

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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May 6, 2026
Start: 10:09 a.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Crystal Hudson,
Chairperson for Committee on
General Welfare

Shaun Abreu,
Chairperson for Committee
On Transportation and
Infrastructure

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés
Darlene Mealy
Frank Morano
Sandy Nurse
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung

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

Rebecca Chew
HRA

Monica Ealey
HRA

Christopher Gonzalez
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John McCarthy
MTA

Dara Goldberg
MTA

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Marie Nadine Pierre
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Deborah Wright
RWDSY

Rachel Swaner
Community Service Society of New York

Beth Williams
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Norm Miller

Angel Rosas
NYPIRG

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Self

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Hildalyn Colon
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Judy Wong
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New York Transit Riders Council

Rodney De Deus
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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Nicolas Pearson
Riders Alliance

Allison King
Riders Alliance

Javier Chavez
Mixteca

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

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Self

Adian Cacho

Christopher Leon Johnson
Self

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check on
the Committee of General Welfare, joined with the
Committee on Transportation Infrastructure, recorded
by James Marino in the Chambers on May 6th, 2026.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Welcome to the
New York City Council hearing for the Committee on
General Welfare, joined with the Committee on
Transportation and Infrastructure. At this time,
please silence all cell phone and electronic devices.
If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill
out appearance cards with the Sergeant-at-Arms. And
with- as a friendly reminder, please do not approach
the dais. Chairs, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Good
morning and welcome to today's oversight hearing on
Fair Fares. I'm Crystal Hudson, General Welfare
Committee Chair, and my pronouns are she/her. Thank
you to Speaker Julie Menin for prioritizing this
topic and for being here this morning, and thank you
to Chair Abreu and the Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure for joining our Committee and
holding this hearing.

Today we're also hearing several bills, including
my bill, Intro 248, which would require the

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3 Department of Social Services to create a system to
4 automatically enroll individuals in city-created
5 benefits such as Fair Fares. An opt-out mechanism
6 would also be established to allow eligible
7 individuals to decline automatic enrollment if they
8 wish to.

9 We're joined this morning by Council Members
10 Brooks-Powers, Marte, Avilés, Wong, and Ung. I'd now
11 like to turn it over to Speaker Menin to deliver her
12 statement.

13 SPEAKER MENIN: Thank you so much. Um, it's an
14 honor to be here today, and I really want to thank my
15 colleagues, Chair Hudson and Chair Abreu, for holding
16 this important hearing. Fair Fares is an
17 indispensable program that provides eligible riders
18 with discounted access to one of our city's greatest
19 assets— our public transit system. It is truly a
20 lifeline for working New Yorkers, yet far too many
21 people who are eligible for the program have not
applied for this much-needed benefit because they are
simply unaware it exists or because of bureaucratic
hurdles that make it incredibly difficult to access
this benefit.

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3 As we urged the Administration to do during our
4 response to their Preliminary Budget on April 1st, we
5 must strengthen our investment in Fair Fares to
6 provide free public transit for New Yorkers at or
7 below 150% of the federal poverty level for bus, for
8 subway, for paratransit. And we worked— as we also
9 work towards increasing awareness through automatic
10 enrollment, which we strongly back.

11 While the cost of living continues to skyrocket,
12 we must be very intentional about our commitment to
13 making this city affordable and accessible for all
14 who want to live, stay, and build a future here. In
15 addition to being a key aspect of the social safety
16 net, affordable transportation is one of the most
17 vital tools we have to strengthen local communities
18 and drive inclusive economic development. When
19 working-class New Yorkers can access mass transit
20 through systems like Fair Fares, they are better
21 equipped to participate fully in the city's economy.
The reduced fare that this program provides does not
just represent a discount.

It also translates to consistent employment,
education, childcare, and healthcare. For low-income
workers in particular, access to mass transit can

1 literally be the difference between whether someone
2 can keep a stable job or not. Access to
3 transportation can serve as a meaningful avenue to
4 achieve economic resilience and mobility. When there
5 are vast inequities across zip codes and income in
6 New York City, programs like Fair Fares can serve to
7 close them. I'm hopeful that today's hearing will
8 serve as a platform for us to strategize in ways we
9 can strengthen accessibility and availability of the
Fair Fares program.

10 To that end, we look forward to the testimony.
11 And in closing, I just want to be clear, this has
12 been one of the Council's top priorities, which is
13 why we included it in our April 1st budget response
14 to insist on an expansion of Fair Fares to include
15 bus, subway, and paratransit, as well as automatic
enrollment.

16 I'll now turn it back over to Chair Hudson.
17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much, Speaker
19 Menin. Fair Fares was first launched in New York
20 City in 2019, and the New York City Human Resources
21 Administration or HRA, administers the program. Fair
Fares offers eligible low-income New Yorkers a 50%

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discount on subway and eligible bus fares, as well as
Access-A-Ride trips.

As of February 2026, there were 379,354 Fair
Fares enrollees. Currently, New York City residents
between the ages of 18 and 64 with incomes up to 150%
of the federal poverty level may qualify to
participate in Fair Fares. Even though enrollment in
Fair Fares has steadily increased since the pro-
program's inception, that increase is nowhere close
to where it should be.

According to a 2020 survey conducted by Community
Service Society of New York, 54% of eligible Fair
Fares respondents reported that they had little to no
knowledge of the program. We know that the city has
made efforts to conduct outreach and promote
awareness about Fair Fares, but more can always be
done. I introduced Intro 248 with the goal of
ensuring that all of those who are eligible for Fair
Fares can access the program. When it comes to
promoting equity and economic mobility for vulnerable
New Yorkers, accessible transportation is key. For
too many low-income residents, the cost of getting
around is a daily barrier to accessing jobs,
education, healthcare, and a sense of community.

1 Programs like Fare Fares are so critical. The
2 program helps to ensure that individuals and families
3 are not forced to choose between paying for a subway
4 ride and meeting their basic needs like food or
5 housing.

6 As elected officials, we have a responsibility to
7 find ways to improve access to programs like Fair
8 Fares. We hope that today's hearing will inform an
9 assessment of how we can improve access to this
10 program to better support the New Yorkers who need it
11 most. We look forward to receiving testimony from
12 the Administration, advocacy groups, and other
13 interested members of the public to learn more about
14 the city's successes, areas for improvement, and
15 ideas for greater access to Fair Fares.

16 I want to conclude by thanking the Committee
17 Staff for their work on this hearing: Aminta
18 Kilawan, Panina Rosenberg, Justin Campos, and
19 Elisabeth Childers-Garcia. I'd also like to thank my
20 staff, Andrew Wright and Elica Ruantan(SP?). I'll
21 now pass it over to Chair Abreu.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, Chair. Good
morning and welcome to today's joint hearing of the
New York City Council's Committees on General Welfare

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3 and Transportation and Infrastructure. I am Council
4 Member Shaun Abreu, Majority Leader and Chair of the
5 Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

6 I'd like to thank Speaker Menin, Chair Hudson,
7 and the staff of both Committees for their work in
8 preparing for this hearing, and the agencies and
9 members of the public for joining us today.

10 Fair Fares was launched in 2019 after important
11 advocacy from the Council and community partners.
12 The program provides eligible New Yorkers with a 50%
13 discount on subway and eligible bus fares, as well as
14 Access-A-Ride trips. The program is administered by
15 the New York City Human Resources Administration,
16 HRA, but the MTA plays a key operational role in
17 ensuring that Fair Fares, OMNY cards, and OMNY
18 readers apply the discount properly across the
19 transit system. This program matters because transit
20 affordability is a central issue in New York City,
21 and determines whether people can get to work,
school, medical appointments, child care, and other
essential services.

For many New Yorkers, especially those with lower
incomes, public transportation is a lifeline to
access the city. Over the years, the Council has

1 worked to expand fare affairs eligibility. Most
2 recently, eligibility was expanded to include New
3 Yorkers earning up to 150% of the federal poverty
4 line.

5 As of February 2026, there were more than 379,000
6 Fair Fare enrollees. That is meaningful progress,
7 but we also know that a lot of eligible New Yorkers
8 are still not enrolled. A September 2025 report by
9 the Regional Plan Association found that only 39.9%
10 of eligible New Yorkers are enrolled in the program.
11 That gap raises important questions for today's
12 hearing. Are eligible New Yorkers aware of the
13 program? Is the application process simple enough?
14 Are outreach efforts reaching the people who need
15 this benefit most? Are language access, digital
16 access, and documentation requirements creating
17 unnecessary barriers? And what more can the city do
18 to connect people automatically to benefits for which
19 they already qualify?

20 The legislation we are hearing today seeks to
21 improve affordability and equity across the city's
public transportation systems. Introduction number
248, would remove obstacles to enrollment by
requiring the city to automatically enroll eligible

1 individuals in Fare Fares and other city-created
2 benefit programs. And I thank my Co-Chair for
3 sponsoring such important legislation.

4 Similarly, Intro Number 825 addresses the issues
5 of replacement transit benefit cards. Losing a card,
6 having a card stolen, or having a card damaged should
7 not prevent someone from getting to work, school, or
8 a medical appointment. This bill would require HRA
9 to issue duplicate Fare Fares, transit benefit cards,
10 when a card is damaged, destroyed, stolen, or lost,
11 with one free replacement and subsequent fee-based
12 replacements.

13 Finally, the two Resolutions we are hearing today
14 call on the state to increase access to public
15 transit by expanding fare discounts and allowing for
16 unlimited transfers. These proposals recognize that
17 the current fare structure does not always match the
18 way New Yorkers actually travel. Transportation
19 costs continue to rise, and those costs fall on the
20 hardest lower-income households.

