that clock is 30 days or 90 days, that's the other bill, but the bill about when does that clock start and who starts it and whether they're required to start it or how much discretion they have, that's a big-- that's a lot of latitude as it seems, right now.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, as Erin mentioned, we'd be--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We're happy--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: to work with you on this one.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it. Okay.
With that, I thank you very much for your time.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And I look forward to seeing you guys next month for the budget hearing. Thank you to members of the public for your patience.

First panel we'll call up. Kareem Walker is here.

Josh Dean from human.nyc. Craig Hughes, Human

Justice Center. And Danielle Emory from URI.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Craig, you get to
go twice because--

CRAIG HUGHES: Sorry. I need to--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No. No. No.
Please. No. That's okay because you're delivering
testimony on behalf of somebody else, as well. So
we're going to have three minutes for testimony
because we do have a number of people that are signed
up. So, you can speed read and you can also submit
to the record and give testimony that might not
necessarily be verbatim. Feel free to condense and
submit the rest and in the record.

[Background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Just make sure the
red light is on your microphone.

DANIELLE EMORY: I think it's on now.
Okay. Okay. All right. Ready?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible

02:20:59]

DANIELLE EMORY: Okay. Good afternoon.

My name is Danielle Emory and I am the director of the People and Animals Living Safely Program at the Urban Resource Institute. I would like to thank the Committee on general welfare for the opportunity to testify today in support of bills 1483 and 1484 and also Chair Levin for his leadership in taking bold initiative is on the issue of pads in New York City's shelter systems. URI is the only DV shelter provider in New York City and one of less than three percent nationwide that offers victims of domestic violence access to shelter with their pets and a co-living environment. Since 2013, URI has welcomed 214 families and close to 300 pence into the PALS program. Today we have 53 families and 71 pence in seven different shelter locations. I share these numbers to illustrate that code sheltering can happen and is already happening in New York City and offer our experience in the hope that those present will see URI as an example and resource for how to implement these services. We often receive referrals from individuals and families who are not eligible for the PALS program for a variety of reasons. Many of these people will end up at PATH or a single

assessment center. As the comptroller's report housing survive is published in October 19th showed, more than 40 percent of families currently in DHS family shelters are there as a result of domestic violence. With only approximately 2500 beds and HRA's DV shelter system, it is the reality of New York City that many individuals and families who become homeless as a result of domestic violence will seek assistance from DHS. Any measure taken to address homelessness in New York City months take into account the role domestic violence has in its occurrence and the two shelf systems seen as complementary and not disparate entities. It is crucially important the New York City, its government agencies and countless not-for-profit providers continue to develop innovative services to reduce barriers to shelter for our city's most vulnerable populations. For the pet owners within these populations, that means policies and services that not only accommodate, but welcome and value the companion animals in people's lives, recognizing the deep attachment and bonds present in their relationships. Bills 1483 and 1484 will help to illuminate the scope of need for services and begin

the process of formalizing a coordinated citywide response. This response needs to be a joint effort between both human services and animal welfare agencies. It will not be successful unless we work together to develop and implement the response. URI hopes and stands ready to be seen as a resource and a model for how these efforts can take shape in New York City as our community continues to expand our work and assisting pet owning families in crisis.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

KAREEM WALKER: Good afternoon,
Councilman Levin.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The red light house
to be on.

KAREEM WALKER: Oh.

[background comments]

KAREEM WALKER: Good afternoon,
Councilman Levin and ladies and gentlemen of the
Council and distinguished guests. My name is Kareem
walker and, for the past seven months, I, myself,
have been homeless, street homeless, though, through
the help of the New York City [inaudible 02:24:00]
Pantry, I now have a 2010 E that has now been
approved by the city and I believe that-- Oh.

Excuse me. That over these past seven months, I have been spending the time on the subways instead of a shelter because I don't feel that the subway-- feel like the subway system is a much safer alternative alternative over the shelters. Journey home, as the Deputy Commissioners mentioned, while a laudable position, a laudable program, doesn't really take into account the root causes of homelessness and I believe that the-- Hold on. Excuse me.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You've got it.

KAREEM WALKER: Sorry. I believe that the haphazard plan that street homelessness, especially for those who don't know about how the program works or how the program is supposed to-- how the program can get you off the streets and, in addition to that, the voucher systems, as well. Couple that with the voucher system, it makes that an even bigger barrier for some who have experienced long-term street homelessness to overcome. As a homeless person, I believe the city's proposal to increase the value of the vouchers is a great first step in, especially considering the fact that we spend approximately 3600 dollars a month to house homeless New Yorkers in the shelters system, while we

could also-- which is roughly double the market value of an apartment in Manhattan. If we are willing to put into the-- put in the budget warehousing homeless folks, wire and we not willing to put that same commitment and giving them affordable housing? Thank you for your time and I will gladly accept any questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

CRAIG HUGHES: Hi. My name is Craig Hughes, but I am going to be reading testimony of Peter Melvin who couldn't be here today. So, I am going to read it verbatim with all that comes with in terms of him referencing himself and not me. But, okay. So, good afternoon. My name is Peter Melvin. I am a safety net activist co-chair of the Consumer Committee of the Continuum of Care and the vice president of the midnight run. I am here today to provide my feedback to LS 9863 and LS 9872 which, editorially, I believe is now Intro 1902 and 1903. Having participated in outreach as a case manager and having also been a consumer of services, I am aware of how long it may take to get case management services through being assigned to a caseload. This past year, I worked with Human NYC to co-author a

white paper on the, quote, sightings process, which includes recommendations on how to make outreach case management services more accessible to those of us living on the streets. Human.nyc has entered the white paper into the record and I recommend you read it. I would also recommend. This brings me to the Into LS 9872, which I believe is 1903, which would cut the 90 days on caseload requirement down to 30 an order for unsheltered New Yorkers to be eligible for any rental assistance going through New York City contacts. Based on interviews and findings in the aforementioned white paper, I suggest additional criteria of obtaining eligibility for New York City rental assistance space 60 days post initial quote sighting and documentation that a person is living on the street or place not meant for human habitation. Additionally, to make further progress in dealing with street homelessness, I am believe that any sightings of known or recognized persons, asleep or awake, should be counted as a sighting and that there should be a uniform number of sightings in case management eligibility across all outreach teams. I'd also like to recommend that there be flexibility in the times when people are engaged. People should

be engaged at times that they are-- I'm sorry. At times best for people when they are street homeless, not at the times that are best for the outreach workers, such as very early in the morning. There showed also the transparency on available housing options, in addition to ensuring the case managers utilize best practices such as the SOAR program, which is an intensive linkage of people to Social Security benefits, which they are likely eligible. And I can't take any questions for Peter, but I think he spoke for himself very well. So, thanks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then, do you testimony you would like to deliver on behalf of Craig Hughes?

CRAIG HUGHES: Yeah, but I think Josh has one from someone who is experiencing homelessness, so I'm happy to switch out. Is that okay?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. No problem.

CRAIG HUGHES: Okay. Thanks.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If you could just identify yourself for the record.

JOSH DEAN: Sure. My name is Josh Dean. I'm reading on behalf of Charmaine Hameed. Hi, Charmaine. Good afternoon. My name is Charmaine Hameed. I've been homeless in New York City for much of the last 15 years. A few months ago I was placed into an SRO. The four then, I lived on the streets rather than the shelters. I was more comfortable living on the streets because the city's shelters, particularly the intake shelters, so left safe than the streets. Working with outreach teams was difficult. I live near Penn Station and I felt like I would meet countless different outreach to teams. BRC is downstairs in the station and Breaking Ground, which used to be Common Ground, is more likely to check on me when I'm outside. Head a few blocks up and you'll meet Urban Pathway or Port Authority. Then there's Home Stat, but I'm not really sure what they do. Also, the homeless outreach unit of the NYPD comes by all the time. They just ask us for our name and date of birth and that's really it. One of the more frustrating things about living on the streets is that I have had to answer the same questions so many times. How long have I been homeless? Too high during? Do I have any history of

domestic violence? Every time there is a new outreach team, I have the answer those questions again. Every time my case manager leaves then I get a new case manager, I have to answer those questions again. It's so frustrating. Another frustrating part of living on the streets is the sightings process because it is so confusing. Breaking Ground, that thing was going need to see you eight times in that location. Where you sleep back, where you go to the bathroom at, where you eat at, that's where you have to be wherever they come around. No particular timing or nothing, which is almost impossible for a homeless person to do on the streets of New York. You have to move around at some point. You cannot just sit there for 24 hours in one spot hoping embedded outreach team is going to come look for you to give you some information or get you some information and you are never going to be placed in an appropriate manner quickly and in a place you feel safe if you are not seen that eight times and logged in by that particular agency. As a co-author in human.nyc's new white paper on the sightings process, I hope that the recommendations be taken seriously. People who want a case manager should be a mother

together case manager. Trust me. No one is out there pretending to be homeless. If you are homeless and you are asking about services, there should not be a holdup. Also, we really need the outreach team to be giving out consistent information. BRC should have the same number of sightings as Breaking Ground, otherwise, you leave us frustrated, confused, and talking amongst ourselves to try to figure out what is going on. Thank you for your time. I don't have a phone, so please contact Josh Dean, me, if you would like to learn more about my story. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. So I want to thank you all for your testimony. I appreciate very much the advocacy that you are doing, all three of you. With URI, I just want to know that-- Now, have you been contacted by DHS to see how it works and that immensely complex system that you work in? Just a little sarcasm.

DANIELLE EMORY: Yeah. So, in the longer form of my statement, talk a little bit more about URIs work and we do actually have shelters for homeless families where we would potentially be interested in having our program with pets. I think

the RFP that gets talked about a lot is for a very specific type of homeless shelter, as I understand it. Low barrier, I think, single person shelter. It's not a family shelter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not family shelter. Okay.

DANIELLE EMORY: As I understand it. I could be incorrect on that, but that is my understanding. So--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it. Okay. Yeah. That's good. That didn't come through with the testimony of the Deputy Commissioner. So, because one would think that DHS could just talk to HRA because they are in the same office. They are in the same agency, basically.

[laughter]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That they could find out what HRA is doing that is so successful with URI.

DANIELLE EMORY: And especially given that the model of the family shelter and a lot of-- It's the same. Like they are in their own apartments. There is the ability for parents to be there.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep. Absolutely. Absolutely. And, yes. So I think you very much for doing and for being so dedicated to it because, yes. It is very important, especially for children--

DANIELLE EMORY: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: and people suffering trauma.

DANIELLE EMORY: And, additionally, because of the housing shortage and because of the difficulty with vouchers, many of our families are not able to identify permanent housing by the time their time in emergency shelter is a lapsed, so then they get transitioned into DHS shelters--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

DANIELLE EMORY: where we struggle immensely at getting their reasonable accommodations to continue on with their parents accepted and processed. So--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes. I've seen that happen.

DANIELLE EMORY: Three times this week.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. No, I bet.

DANIELLE EMORY: No. No. Like my team is been helping three clients this week that we have been trying to get to have their pets be able to be with them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It increases the urgency to have the direct to permanent housing out of your system--

DANIELLE EMORY: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: and not have to go through DHS.

DANIELLE EMORY: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. And then, just as a-- Josh, you said in your testimony and the testimony of Charmaine and then in your white paper, do you want to maybe speak to just what the recommendations are in terms of streamlining or rationalizing or whatever it is. Making rational, not like rationalizing. But like making rational the sightings process.

JOSH DEAN: Sure. So, first things first. We're not saying that, you know, the first time someone is seen on the street, automatically, every single person should get a case manager. But if someone is out on the streets, it's clear that

they are homeless, and they're asking about services, they're asking for a case manager, they should get a case manager that first time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

JOSH DEAN: In addition to that, we are recommending that the number of sightings they standardize across the outreach teams--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

JOSE DEAN: because what we are seeing-- we asked 41 people if they were familiar with the sightings process. 78 percent of the people said yes and then we ask, okay. Well, how many times do you think you need to be seen? And from there, we saw the answers range pretty wildly. So, it ranged from two to 12. The most common answer was six. Some people said I don't know how many times, but I know it is a few times. One person said every day for a year. So there was a really, really wide range of understandings. If the outreach teams all have the same understanding and followed the same process and, at the very least, had a consistent message that they communicated to people on the streets, there would have been so much misinformation, so much confusion,

so much frustration. And we hopefully would be able to move people through the process quicker.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And I just want to say that, just for the record, so last May, I believe I had a meeting with you and DSS or DHS and your suggestion was to not adhere to this chronicity requirement for people to get into safe haven. At which time, they said, no. We're not going to do that. And here we are in 2020 and they are, in fact, announcing that they are taking that suggestion. So, congratulations.

JOSH DEAN: I hope to follow through with that. But thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. I'm assuming you didn't-- I got notified when they were making it.