21 When transit becomes unaffordable, the
consequences are real: missed appointments, fewer
jobs, longer commutes, and greater isolation from
services and communities people depend on. I look

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3 forward to hearing from the Administration, the MTA,
4 advocates, and members of the public about the
5 current state of Fair Fares, the barriers to higher
6 enrollment, the transition to OMNY, -please keep it
7 down in the Chambers- replacement card challenges,
8 Access-A-Ride participation, and what steps are
9 needed to make the program more accessible,
10 effective, and equitable.

11 Before we begin, I would like to thank my staff
12 and the Committee Staff for their hard work in
13 preparing for today's hearing. Jaleesa Quigley, my
14 Deputy Chief, Theodore Miller, Counsel to the
15 Committee, Sierra Townsend, Counsel to the Committee,
16 Kevin Kotowski, Senior Policy Analyst of the
17 Committee, John Basile, Senior Policy Analyst of the
18 Committee, and Adrian Drepaul, Principal Financial
19 Analyst of the Committee.

20 I would also like to thank the staff of the
21 Committee on General Welfare for their work on
today's hearing. I will now pass it over to my
Co-Chair, Chair Crystal Hudson.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much Chair and
I'm going to call on a couple of our colleagues with
bills before the Committee. And before that, I'd

1 like to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council
2 Members Pierina Sanchez and Justin Sanchez, not
3 related. Council Member Brooks-Powers.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you Chair
5 Hudson and Chair Abreu, for holding this important
6 hearing. Um, public transit is essential to how New
7 Yorkers live, work, and move throughout our city.
8 But for too many families, the rising cost of transit
9 continues to create real barriers to opportunity.
10 That's why I introduced Resolution 52 in support of
11 state legislation sponsored by State Senator Leroy
12 Comrie to expand Fair Fares and ensure that more New
13 Yorkers can access affordable transit.

14 This proposal would expand the Fair Fares program
15 to those earning up to 200% of the federal poverty
16 level across our broader transit system, including
17 subways, buses, paratransit, the Long Island
18 Railroad, and Metro North. Because, of course, as
19 New Yorkers, we're multimodal. We know that the cost
20 of living in New York City far exceeds federal
21 poverty thresholds.

Families who may not qualify today are still
struggling to afford daily commutes to work, school,
and essential services. When we make transit more

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3 affordable, we connect people to opportunity and
4 strengthen our entire city. I look forward to
5 working with my colleagues in government to advance
6 this proposal and deliver meaningful relief to New
7 Yorkers. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much, Council
9 Member Brooks-Powers and now I'll turn it over to
10 Council Member Marte.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Good morning, everyone.
12 I'd like to thank Majority Leader Abreu, Chair
13 Hudson, for holding today's hearing. I also want to
14 thank the Speaker for being in attendance today. I'm
15 here today to discuss Intro 825, a bill that requires
16 DSS to provide more than one replacement Fare Fares
17 card for those who may - lost their card.

18 My office has had a number of constituents come
19 to us for help because they lost their replacement
20 card, and they were told by HRA that they can't
21 receive additional replacements for the remainder of
the year. Now that ain't right.

Intro 825 is a simple way to make sure Fair Fares
is accessible for all who need it, and that nobody
who loses their card also loses their benefits. I
look forward to hearing from DSS on this issue, and

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3 how we can work together to ensure everyone can
4 receive replacement cards, uh, for the remainder of
5 their benefit allotment. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much and now
7 I'll turn it over to the Committee Counsel to
8 administer the oath to the Administration.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, in accordance with the
10 rules of the Council, I will administer the
11 affirmation to the witnesses from the Mayoral
12 Administration. Please raise your right hand. Do
13 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
14 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this
15 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
16 questions, Chief Program Officer Rebecca Chew, Deputy
17 Commissioner for Fair Fares, HEAP, and IDNYC Monica
18 Ealey, and Chief Strategy Officer Christopher
19 Gonzalez. Thank you. You may begin when ready.

20 REBECCA CHEW: Good morning. Can you hear me
21 right? Yeah. Okay. My name is Rebecca Chew, and I
serve as Chief Program Officer of the Human Resources
Administration, HRA, within the Department of Social
Services, DSS. I would like to thank Speaker Menin,
Chair Hudson, Chair Abreu and members of the
Committee on General Welfare, and the members of the

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3 Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure for
4 convening today's hearing on Fair Fares. I am joined
5 today by Monica Ealey, Deputy Commissioner for Fair
6 Fares, Home Energy Assistance Program, HEAP and
7 IDNYC, and by Christopher Gonzalez, DSS Chief
8 Strategy Officer.

9 HRA's mission is fighting poverty and income
10 inequality by providing New Yorkers in need with
11 essential benefits. We understand the importance of
12 transit access and affordability. We share the view
13 that public transportation is an integral part of our
14 city. Reducing transportation costs for low-income
15 households means access to family and friends, health
16 care and education, and the ability to more fully
17 participate in the life of our shared communities.

18 Transportation is a daily necessity that impacts
19 the geography of opportunity low-income New Yorkers
20 face. Access to transportation is transformative,
21 and we want New Yorkers to be able to benefit from
our outstanding transit system. Fair Fares serves as
a crucial component of driving those values forward.
Since Fair Fares' inception, City Hall, City Council,
and DSS have worked tirelessly to expand its reach.

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3 Over the last 6 years, income eligibility has
4 grown from 100% of the federal poverty level to 150%.
5 The eligible population has expanded from those
6 receiving cash assistance and SNAP to open enrollment
7 to all eligible New York City residents through an
8 online application portal.

9 Fair Fares links low-income households with the
10 50% discount on subway and eligible bus fares, or 50%
11 off Access-A-Ride paratransit trips. For more
12 information about this program, we encourage New
13 Yorkers to visit nyc.gov/fairfares call 311, or visit
14 one of the 5 Fair Fares New York City locations. New
15 York City residents may be eligible for Fare Fares if
16 they are between the ages of 18 and 64, or in a
17 household that meets the income guidelines for the
18 program, are not receiving funds to pay for the full
19 cost of a subway or bus ride from the Department of
20 Social Services Human Resources Administration, or
21 any other New York City agency, and if choosing the
subway and bus discount, they are not currently
participating in, or eligible to participate in, any
other transportation discount program.

For instance, if an individual is eligible or
already participating in the MTA Reduced Fair

1 program, they are not eligible for the Fair Fare
2 Subway and Bus Discount. Note also, that
3 Access-A-Ride customers may request the Fair Fares
4 Discount be applied to their Access-A-Ride fare.
5 People should visit the MTA's website, mta.info, for
6 more full information about their Reduced Fare
7 program and how to apply. Briefly, the MTA
8 highlights their Reduced Fare program is available to
9 any person age 65 or over or any person with a
10 qualifying disability, receiving Medicare benefits
11 for any reason other than age, serious mental illness
12 and receiving Supplemental Security Income, SSI,
13 blindness, deafness, or hearing loss, ambulatory
14 disability, cognitive disability, or other physical
15 disability.

14 At present, Fair Fares has approximately 380,000
15 participants. Community-minded partners have served
16 as an invaluable resource in pursuing our Fair Fares
17 outreach strategy. In government, for instance, DSS
18 and MTA's longstanding partnership includes
19 participating in transit talk events in subway
20 stations to promote Fair Fares and help people apply.
21 Uh, DSS provision of outreach and enrollment

assistance at transit talks and the MTA partnering to promote Fair Fares online.

Also in government, DSS has partnered with the Department of Youth and Community Development, DYCD, Administration for Children's Services, ACS, Department of Education, DOE, CUNY, Department of Probation, Small Business Services, SBS, New York City Health and Hospitals, the Public Engagement Unit, community boards, and elected officials. We have engaged community-based organizations in promoting Fair Fares, including VNS Health Community Center and the Street Vendor Project. Whether through training partner staff, community events, or pop-ups, outreach remains an in-community endeavor for us, consistently meeting New Yorkers where they are.

In addition to engaging with partners, we have engaged in advertising campaigns to raise the public's awareness about Fair Fares. In 2025, the city invested more than \$2 million in targeted advertising. In 2026, we have an ongoing advertising campaign that began in March and runs through various channels through June. That campaign includes ethnic and community newspapers, TV and radio spots in

multiple languages such as English, Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Bengali, and Russian, social media, search engine keyword marketing, outdoor advertising, Link New York City kiosks, bus shelters, subways, ferries, and ferry terminals.

We continually look for ways to expand our outreach and educate the public about fair fares. Raising the program's visibility, and connecting people to this important resource.

I will now turn to the legislation on agenda for today's hearing. Introduction 248 proposes that the Commissioner of Social Services create a system to automatically enroll individuals in city-created benefit programs like Fair Fares NYC. As the Administrator of major benefits programs, DSS understands that public benefits do not exist in isolation. An individual who may be eligible for public benefit X may also qualify for public benefit Y.

To the extent possible, DSS seeks to connect clients with benefits they are eligible for. For instance, when an individual is determined eligible for cash assistance, CA, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, they're

1 automatically evaluated for eligibility for the Home
2 Energy Assistance Program, HEAP, and where eligible
3 placed on an auto-enrollment file autopay for the
4 annual HEAP grant.

5 Another example during the course of case
6 management for households in shelter, the client will
7 be informed about options to pursue public benefits
8 for which they may be eligible, like, CA, SNAP, or
9 rental assistance. With respect to Fair Fares, DSS
10 currently employs a fast-track component process
11 whereby Access HRA, CA, and SNAP clients can click a
12 button to, agree to the terms and conditions of the
13 program, acknowledge the program's rules, and enroll.
14 The process is quick and easy, taking only a few
15 minutes at most.

16 As of March 2026, roughly two-thirds of Fair
17 Fares clients are fast track when counting as a share
18 of overall enrollment volume. 67.3% fast track,
19 32.7% open enrollment. Altogether, DSS understands
20 the importance of outreach to potentially eligible
21 applicants and efforts to reduce the Administrative
burden on applicants during the course of the
benefits application process.

3 That said, informed consent and client privacy
4 remain critically important components of the
5 benefits application process. Benefits applications
6 require access to personal information and clients
7 authorizing review of their confidential information.
8 Such information is a requirement to proceed with
9 most, if not all, benefits applications. An
10 eligibility assessment for benefit may interact with
11 an array of protected information like residential
12 history, household composition, income, documentation
13 status, veteran status, pregnancy status, HIV
14 diagnosis, or status as a survivor of intimate
15 partner violence.

16 DSS must be conscious of the fact that such
17 sensitive information is subject to numerous privacy
18 regulations and laws. Furthermore, were DSS to
19 create a single repository for such information for
20 the purposes of auto-enrollment, that database could
21 pose risks to prospective automatic enrollees in
benefits programs.

I would also want to highlight the concerns
around the feasibility of this legislation as
currently written. For prospective auto-enrollees,
DSS does not have an existing relationship with, it

1 is important to note that other agencies and levels
2 of government have restrictions on how we can use
3 their data. The outcomes of discussion with those
4 other stewards of government data are not a foregone
5 conclusion. For prospective auto-enrollees DSS does
6 not already have a relationship with, alongside
7 consent to obtain and use their data for the purposes
8 of auto-enrollment, it is unclear how DSS would
9 obtain independently and without permission or prior
10 authorization sufficient information to enroll them.
11 As highlighted before, city benefits may include
12 assessing income information, housing information,
13 medical information, or status as a survivor of
14 domestic violence.

15 To be clear, we want to connect New Yorkers to
16 the public benefits they are eligible for. We want
17 to have further discussions with the sponsor around
18 what is possible in this domain to include
19 consideration of respecting clients' agency and
20 privacy, obtaining requisite assurances on the
21 current accuracy of the information, and efforts to
connect clients to the public- to the public benefits
that best meet their needs.

3 Turning to the second introduction on the agenda
4 today, Introduction 825, sponsored by Council Member
5 Marte, would require HRA to issue duplicate transit
6 benefit cards under the Fair Fares program where a
7 participant's card was damaged, destroyed, stolen, or
8 lost. HRA would be required to provide one
9 replacement card free of charge and would charge \$15
10 for subsequent replacement cards. We want the Fair
11 Fares program to be client-centered and
12 user-friendly. We understand that the unexpected
13 happens and that a mode of payment can be lost,
14 damaged, or stolen.

15 That is precisely why we offer a free first
16 replacement card via Access HRA. We would want to
17 have further discussions with the sponsor about this
18 proposal and why our policy is that after replacing
19 one enrollment card each enrollment year, program
20 participants can buy their own OMNY Card or add the
21 discount to a credit or debit card.

22 That operational consideration allows program
23 participation— participants some flexibility here.
24 Again, Fair Fares program participants can use their
25 Fair Fare discount via one of the following: a debit
26 card, credit card, cell phone, or OMNY Card. Thus,

1 there are alternatives if their current mode of
2 payment is lost, damaged, or stolen. In limited
3 cases, because understanding— because our
4 understanding is the MTA has a limited number of OMNY
5 cards, we are able to take extenuating circumstances
6 into consideration.

7 I would like to close by expressing our gratitude
8 for the partnerships that make Fair Fares work,
9 including our partners in government, like elected
10 officials, policy makers, our sister agencies,
11 agencies and the MTA and partners in our communities,
12 like our transit advocates, our on-the-ground
13 community-based organizations, and engaged community
14 partners committed to outreach, raising awareness,
15 and enrollment.

16 We take the responsibility of guiding the Fair
17 Fares program into the future seriously and
18 appreciate your thoughtful contributions to this
19 ongoing dialogue. With that, I welcome your
20 questions.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much, and I'm
gonna kick it over to Speaker Menin for her
questions.

1
2 SPEAKER MENIN: Great, thank you. Um, I, I first
3 of all just want to say I'm very disappointed that
4 the Commissioner did not come. I think that this
5 topic is so incredibly important to working families
6 all across the city. The Council included this in
7 our budget response on April 1st. We did request
8 that the Commissioner or the Administrator, either of
9 them, come, and neither did.

10 And so I'd be remiss if I did not express our
11 deep disappointment in that. Um, moving forward. So
12 you testified about the \$2 million in targeted
13 advertising that was spent in 2025. The fact that
14 40%, um, you've sort of got a 40% uptake rate. So
15 only 40% of New Yorkers who are eligible for Fair
16 Fares are utilizing it. So what do you attribute
17 that low usage to?

18 REBECCA CHEW: Sure. Thank you, Speaker, uh,
19 Mennin, for your question. So as of the end of March
20 2026, we had approximately 380,000, uh, program
21 participants. Um, our enrollment numbers have
steadily increased over the years. Um, I would say
since the end of 2022, the program has actually grown
by 100— approximately 106,000, um, people. And so,
you know, as part of our, um, outreach campaign,

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3 we've worked through with a network of our community
4 partners, um, and sister agencies and with the MTA.

5 So for instance, with the MTA, um, you know, we
6 participate in transit talks, um, at the MTA customer
7 service centers. There's iPads where, um, people
8 can, you know, enroll in Fair Fares. For existing
9 HRA clients, we, um, do a campaign of sending out
10 robocalls and text messages and emails, uh, to
11 encourage, um, people to apply.

12 Um, we work with partner agencies such as ACS.
13 Um, we've trained over 100 DOE staff members. Um, we
14 also work with NYCHA, uh, DCAS, H&H, um, the public
15 engagement unit, um, and a number of other agencies
16 and also, um, local community partners, um, such as
17 the Street Vendor Project and also, uh, VNS Community
18 Health Centers. Um, and, uh, we offer trainings and
19 social media kits to promote, um, the utilization of
20 fair- or the availability of Fair Fares.

21 We have ads um, you know, print media, uh, video
in bus shelters, at all subway stations, at the ferry
terminals. Um, you know, we even include, uh, you
know, NYCHA has included information about Fair Fares
in their rent receipts. Um, you know, so, you know,
we, um, we're very committed to promoting it as much

as possible in the community and realizing there's more we can do.

SPEAKER MENIN: I certainly appreciate what you're saying, but I think there has to be a recognition that the system is broken, that it is not working when more New Yorkers who are eligible for it are not utilizing it than are utilizing it. And that is really why we wanted to— one of the many reasons we wanted to have this hearing today. We need to fix the system. The way to fix the system, in our opinion, is to make it free, uh, for bus, for subway, for paratransit, as was indicated in our proposal, up to 150% of the poverty level. And so that is, you know, the Council is strongly pushing for that. We believe very much in the need for this and in the automatic enrollment.

REBECCA CHOW: Uh, thank you, uh, Speaker Menin. The Administration is reviewing the Council's proposal. Um, we're gonna continue to encourage eligible residents to enroll in Fair Fares and work with the city and state partners to make transit more affordable for all New Yorkers.

SPEAKER MENIN: Let's talk about the enrollment. You know, if you try to enroll for Fair Fares, you

1 first need to download an app. What is the point of
2 the downloading the app, which again, I think, really
3 creates a barrier to usage?

4 REBECCA CHOW: Sure. So there are, ah, two ways
5 people can enroll. So for existing HRA clients, they
6 can log into Access HRA. Um, there's a, a banner
7 that appears that says enroll now, um, and through a
8 handful of clicks, um, as, you know, people can
9 confirm that they want to enroll, uh, agree to the
10 program terms and conditions, validate their mailing
11 address so we'll know where to mail the card if they,
12 uh, would like the card, um, you know, and sort of
13 the mode of payment that they wanna put the, um, the,
14 the discount on.

15 For those in the community, they can create an
16 account through, um, Access HRA by creating a login
17 account, um, and then also upload documents directly
18 onto, uh, through using the app, uh, to apply. We
19 also have brick-and-mortar, um, Fair Fares locations
20 in, um, each of the 5 boroughs to provide in-person
21 support. Um, and also there's the option to apply
through— by calling 311.

SPEAKER MENIN: Once you get through the app and
then you go on to the application, it is 13 to 15

1 pages for the application. What is the reason for
2 this level of bureaucracy and this— the, the, the— it
3 just— the bureaucratic barriers and hurdles.
4 Obviously, it's a hurdle if people are not utilizing
5 it who are eligible.

6 REBECCA CHEW: Mhm, yes thank you, Speaker Menin,
7 for your question. So, um, for Fair Fares
8 eligibility, we look at identity, uh, New York City
9 residency, and income requirements. And so, you
10 know, the questions are, are designed around those,
11 um, you know, those areas. And then, you know, so we
12 have worked hard to streamline the process and
13 identify efficiencies. Um, and it's something we're
14 continuously looking at to improve and refine.