JOSH DEAN: I got notified when you got notified.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Yes. I think, you know, for all of your-- everyone's testimony here, it's incredibly important that you all keep testifying and keep on making-- putting this out there in the public sphere because it's how policy gets changed. It might not happen, you know,

the next day, but it is, in fact, the only way that it gets done. So, I want to thank you very much for your testimony and for staying engaged with us. I greatly appreciate it.

JOSH DEAN: Thank you.

[Background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, sure. Okay.

We'll also call up now Halle Chu from the Manhattan Borough President, Gail Brewer's office. Isabel Adams from the Brooklyn Borough President. Eric Adams and Susan Stetzer from Manhattan Community Board three.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh. And we are joined by Council member Vanessa Gibson. Just make sure that the light is on and identify yourself for the record, please.

GAIL BREWER (on behalf of): Hi. My name is Halle Chu. I'm with the Manhattan Borough President's Office and I'm reading testimony on behalf of Gail. I submitted a much longer testimony, but just wanted to jump right into a set of recommendations specifically targeting the borough president's work with the emergency shelter network

and then also with DHS's street homeless solution unit on the respite beds program with houses of worship throughout New York City. Manhattan, currently, is one of the sites that has the most religious facility sites offering the most number of beds out of the program. About half of all the boroughs. So I just want to jump right in.

According to one of the DHS's kind of quarterly monthly report, the average daily utilization rate of respite beds is within a range of 74 to 86 percent over the past four quarters. In Manhattan, the data from the two Manhattan centric drop in centers show an average daily utilization rate as low as 61 percent for one month and as high as 92 percent for another month. While the wide ranges reflect the transitory nature of street homelessness and fluctuations are to be expected, I believe addressing the following issues will increase the utilization rate of respite beds and allow for expansion of the respite shelter model into more houses of worship throughout the city. Curfew requirements.

Individuals placed into respite sites are required to report to the site by a certain time, sometimes via designated transportation from the drop in center to

the site. They must remain on site until a specific time the next morning, also required to be transported back to a drop in center at some locations. Curfew is very limiting to people who work or have other obligations that prevent them from getting into a respite site on time. DHS should work with those shelters on more flexible curfew requirements so working individuals who need shelter can access respite beds. Recommendation on pets. In light of Intros 1483 and 1484, for compensations around that to see if that can be accommodated at the sites. Drop in center accommodations. Multiple constituents have raised issues about drop in centers not having anything other than chairs to sleep in and then also constituents feeling unsafe, especially women who access these drop in centers. Coordination with site. Most respite sites are run by volunteers. Understandable, volunteer availability impacts or overall availability of respite beds. For example, a few sites are open during the summer months because congregation members may be out of town, unit, both each advocates and organizations, like the emergency shelter network recognize that having a consistent number of available beds is beneficial the program

coordination and placement. One idea that the ESN supports is for nearby shelters sites to collaborating keep more beds open through sharing volunteers. And then, one other recommendation for resources is to be able to have resources bring on a full-time coordinator to encourage collaboration among existing respite sites and also with agencies with drop-in centers and, obviously, the funding to be able to support people in these coordination roles to improve, perhaps, expand the program. And their other recommendations for the rest of the testimony.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. And just one thing to follow up on that. It's not impossible for a respite program that have a paid staff member through--

HALLE CHU: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: one of the outreach organizations and it's relatively, you know, cost-effective. It's not incredibly expensive--

HALLE CHU: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: to have one or two paid staff members.

HALLE CHU: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This happens in my district, I'm quite familiar with it.

HALLE CHU: And those are the, I would say, the better run sites. So, the sites that are willing and lack resources, I think, would benefit from having--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes. In this day and age with slack groups and whatever, you know, you can--

HALLE CHU: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: probably pretty easily build a consortium of volunteers to be able to convert different churches and synagogues within the network.

HALLE CHU: Sure. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. So thank you--

HALLE CHU: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: very much for your suggestion.

ISABEL ADAMS: Hello. My name is Isabel Adams and I here to testify on behalf of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams. In morning, Chair Levin and committee members. Thank you for the

opportunity today to speak on measures that would improve the circumstances for people experiencing homelessness with pets in New York City. Borough President Adams supports Intros 1483 and 1494 which would provide accommodations for pets and homeless shelters, as well as require reporting on pet placement. The Borough President has been a proponent of initiatives to combat street homelessness, as well as efforts to make it easier for people and pets to be together. Last year, he urged the passage of Bill S4919, advanced by State Sen. Parker, which offers a 100 dollars tax credit to people when they adopt a pet from a shelter. That gets to the heart of helping homeless animals, but we must look at this issue holistically. Recently, the National Alliance to End Homelessness published a manual on keeping people impacts together and homeless services. It outlines existing modelers of sheltering people and pets together across the country, some of which are simple and do not require capital improvements. We need not start from scratch, so let's not overcomplicate the matter with conversations about building new friendly buildings or complete retrofits. We can make select existing

shelters accessible to people with pets. New York City should be an example of how compassion and common sense can work hand-in-hand. Research indicates pet ownership within the homeless population can decrease stress and anxiety, provide a sense of responsibility, decrease feelings of loneliness, and create more opportunities for social interactions with other people. If we are to best serve our community, our laws need to prevent the rupture of these beneficial human animal bonds. People experiencing homelessness are under enough trauma. Why further traumatized them by forcing them to give up their pets? Possibly the only stable relationship they have in their lives. Borough President Adams urges you to swiftly pass these measures to absolve our city's most vulnerable from the burden of having to decide between seeking services and giving up their animal companions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

CRAIG HUGHES: Hi. My name is Craig Hughes. I'm a supervising social worker with the Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project. We have a much longer testimony for the record, but, for the

record, I'm just going to just speak more plainly for the purposes of this. It's regrettable that Council member Holden chose not to stay. I think there would be great discussion with the community as he was interested in hearing.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Just to clarify, I think it's actually having a meeting with DHS. So-- For what it's worth.

CRAIG HUGHES: I hope it's more productive.

[Laughter]

CRAIG HUGHES: So, as someone who has worked in homeless services for well over a decade and someone who has done outreach, one way we've come to think about outreach models is there is a contact and policing model and then there is a harm reduction model. And there is an inherent cruelty to saying that we want to-- That we encounter someone who is very cold on the street and then we say we're worried about the long term and not the short term. A basic rule of social work practice, and probably some other professions is you meet someone where you are at. When I was trained and harm reduction work many years ago, what that actually meant to is you physically

meet someone aware they are at. And if they are phrasing, will you give them a blanket because that will reduce the harm that calms from being frozen. And that is saying with that is that if someone is saying, I am not safe in a shelter but, for example, I'm staying on the street tonight, but I need hand warmers, you give them hand warmers. This is a really basic practice. So, it was guys didn't bureaucratic speak of worrying about the long term, but, really, if you're not worried about the short term, you're not worried about someone. And so, what I would say is that we have seen, under the de Blasio administration and, guised under progressive rhetoric, and increasing number of police encroachments into the outrage system. Each responding to a moment of panic pressed by the press. So, each going back to the joint command center. We're using militarized rhetoric to talk about people who literally have nothing. To spend millions of dollars on a center to watch 20,000 camera views, staffed by police and outreach workers to disperse-- to reportedly disperse services that are probably almost always accompanied by police. So, first and foremost, I would put forward, one see you expand

something like a joint command center in a criminal justice reform like that is, it's almost impossible to get it retracted. So I just want to be clear that our position is that it should be ended and closed right now before it becomes normalized. That kind of Orwellian absurdity should not exist in the city. It is not helpful for homeless people. It is helpful for bureaucrats trying to manage bad press coverage. I will also go on to say, just in reference to Intro 1902 with the case management, we had hoped to get this to convince Council member Levin to put this in the bill. Hopefully you will. Mandate that outreach teams actually carry basic supplies with them, including petty cash. I'm going to go little bit over my time with one very brief example that I think is very powerful. I apologize. We had a client, in not too long ago, an elderly woman living in public space for well over a year. A woman over 70 years old. She was engaged repeatedly by municipal outreach teams. She had a breaking point in that trust building process where she had her sneakers stolen and, when her sneakers were stolen in the outreach worker showed up the next day, she said to them, can you please help me get new sneakers? It

was cold. She needed sneakers. In the outreach team-- and I'm dead serious about this-- said, it's good to see you. I'm sorry. We cannot. Like we can't do that. And walked away. She then took a subway in hospital socks in the Manhattan and walked to get the cheapest pair of sneakers she could find. I believe that municipal outreach worker wanted to help her. I also believe the kind of bureaucratic nonsense that came out today about worrying about the long term harmed her and it also meant that she did not build a relationship with that outreach team. In fact, got to the point where she refused to let them place her in a safe haven when she was willing to be placed in a safe haven because she was so hurt and offended by what it happened. And I think is Bell definitely needs to include a mandate that outreach teams provide harm reduction services which, for me, not just mean needles exchanged. I know that brings all this other stuff that people are concerned about, wrongly, but whatever. It means blankets. It means warming gloves. It means socks then it means some petty cash when someone's in a desperate situation and needs a pair of sneakers. That's how you build trust and that is how you get someone inside. It's

not just about the availability of safe havens, which we all know are coming by the hundreds tomorrow. It's about getting someone through the night and building trust so that when that safe haven is there. They're open to it. Thanks.

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks, Craig.

SUSAN STETZER: Thank you. I'm Susan Stetzer, district manager of Manhattan Community Board three, which is the East Village, lower East side, and Chinatown. We have many street homeless, especially in the East Village and in three of our parks. We have over 15 shelters. We work very closely with Goddard Riverside, our Manhattan Outreach Consortium group. And I wanted to say that there outreach workers, think, are absolutely the best. They are very caring people and they will put people on case management at a first sighting if they want to be on case management. They used that discretion. Community Board three has been advocating for shelter for people with pets for years and were very happy to see there is finally progress. Currently, pets have been registered has been registered as emotional support animals and accepted

into safe havens with owners. MOC will take the responsibility for this process, including fees. Lower East Side Harm Reduction also does this, but there must be much more awareness that this can be done. And I'm sure more organizations or do it if they understood the need. We clearly need more beds available for people with pets, as well as drop-in centers. Right now, there is, half a block from my office, I have a couple with the dog living under scaffolding for months. They are an example of street homelessness-- street homeless people with barrier to shelter. They have been refused as a couple by family intake and they are now trying to get their dog registered as a support animal. I would like to also take this opportunity to speak about other barriers to shelter. A big one is safety, which is talked about a lot today. And drugs are part of that safety issue. We see many single adult men though will not endure the shelter or they do leave the shelter because they feel unsafe. We recently had a shelter resident a block away from us arrested with 200 bags of heroin. It's not safe for the residents when you have these kinds of drugs in the shelter. We have lobbied very unsuccessfully for

DHS peacekeepers to increase safety, but DHS will only assign them to mental health and DHS run facilities. And this is a money issue. And we have been also advocating for a formal protocol of outreach workers with harm reduction workers. Our outreach workers have informally tried this on its own. It seems to be successful and I don't understand why there isn't a more formal city policy for this. There are not enough safe havens. We do have people on waiting lists for safe havens because they did not want to leave their community. There's beds available in the Bronx, but not lower Manhattan. We have only two safe havens and Community Board three. We definitely need more in lower Manhattan. I just want to mention a few other things. I hope this new program with the hub, the command center, I hope it becomes workable. Right now, people are not necessarily coordinated. I have interfered in a clean-up where the people involved were on case management, but the Home Stat people there didn't know. And I said, don't you have access to the hub? They said, no. Our superiors to. And I also-- The police homeless outreach were telling them to move and I said, how can you tell them to move when it is

against the law? And so they didn't tell them to move, but if I hadn't been standing there, they would have been moved in then how would their case manager find them?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: These are all incredibly important perspectives and it's immensely frustrating. It's not just about, you know, whether I was consulted around this policy, but whether you all were consulted about this policy and whether street outreach teams were consulted about this policy. You know, so, there's a lot more work that we need to do and I think it really does start with actually engaging with people that have lived experience and people with on the ground expertise. So, we appreciate very much your patients and waiting to testify, but really appreciate your testimony and will use it as a guide moving forward for sure. So, we greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

SUSAN STETZER: Thank you.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. We have Michelle Vila Gomez from ASPCA. Murica Azoff from ASPCA.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Harold Moss from Catholic Charities. Is that right? Yep. And Kathy Nazari from Voters for Animal Rights and behavioral consultant.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Okay. Whoever wants to begin.

MICHELLE VILA GOMEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Vila Gomez. I'm the legislative senior director for the ASPCA and we're here to discuss and share over support of Intro 1483 and 1484. These bills are critical to understanding the scope of the problem created by a lack of pet friendly sheltering options and would push the city to come up with a practical plan to help homeless pet owners. It's them poor and to consider that homeless pet owners may constitute a hidden population. Some are secretive for fear of their pets being confiscated and because pets, especially dogs, are not allowed in most shelters, homeless pet owners may not appear on counts. The ASPCA believes that keeping people and pets together, wherever it is possible and appropriate to do so, should be a priority for the animal welfare community and for

society as a whole. To achieve this goal, we must put aside preconceived notions and treat people with respect and dignity, whatever their financial or other life circumstances. We must support laws and policies that strengthen and support, rather than break the bond between people and animal companions. We have seen that co-sheltering, housing approach that keeps pets and people together, works. Here, in New York City, we can point to the successful PALS, people and animals living safely program, created by the Urban Resource Institute. URI discovered that nearly half of its clients were staying in abusive relationships to prevent harm to their pets. URI now has animal friendly accommodations at six facilities and have allowed more than 100 families to escape domestic violence. They serve as a model here. A study performed by the NYU Silver School of Social Work done in 2018 found four themes regarding barriers to obtaining housing and accessing services. One of them is pet exclusion policies. The prohibition of animals and city shelters, drop-in centers, and transitional housing programs is a major barrier for those who would accept placement, if not for their pets. City shelters accept service and

emotional support animals, but homeless people with pets still face the agonizing choice to give them a way or remain on the streets together. Surveys of homeless pet owners reveal a level of attachment to their pets that may be greater than reported by pet owners who live in traditional residences. Leslie Irving conducted a study of 72 homeless pet owners in California, Colorado, and Florida and she points out that keeping a pet while homeless involves an intense level of commitment and a little more than hardship. Her study shows that the homeless routinely give up offers of sheltering that would require them to give up or separate from their pets. Numerous private organizations provide essential services for the homeless with companion animals. Through our own pet retention and community medicine work in New York and LA, we are learning how effective collaboration between animal welfare, law enforcement, and human services can be a help at keeping pets and people together. I have a colleague here who is going to speak to our programs, that we have to keep in mind that the nonprofit partners cannot really solve this problem. You know, we can work to help people keep their pets and harm reduction, provide services to

folks on the street with their animals, but unless there is a place that we can direct them to for proper housing, we are left at a disadvantage. So, we look forward to working with you. We support 1483, 1484, and we would like the city to consider as a resource and having these conversations as how to provide these services at shelters.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Much appreciate that.

MURICA AZOFF: Hi. My name is Murica Azoff and today I am speaking on behalf of the ASPCA's community engagement program, a program that works to keep people and pets together. We provide access to services that improve the health and welfare of animals whose caregivers facing challenges or hardships. We provide spay neuter service is, access to veterinary care, behavior all assessments, supplies support, educational resources, and case management. Our program supports people experiencing homelessness in a myriad of ways, but I will focus on two categories today. Pet owners who reach out to us for support and pet owners who were referred to our program by the community. On average, our program receives three phone calls a week from people who are

either at risk of becoming homeless or who are already experiencing homelessness. The majority of these callers are seeking temporary or long-term boarding for their pets while they enter the shelters system. Some of these pet owners are in the process of getting ESA or emotional support animal letters so that their pets will have a better chance of going into the shelters with them. This is a process that is complex and can take a long time. Some owners are in the process of being evicted and reach out because they want to avoid having to surrender their pets and many of these pet owners are living on the streets because they would rather do so than be separated from their pets. While the ASPCA can provide supplies and veterinary care for these pets and pet owners, we do not have the resources, nor the capacity to temporarily board or house peoples pets. Instead, we encourage people to identify a friend or family member who is willing to house the pad or pets and we provide them with any needed supply, transportation, and veterinary care. While we aim to keep people and pets together, we do also offer surrender support when needed. However, often, people don't have a family member or friend who is

able to care for their pets and may be forced to actually give up their pets or stay out of the shelters system. We also receive referrals from the community for people experiencing homelessness with pets. We send caseworkers to the location to offer our services to the pet owners. While it's certainly not ideal for humans or pets to live on the street, I am continuously impressed by the condition that most of the pets living on the street are in. Most of the time, the pet owner or pet owners have spayed or neutered their pets, kept them up-to-date on vaccines, and have a veterinarian that works with them and their pets. Pets are family and for the pet owners experiencing homelessness that I have worked with, having their family with them is what keeps them going every day. I worked with a man in December 2019 visited after receiving a complaint of a quote, unquote panhandler using his cat to make money. This man's cat was spayed, up-to-date on vaccines, and he had an entire suitcase full of clothes to keep her warm in the winter. She had a harness, a leash, and was showing absolutely no signs of fear or stress. He had all of her paperwork and so much food that he didn't even accept the food I

had brought for him because it would be too heavy to carry. I asked if he needed any support and he said, I just want people to stop harassing me and my cat and to find a place where we can live in peace. Our program can provide a lot of support for community members experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, but we can't solve the problem. As Michelle said, we need reasonable pet and housing policies in place that help keep people and pets together. I am consistently inspired by the strength of the love that pet owners have for their pets, even in the face of immense hardships. I hope that, moving forward, these individuals and families can receive more support in staying with their beloved pets and I urge you to support Intros 1483 and 1484. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

Thank you.

KATHY NAZARI: Good afternoon, Chairman Levin. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Kathy Nazari. I am a board member of Voters for Animal Rights and I work with animals and their humans on behavioral issues. As such, I fully support Intros 1483 and 1484. These bills are

important for their recognition of animal companions as integral family members. The physical and mental health benefits of living with animals, for both humans and animals, have been well documented. And I've provided a few references for you. We have the caregiver attachment, an emotional bond that is stronger and more secure than we have with most other humans. This often gives people a sense of purpose that another living being depends on them. The symbiotic relationship releases chemicals in our and in our pet's brains that are responsible for happiness, intimacy, and relaxation, among other things. Our pets sense our moods and give us comfort and emotional support, and not just those deemed as emotional support animals. As a professional, sadly, I see what happens when that human-animal bond is broken. We've all seen videos of how cows grieve when their young are taken from them. It's heartbreaking. Our cats, dogs, birds, and other companion animals perceive us as their parents. Any of us who has ever lost a parent knows that indescribable and profound devastation. It causes depression, anxiety, loneliness that can manifest in physical symptoms for both the animal and the human.

It can trigger such extreme forms of separation anxiety where some animals will refuse to eat or drink and sometimes self-injure. Companion animals have been paired with veterans suffering PTSD. In 100 percent of those cases, the traumatic symptoms were reduced. Our homeless population has experienced and continued to experience multiple traumatic events. They, basically, live in a state of depression and isolation. We know from empirical evidence, that having an animal companion creates a sense of connectedness and comfort. By forcing them to endure another extreme stress of giving up their beloved family member, we are destroying so much when we tear this nuclear family apart. Our New York City shelters and rescue groups are overloaded with homeless animals. If pets already have a family, they should be allowed to stay with them and not overburden our animal shelters that need room for truly homeless animals. This legislation tells DHS to create a common sense plan to allow people with pets to enter and live in homeless shelters and not force any painful separations. Let's truly be progressive and compassionate city that helps to and four-legged families stay together and let's help our

hard-working and overburdened animal shelters and their workers by reducing intake of pets who already have a home. For these reasons, I urge the passing of Intros 1483 and 1484 and I think you for your time. And I just wanted add quickly, if you want me to email use these references, I can do that so you can just click on the links.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. No. Thank you. Thank you. And just to follow up on one point that you made-- And I'm not sure if there any scientific studies to back this up, but the experience of living on the street for an extended period of time is very stressful on somebody psychologically and physiologically. And that stress can manifest in ways like PTSD. And so the--

KATHY NAZARI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know, the proven 100 percent correlation between veterans symptoms being ameliorated by-- PTSD being ameliorated by an animal and the correlation with just living on the street which is its own into serve PTSD, I think, is probably pretty substantial. It would stand to reason. I don't know if there is been any--

KATHY NAZARI: Actually, I do have some information about that. The National Alliance to End Homelessness has actually determined that the experience of being on the street does cause PTSD.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

KATHY NAZARI: And, in many cases, when someone has an animal who they are living on the street with, it does help to reduce some of the trauma and some of the anxiety and depression that is associated with PTSD.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's constant fight or flight is what--

KATHY NAZARI: Exactly. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

KATHY NAZARI: I would just like to add one other thing--

[background comments]

KATHY NAZARI: is that there been studies also that show that even just looking at an animal or stroking an animal can release certain feel-good chemicals--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

KATHY NAZARI: in our brains and so that's very-- it is very comforting.

[background comments]

KATHY NAZARI: Yeah. I can give you--
There's, actually, in the references, there is a lot
of that information.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

KATHY NAZARI: oxytocin, dopamine.
There's like five or six different chemicals.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I was at the
children center not too long ago, which is where
youth that have been removed from their families by
ACS, that is their way station for them. And ACS has
a program bringing dogs and to the children center to
help, you know, alleviate the stress. So, it's, you
know, physiologically proven.

KATHY NAZARI: Yeah. I mean, there are
also programs where animals are brought into senior
centers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

KATHY NAZARI: And where people who
experience Alzheimer's and are, basically, shut out
from the outside world will start to engage with
people--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

KATHY NAZARI: with the animal, with people. The talk. It's like they come alive again.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Thank you.

KATHY NAZARI: Thank you. Yeah.
That's [inaudible 03:10:11].

HAROLD MOSS: Good afternoon. My name is Harold Moss. I'm the director of Beacon of Hope, a division of Catholic Charities Community Services of the Archdiocese of New York. This testimony is provided on behalf of the agency use division Beacon of hope and, based on extensive experience working with formerly homeless individuals with serious mental illness. This testimony is offered in support of 4435 and 4422. Beacon of Hope stabilization bed program was created in June 2016 under a partnership between Catholic Charities and Bowery residents committee through the New York City Department of Homeless Services. The program was a direct response to the Mayor's office initiative to partner with faith-based organizations to help decrease the rise of the number of chronic street homelessness in the city. Beacon of Hope delivers comprehensive case management services with a focus on securing permanent housing. Despite incentives and the

perceived advantages of more permanent housing, however, many of the stabilization bed residents are reluctant to move from the program. However, we believe that the stabilization program model is effective, as we accept the fact that we are working with residents who have decades of deeply entrenched behaviors and a myriad of personal challenges, including medical and psychiatric conditions, which have not been stabilized. So, too, many of the residents may be overwhelmed by the massive undertaking associated with recovery and/or ambivalent about change. We believe that patients consistency, objectivity, support, and most of all, compassion, may still be in our best interest for reaching this very difficult to treat population and we believe that it is only through intensive and consistent and timely case management services that this work can be successful. As such, we fully support the bill requiring case management services be provided to the street homeless once they are identified as such. Jumpstarting the recovery process while someone remains homeless could have a meaningful impact on an individual's experience and the stabilization bed program. By transferring case

management services, instead of initiating them, the individual may be more hopeful, recovery-oriented, have a shorter length of stay, then have less long-term dependence on emergency service and systems. Importantly, jumpstarting the recovery process with case management services has the potential to reduce the trauma of the homeless experience. To this end, we also supported the bill that would set 30 days as a maximum time that HRA could require a street homeless applicant to have received case management services to be eligible for rental assistance programs. The availability of such assistance would free up the backlog for beds at the stabilization bed program as those who receive such financial assistance are placed more directly in the housing programs. And those individuals who have specialized needs can be served by more intensive case management services such as the ropes provided in our program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

I knew that there was a program in 2016. Yes. I don't know if anyone else did it other than you guys.

HAROLD MOSS: I don't know. I wasn't there at the time, but--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

HAROLD MOSS: we've had it for almost 4 years now.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Yeah. I'm glad to see that that is working. I'm glad to see that they are revisiting the model.

HAROLD MOSS: We are. And were very interested in developing more stabilization bed programs.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes. Thank you very much. We appreciate the good work that you all do I Charities. Thank you.

HAROLD MOSS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you all very much. I'm going to call the next panel. Eric Lee from [inaudible 03:14:19] United. Eric. Giselle Routhier and Josh Goldfein. Coalition for the Homeless. Legal Aide. And then I'm going to call up three more names and-- from Legal Services. You guys can kind of swap in, if that's okay. Julia Oaken from Brooklyn Defenders. Deborah Burkeman from NYLAG and Raji Edayathumangalam from New York County Defenders. Sorry if I mangled the name. So if you guys-- Let's see-- Have a seat nearby. Okay.