15 SPEAKER MENIN: I mean, I do have to say, I don't
16 think 13 to 15 pages is streamlining it and I think
17 when only 40% of New Yorkers are utilizing it who are
18 eligible, that's a failing grade. And that's very
19 problematic, which is again why we are urging for
20 this change. Uh, moving gears, I do have a question
21 on Intro 248 and your testimony, because I'm
concerned that the agency seems to be relying on,
issues that I think— in, in, in saying that you're
somewhat opposed to the bill, which is how I read

1 read this testimony, that you're relying on things
2 that are eminently solvable. I do wanna point you to
3 a program that, um, I created about a decade ago
4 called NYC Kids Rise, which again is a college
5 savings account.

6 We were able to make it universal to cover every
7 public school kindergartner, including undocumented
8 kindergartners. And I mention that because some of
9 what I'm reading in the objections to the bill, I
10 think, are eminently solvable in terms of the
11 benefits question, the data privacy question, uh,
12 certainly ensuring that undocumented, um, individuals
13 are covered.

14 So I would really urge you to work with the team
15 over at NYC Kids Rise who worked with the DOE and how
16 we were able to create that.

17 REBECCA CHEW: Okay. Thank you, Speaker Menin.

18 SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. I'm gonna pass it back
19 over to Chair Hudson. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much, Speaker
21 Menin. Um, so despite outreach efforts, enrollment
in Fair Fares remains low, as we've heard. A
September 2025 report by the Regional Plan
Association found that only 39.9% of eligible New

1 Yorkers were enrolled in the program. Reported
2 barriers include lack of public awareness, a
3 burdensome application process, and the exclusion of
4 reduced fares on commuter railroads.

5 Fair Fares eligibility was recently expanded, how
6 was the information about new eligibility made
7 available?

8 REBECCA CHEW: Yes, uh, thank you, Chair Hudson.
9 Um, we made the information available by promoting it
10 through partnerships with the MTA. They promoted the
11 information at, uh, various transit talks. We've
12 also partnered with a variety of our sister agencies
13 such as NYCHA, Health and Hospitals, ACS, uh, DOE,
14 DCAS, um, IDNYC, one of our other programs at HRA,
15 um, to, you know, inform, uh, the public around, you
16 know, the, the increase and expanded eligibility
17 criteria.

18 Uh, we also have advertisements, you know, uh,
19 through social media. We are on LinkNYC kiosks. Um,
20 we also have print ads, you know, in subways, buses,
21 ferry terminals. Um, we also sent out, uh, to
22 existing HRA clients, uh, information to, to raise
23 awareness. We also target our outreach through

community partners such as VNS community health centers and the, uh, Street Vendor Project.

Uh, we also have put, uh, door hangers outside of apartment buildings in, in zip codes with, um, the highest concentration of eligible enrollees. Um, you know, we've also, um, put in ads in, um, local bodegas and convenience stores, check cashing places, laundromats, again, in, in neighborhoods that have concentrations of people that could, you know, benefit from our program.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you have a, a, a system to track— who's receiving— who's applying for benefits from any of those, um, advertisements? So, for example, if somebody is— is any— is somebody who's applying saying, oh, I received something on my doorknob, and therefore that's how I learned about it, and that's how I'm applying? Is there any way to track that?

REBECCA CHEW: I believe— thank you for your question, Chair Hudson. I believe we are able to track the number of scans on the QR codes. Um, I'll see if my colleague, uh, DC Ealey has additional insight, please.

3 MONICA EALEY: Uh, we do track the number of
4 impressions from the, uh, clicks onto the website.
5 Uh, we believe that in FY25 we had about 14 million,
6 um, and the number of, uh, clicks for the
7 advertisements that were done from this QR code were
8 about 27,000.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And sorry, can you repeat
10 where the QR codes are, are appearing?

11 MONICA EALEY: Um, they are appearing on the bus
12 and shelters. All of the, uh, advertisements have a
13 QR code on it.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

15 MONICA EALEY: It says Fair Fares has expanded.
16 So that's, you know, anywhere on the subway, on the
17 bodega, uh, storefronts, and all of the places where
18 you see the advertisement.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. So, um, you've
20 reportedly sent over 550,000 text messages since the
21 summer of 2022 to New Yorkers about Fair Fares as
well. Do you know how many enrollments resulted from
that outreach?

REBECCA CHEW: Um, thank you, Chair Hudson. Um,
so understanding that, you know, causation—
correlation is not causation— of the approximately

568,000 people PU has done outreach for, for Fair Fares since 2022, approximately 87,000 got enrolled via the fast-track process. Um, some people may have also enrolled via, ah, open application.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. And, um, do you agree with the estimate that only 39.9% of eligible New Yorkers are enrolled?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's accurate? Okay. And how do you measure whether Fair Fares's advertising and outreach campaigns are successful? What specific efforts have been most effective in increasing enrollment? I'm gonna do some quick math to figure out the percentage of that.

REBECCA CHEW: So, you know, we continuously monitor, um, you know, our enrollment uptick. Um, you know, and we are, you know, leaning into our current advertising and marketing campaign. Um, you know, we believe in the value of Fair Fares and we're always looking for ways to strengthen the program and increase our outreach.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so, um, if I'm correct in my quick math, it's 15% of the text messages that have been sent, um, have resulted in enrollees. So

1 is that considered a successful outreach method,
2 would you say, or not so much? I don't know, I'm
3 just trying to figure out, like, what your threshold
4 is. 15% is not nothing.

5 CHRISTOPHER GONZALES: So, you know, I think, you
6 know, it's certainly a good question. I think, um,
7 you know, what we kind of look to is, you know, the
8 larger number of enrollees. We absolutely understand
9 there could always be more done. Um, and again,
10 we'll, you know, continue to, uh, kind of lean into
11 not only our marketing campaign but also working with
12 our partners. We work through, you know, our CBO
13 networks, uh, to make sure that, you know, for, you
14 know, that maybe more trusted voices than government,
15 um, are, you know, sharing, uh, you know, and
16 providing access, uh, to the program.

17 So, um, you know, again, we, um, the, the fact
18 that the trajectory of the program is going up, we do
19 consider a success, but we, you know, can always, uh,
20 um, you know, and, and are always in pursuit of doing
21 more.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Um, how many people
visit the 5 Fair Fares offices each month, and are
you able to disaggregate that by office?

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3 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes. Uh, thank you, Chair
4 Hudson. So, um, for the Bronx office, our monthly
5 traffic is approximately 500.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 500 people?

7 REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Annually?

9 REBECCA CHEW: Monthly.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Monthly.

11 REBECCA CHEW: Mhm. And for, uh, the other 5
12 boroughs— Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island—
13 the monthly traffic is approximately 450 people per
14 month.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: For each of those, not—

16 REBECCA CHEW: Yes. Per— yeah. Yes for each
17 site.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Each site experiences about
19 450 visits or engagements per month. Okay. Um, are
20 the current office locations and hours sufficient to
21 meet demand?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, we believe so. It's, it's,
um, you know, business hours, Monday through Friday,
8:30 to 5:00.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 8:30 to 5:00, okay. Um,
might you consider extending or shifting hours so

1 that if people have jobs, they're able to actually
2 visit these sites to enroll in the program?

3 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So I think we can
4 certainly consider that, but I think, you know, what
5 we look at is not just obviously the in- you know,
6 the in-person visits but also-

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The other types of
8 engagement.

9 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Yeah, exactly, so, um, you
10 know, it's something we could certainly consider.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, I mean, it's, it's my
12 critique of government, which I recognize I am a part
13 of, but we always make everything available 9 to 5,
14 and we're talking about people who are struggling to
15 afford to pay for their bus fare and subway fare,
16 who, you know, are often working people. And so to
17 make something available only during business hours
18 just makes it really hard. Somebody has to take off
19 work. That means they might not be getting paid for
20 that day. If they have to drop their kids off at
21 school, et cetera, et cetera. So sometimes, you
know, a little bit more flexibility, staying open a
little bit later, maybe opening on a Saturday a

month, something like that, is something at least,
you know, I think worthy of consideration.

Um, do you have plans to open additional Fair
Fares enrollment sites or provide more mobile
enrollment assistance?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, at this time, no.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And, um, how is HRA
assisting Fair Fares participants with the transition
from MetroCard to OMNY?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, thank you, Chair Hudson, for
your question. Uh, we began— we have fully
transitioned to OMNY, all of our clients.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great.

REBECCA CHEW: Um, we began that process in
February 2025 by providing OMNY cards to all new and
renewing, um, enrollments or existing clients who
wanted to transition to OMNY. Um, in November 2025,
uh, the Fair Fares Program mailed over 60,000, um,
OMNY cards to all enrollees who had not yet
transitioned, uh, to help ensure everyone had access
to their discount before the sunset of MetroCard.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, great. That's good
news. Thank you. I'm gonna ask a handful more

1 questions and then I'm gonna turn it over to some of
2 my colleagues for their questions.

3 Public transit is essential for New Yorkers'
4 access to jobs, schools, health care, child care, and
5 other services. Lower-income New Yorkers are more
6 dependent on public transportation than higher-income
7 households, and transportation costs have continued
8 to rise over time. Does HRA collect data on how Fair
9 Fares affects participants' access to work, school,
10 medical care, food, benefits, or other essential
11 services?

12 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, we do not.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And has the Administration
14 studied whether Fair Fares improves economic
15 mobility, employment access, or household stability?

16 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, we've administered surveys,
17 um, to participants in the past, um, to, you know,
18 kind of gauge client satisfaction, um, and sort of,
19 uh, benefits of the program. Um, so we've done that
20 before.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And, um, do you have
information available on, on some Fair Fares
participants to understand their work patterns?
Like, how many— like, there are a lot of eligible New

1
2 Yorkers who are not actually working, um, for various
3 reasons, and so I'm wondering if you have that data
4 specifically about work patterns, or if you could
5 make a summary of that information available without
6 the personal identifying information.

7 REBECCA CHEW: Right, so employment is— it's not
8 any— we don't— that's not a—

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You don't track it.

10 REBECCA CHEW: Part of the application process.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

12 REBECCA CHEW: So, we don't collect information
13 about employment. You know, we ask about identity,
14 New York City residency, and income.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

16 REBECCA CHEW: So we don't collect that precise
17 data point.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And, um, Fair Fares
19 was launched in 2019 and is administered by HRA. The
20 program provides eligible low-income New Yorkers with
21 a 50% discount on subway and eligible bus fares,
including the Staten Island Railway, Roosevelt Island
Tram, Hudson Rail Link, and Access-A-Ride trips. As
of February 2026, there were 379,354 Fair Fares
enrollees.

Overall, how would you characterize the current state of the Fair Fares program?

REBECCA CHEW: Sure. So, um, we would say that we believe in the value of Fair Fares and we're always looking for ways to strengthen our program. Uh, we believe in our mission. We believe we built, ah, a, a good infrastructure around our program, uh, to provide the benefit in an efficient and expeditious manner. Um, having said that, the program can grow. Um, we understand— we understand that there's challenges, um, in reaching everyone who can take advantage of the program. We're going to continue to lean into our marketing campaign, um, you know, and work— and we look forward to working with Council, advocates, CBOs, uh, so we can leave no stone unturned in reaching folks, um, in need of the program.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for that. And you mentioned in your testimony that there are approximately 380,000 participants. Do you have an exact exact number?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes, it is 379— it is 37— 379,910.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: As of?

REBECCA CHEW: As of, uh, March 31st, 2026.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. And do you know,
4 um,— how that enrollment compares to prior years, how
5 much of an increase we've seen?

6 REBECCA CHEW: Sure. Oh, so, um, that has
7 increased, um, from the 332,304 in April 2024.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, 332,304?

9 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes, 332,304.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: As of April 20—

11 REBECCA CHEW: April 2024.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

13 REBECCA CHEW: So that's an increase of roughly
14 0.6% each month. Um, another data point is that, um,
15 since the end of 2022, um, our program's grown by
16 approximately 106,000.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 106,000 people?

18 REBECCA CHEW: 106,000 people.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 106, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay.
20 Um, do you have an estimate of how many people are
21 currently eligible but not enrolled in the program?

REBECCA CHEW: Um, yes, approximately 575,000
people are eligible and not enrolled.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And how does HRA expect
enrollment to change should Fair Fares change to a

100% discount for those who are eligible or those who
are currently qualified?

REBECCA CHEW: Sure. So the Administration is
reviewing that proposal.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And, um, do you have
any stated goals for Fair Fares enrollment in fiscal
year 2026 and fiscal year 2027?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes. Um, our goal is to, um, you
know, continue to partner with our network of
partners to reach as as many eligible people as
possible. Um, and, you know, to, to just really
support as many people as possible, um, you know,
benefiting from the program and continuing to, uh,
find creative ways to reach more people.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So no specific metrics
you're trying to achieve or reach.

CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So at this point no, I
mean, one of the, the, the challenges with, you know,
projecting, um, those type of metrics is that, you
know, there are varying circumstances as to why
people might or might not wanna take advantage of the
program.

So, um, you know, at this point, you know, again,
we're, you know, as, as, uh, ah, Chief Chew said,

1 we're gonna continue to lean into our marketing
2 program and working through partners, um, and, uh,
3 and, you know, hope to grow the program that way.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And, um, do you know how
5 many— CBO partners you currently have or are working
6 with?

7 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So as part of our, uh, New
8 York City benefits, uh, program, we have, uh, I
9 believe 36, uh, CBOs that we work with.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so they're not
11 specifically for Fair Fares?

12 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: No, it's for benefits
13 access altogether. But, um—

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

15 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: You know, the— with that
16 group and also with our community outreach team, we
17 do a lot of tabling events in communities, um, and
18 the CBOs, um, you know, partner with us on that as
19 well.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then you, you mentioned,
21 um, just now, you know, there could be a variety of
reasons why people are not enrolling. Um, do you
know what, or can you identify what some of the most

significant barriers preventing eligible New Yorkers from enrolling in Fair Fares might be?

REBECCA CHEW: I would— ah, thank you for your question, Chair. I would say, you know, New Yorkers have a variety of travel patterns and modes of transportation preferences. Um, so, you know, and, and kind of personal family planning around commutes, um, and travel.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Um, I'd like to acknowledge that we are joined by Council Members Hanif and Louis on Zoom and also by Council Members Dinowitz, Mealy, and Morano here and I'm gonna go to colleagues for a few questions, and then I'll come back.

Um, Council Member Mealy followed by Council Member Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. Um, I would definitely like to know, um, what was the outcome of what the Speaker just asked you about the 15 pages that our constituents have to go through in order to get this, right?

REBECCA CHEW: So, um, thank you, Council Member Mealy, for your question.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Um, so is there a plan to
4 maybe downgrade that application that it could be
5 more friendlier? Because remember, a lot of us don't
6 have time. Seniors involved just as well.

7 REBECCA CHEW: Sure, thank you. Um, you know, so
8 as part of the, um, online application, someone would
9 log in and create a login account for Fair Fares,
10 they would be asked information about their identity.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We went through that. I'm
12 just asking, are you considering streamlining that
13 application?

14 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Yes. So what I can say—

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: What the Speaker asked.

16 CHRISTOPHER GONZALES: To answer your question,
17 Council Member, I think it's a valid question. You
18 know, what I can say is, you know, with, um, er,
19 within— with all of our benefits programs, we are,
20 uh, constantly reviewing to see if we can find
21 efficiencies to make sure that accessibility is as
incre— is, uh, as easy as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So if you're not asking
people for all their information, like their Social
Security card number, so why could it not be
compressed to 3 pages?

CHRISTOPHER GONZALES: So I, listen, I think if there are ways that we streamline the process as much as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: If they're asking those important questions and their family history, why couldn't it be cut down to just 3? So let me move on. Please think about that. Um, and you say you're no— no longer using the mobile enrollment assistant trucks?

MONICA EALEY: What's your name? Um, you know, I mean— Fairfax never had any mobile enrollments. Are you speaking of the MTA?

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: The trucks?

MONICA EALEY: That's the MTA, and I'm sure that they're still using that. I'm, I'm not aware of— Fair Fares does not have a mobile enrollment truck.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The MTA will be here to testify in a little bit. Yeah, this is HR.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Can I have one more question? How much advertisement are you doing with the local, um, newsletters? What percentage is that?

MONICA EALEY: We would have to get back to you on the percentage, but I know that we are advertising.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So what is your budget of
4 advertising?

5 MONICA EALEY: It's \$2 million.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So how much is going to
7 minority contractors? Y'all should have that.

8 MONICA EALEY: Most all of it. I think that's
9 part of the, uh, Mayor's office contracts on
10 advertisements.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So you don't have the
12 percentage?

13 MONICA EALEY: I don't have the percentage with
14 me right now.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: You don't have one that
16 you know of, like our time press for From Bed-Stuy?
17 No, Bedford-Stuyvesant.

18 CHRISTOPHER GONZALES: We can get back to you on
19 that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Please do, Chair, because
21 this is important.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes, we can follow up with
that.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: They say that, but we need
to see it also.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Thank you for
your questions. Council Member Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Uhm, yes, um, thank you,
Chair. Um, my office deals with a lot of seniors,
seniors that either don't know how to scan documents
or upload to, uh, like an application like Fair Fares
NYC. Um, or they simply, uh, don't know how to, uh,
apply because it's such a complicated process. I
didn't count the number of pages, but it is just not
easy, uh, for anybody that never scanned documents
before in their life, or, or the, the only thing they
know to do with the cell phone is to make phone
calls. You know, they, they just don't know how to
upload documents to a portal. Okay, um, so what I,
uh, what I want to know is that, do you have, like, a
paper option where someone can actually do it the
old-fashioned way, make copies of the documents and
send it in? Because I think a lot of seniors, at
least in my district, uh, would, would do— would be
able to do that, but they would have a very difficult
time navigating your website and apply online to the
Fair Share NYC. Can you— can you talk about that?
Would a paper option be possible?

1 REBECCA CHEW: Thank you, Council Member, for
2 their question. Um, Fair Fares eligibility is up to
3 64. The senior population is, um, uh, sorry, it's
4 covered by the MTA. So that question should be
5 directed to the MTA. As you said, they will be here
6 later.

7 CHRISTOPHER GONZALES: But, but to, you know, just
8 to add to that, I just wanted to, you know, reiterate
9 that yes, we understand that, you know, there might
10 be, um, uh, digital barriers to access. That's why
11 we have the 5 in-person centers. And it's also
12 really why we lean heavily into our community, uh,
13 um, our CBO partners, because they can actually, you
14 know, help in that process in, uh, making sure that
15 they're, uh, walking people through the application
16 process.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah and I also want to say
18 that, uh, due to language barriers, they may have
19 difficulty in reading, the, uh, or understanding the
20 application, uh, in the, in the English form. So you
21 gotta make sure that it is available in several
languages. I think that is also another barrier that
you have to overcome. I mean, 550,000 people
eligible but did not enroll. That's 60% of the

1 people out there that we can service but either don't
2 bother because it's complicated or just, they just
3 don't know about it. Oh, I'll say, Council Member,
4 if there are, um, constituencies that you feel, um,
5 that need, you know, more, uh, accessibility, we're
6 happy to work with you and anyone else up here, um,
7 you know, to make sure that we're paying attention.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah, perhaps you can send
9 us a portal and one of my staff will upload all the
10 applications in one batch rather than making them
11 apply individually, you know. That's something we
12 can definitely work on.