GISELLE ROUTHIER: Hi. My name is Giselle Routhier. I am the policy director at the Coalition for the Homeless. We submitted joint testimony with the Legal Aid Society and we will come this opportunity to testify before the Council of about Outreach NYC and street homelessness, more broadly. I want to start with Outreach NYC. Mayor de Blasio's Outreach NYC - and as comprises multiple policy shifts, none of which address the true cause of homelessness. A lack of affordable, safe, and appropriate housing. The policies outlined in Outreach NYC, along with several other related street homelessness initiatives, announced by the mayor during the latter half of 2019 may seem innocuous, but they actually represent an underlying shift towards the criminalization of homeless New Yorkers. Taken together, these policies create a vast multi agency's surveillance system to monitor homeless individuals who seek refuge in the transit system and bed down on the streets as part of a broader strategy to treat homelessness as a quality of life issues for non-homeless New Yorkers. Outreach NYC consists of several distinct policies, including training nearly 20,000 city workers to identify and report homeless

individuals they received during the course of their work duties and establishing the joint command center that actively tracks homeless people through CCTV and deploys outreach teams or NYPD to engage with them. This center and its cameras are actively monitored by the NYPD in real time. Outreach NYC is the wrong approach to street homelessness because it does not address the root causes of homelessness or treat our neighbors on the streets with dignity. The missing solutions to homelessness are simple. Supportive housing, affordable housing, low threshold shelters. Instead of embracing these solutions to the scale needed, Mayor de Blasio has emphasized surveillance of New Yorkers who sleep on the streets and in the subways. The requirement that a vast army of city workers report on the locations of homeless individuals as part of their job duties, coupled with the implementation of real time CCTV monitoring of homeless people by the NYPD, our policies that serve only to turn New York City into the big brother dystopian society envisioned in 1984. Increased contact with law enforcement for quality of life issues that is not only on wall come by homeless New Yorkers, but it is actively harmful to individuals

whose freedom, finances, and ability to obtain housing could be directly impacted for years to come, as a result, to say nothing of the trauma inflicted by such encounters. We urge the city to immediately and surveillance of homeless New Yorkers through the joint command center and the city worker reporting requirement. We also repeat our recommendation from a few months ago that the city immediately cease the subway die version program and administratively clear all quality-of-life summonses that were issued to the hundreds of individuals targeted over the past few months. Because of limited time, I want to have my colleague, Josh, talk about the legislation at hand today and some housing solutions, but there is one thing I wanted to respond to that came up in a testimony to today and that was with respect to safe havens being more appealing to folks on the street. I think that is something that is universally known and one thing that we have talked with DHS about and we urge the administration to the two is actually think about how they have crafted their regular DHS shelters system and why they could not implement Psalm of the policies that make safe havens more attractive and appealing to people into that bigger

shelters system. So, having flexibility of rules, having flexibility, getting rid of DHS PD, making the system more welcoming. And so, that is something I would encourage the city to actively pursue. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: As you said, simple solutions, actually, that, for some reason, we still are not doing. And then, just to your comment about 1984, I hadn't really thought of it. That's kind of in general in our society and overused analogy. In this instance, I think it actually is very much like 1984 where you're just sitting there minding your own business and then somebody who works for the government spots you, calls and into a command center, and then a policeman comes out and threatens to give you a ticket.

GISELLE ROUTHIER: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think that actually probably did happen. So--

GISELLE ROUTHIER: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

JOSH GOLDFEIN: I'm Josh Goldfein from the Legal Aid Society. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. As Giselle said, we

submitted joint written testimony with coalition for the homeless on the theme of common sense solutions. I think the four bills that were on the Council's calendar for today are all common sense solutions. We support them. Certainly people need more services and access to housing as soon as possible, but we also want to affirm, particularly, on the day when simultaneously in this building there is a hearing going on in the Senate about housing, statewide housing solutions, that permanent housing is, of course, the number one resource that all of our clients need. So we have on the table right now HSS, which is a bill that is pending in the legislature and the Council has affirmed its support for that. And we appreciate that. There is a new proposal from Senator Cavanaugh, Senator Prasad [sp?] for a statewide section eight program that would also provide vouchers that would not be linked to public assistance benefits. So we need all these kinds of solutions to be in place. We need the commitments that were made from the city and the state for supportive housing to be delivered so that we have places for people to go. We need supportive housing tenants Bill of Rights so that people who are in

those placements know what their rights are and the-- you know, most crucially it is solving the problem, as we all know, the answer is permanent housing and we want to just keep everybody focused on those solutions, as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

ERIC LEE: Hi. Good morning. My name is Eric Lee. I'm the director of policy and planning for Homeless Services United. Thank you, Chair Levin and the Council for letting me testify today. I wanted to first echo those your points, Giselle and Josh, that your points are well taken. I'm going to jump into the legislation that was suggested. For Intro 1902, HSU strongly supports the effort to reduce barriers for shelter and better serve the needs of homeless families and individuals. We applaud the solutions that were put forth by you, Chair Levin and Speaker Johnson with a comprehensive case for change trying to think through really client-centered comprehensive wraparound services. Expanded safe havens, more medical respites. A lot of the things that we already heard about today. In terms of 1902, we fully support the ideas that individuals who are verified street homeless showed

received DHS case management homeless services in a timely manner. In fact, they already do under current policy. So, to that end, were not sure whether this would actually make-- this legislation would actually make it a timelier provision given that outreach staff use clinical training to engage and assess to the best of their professional ability whether someone is street homeless and what their individual needs are. Then, upon verifying their homeless status as street homeless, they are then on the outreach team's caseload. Where we feel there could be an opportunity to improve case management services for street homelessness, could be greater collaboration and information sharing among all agencies, government partners, both DHS and non-DHS providers that work with the street homeless individuals. Street homeless outreach programs utilize Street Smart and CARES databases to track individuals, but non-DHS providers do not have a formal access to that and they don't have any weight actually know if somebody is known to DHS when they interact with them. So they call and they may or may not get someone to answer that question, but they can't route them back to CARES. So they can't say,

oh, you actually have a safe haven bed. Maybe you should go back there before it gets given away or you are this close to being registered as chronic. So we don't want to put you in some other situation that would actually reduce your options of getting placed. Let me see here. For 1903, HSU supports the shortening of the caseload requirement from nine dated 30 days for City FHEPS eligibility for street homeless. That said, outreach providers have expressed to us that the majority of individuals that they serve that are not yet chronic do have significant challenges such as active substance abuse and are best served in supportive housing to ensure long-term stability. So, in order to really make sure that this shortened caseload requirement is a viable option, people that are being placed in permanent housing need to have robust services, community-based wraparound care, and that there is transitional services to maintain the stability to make sure long-term. In terms of 1483 in 1484, HSU supports reasoning that individuals and families should, whenever possible, be able to bring their pets with them in the shelter. But we do caution that implementing this policy without extensive

planning and research could be problematic. We need to really, with the DHS shelter system, prioritize the welfare of all families and individuals in the programs both with and without pets. Some immediate challenges-- I'm just going to try to go through these super quickly here. Single adult shelters are going to be especially problematic given the physical layout. Share dorm space, congregant settings. You're going to have multiple people in a room. Two pads can literally start fighting with each other. There was also a really unfortunate story that came out from [inaudible 03:25:18] about a woman-- or sorry. A seven-year-old girl on the upper West side who got bit in the face by a dog when trying to give the street homeless individual a dollar yesterday. So that where we don't want to create undue concern where there is, we-- there can be cases where things can happen where, if a pet isn't familiar with someone, staff or someone else in the building, bad things can happen, as well as if there is allergic or asthmatic reactions. And then, given the low vacancy rate of shelters in general, whether this might have an undue reaction where you're going to have involuntary shelter transfers when pads don't get

along or if one person is Jake and all the other things with that. And then, just in terms of funding for this, thinking through funding for pets either for food or welfare if they can afford it themselves, possibly needing more additional funds for additional cleaning staff in order to clean up after the pad if there are problems in the shelter and making sure of everything is clean. Capital repairs if there's damage from the Pats or if they need to build an extra space for like places for pets to play given that they can't leave shelter and they need to like take them out to walk at 11 p.m. at night or something like that. And so, given all those concerns, we feel that Intro 1484 should be implemented with enough time to really collect sufficient data to give 1483 a very thoughtful enactment. Thank you.

DEBORAH BURKEMAN: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Deborah Burkeman and I'm a senior staff attorney in the public benefits unit and the shelter advocacy initiative at NYLAG. We want to thank Chair Levin, Committee Council, for this opportunity to testify and we also want to thank Chair Levin for the recognition of the report NYLAG recently put out and

we're very proud of that. So I had prepared a lot of testimony, but I won't go through things that people have said over and over again. But one thing I don't think anybody has mentioned yet is that many of my clients who are street homeless are actually forced into street homelessness by DHS's own eligibility processes. Families, even adult families, so like two adults who are together without any children, looking to enter children must provide a complete history of all the places they have lived in the last one to two years, but for the chronically homeless, this burden is especially onerous. In the process then requires that each place that is listed be verified by outside contacts. Even for periods of street homelessness, clients are expected to provide contacts so that DHS can verify that the client was living on the street at any given time. If the verification contacts don't answer the phone or if DHS can't speak with them, then the client is found ineligible for shelter for not cooperating with the investigation and then they have to reapply, returning to the intake center every 10 days and spending ten to 20 hours waiting for a new temporary shelter placement. I have clients of gone through

intake every 10 days for the last year and they still haven't been eligible for shelter because of this process. Additionally, if DHS determines in their investigation that clients have a so-called alternative housing option, even if the clients have proof the purported option is not available to them, DHS will deny them shelter and the clients can't return to intake for at least 30 days unless they have some form of new evidence. This means that when DHS believes clients have another place to sleep, even if the clients have been forbidden from returning to this suggested address or if that address proposes health risks or is out of state, the clients are forced into street homelessness. If someone was not, in fact, homeless, they would not seek shelter and they would not subject themselves to the trauma of the shelter intake process. I have several clients who have found the eligibility process so traumatizing that they left the system and either opted for street homelessness or went into unsafe and unsanitary housing. I have seen clients with disabilities face noticeable deterioration's to their health because of the eligibility process. There are several other DHS practices that I see

routinely in my practice that cause shelter to remain inaccessible for many who need it. One has already been mentioned. It's the curfew policies and the prohibition on bringing in outside food.

Additionally, intense policing of shelters and the aggression of shelter staff towards residents can make the shelter violent and frightening for residents and I have many clients who choose street homelessness over shelters simply to avoid interactions with shelter staff have been known though verbally and physically abuse my clients.

Shelters often in excess of all for clients who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices and these clients often report broken elevators and facilities that are impossible to navigate in a wheelchair even when the shelters are labeled accessible. Shelters often restricted for homeless transgender or gender non-binary clients who are, at times, prevented from living in the shelter for the gender with which they identify. DHS wouldn't need increased outrage services if shelter eligibility policy is were less restrictive. Thank you very much.

JULIA OAKEN: Hi. My name is Julia Oaken and I am the affordable housing specialist at

Brooklyn Defender Services. Thank you for your time today. So, Brooklyn Defender Services support Intros 1483 and 1484 for a number of the reasons already elaborated today. We also support intros 1902 and 1903 which are directed at increasing services for street homeless individuals and I want to talk a little bit more about that. So the street homeless population in New York has been both situationally and systemically cut off from the types of supportive services that we know are essential in getting people into stable living situations. Limiting the kind of support that caseworkers provide mainly the shelter residents, ignores this critical subset of our homeless population who often require those services most. For that reason, BDS is in favor of both extending case management services to the street homeless individuals, as well as limiting the time that they must await to access those rental subsidies. Just this week I met with a 56-year-old woman who was, for the first time in her life, street homeless. She lost her apartment after becoming unemployed and failing to make rent and, since June had been living out of her car until that, too, was seized pursuant to an arrest. Now, she is afraid to

enter shelter. Given the city's current policies, I had to tell this woman that, even though she has no money, even though she is living on the street and her possessions have been taken, even though it's the middle of winter, she can't even get a housing voucher and begin to look for apartments until she has been receiving DHS services for almost three months. We can't hope to solve homelessness if we have a policy on our books that force New York's most vulnerable communities to proactively seek out this type of assistance while in crisis and then be forced to wait months while on the street before receiving any funding. While BDS supports today's legislation, we believe it needs to go further. The chronically street homeless should receive housing vouchers at the start of their case management, rather than 30 days in. we also believes that this policy should be extended to all shelter residents, as well, who currently still have to wait in shelter for 90 days before receiving a voucher. There also needs to be an increase in funding, as people have talked about today, for housing relocation specialist in shelters and, perhaps most importantly, there needs to be a substantial increase in housing voucher amounts and

an increase in the enforcement of source of income discrimination laws in New York City, if we want our homeless population to truly be able to use the program that they are eligible for. So I think you for your time and consideration of our comments.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. On the 90 days versus 30 days for in shelter--

JULIA OAKEN: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I recently went back and I-- sorry? Josh, I can say to Josh and Giselle, too, from Legal Aide. I went back and I found Legal Aides policy positions back in 2011 when Steve Banks was the attorney in charge at Legal Aide. And that was Legal Aide's position back then. So, we should remind the Commissioner next time we see him that he once had that position himself. So, he should stick to it. Thank you very much for your testimony.