13 REBECCA CHEW: Yeah, we can absolutely work with
14 your office, Council Member, on a pop-up or any way
15 to support.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Council Member
17 Morano.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Chair. Uh,
19 thank you, Ms. Chew for your testimony and everybody
20 else. Um, your testimony says DSS already
21 auto-enrolls people into HEAP when they're receiving
SNAP or cash assistance and that those cases are
fast-tracked in roughly 2 to 3 minutes. So if the

3 infrastructure already exists, why has Fair Fares
4 remained a separate bureaucratic process for so long?

5 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, thank you, Council Member
6 Morano, for your, uh, for your question. Um, so for
7 HEAP, we— in order to, um, have, you know sort of
8 reciprocity with HEAP, we had to work very closely
9 with our state oversight agencies, um, OTDA, because
10 of the, you know, confidential nature of the
11 information in connection with people's public
12 benefits applications for, uh, cash assistance and
13 SNAP, um, in order to be able to, um, you know, um,
14 have the autopay file through HEAP.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: You spent a great deal of
16 time in your testimony talking about privacy
17 concerns, and I appreciate the privacy concerns you
18 raised. But millions of New Yorkers already give the
19 city extremely sensitive information for taxes, SNAP,
20 Medicaid, housing assistance, and public schools. So
21 where exactly is the line? At what point does
privacy become an excuse for maintaining unnecessary
bureaucracy?

REBECCA CHEW: Right. Thank you. Oh, thank you
for your question. So, you know, we, we very much
believe in, in people's right to free agency and to

1 privacy in their personal information. So when
2 they're applying for a public benefit, um, you know,
3 we have to protect that information, whether it is
4 about their domestic violence status or health
5 information or, um, income information. All of that
6 is highly protected information governed by, you
7 know, state and federal, uh, laws and regulations
8 that that there are boundaries, even within our own
9 social services agency, that we cannot just, you
10 know, share that information without, um, you know,
11 the, the client's express consent and permission, um,
12 and also in consultation with our oversight agencies.
13 And, uh, Chair, if you'll permit me, one final
14 question on the replacement—

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sure thing.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Card bill. Um, you— I'm
17 proud to be a sponsor of the Replacement Card bill,
18 and your testimony says participants can already
19 switch the discount to a debit card, credit card,
20 phone, or OMNY Card but if we're being realistic, a
21 lot of low-income New Yorkers don't always have
stable banking access, smartphones, or reliable
technology. Isn't that exactly why physical
replacement cards still matter?

1 REBECCA CHEW: Um, thank you, Council Member, for
2 your questions. Um, so yes, when someone is eligible
3 for, uh, the Fair Fares, uh, program, they can elect
4 to have, um, us mail the physical OMNY Card. Um,
5 they can also elect to use, um, you know, their smart
6 phone or link it to a credit card or debit card or
7 their own OMNY Card. Um, and so, you know, there's
8 multiple options there, including, like, you said,
9 the physical card.

10 Um, and for, um, you know, HRA, um, if someone
11 needs a replacement card for their lost OMNY Card,
12 again, even though there's innovations now where
13 there's multiple, um, facet- you know, ways to, to
14 access the, the Fair Fares Discount, you know,
15 through all those different, um, you know, types of,
16 uh, options, uh, we can also mail out, you know, a
17 replacement OMNY Card if that's the primary, um, way
18 that people are using, um, participation in the
19 program.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. HRA
administers Fair Fares applications through Access
HRA and through 5 Fair Fares offices. Enrollment
lasts for 1 year and may be renewed as long as the

participant continues to meet eligibility requirements. Applicants are notified by mail after review, which may take up to 30 days. How long does it currently take on average for an eligible applicant to be approved for Fair Fares?

REBECCA CHEW: Um, thank you, Chair Hudson, for your question. Um, it takes approximately 4 days.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 4?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How many Fair Fares applications are currently pending?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, approximately 1,500 are currently pending, and none of them are over 30 days pending.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and-- okay, so there are none pending for more than 30 days currently?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and, um, what are some of the most common reasons applications are denied, delayed, or abandoned? We heard from, um, one person this morning at the rally, you know, that she was \$1,000 over the eligibility requirement. So I'm curious to know, is it, is it income? Is it residency?

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3 MONICA EALEY: Thank you for the question,
4 Council Chair. Generally, it is for income, um, or
5 sometimes it's incorrect documents, um, and income
6 eligibility, of course, is the major reason why
7 people are, uh, denied.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And, um, what's the process
9 if, if somebody— if, if the reason is for, um, the
10 paperwork, right, that you just mentioned. What's
11 the process for helping folks to correct that
12 paperwork?

13 MONICA EALEY: There is a notice that goes out,
14 um, to the individual that allows them to know what
15 the issue was, and they have that ability to correct
16 it, uh, within, uh, 30 days.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And how do they receive that
18 notice?

19 MONICA EALEY: In the mail.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: In the mail, okay. Um, how
21 many Fair Fares applications were submitted in fiscal
year 2025 and fiscal year 2026 to date?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes 231,270 applications, uh,
were initiated in fiscal year '25. Um, 118,009 were
approved. Uh, 51,018 were denied. 160—

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Wait, I'm sorry. You're
4 still talking about fiscal year '25?

5 REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so 118,009 were
7 approved.

8 REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And how many did you say
10 were 50—

11 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, 51,018, 5-1-0-1-8, were
12 denied. Um, 168 were canceled.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Um, canceled by HRA?

14 REBECCA CHEW: No, by the client.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Oh, by the client, okay.

16 REBECCA CHEW: Um, and 62,071 were incomplete.
17 That was for, um, fiscal year '25. I can go over it
18 again, or we can send it after.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: No, that's perfect. I have
20 the numbers. Do you have for, um, to date on fiscal
21 year '26?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The same stats.

REBECCA CHEW: 191,224 applications have been
initiated so far in fiscal year '26. 99,083 have

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3 been approved. 38,606 were denied. 99 were canceled
4 and 45,502 have been incomplete.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And so— for the incomplete—
6 um, the incomplete applications, those are the ones
7 where people are notified by mail that their
8 applications were incomplete and have an opportunity
9 to then resubmit paperwork or?

10 MONICA EALEY: No, the denials are the ones that
11 receive a notification in the mail. Incomplete they
12 have emails and text messages that say hey your
13 application is incomplete, you need to upload
14 documents and, for whatever reason, they're not
15 uploading the document.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then, um, maybe you have
17 this for fiscal year 2025, but I'm just curious to
18 know, of those incomplete applications, how many are
19 then within a certain amount of time or ultimately,
20 um, approved?

21 MONICA EALEY: We don't have that statistic.
What happens is that incomplete application expires
after 10 days, and so they would have to restart the
application.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So once they've been
4 notified of incompleteness, then they have 10 days to
5 correct, and after that they'd have to reapply?

6 MONICA EALEY: Start a new application, yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I think that is just
8 another example of where we can create an efficiency
9 and maybe, you know, not limit ourselves or limit
10 clients or potential, um, enrollees to just 10 days
11 to complete an application and maybe even extend it
12 to 30 days. I personally don't understand why there
13 would need to be a time limit anyway. But if there
14 must be, maybe 30 days so that people can have the
15 time to resubmit rather than just 10 days. It feels a
16 little tight.

17 Um, but thank you for those numbers. It's- we
18 appreciate the, the, the data. Um, are applicants
19 able to submit all necessary documents through Access
20 HRA and the mobile app? Or there's some that have to
21 be submitted another way?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes. Um, applicants are able
to submit all necessary documents through Access HRA,
uh, the mobile app, and the vast majority of
applicants do apply and renew online.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: They do-

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3 REBECCA CHEW: Apply and also renew, um, online.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And what percentage
5 of Fair Fares participants successfully renew their
6 enrollment each year?

7 REBECCA CHEW: Um, over the past 2 years,
8 approximately 50% of clients, um, have not, uh,
9 renewed.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So 50% have renewed and 50%
11 have not renewed?

12 REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And- is- so does that mean
14 50% of the people lose their benefits because they
15 don't complete the renewal on time?

16 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, well, roughly 50%, um, you
17 know, -fall out of the program, um, also-

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Fall out of the program,
19 meaning they're no longer eligible?

20 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, well, they were not renewed
21 for the program, so they would have fallen out of the
program, but about 19% of the clients who dropped off
because of failing to renew do return to the program
within 120 days.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so, you know, I think
this is- another opportunity for efficiency where if

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3 we know people are eligible, I mean, why are we even
4 asking them to renew? If they're eligible, they're
5 eligible and shouldn't we just automatically renew
6 their applications?

7 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So I think this is, you
8 know, one of the things that's kind of core to, uh,
9 why we want to take a look at what's being proposed
10 here.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes.

12 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Is, um, you know, the
13 threshold of consent, um, you know, is still there
14 for, you know, um, uh, for clients that for some
15 reason might not necessarily wanna be in the program.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

17 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: I think we could certainly
18 look at, um, maybe ways we can, um, increase, you
19 know, interaction and make sure that we're, that, um,
20 we're creating maybe another layer of, uh,
21 interaction to, uh, make sure people don't fall off,
but, uh-

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, I mean, I think the
consent I'm with you on, and- but I think there's-
it's one thing to ask people if they consent to being
re-enrolled in the program. It's another thing to

1 ask people to re-enroll in the program. And if half
2 of the people who are enrolled in the program are
3 then falling out of the program simply because
4 they're— they have to re-enroll, or renew, I think
5 we're failing.