JULIA OAKEN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. You may begin.

RAJI EDAYATHUMANGALAM: Good afternoon--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh. Hit the--

RAJI EDAYATHUMANGALAM: Oh. Good

afternoon, everyone, and thank you, Chair Levin. My name is Raji Edayathumangalam. Anytime I see someone with a piece of paper and they look perplexed, I know it is me. Be it in the dentist office or in a driver's license office.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: My apologies.

RAJI EDAYATHUMANGALAM: No. That's quite all right. It's one of the longest names. I am a forensic social worker at New York County Defender Services. I am also in New York State licensed social worker with a background in community mental health and, so for me, it was very interesting to sort of hear that discussion about danger to self or others and also about Kendra's Law. But particularly the conversation about danger to self or others. A kind of brought to my mind about where we place the problem in terms of individuals of versus structural inequity and finding solutions in the wrong place. I am here particularly to represent front line social workers like myself and my colleagues working directly with clients who are tangled up, as we have been talking about in the scary web of the criminal justice system. So, majority of our clients are

homeless or really on the verge of becoming homeless again and it is really my deepest hope today that this hearing is going to be a watershed moment for this pandemic of homelessness. And also for that it plagues our city and it should be plaguing our collective conscience here. I also want to bring why am I here? Because social workers are already in the crossfire of the new bill reform laws and also on the city's ongoing housing crisis. Basically, our roles are shifting swiftly as we speak as this bill reform is rolling out. First, let's make it clear, it was our intention that clients not be held in jail. Right? We wanted them to be out and, especially, however at the same time, it presents immediate challenges for homeless clients will not have three meals and a cot. And then, secondly, there homelessness is going to precipitate their cycling in and out of the criminal justice system for all of things that previous speakers have spoken about. And it's just going to happen more hastily. And then, thirdly, social workers are also now caught in this highly, highly under resourced and fragmented system that we are talking about in terms of services. You know, I'm just going to use an example. One of the

weeks-- Just a few weeks ago I was assigned seven clients in that week and three of the seven were homeless and two others were on the verge of homelessness, so but like any other good social worker, I take a deep breath, I tried to turn my rage and utter sense of helplessness into trying to be compassionate and kind of understand that they have the same strong feelings, except that a whole new level of trauma and intensity. So, I will say that's because there is just, as everybody said, there is just way too few options that are safe, affordable, and permanent in terms of housing which really puts our homeless clients in an impossible situation. It's almost as if social workers are being asked to be magicians. Everyone is coming to us for food, shelter, and clothing. We can do this food in the clothing part. In fact, thanks to my supervisor, we have a closet that is stocked with shoes, socks, clothing, and food. However, we are not able to stock the closet with housing, so that is part of our problem. Make no mistake. I'd like to close by offering a few no-brainer solutions to the problem that we are talking about. First is that we-- Everyone said we need significantly more effective

and simplified housing options. We also need facilities that have onsite staff and services, so that should come with the housing. And then the second one is that we definitely need more social workers at public defender offices such as ours to help manage what we are really facing at this time. And then, also, were asking for integrated, coordinated, comprehensive mental health and substance treatment coordinated with housing options, which also have to be community-based, culturally sensitive, and trauma informed. And I think the last piece, which is probably the most important to make any of these worthwhile is that we need better systems of coordination between service providers across various city agencies and organizations. For example, why can't we have an integrated intake system, assessment system that is centralized and standardized across-- and portable across agencies? Why is it that the client has to answer the same question 80,000 times across agencies? And I also want to close with second-- So that could be a simple solution which we can figure out in terms of coordination across agencies.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Early with DHS and Health and Hospitals.

RAJI EDAYATHUMANGALAM: Yes. Exactly. And then, also, you know, someone comes to me through the court system and I do an intake and then the person says, look, you're going to send me now to a drop in shelter. Guess what they're going to do? They're going to ask me of the same hundred questions all over again. And then, the last thing I will say-- I'll close with this. I second someone who said that social work education is really about meeting people where they are. Physically, metaphorically, and psychologically. And so, the idea that we have to really talk about whether we meet someone short term needs versus long-term needs is really not dignifying them by listening to what they really ask for. We ask people what they need and they very well know what they need. And the idea is to build authentic and lasting connections with our clients that we can actually tried to address what it is that they've been asking us for a long time. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. And thank you to this panel. I look forward to working with you on the days ahead. I'm going to call the

next panel, but we're going to take a couple minute break. But the next panel is Lauriel Madonna Moore. Marilyn Galfin. Adita Berncrandt. And Steve Gruber. And Ali Feldman, but I don't know if I've seen Allie here. So, which is going to take a couple minute break.

[background comments]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: If everybody could please quiet down, we are going to start again.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Welcome back, everybody. Thank you. So, will start with Lauriel, if that's okay. If you want to. Okay. Just to make sure to speak into the microphone. Identify yourself for the record and make sure the red light is on.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Yeah. Hello? Okay. Okay. I just want you guys to know this is been like three days in the working. Okay. This is a quote by Mother Teresa that always kind of resonated with me. We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked, and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty. My name is

Lauriel Madonna Moore, a.k.a Oreo's mommy. I understand if you don't remember his name, as he is unforgettable. I'm here to share my story. It's on like any you have heard the four and yet like so many of you have. My whole life I've only ever wanted one thing. To love and be loved deeply. I always knew I could only give that kind of love to one person, so I would end up spending years looking for that person, which would bring me to New York City three weeks shy of my 21st birthday. I had no idea what was ahead of my innocent self then. I remember that desperate, aching, deep in my gut for love. Eventually, I would come to realize the only person who would ever love me like that is myself. This realization would change my outlook on love forever, being now I know humans cannot be trusted. I lost my job and I ended up losing the room I was renting when a friend offered me to stay with him. And during this time, I realize that desperation for love never really left me. My brain was just trying to protect me. So, there I was, again, longing for love I'll never get. I've always believed in destiny, so when I was asked to leave because of fear of this friend and his roommates losing their apartment for my legal

residency, I had no choice but to go back to the homeless shelter where I realized something in me has broke. And I will never be the same. With nothing to lose, I begged on the streets where I was offered a job where I saved and moved out of the homeless shelter into our room. Months later, my lease was up, so I started looking for a new room, always checking if pets are allowed until an April 4th I found-- I went through my savings and spent my last thousand dollars on a room that took pets. April 4th. The next day, brought home Oreo after looking all day on Craigslist. One week later, I would unexpectedly have a mental breakdown from the year and a half I spent working under horrible boss in a soul sucking industry. I started begging, hoping that I could make enough for the rent. That didn't work out and I literally found no resources for people with pets. But the guy that I got Oreo from offered for me to stay with him. So, God of desperation, I did and over the next three months, I learned about Oreo's past and trauma and I would take them with me every day to go beg for money with the plan to save and get an RV and travel and live life. But life is funny like that because things happen

that you don't expect and that you don't anticipate for, so you just have to roll with it. And then on the streets I realized that what I had been looking for my whole life I could never get from humans, but Oreo gave it to me. He didn't charge me. He didn't use me. Didn't want anything but food and love. So I then realized that, as long as I have him, it's going to be okay. Nothing matters. It don't matter where we are or what is happening. It could be 18 degrees outside and snowing, you know? But me and him are just under the blankets and wear warm and he is snoring and I smell his fart and I'm just like, stop. God. I just had-- 18 degrees and snowing and I'm in front of Starbucks on blankets with nothing and I never felt so happy and had so much peace than when I was there. Never. I felt okay. I wasn't scared. I was hurting. I was watching the snow with him in my arms. And so much happened. You know? People tried to hurt me and he defended me and he provided his love and loyalty and I had nothing. Nothing without him. I literally would've killed myself, literally, because I have nothing. So, Oreo has given me a reason. Like even the simplest I can't kill myself because nobody is going to love and

take care of him like I will. Sorry. So that was something that I always thought about. You know, so as it gets, I can never leave because no one is going to make his food like I do. You know? I know how he likes it. And no one is going to play with it like I do. No one gets Oreos like I do. And I would be so jealous thinking of someone else loving him. So, Oreos essentially gave me life that I never-- Thank you. I never thought I would have. You know? So, being in a position of having to choose between that love that you've never had that you now have and being warm and dry, I, obviously, chose the love and, you know, I just wanted to say that-- I just want to say that, in this day and age, it's hard to believe that this is a reality that there is no resources. And I remember one I was begging on the street I would get in the conversations and people could not believe that there is nothing and there's nothing. Like there is no help and the police would come because someone would call because they said Oreos was being aggressive. He's not aggressive. He just doesn't like strange people walking up to and trying to touch him. He doesn't know who you are. So, the police would come. And then, they would say, you

know, we have a report of him-- they have to apply. They are just doing their job. I get that. You know, most of the time, they-- whatever. But then they say you can't be here because now you're creating an issue for this business. So, where am I going to go? I don't know, but you can't be here. So I had a system where I would pack up from that spot and go across the street to Starbucks. That was my-- under the scaffolding, that was the rainy days spot or where I go when the police say I can't be there. Then I would wait a couple hours or, if I don't have the energy, I just wait that night and then the next day I would come back. And that, literally, how I did it. I ping-pong back and forth. And somebody at Starbucks would call and complain. You can't be here. Go back to [inaudible 03:47:29]. So, it was just a constant-- you know, tried to sleep in an ATM thing in Chase, the police were called and woke me up. You know. It's mind-boggling how, literally, there is nowhere for me-- like literally. And I have this dog and he is literally the solution all my problems, but in a way, the cause of all my problems. I'm out here on the street because of him, but, you know, he gives me something

that I have never found. It's just odd that I am in that situation that I have to choose. And anyway, so I just want to say that having the option to have your dog with you is more than just, you know, a luxury as it is considered. The only people that have money can afford a dog should have a dog. And when, in reality, a dog is more than just a pet. He, literally, will keep people sober. They will be sober just to be able to be here for them. He keys them love and comfort and security and safety. Protection. Purpose. Like the list goes on. Like literally. So psychologically impactful and there is so much research out there that I have looked at that I won't even get into because then will be here for three hours, but, literally, it is scientifically proven that, you know, this bond between animals and humans is real and intense. And, you know, all the research and everything that goes into it, I just-- that describes me. That describes me and Oreo. All of it makes sense. All of it clicked and that's when I was like-- so this thing I have, it makes sense and it's not just me and then I'm like this is crazy, you know? This is truth. So, long story short, now me and Oreo are in a room, a single room in a shelter

that is not normally accommodating to animals. They have a Chihuahua and then there is Oreo, a 70 pound pit bull mix, who people of been-- they complain. I had to have a sit down with the director. They were uncomfortable with his presence. And, through that and safety, you know, and whatever -- so I have to have him unfold while he used in the building, which, whenever. Okay. Safety. I get it. Bad it's just-- you know, it's just-- It goes to show like it's just frustrating that, you know, he has to have this vest on that say, do not pet. He has to have the muzzle on. He has to have all this, you know, just-- and he's miserable. He's just walking up the steps like-- I'm like just go. Like if you stop and try to take it off, you're wasting time. We could be there already. So we get up to the room and he's just-- so when I take it off, he shakes and then he runs and grabs his toys and he's just-- he's playing and he's free. You know? He likes to be free and naked. That's Oreo. Free and naked. So, he's got all these things that just drives him crazy, but, you know, I remember how he was on the street and I remember how he was in the room. Like in the street, he was a different dog. He was on defense.

Constantly on alert. Defense. You know, as I was, but he was, you know, has teeth. So, he was, you know, defensive of everyone who walked by us. And now he's in the room. Like he lays down on his bed. He didn't used to do that. He would always be curled up, you know, like this. But he lays on his back. He's just way comfortable and I was thinking like that's crazy that he's being forced to be aggressive out of fear because there's no options. And so I'm just want people to know that, you know, it's not that he's suffering. I'm not forcing him to be there. I'm not like irresponsible making bad choices. I'm not using him a scam to get more money. You know, I'm not like-- You know, you see it and you think things, but you should know there is so much more to it. You know? And, I mean, yeah. He used as like really my whole existence right now and he is part of my identity. I don't know who I am without Oreo. You know? He was taken from me for two weeks. You know? And I, literally, was lost. I never felt so lost and when I got him back, I felt like, wow. I could never go through that again. So I told myself I would never put him in a situation where I would have to like-- where he has to make a

choice. You know what I'm saying? It's not [inaudible 04:01:54] if someone is coming with a knife, okay. Maybe. But anything else, I'm never going into that. So, yeah. So, basically, you know, I feel like it is destined. Everything I've been through has to be for something. You know? And I thought I had a plan. I always had plans. They never worked out and then this is where it came at me and I didn't expect it and this just feels right. Like this is added. This is Oreo in the-- and we have a future and to share people and educate them about like things that, you know, second-guess. You think you know, but you have no idea. And that's kind of my motto. Things are not as they appear. You know? So, that's-- yeah. That's really all I have to say. Yay.

[applause]

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Where is Oreo right now?

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Probably laying on my bed with the cone around his neck miserable because he decided to jump down three steps in front of me and tore off his toenail in the back. Yeah.

That's Oreo. So, I'm walking back and I see all this blood and I'm like--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh. Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Are you bleeding?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It happens. Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Dog toe nails bleed a lot. Okay. I just want to let you know. I was mortified. There was blood on my shirt and the blanket. I was like what is going on? What did you do? How did this happen? Where was I? And so, generous people, connections I've made, you know, I have helped to me. You know? I see, lovely lady, was able to get me food. You know, when I needed it. Anyway, so he's on the bed probably laying there waiting for me to come back with the cone around his neck like looking like he's dead.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: I swear, when I'm going to go in the door, that's the look. Where have you been? Where have you been?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm glad that you're [inaudible 04:03:35]

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Yeah. He's good now. He's good.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, thank you.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: No problem.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you for
testifying.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Do I turn this off
now or like-- Who is next or do I turn it off?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Whoever wants to go
next.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: You want ot get
next? Okay. I'll turn it off.

MARILYN GALFIN: Hi. How does one follow
that? I'm Marilyn Galfin, Voices for Shelter
Animals. We support Intro 1483, legislation to
provide pet friendly shelters and alternative housing
that allows people to stay with their pets for the
best possible psychological and emotional outcomes.
The story of a dog midnight and his family could have
had such a positive outcome with Intro 1483.
Midnight lived with children from as young as five
years old to teenagers. The family were evicted.
They lost everything and, with no other recourse,
they had to surrender their dog to the New York City
animal care centers, only to end up being killed.
Her owner described him as friendly, gentle, and

playful with children. A picture of him hiding scared under a sheet in his cage still haunts me, as well as to imagine how devastating it would be for this family as they learned of their pet's fate. This past December, on an unbearably cold night in my Chelsea neighborhood, I saw a group of three homeless people huddled together with their dogs who they buried deep under mounds of blankets, attempting to protect them from subfreezing temperatures. And Lauriel and her dog, Oreo, was one of them. And that's how we are now, I guess, friends. I said as friends. It is not only heartbreaking, but it is unconscionable that there is no alternative for them to go anywhere with their pants and no one should ever have to choose between a warm bed in a shelter for themselves or surrendering their pet to a kill shelter or give their pet away. When an animal in terms the New York City animal care centers, an otherwise well behaved animal, can do about the fear-based behavior issues from the trauma of separation and the nature of the shelter environment as an midnight story, with the possibility of the same outcome. Separating off homelands person from their animal companion can cause severe psychological

distress for both. It may exacerbate the sense of loss of control of their lives, especially when in their most vulnerable state. This bond can be the most important foundation for a homeless person, giving them a sense of responsibility for another life, motivating them to seek the help they need to put them back on the path to self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. Their pets are their best friends. A family member. Someone who gives them comfort and all the other things that Lauriel has expressed to you today. They need to be kept together. Even victims of domestic violence would rather stay in a dangerous situation and risk their lives, rather than if their pets. In Hurricane Katrina, a poll found that 44 percent of the people chose not to evacuate because they did not want to abandon their pets. Many lives, animals and humans, were lost, which led to major changes to the state and federal laws regarding the evacuation of pets during disasters. In a Wallet Hub study, New York City placed 90th, making it the 11th least pet-friendly city in the nation, less than 23 percent of the city's rental units are pet-friendly. The sixth smallest proportion in the nation. Ultimately, it's

critical that this city addresses this pets and housing discrimination and makes sure any new affordable housing is pet friendly as the best long term solution to the homeless human-animal crisis. If we are to be a city of compassion, we ask the Council to pass Intro 1483, to create housing that keeps people and their beloved pets together. We also support Intro 1484 and all the other legislation presented at this hearing today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Marilyn.
Thank you.

STEVE GRUBER: Hi. My name is Steve Gruber and I'm the director of communications for the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals. I want to first say thank you, Lauriel, for your courage in speaking today and you said a lot of really important words. I would also say Chair Levin and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in support of Intro 1843 and Intro 1484. Since 2003, the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals has worked to reduce the killing of animals and the animal care shelters of New York City. And one of our core objectives was to reduce animal homeless Ms. Now, one of the best ways to reduce animal

homelessness is to keep people with their pets. Good for the animals. Good for the people. You know, it is widely accepted and it has been spoken about much today about the critical human animal bond. It's particularly important during times of crisis and stress such as homelessness when people are facing, perhaps, some of the worst times of their lives. And, for many people, their pets are the only source of comfort and stability. In 2006, the Mayor's Alliance created a program that had about a 12 year duration of helping pets and people in crisis where we now, run by a social worker, who worked with people facing different kinds of crises including homeless and is to find solutions to keep their pets with them. Without the support policy is in place, each case that came a challenge. But we worked, you know, through them as much as we could. And then, in 2013, had the opportunity to work with the Urban Resource Institute in their creating of their PALS program. And I was really such a major and visionary program that today does provide for cohousing between animals and their people. Another instance where I've had some very gratifying work is working on the Animal Planning Task force at the Office of Emergency

Management of New York City. Over the years, we created a plan. We implemented a plan that now allows for code sheltering in emergency shelters when disasters are declared. I think the point is that people who are facing homelessness are, in many ways, have great similarities to people who are facing domestic violence, people who are, you know, facing any kind of crisis where they are having to leave their home. And they should not have to make a choice between giving up a loved family member and finding a roof over their head. And just one last thing I would like to say is I think, because the nonprofits are great resources to work with the city to find solutions, as we did with-- on the Animal Planning Task force. ASPCA, animal care centers. And numbers of organizations are great resources that can help to provide the solutions, help create that. The funding for that, though, we believe, should rest with the city to fund these shelters that, hopefully, will be pet friendly. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Thank you to the testimony and for all the work that you are doing.

HEATHER GREENHOUSE: Hi. I'm Heather Greenhouse. I'm on the board of Voters for Animal Rights and I'm speaking on behalf of Ali Feldman-Taylor. She's the president.

ALI FELDMAN-TAYLOR (on behalf of):

Thank you, Council member Levin, for introducing this important legislation, Intros 1483 and 1484. I'm just going to read exactly what Allie wrote here. My name is Ali Feldman. I am president of Voters for Animal rights. I also volunteer as a cat rescuer in my neighborhood of Bed Stuy. Today I want to tell you a personal story to illustrate why New York City badly needs resources and protections for people experiencing homelessness and their companion animals. Last year, on a quiet Sunday night, I was at home when there was a knock on my door at 10 PM. My husband peered outside and saw a woman holding a bag in one arm and holding an orange cat and the other arm and said, I think it's for you. I open the door to a woman who appeared scared, nervous, and relieved. Her name was Lola. She explained that she just escaped from her abusive husband and needed a place to her cat, Paco, to go safely for a few days so that she could go to a safe haven for herself in

New Jersey. She explained that she lives in the neighborhood and had found my apartment by googling animal shelter Bed Stuy and my address came up. I invited Lola and Paco inside and explain that, despite having an above average number of cats, my apartment is indeed not an animal shelter. Her face sunk. I knew I had to help her. This was an emergency. She could not go back to her apartment with an abusive husband and the safe haven in Jersey wouldn't take cats. So I agreed to foster her For a few days while she got settled. Lola came back to visit Paco. We had to schedule her visits at specific dates and times because she was afraid that her husband, who still lived nearby, would see her, as he began showing up at her office. A few days of fostering, Paco the cat turned into weeks and months as Lola struggled to get back on her feet. It is not easy to start over and find affordable safe housing, while working full time in processing the divorce within abusive husband who continued to harass and stalk her. The situation was already difficult enough for Lola, but knowing that her cat was in a loving home provided solace to her during an extremely difficult time. Lola and Paco are one of

the lucky ones. What would've happened to them if I hadn't been home that night that she knocked on the door? I can't even imagine the alternative. She just so happened to knock on the right apartment door at the right time. What happens to the millions of other women who want to leave domestic violence situations with their companion animals? There is zero programs that provide emergency shelters for victims of domestic violence and their companion animals and there are zero programs that provide long-term foster care for the animals while their humans are healing and rebuilding their lives. This has to change and I urge the city Council to please takes with action. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

ADITA BURNCRANDT: Thank you, Committee Chair Levin and the committee. My name is Adita Burncrandt and I am the executive director of NYCLASS. We are an animal advocacy and political action organization founded in 2008 and we are based in New York City with supporters and all five boroughs and I am a lifelong New Yorker and I live in Queens. So, NYCLASS is strongly in support of your bills, ensure 1883 and 1884, which would help solve

the ongoing problem of homeless shelters shutting out people in need of shelter who are pet owners. Nearly every day and in all extremes of weather, I see homeless people with pets suffering on our streets. In my conversations with many of them and they are discussing this pressing issue with other animal advocates, it is very clear that many of these individuals are only out on the street because their dog, cat, or other pet who may consider their family member is prohibited from entering the shelter with them. This puts people already dealing with so much in a heartbreaking dilemma, remain on the streets or abandon their beloved family member. This dilemma is also true of victims of domestic violence who are barred from most shelters, if they own a pet. We know that many victims stay in abusive life-threatening situations because they refused to give up their pets in order to access a shelter. We must change this. This winter, I tried to help a man desperate to get into the shelter the day of severe storm was to head New York City. Because he had a dog, he had no options of entering the shelter unless he had emotional support papers for his dog, which he was completely incapable of procuring and certainly

not in time for this storm. So he instead was forced to raise money for a hotel room so he and his cherished dog wouldn't have to face the brutal pending storm on the street. Imagine how many other homeless individuals have similar stories like this every day. A recent New York University study confirmed that pet ownership is one of the main barriers to the shelter entry. Intros 1483 and 1484 would finally write this wrong and make our homeless shelters more accessible to people in need who have pets by providing pet friendly shelters and identifying other temporary pet care arrangements that would allow homeless pet owners to keep their pets. NYCLASS commands Council member Levin and the other bill cosponsors for being leaders in taking the initiative to create a more compassionate policy for homeless pet owners seeking shelter in our city shelters. We urge the committee to pass these bills. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you very much to this panel and for helping bring such moral clarity to this issue. It's greatly appreciated. Thank you. Okay. We're going to call

back up Josh Dean representing himself. Linda Mann.
Maureen Medina and Marian Koenig.

[background comments]

LINDA MANN: Good afternoon. My name is Linda Mann and I am speaking on a purely personal note for Intros 1483 and 1484. I am a blessed human being. Today, I do not have to decide whether to sleep on the street with my companion animals, Cinnamon and Sweet Pea, or go to the shelter and give up the loves of my life. I do not have to make an agonizing choice. It is a no-win situation. How could I possibly decide to subject my sleep, and is sent girls to life on the streets? On the other hand, how could I possibly give them up? They are not only family, but for many people, they are the source of emotional support. I cannot even vaguely imagine what it is like to be homeless. We are cities striving to be more compassionate. Ours social conscience demands that we create policies that support the human animal connection and provide housing and healthcare for all of New York City residents. Helping that one homeless person who has to decide what to do tonight may not change the

world, but for that one person and his or her best friend, the world will certainly be changed forever.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

MAUREEN MEDINA: Do we have to go in order of which we are called? Thank you so much, Councilman Levin, for this. For all of this. My name is Maureen Medina and I am here in support of intros 1483 and 1484. I have worked in social services for the past few years, almost 10 years, with populations experience housing crisis. Though there is a right to shelter in New York City, it is not so black-and-white and initial entry is conditional. One does not simply choose to enter shelter and it is, in most cases, a last resort. Those who make or are forced upon the decision of entering shelter to so with countless factors to consider like financial status, possible eviction, how to care for themselves and their household, or even just to qualify for housing assistance. There are several entryways shelters in the city for men, women, and families before they are all assigned to a more permanent shelter and none of those allow for pets. As a former outreach worker, I have never encountered clients and DHS facilities that had their

pets with them, though we have fielded many calls and inquiries outside of those facilities about available housing allowing for animals. Many people refer to our programs are already facing insecurities and one recurring concern is domestic violence and they will not leave a dangerous situation until they can ensure the safety of all of their loved ones, including their pets. Regardless of their personal situation, the point is that we have housed, and I use that-- the parentheses very strongly-- to many-- we have too many people without realistically or holistically addressing their needs, most of which lead them to shelter to begin with. In most circumstances, those experiencing housing crises are marginalized and facing both systemic and personal hardship, including physical and mental health conditions and being forced to separate from their pet is additionally damaging to both the human and animal. Please do not reduce people to being difficult, picky, or noncompliant or not and enough of a dire situation just because they refused to enter shelter which, again, would make them eligible for additional services. If we truly want to address homelessness and provide long-term sustainable housing and

assistance, especially for this underserved population, we need to acknowledge that many people have pets that they love like family and it is truly impossible to decide whether to be homeless or to abandon your loved one. Please do not make them choose. Please, DHS, allow pets in the shelters. Thank you and please support Intros 1483 and 1484. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

Thank you.