6 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So we're happy to
7 continue, uh, taking a look at that and figuring out
8 what efficiencies.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and it also, it just
10 seems like, you know, hamster in the wheel, like we,
11 we still haven't, we still haven't gotten to 100%,
12 um, enrollment or whatever for every eligible New
13 Yorker we know exists. And then we're at— we're
14 losing people because we're asking them to renew, and
15 then we're trying to get them back, and then it's
16 just like this continuous cycle, and we're still not
17 getting to as many people enrolled in the program as
18 possible.

19 And so, you know, I would love to, you know, be a
20 partner to you all in thinking about how do we create
21 efficiencies in the application process specifically
to, um, to guarantee more— greater enrollment, but,
you know, easier access throughout the process.

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3 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Absolutely. We're happy
4 to continue that conversation.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Um, do you send renewal
6 reminders?

7 REBECCA CHEW: Um, yes, uh, we send out letters,
8 text messages, and emails to remind enrollees to
9 renew. Um, we send out a letter 90 days, um, to the
10 renewal period. Um and then another 30 days prior,
11 and also text messages 3 days prior to the renewal
12 expiration.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And what about the emails?

14 REBECCA CHEW: Emails are sent 30 days before the
15 expiration of renewal.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. So letters 90 days
17 and then 30 days, text message 3 days, and emails 30
18 days. Okay. Um, I wanted to ask a question. Um,
19 in, in your, uh, testimony, Chief Chew, you mentioned
20 that 2/3 of Fairfax clients, you enroll via the, ah,
21 fast-track program. And I'm just, I'm curious to
know, the difference between those who are currently
in- if you have this information- of the eligible New
Yorkers, how many are already in the HRA system
versus not? And if you have that or would know that
information.

3 I guess what I'm trying to get at is if
4 two-thirds of the clients are using this system,
5 perhaps the remaining third could be or would be
6 using the system. And so I'm wondering if it's
7 because either they're not in the— they may not be
8 receiving cash assistance or SNAP, um, or if they
9 are, you know, how can we get to that last third of
10 people?

11 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Yeah, let us dig into that
12 and we'll get back to you.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, sure. Um, okay, so
14 the Council needs reliable data to evaluate whether
15 Fair Fares is reaching eligible New Yorkers, reducing
16 transportation hardship, and operating efficiently.
17 We'd like to get a better understanding of the
18 current enrollees of Fair Fares and forgive me if
19 some of these questions are redundant, and if we've
20 already gone over them, then we can skip them. Um,
21 do you have the breakout by borough for active
enrollees?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes. So enrollment by borough
as of, um, March 31st, 2026, on the enrollment in
each borough is for the Bronx, 99,570. For Brooklyn,
125,891, for Manhattan, 65,296, for Queens, 77,451,

1 for Staten Island, 11,702. Um, you may not— have
2 this, but, uh, do you have eligibility based on
3 borough? So of the total number of eligible New
4 Yorkers, do you know the borough breakdown?

5 REBECCA CHEW: We don't have that. We'll have to
6 dig into seeing whether that's something that—

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, because I— what would
8 like to figure out is the percentage of people in
9 each borough, and if perhaps we need to work a little
10 bit more with certain CBOs, or think about the Fair
11 Fare offices. Um, I would guess, because the 5
12 poorest Council districts are all in the Bronx, one,
13 uh, straddles the Bronx and Manhattan, Council Member
14 Encarnacion's district, and— Bronx enrollment is
15 lower than Brooklyn enrollment.

16 And so my guess is that there are more people who
17 are eligible and not enrolled in the Bronx perhaps
18 than in other boroughs. And so just trying to figure
19 out the delta there between how many, how many
20 eligible New Yorkers are in the Bronx versus how many
21 are actually enrolled and proportionately allocating
our resources and investments into each of the
boroughs based on that?

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3 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Yeah, no, I think that's a
4 good question. Um, I mean, we would only know the
5 folks that are already within our HRA world, but
6 that's something we can, you know, dig into.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, yeah, I mean, even
8 knowing how many are in the Bronx that are eligible
9 versus that are enrolled, you know, and for each
10 borough would still be helpful, I think, if not the
11 total universe. What's the percent of unduplicated
12 Fair Fares eligible households in the current HRA
13 benefits universe that are not enrolled?

14 REBECCA CHEW: We don't have the percent of
15 unduplicated Fair Fares eligible households that are
16 not enrolled. However, I think we said it, ah, a
17 little earlier, but 67.4% of Fast Track eligible, ah,
18 Clients, those are— those enrolled in SNAP in— or
19 cash assistance are, um, unenrolled in the Fair Fares
20 program.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you, helpful
and, um, how often is the total enrollment data
updated on HRA's website?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, it's updated monthly.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Monthly?

REBECCA CHEW: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and—

4 REBECCA CHEW: Sorry, I'm so sorry, weekly.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Weekly, even better. Um,
7 does that number include currently enrolled and
8 active users or something else?

9 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, current enrollees.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Current enrollees, okay.
11 And how many HRA clients qualify for other transit
12 subsidy programs and thus do not need Fair Fares?

13 REBECCA CHEW: Um, we don't have that
14 information.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. It would be good to
16 get that if you—

17 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Yeah, let us—

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: If you can look into it?

19 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Let's see what we can pull
20 together.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. What's the
average income and age for current active Fair Fare
enrollees?

REBECCA CHEW: Um, we'll have to get back to you
on that. Okay and you do not collect employment
status, right? So you wouldn't be able to provide a

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3 breakdown of the current active Fair Fares enrollees
4 by employment status?

5 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes, Chair. We don't, uh,
6 collect employment information for Fair Fares.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and do you track Fair
8 Fares usage after enrollment?

9 REBECCA CHEW: Um, yes, we do.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And do you have, uh, numbers
11 on that, or how often are enrolled participants
12 actually using the discount?

13 REBECCA CHEW: Sure, historically, um, usage has
14 been around 50%. Um, since the expansion to OMNY,
15 uh, program usage has risen, averaging now 56%, um,
16 in fiscal year '26.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and how do you collect
18 feedback from participants about outreach efforts and
19 the program itself?

20 REBECCA CHEW: Sure. So, um, you know, we, um,
21 mentioned before that we have had a few, you know,
surveys to check for, you know, client satisfactions.
We also, um, you know, may receive calls through our
one number system, um, to get feedback from, uh, Fair
Fares participants.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you and how many
4 Fair Fares related complaints has HRA received in
5 fiscal year 2026 to date?

6 REBECCA CHEW: Um, we've received, uh, 826.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And what are the most common
8 reasons for complaint?

9 MONICA EALEY: Um, so during fiscal year 2026,
10 this was the transition to OMNY, so many of those
11 calls were related to, um, not having access to
12 reload their Metro Card, um, and that vending
13 machines were no longer available at their, um,
14 stations.

15 So we took those opportunities to transition
16 those clients over into OMNY so that they had access
17 to their discount.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. I'd like
19 to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council
20 Members Stevens and Krishnan. Um, and then, what
21 assessments have you undertaken related to the impact
of Fair Fares? Are there plans to undertake any
assessments in the future?

REBECCA CHEW: Um, we have conducted, um,
various, you know, Fair Fare studies, um, and
surveys, um, to get, um, feedback, and going forward

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3 we do plan to continue this work, um, you know, and,
4 um, you know, the focus of, of future assessments is,
5 is under discussion.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Um, I just
7 want to get into the legislation, and I think we're
8 gonna move on to the MTA in a few. And actually,
9 before I do that, I do want to ask- you have
10 questions? Okay. I do want to ask a question um for
11 Council Member Brooks-Powers, who had to leave. Um,
12 2 questions from her.

13 Given the cost- given the high cost of living in
14 New York City, how is the Administration evaluating
15 the need to expand Fair Fares eligibility beyond
16 current thresholds? And what data are you using to
17 assess how many additional New Yorkers would benefit
18 from an expansion to 200% of the federal poverty
19 level and beyond?

20 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So that is, you know, as
21 with the other Council and advocate proposals still
being reviewed right now. And so, um, you know, once
we have more to share, we'll certainly share with
this group.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and then she also
wants to know, um, or she says thousands of eligible

New Yorkers are still not enrolled in Fair Fares.

Can you walk us through where the biggest drop-offs are in the enrollment process and what concrete steps your agency is taking to ensure eligible individuals, particularly those already receiving public benefits, are automatically connected to this program?

REBECCA CHEW: Sure. So, um, you know, we, um, will continue to kind of review those proposals, um, you know, and, and examine and encourage, rather, um, eligible New Yorkers who qualify for Fair Fares to apply for Fair Fares and better understand kind of like, you know, and factoring in there's things out of our control such as, uh, commuter preferences or modes of transportation preferences also.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, um, thank you. I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Sanchez, who has a couple questions. Then I'll come back with some questions specific to the legislation, and then we'll move on to the MTA. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you so much Chair, uh, and Chairs, and good morning. Um, you know, just echoing support for the legislation that is being considered today. Um, I represent the Northwest Bronx, Kingsbridge, Fordham, University

1 Heights, and I think, uh, as Chair Hudson pointed out
2 when she was speaking about the 4 lowest-income
3 districts being in the Bronx, I think probably no
4 other Council Members understand, uh, as deeply as we
5 do how difficult it is to reach low-income New
6 Yorkers, right?