JOSH DEAN: Good afternoon. My name is Josh Dean. I'll be brief as it is been a long day. My colleagues have done a phenomenal job of advocating for housing. Safe Haven, supportive housing, affordable housing, you name it. I think that point has been nailed pretty well today and I think the animal welfare community turned out very big today. So, thank you all for coming out and speaking so eloquently about the needs for homeless pet owners. I want to talk briefly about the short-term needs of folks on the street because I think that is been overlooked in, crack from Urban Justice touched on that a bit. Got some good news for you, Councilmember. I texted Bombas about you 10,000 sock

request and they are down. They're going to fulfill that request if DHS is up to it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Wow. Yeah.

Amazing.

JOSH DEAN: So, the only thing standing between not happening now is DHS. Bombas is on board. You are on board. Outreach teams are on board. We've got to make it happen. It's really concerning that, you know, that hasn't happened yet. I could share from personal experience that, in our initial conversations with DHS when we raised, you know, what we do and shared what we were looking at and asked, you know, how we can work together, I recall, so, you know, what they asked of us was stop giving out socks. They said it makes it harder to convince people to come off the streets, which is bull shit. If you think that the make or break between coming in off the streets as a pair of socks, you better take a hard look at what you're offering. It's really concerning because last year, 148 New Yorkers die while living nonsheltered. Despite the fact that HUD data indicates that only five percent of the homeless population is unsheltered, unsheltered homeless deaths account to 37 percent of

homeless deaths. On the morning of October 5th, we lost Chang Kwok, Anthony Leon Manson, Lazario Vasquez Villagas, and Floria Moran to a tragic and preventable murder. I'll take a couple seconds for a moment of silence for them. We're seeing the city and state resort to cruel tactics to deter people from staying in public spaces, especially where those are more wealthy or more white tend to spend their time. Here are just a couple examples. Recently Elizabeth Kim of compliments reported that at the West Fourth subway station, the MTA removed the backs of the benches to deter people from sleeping there. And where two of our colleagues at the Safety Net Project [inaudible 04:25:39] data and showed a 44.5 percent increase since 2017 in displacements, also known as street sweeps or clean ups. Number three, the subway diversion program. I won't say anymore. The number four, the joint command center, which we touched on today in which I thought Giselle and the Coalition for the Homeless really pointed out its flaws. And then number five the outreach teams don't give people things. We talked about that with the socks, but it's freezing cold out. If someone doesn't want to come inside because they don't feel

safe going of the shelter and we can't offer them a safe haven that night, give them a pair of socks, warm meal, or a blanket. People are dying. 148 people died last year on the streets. Sorry. I think I shared my recommendations or our recommendations with you pretty thoroughly, so I will leave it there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Josh.

[background comment]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you for contacting Bombas.

JOSH DEAN: Anytime. My pleasure. Hi Sam and Kelly. Thank you.

MARIAN KOENIG: My name is Marian Koenig. I'm a lifetime pet owner, but mostly I am also an animal rescuer. Therefore, I'm in the trenches almost-- Well, at least every weekend, day and night. I am here to testify that passing Intro 1483 is the only choice our society can make. My admiration goes to the City of New York for its persistent work toward achieving pet friendly shelters. I am aware the city issued a request for proposals for a shelter that would take pets. That was more than a year ago. I looked into what could

possibly be the problem. The barrier. The only tangible reason I could fathom is possibly liability insurance. The city, with the help of ACC and ASPCA, could whittle this cost by providing, I think, the following, during intake. Proper sized cages for dogs and/or cats to be placed next to the owner's bed outfitted with beds and water bowl, cages for cats can be outfitted with cardboard litter pans, a cardboard box for the cat to hide. Number two, proper fitting muzzles. Some owner say no, but this would solve the problem of people saying fear. We're trying to eliminate why they can't go in. So, proper fitting muzzles, as a rule, when outside room and proper fitting leashes. Volunteers instruct safest way to hold a leash, securely wrapped around wrist. That's a big problem that could be solved within a minute. The last thing would be eco-friendly pet waste bags and dispensers. This is not big cost, but it would really help the animal shelters to take in right away. To take in pets. A homeless person's pet could very well be, as we've all said, their lifeline to caring to exist at all. It could be their last shred of love, perhaps their only shred of love. Meaning, when individuals break down, they're

not entering with joy. They break down and enter a shelter. It is not with relief or peace, but pain. What if Rusty was here? Where is he? What are they doing? When can I see them? What is? This bill will help humans to get off the street. There is no other answer. There needs to be no more what if. It's ridiculous. I think it is as simple as that and I think people can gawk at cages. They can gawk at muzzles. But if it starts the process and solves, I don't see why not.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much for those suggestions. It's very helpful. Thank you to this entire panel. It's very moving. Thank you. And thank you for staying. Okay. This is our last panel. It's a big one, though. Casey Reardon. Caitlin Bellajulah. Joey-- what is it? Oh, he left. Okay. Greg Zucker. Okay. Diana Rose. Lauriel Moore.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Whoever wants to begin.

CAITLIN BALOGULA: Great. I'll start. Good afternoon, everyone. For this opportunity to testify in favor of Intros 1483 and 1484. My name is

Caitlin Balogula. I'm a psych student at Hunter College. Additionally, I have conducted mental health research at NYU Langone and [inaudible 04:30:54] Cornell Medicine. At Cornell, I worked with at risk populations such as veterans and 9/11 responders. Many of whom were experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. I come to you as a community member, born and raised in Brooklyn who cares deeply about New Yorkers and especially about our most honorable. I am also an animal lover. I feel we must do all that we can now both New Yorkers and animals and it just so happens that, in many cases, this means helping them stay together. I'm going to skip over all of the empirical evidence showing how great keeping animals and humans together because that was reiterated many times. I'm sure many people in this room have experience the joy that an animal offers. People experiencing homelessness or who are housing insecure phase tremendous stress daily. The comfort and companionship that pets provide them is invaluable. Please adopt these measures so that people don't have to choose between having a roof over their head and losing their best friend. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. And I'm sure there's plenty of research and literature on the psychological effects of companionship from an animal, correct?

CAITLIN BALOGULA: Yes. I mean, you seem to be well informed about it. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

MARY CAHILL: Do I push this?

CAITLIN BALOGULA: Oh, it's on.

MARY CAHILL: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Mary Cahill. I am a nurse practitioner and I spent 15 years on the medical team of the Bowery mentioned that the free clinic. I am actually reading for Casey Reardon. Thank you, council members for allowing me to testify here today. My name is Casey Reardon and I am here as a private individual in favor of proposed legislation 1483 and 1484. Though I am a resident of Jersey's said a, I am deeply invested in this issue because I recently graduated from and why use animal studies MA program where I researched people experiencing homelessness with Pat in New York City. Over the past year, I've surveyed dozens of homeless pet owners throughout New York City with the help of the national nonprofit My

Dog is My Home and found that 46 percent of surveyed people reported that there was a time in the past year when they wanted to stay in a shelter, but could not. Of these, 55 percent said the main reason was because their animal was not allowed inside. 65 percent been denied access to a shelter at least once because of their animal. Finally, 50 percent reported they would not stay in a shelter unless their animal was allowed inside. It's a widespread argument that pets are family members and all responsibility for life. And most of the individuals I've worked with over the past year acquired their pets before becoming homeless. By refusing to abandon their animals after losing their homes, these community members are merely living up to the expectations we have for all pet owners. That is to remain with and care for one's pets regardless of life's hardships. It is my opinion that proposed legislation 1483, 1484 are a critical step towards helping the city achieve its goal of putting an end to homelessness and bringing all New Yorkers home. Thank you again for allowing me to testify here today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

DIANA ROSE: So, my name is Diana Rose.

Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Council member Levin and everyone else. I don't have any speech as planned because I found out about this away hours of the morning, but knowing me and how much I have fought for human rights and animal rights ally, I could not see any other place that I would rather be, so is said waiting an hour or 17hours, that's fine. Doing personal outreach, not with any agency, but going throughout the city of New York, as a native New Yorker-- I'm originally from Queens-- in the 80s and 90s and realizing that the homeless community, as a whole, was not looked on and as human beings. They were persevered and persecuted in one state and then they were ostracized in another. So, encountering these situations where I would sit hours and have conversations with human beings that want anything and everything that any human being deserves, along with their animal be beside them and hearing countless I do not matter. My animal doesn't matter. On a side note, hopefully, looking at animals, no longer is property and looking at them as the beings that they are and the reason why, so I have a last breath in my body, I will continue to fight for them

and for the humans that love them and protect them. Also the from an educational background and a wellness background and also a survivor of domestic violence, knowing that I could have possibly been placed in 2018 in a situation that wouldn't have allowed me to bring my companion animals, two of them which are service dogs, into a facility, I would've chosen to be in the streets because I would've never parted ways with my family. And the more that you look at these animals in connection with their human family, the more 1483, 1484 is prevalent. And on a personal level, it's interesting how the universe works because the young ladies sitting beside me, I had conversations with her when she was in the street and I had the pleasure of meeting Oreo. And when I tell you that she is not bullshitting you when I tell you the level of respect, adoration, and relationship that these two beings have with one another, it's incredible. So I thank you and I hope that, before my time is done on this planet, that I see that all this beautiful work is not for nothing. That it actually takes place and that we remove the bureaucratic bullshit and we humans for what they are

and who they are and their animal beings and, again, not as property. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Oh, yeah. It's my turn. Okay. Okay. So, just wanted to touch on some things that I found to be really important as I was listening to everybody. I just want to say that-- I was in the middle of looking it up. Colorado has an animal co-living system in place already and several of them, actually, that I have looked at. Then, from what I read, it was like volunteers would tend to the animals and, you know, cages that are separate from-- in the morning, you, you know, get your dog and you would go about your life. But, you know, just because I know that to have a system like this is important and it's crucial that we need to figure it out to where it works and it makes sense in every way. Because what I want to touch on, which nobody has said anything about, is that-- Yeah. The one thing is there are no resources like-- Let's say I'm on the street with my dog, right? You know, that's bad, but if there were just some resources that could make-- You know, there's no vet care. There's no

free vet care at all. Nobody offers a basic exam.
So, I mean, unless you just know a vet.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The ASPCA is
raising their hands.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Well, I was on the
phone with the Humane Society and the AC-- I called
everybody and I think the ASPCA was 40 dollars and it
was 92nd. And then I called and they said, we don't
offer exams at 92nd or whatever. And I was like,
maybe it's misinformation, but, you know, if you
bring your--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible
04:39:13]

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: It's low income,
right?

[background comments]

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: But it's not free
free like absolutely you pay nothing.

[background comments]

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: Okay. So that's
the thing. Nobody knows that, right? People are
homeless. They have dogs. I have, you know, a pit
bull and he's-- I found later on he has really
sensitivities to food and the environment. You know,

his paws get real inflamed. His ear, like he had a little alopecia. And I'm like, what is this? Is this fungus? Is this mites? I'm freaking out. I remember making a sign saying, need dollar sign number for vet in front of the, you know, West Village-- I won't call them out, but I sat there in front of there and then I moved across where the Starbucks and nobody gave me nothing. And, you know, it was literally for a vet. Like, you know, that's how desperate I was. And long story short, you know, it takes you to a place. You don't want to feel desperately anxious and worried about your dog, you know, being sick or whatever. So, you know, I mean, that's something that's available that needs to be like known. Like I want to go make flyers and pass them out because I didn't know that. So long story short, that was one thing. Like jackets or coats, you know, if I didn't have so many people that were generous and cared about me and Oreo, like he wouldn't have like as much as he has. You know? So where would you go to get those things? I know the ACC has like the pet-- you know, but that's more for people in homes, you know? So, I just feel like there should be more services in general for people

struggling with their pets because, as far as I know like it's just the ACC, right? So, either way, that was one thing I wanted to say. And then the Colorado thing and then-- Okay. So the other thing was something I considered for a while was going in-- because by law, if you present, you know, this is a service animal, by law the establishment can only ask you two questions. Is this a service animal? You say yes. What service has he been trained to provide? Now, by law, I mean, it's a loophole. You could lie. They legally can't check or verify. You know? That's the Mayor's Disability Act is for, right? To protect your right to, you know, not have to display your information. And that was something I considered, but that's illegal, you know? That's lying and that's a liability for what if something happens, you know? And people-- So it was just a moment of desperation, but I feel like, you know, that's an option. You know? What if I just say he's a service dog? Right? And that creates a whole other issue out of desperation. That's all I'm saying. And then the other thing I wanted to say was this is probably the biggest issue I've had with being a homeless person that owns a dog because I own

a 70 pound pit bull and he is not-- that's a big 'ol dog and on top of being a 70 pound male pit bull, for the most part-- for literally his whole life he was unneutered and he has trauma. Dogs have trauma. They can have trauma. So he has trauma with-- and he also wasn't socialized properly, so he's scared of a lot of things. Big, black trash bags and you're walking by and here he is, arf, barking at them and they're like what's going on? The police he has issues with because their uniforms, they're big. They're a solid color and, you know? And I guess just their presence. Oreo does not like the police. He doesn't like the MTA workers that wear the yellow vests. Oreo doesn't like the Buddha statue on 14th street. He doesn't like that Buddha statue. So, you know, he's scared and he doesn't know what's going on, so that's aggression, right? Do you know how many times the police have been called only because they thought he was being aggressive? And then guess who shows up? The police shows up. So, of course, he's barking and he's putting on a show and I'm just like, please, stop, stop, stop, stop. These are not the people you can bark at. They're here because you're barking. So, it's like-- You know, if it was

a Chihuahua, it would be like, oh, he's so cute, right? He's a feisty little Chihuahua. So it's like it's a whole-- it's one thing to be homeless with a dog or an animal, but then it's to be homeless with a pit bull is a whole other experience. And then to be homeless with a pit bull that has trauma. It's like how-- You know what I'm saying? How can you handle that? Like for a lot of people, you know, it would be overwhelming. Oreo has climbed over me and huge red scrapes on my legs trying to get to somebody that's too close. You know, like he literally like he is scared.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MOORE: And so it's difficult to manage a dog with trauma. So, anyways, that was the things I wanted to say and-- So, on that note, I noticed that when I was-- I was forcibly removed from the street and I was placed in shelter that was a DHS shelter, but not like a safe haven. The police showed up. It was a big ordeal, but the point I'm trying to make is I was never offered transitional services, so I went through a phase of like shock, I guess. I kept going back to my spot. So I had a room and I stayed out like

during dirty weather because, I don't know. I was just like, this is where we are. This is where me and Oreo are and then Oreo would bark and be aggressive and he was like-- and then we would get back to the room and he's laying on his back, playing with a toy and it took me like more time than it should've to realize that I have no place no more. You know what I'm saying? So, that's something that I feel is crucial because, if people have access to like a transitional therapeutic, you know, setting or services, and then they'll be probably more likely to want to stay. You know, oh, this place isn't so bad. You know? Because you're losing a bit of your freedom. You know, a bit of like confidence. You know, like it's different when you're on the street. When you're on the street, you're free to [inaudible 04:55:39]. You're like, whatever. You know? You don't care if people judge you. You know, you have this like face on. This mask. So, trying to take it off can be very difficult. So, I just feel like there should be like transitional services. I thought there was going to be in safe havens, but, honestly, I mean, you can talk to your case worker, but she's not like a therapist who specializes, you

know, in homeless trauma or whatever. Because I know, for me, being on the street was traumatizing. Like just in general. So, the other thing I wanted to say was that I am so for these bills. All of them, actually. But I do want to be honest. I think the system and housing people with pets needs to take into account what type of pet it is because, like I said, he's a 70 pound pit bull and he's-- you know, literally, walking down the street, Oreo is in front. He clears the path every time. People will dodge. They run across the street. They see me and they're like already on that side waiting for the car. You know, so they'll literally run into traffic trying to avoid this pit bull. You know, people split like they'll split. They just have a path like Noah. Like I swear like Noah's ark. Like just me and old Oreo because of fear. When I first got to the safe haven, they set me down and expressed there was a lot of people that were expressing fears and concerns because they didn't-- his presence. We're talking about he's sitting down with a muzzle. He just has like miserable like, you know, face. He's just like.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: That's Oreo. That's Oreo with a muzzle. It's just the fact that he's a pit bull and it just-- I mean, I'm used to it, but how could I house Oreo knowing he has trauma and knowing his personality. He sees another dog and he's, you know, on guard. So imagine somebody else that has a pit bull and I have a pit bull or any other dog, you know, that's a big dog. So, I mean, muzzles are not-- dogs are dogs. Things are unpredictable. I mean, I just think that the system should take into account the breed of dogs, is what I'm trying to say or the type of animal because you know what I'm saying? Like what do you do someone with ferrets? Right? They can't sleep in a cage.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: I mean, I'm totally for it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Strangely illegal. There's a whole backstory with ferrets.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Oh, yeah. I only say that because when I was on the street--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Rudi Giuliani something and the--

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Okay. I don't know about that. All I know is that when I was on the street, I knew a girl that was homeless and begged and she lived in a van with her husband and she had ferrets. Two ferrets. And I remember, you know, talking to her through that and then--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Long story short, so that's all I'm trying to say. Is that nobody's ever spoken about like, you know? Because him being a pit bull is--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I understand.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: a huge impact on my life in homeless experience. If he was any other breed, it would be a completely different experience.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Right.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: People either think he is cute or people are afraid of him.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So, long story short, that was-- want to be a part of that. And

the other one is-- You have two other ones, right?
1903 and 1902?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Yes.

Introductions, though, right? Not-- Okay. So, I don't know if anyone spoke on these, but 1903 is the 30 day max, so when you-- in order to get a case worker fro-- I was with Manhattan-- I don't know how to say it consordium? Consortum?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Consortium.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Consortium.

Yeah. I always say it wrong. They have, you know, like different organizations that help. They have--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So, long story short, there's like Breaking Ground. There is like, you know, Goddard.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: But in order to get a case worker through one of them, you have to be on the streets or homeless like for nine months.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: That's like enough time for a baby to be born.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: And, I mean, that's forcing people to be out there. Like why nine months? Like seriously.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: And so they come out and they do outreach. They checked and they see you and they go, okay. They write you down on this account meeting that we saw you and now we are verifying that you-- So, I mean, 30 days is more than enough. You know?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So, long story short-- And there is a lot of, you know, strain on the case worker, so it took me a long time to even get a case worker.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So, anyways, I just wanted to speak on the importance of the bill because I know that the dogs in shelter is very important, but this one also is crucial because Oreo was on the street for months experiencing trauma every day and every day they're on the streets, it's another opportunity. You know? So, it's just 30

days. You know, it's like, hey, she has nowhere to go. So, and then 1902 would require DHS to provide case worker services to homeless people instead of having to rely so much on these outside organizations who are limited in their budgeting and they are strained with their case load.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So, one case worker can have like 20 people that she goes and sees and she has to like take into account individuality.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: She has to form a relationship with each of these people. You know, our job is to try to get you to come into the shelter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So she's patient. She's reassuring. My case worker was amazing. I seriously think whoever trained her or however she got the way she is should be set as a standard for, pretty much, all homeless services because she wasn't judgmental. Shayla send. I rambled. She listened. We were there for hours. Our first meeting was an hour and a half. Okay?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: But she listened. I didn't want to do the traditional-- I wanted to an RV and travel, right? And that's outside of the-- They want you into housing. You know, that's the goal. To get you affordable income or whatever. But I was like, no. I want to save and get an RV. And she was like, you know what? We're going to work with you. We are going to work on it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: So, it just opened my eyes to how she's the only one like I've had that experience with and everyone else is like-- That just needs to be--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Very important.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Okay. And the last thing I wanted to just say was that everything that is been sent today is true and wonderful, but the real solution to ending homelessness in general and ending people with pets being on the streets is the stigma around people with pets on the streets. The stigma is that pets are a luxury. They're a privilege. You know what I'm saying? So, if you're on the streets with your dog, that dog is suffering.

He's suffering because he's not living-- He's being forced because of your choice. He's now suffering because he has no choice. He has no voice. He can't-- and I used to get into arguments or people would say stuff and I would just stop replying and I just sat there like and ignore them because they, literally, are so upset that have the audacity to have him out here. I should give him up to a good home. Okay. If I really loved my dog-- I had this woman give me a card for pit bulls-- What's that organization that takes pit-- I forgot what it's called, but it was like the Bully Club. It's like they specialize in, you know? And they were like, if you really love your dog, you'll give him-- you know, you'll call this number. They'll take him. They'll give him back to you. All you have to do is sign this paper. She literally sat there for 30 minutes trying to convince me. And I'm like, I'm not fucking stupid. That's called releasing my rights. Okay. I'm surrendering. That's a surrender form. I'm not saying anything. I was just looking at her because she had a 20 in her hand. So I was just like yeah. Okay. Yeah. Totally. But she gave me the 20 and I walked off. I'm not going to-- She felt like

Oreo was better off in some shelter with a bunch of other pit bulls instead of with me. And it was like she was trying to like coerce me into it. Like sign this surrender form. They'll give him back to you. But, you know, I'm smart. I know what was going on. But, you know, and I got your 20 dollars. I'm just kidding. So, anyways, what I'm trying to say is that, you know, yeah. So the stigma is the main thing. So I don't know. I'm interested in trying to change that however. You know, let people know like my motto for everything I do in life has come to things are not always as they seem. It's that simple. You think you know, but you have no idea. You see someone. You think this. You don't. You don't know what they're going through. You know, I have no-- I can't imagine what people go through and they walk around holding that with them. But I'm on the ground. On the cement. My life is out on display. You know what I had for breakfast. You know what kind of-- You know I've been wearing those same pants for three days and that's all on display, so therefore, you have given yourself the right to judge me, to criticize me. And that's the problem. Like it's the problem because I learned through being

homeless that there is no like-- Most people are nice to me. Most older white ladies are nice? No. Muslim people give me money. Like older black people, young black people. Like the most surprising people. You know what I'm saying? And I learn from that. I don't judge no more. Being on the streets, the one thing I walk away from is I don't judge anymore. I don't judge. I used to be friends with-- I had a friend that was a crack head. I had a friend who did other drugs. You know? I sat there with a heroin addict and trying to convince her to go to the hospital and get her arm looked at because she missed a vein. I didn't judge her. I wasn't standing there looking at like you're fucking pathetic. Why would you do that? You know what I'm saying? Like I stopped judging. I will never judge anybody again. So, I just feel like that's something that-- I don't know. Like the city can do like some type of informative campaign, you know? Like they do the thing with the subway. Like you said the deferred program.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I mean, it's a good--

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Right? Like they do it for other stuff.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. It's a good note to end on.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: I remember going down the subway station and trying to sleep because I was so tired. It was really windy and like an hour later there's like four homeless outreach cops saying that I have to leave. Someone took a picture of me and sent it to them. And I'm like, okay. You know? And I'm just sitting there. And they stand there.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Chit chatting among themselves watching. They will not leave until you leave. Every last thing is gone. So you're sitting there and you're like-- You just had an hour of sleep and you're exhausted and Oreo is sitting there and he's looking at them like-- And I'm just trying to [inaudible 04:54:31] and I'm trying to get my stuff and it's like-- Yeah. So, it's like, you know?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: There has to
be-

DIANA ROSE: At least, you know, you're
not in that situation.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Yeah. I know.
I know. But--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, judge not
lest--

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: lest you be judged.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Yeah. And
then that goes back to, you know, different types of
homeless people. There's the ones that don't shower
and haven't showered in months, there's the ones like
me who do like to shower. There's the ones who, you
know, it's whatever. I'll do a bird bath. I did
bird baths for years. And so by looking at them,
they're like, oh, that homeless person, he's wearing
dirty clothes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: But me, I'm
clean. I'm well spoken. You know how many times
I've been told that? I'm well-spoken and clean. Why
are you out here?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: It's like, oh, because I don't look like that, I'm more worthy of not being out here? So, the stigma is the biggest issue and I know it's a very complicated thing to tackle, but I mean, there's got to be a way to let people know--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: that that is not what you think. And I watch a lot of videos. I'm not going to ramble, but there's a series on Youtube where this guy interviews homeless people. He says, Christine. The crack addict. And she sits there and he just-- she talks about her life and though the end of the video, you're like you have a whole new outlook.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: She looks rough, right? But then you hear her story and you're like--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Wow. Christine, how did you survive all that? You know? So I don't know. Maybe that can be--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible

04:55:54]

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: An option.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No. Thank you. I appreciate all of your testimony.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Thank you. I'm sorry. I know it's just-- It's a lot, but--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. I know. But thank you so much.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Ignorance. Ignorance is the problem. You know? The ignorance of not knowing and just--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: People are afraid of what they don't understand. So that's the problem.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: How do we fix that, though, you know?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Yeah. It's a challenge. Thank you, though. Thank you.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: All right. That's it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

LAURIEL MADONNA MONROE: Everyone is
leaving.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Thank you
everybody for your testimony and for being here at
3:26 this hearing is adjourned.

[gavel]

[background comments]

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 March 31, 2020