7 Um, in my office, we served, like, 15,000
8 constituents in the first 4 years, and all of that
9 was, like, people who walked into our office or, you
10 know, we met them on the street or something like
11 that. It's really tough to reach people. So I— my
12 first question is, um, regarding the, you know,
13 relatively low rates of folks who are enrolled,
14 eligible folks that are enrolled, that 39.9%. In
15 your estimation, where do you think we're losing
16 folks in the pipeline? Is it awareness? Is it the
17 application completion? Is it documentation
18 requirements, recertification, approval delays?
19 Where, where do you think the problem is?

20 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: So, thank you for that
21 question. So, I think, um, you know, I think it's
probably, ah, you know, a variety of things, um, you
know, including some of the things you just listed
off, but there's also, um, you know, people's, uh,

1 appetite to, uh, take advantage of this benefit also
2 varies depending on personal situations. Um, you
3 know, I think if you, uh, are seeing, um, you know, a
4 particular constituency that, um, ah, seems to be,
5 um, I guess less connected with our outreach efforts,
6 we're happy to, ah, you know, follow up and set up,
7 ah, you know, a pop-up up event in your community,
8 just to make sure that we're, you know, reaching as,
9 as many folks as possible.

9 But, you know, as, as we said, uh, previously,
10 it, you know, we're assessing the program every day.
11 And so, you know, where we can find efficiencies and
12 make sure that we're actually reaching, you know,
13 folks that aren't hearing from us, we're open to all
14 opportunities to do that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Chair, if I may just ask
15 my second.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You may.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you, Chair. Um,
17 well, first, just welcoming you all to partner with
18 us. We do a lot of town halls and events in our
19 parks. We try to program a lot in the district
20 because that draws people out, and then we can offer
21 them services. So, Jamar, I'm looking at you to help

me get, uh, the, the team to do applications live,
um, more often in our district.

So my, my second question, I want to echo Council
Member Hudson's request for data on, you know, by
income band, by age, by employment. You said you
don't have employment status but by the demographics
that you do have, what the enrollment rates are for
eligible New Yorkers. Um, and so my second— my last
question is, uh, whether the agency has analyzed how
many low-income New Yorkers who received fare evasion
summonses from the NYPD, um, or arrests or, or any,
anything like that were eligible for Fair Fares but
not enrolled. Um, and if this is not something that
you have looked at or analysis— that has been
completed before? Is this something you can work on
with the NYPD, since we know the correlation is high?

REBECCA CHEW: Um, yeah, we, you know, HRA
doesn't have any information about fare evasion.
There is a local law that we do comply with where we
get, um, files, I think it's monthly, from the NYPD,
um, on, I guess, summonses or something issued for
fare evasion, and we will mail Fair Fares information
out to those addresses to make sure, um, and raise

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3 awareness about the availability of our program, um,
4 to, to people cited for fare evasion.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Got it but you don't
6 have numbers or can you get back to us? Because if
7 you're getting addresses, then you should have
8 numbers, right?

9 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, yes, we can get back to you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Okay, great. Uh, thank
11 you so much. Uh, thank you, Chair Hudson.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Um, okay, a
13 couple of, uh, questions about the legislation. So
14 for Intro 248, it would require DSS to create a
15 system to automatically enroll individuals in
16 city-created benefits programs using information such
17 as tax and social services enrollment rolls. Intro
18 1028 also requires the inclusion of a conspicuously
19 communicated opt-out mechanism as part of the notice
20 for this program.

21 DSS shared concerns that it would be
inappropriate to enroll clients in benefits they do
not wish to receive. Can you provide further
information about this concern?

REBECCA CHEW: Sure, so, you know we very much
value, um, you know, people's right to privacy, um,

1 and the protecting the confidentiality of information
2 for people, particularly who are applying, uh, for
3 public assistance benefits, um, you know, and so our
4 concerns around, uh, clients' consent to, um, where
5 their information is being used, um, you know, and
6 also the, you know, there are, um, you know, state
7 and federal laws and regulations, um, governing, um,
8 and limiting the use of information collected for
9 specific, uh, public assistance benefits and that
10 prohibit, um, and set boundaries for not sharing
11 that, um, you know, outside of, of the intended
12 purpose.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and does DSS anticipate
12 any cost associated with the bill? Um, uh, the
13 Administration is reviewing the proposals at this
14 time, including, uh, budget considerations, and
15 would, would have to involve OMB.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Um, do you— might you
16 know whether or not the expenses would be fully from
17 the expense budget, or may some be capitally
18 eligible?

19 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, thank you for your question.
20 Again, we are reviewing the proposals.
21

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Does the
4 Administration support automatic enrollment in Fair
5 Fares and other city-created benefit programs?

6 REBECCA CHEW: Uh, the Administration is
7 reviewing the proposals at this time, and we, uh, you
8 know, remain committed to, uh, partnering with city
9 and state partners, um, to make transit more
10 affordable.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Are there any— that was a
12 good answer, by the way, not a yes nor a no. Um, are
13 there any concerns that the Administration has
14 outside of the privacy concerns you've just outlined?

15 REBECCA CHEW: Um, it would be privacy and also,
16 uh, clients' consent and agency to decide what— what
17 programs to enroll in.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And, uh, what city
19 records could currently be used to identify
20 individuals who are likely eligible for Fair Fares?

21 REBECCA CHEW: Um, again, you know, there are,
there are so many state and federal rules and
regulations guarding and safeguarding, um, the
privacy of clients' information. Um, looking at the
open enrollment aspect, for instance, that's
people's, uh, personal income information, um, that I

3 imagine would be governed, um, by a set of also, you
4 know, kind of rules governing tax records and, um,
5 and financial information.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and so I— you've sort
7 of addressed already the privacy consent or data
8 sharing issues that would need to be addressed before
9 implementing automatic enrollment. Is there anything
10 else that you feel like we should know?

11 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Um, I mean, I think that
12 mainly covers it, and then obviously we'll continue
13 with our analysis on the, um, operation and budgetary
14 implications.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and just to be clear,
16 I'm trying to help you help New Yorkers. So
17 hopefully we can all work together.

18 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: We're all on the same
19 page.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, I know it's, you know,
21 we all want to do the right thing. Bureaucracy often
makes it incredibly difficult. Um, but I think with
a little chutzpah and imagination and perhaps some
investments, we can make it happen. So, um, do you
know how many current HRA clients— let me ask this
differently. How many current HRA clients does HRA

1 estimate could be automatically enrolled in Fair
2 Fares? If we're thinking specifically about
3 automatic enrollment, so those— maybe the two-thirds
4 that are using the Fast Track. Or I guess you, you,
5 you said earlier you don't necessarily know whether
6 all of the eligible New Yorkers are in your system.
Correct?

7 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Correct. Yeah, so that,
8 that would be—

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I guess I'm trying— I'm, I'm
10 inadvertently helping you avoid answering my
question.

11 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: We can, uh, look into that
12 further.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Fair. Um, okay, Intro 825
14 for replacement transit benefit cards. What is HRA's
15 current policy for replacing lost, stolen, damaged,
or destroyed Fair Fares cards?

16 REBECCA CHEW: Um, yes, thank you, Chair, for
17 your question. So currently, um, you know, clients
18 can request and receive a free, uh, replacement card,
19 um, within the 1 year of their enrollment. For
subsequent cards, um, you know, they can purchase a
20 new card, or if there's a special circumstance, um,
21

1 because understanding that, you know, things happen
2 and people can experience, uh, you know, a lost card,
3 a stolen card, or a damaged card, um, for a variety
4 of reasons, um, we can also accommodate and send out
5 more than one replacement card within the enrollment
6 period at no cost.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: One- you- you send out one
8 replacement card, and then after that it's \$15, is
9 that correct?

10 REBECCA CHEW: No, we don't charge at all for any
11 replacement cards. So for the first one-

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So the first one it's free,
13 and then -

14 REBECCA CHEW: Second one, third one for all, all
15 are no charge. We do not charge.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so how many times- is
17 there a limit on how many replacement cards one can
18 receive?

19 REBECCA CHEW: Um, you know, by program rules, it
20 is typically one per replacement per enrollment
21 period. But upon-

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So one per year?

REBECCA CHEW: One per enrollment period.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The enrollment period is for
4 a year? You renew after a year?

5 REBECCA CHEW: Right and then— but if something
6 happens and, um, there's an extenuating circumstance
7 where someone needs a second card,—

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah—

9 REBECCA CHEW: Um, we will grant that request and
10 there's no charge to the client.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and then how many Fair
12 Fares replacement cards were requested in each fiscal
13 year '25 and to date in '26? Yeah, you can go ahead.

14 MONICA EALEY: In fiscal year 2025, we issued
15 almost 95,000, uh, replacement cards. And to date,
16 as of fiscal year 2026, it's almost 60,000.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 60?

18 MONICA EALEY: 60, yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 95,000 is a lot of
20 replacement cards. What are the main reasons?

21 MONICA EALEY: Lost, stolen.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Lost, stolen. But I mean,
people are like literally just losing their cards?
95,000 people are just losing their cards like that?

MONICA EALEY: Yes, yes.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What's it— if they're lost
4 or stolen, you shut that card off before you send
5 them?

6 MONICA EALEY: Correct. The discount is removed
7 from the card and we send a replacement card and add
8 the discount to the new card.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Um, how long does it
10 currently take for a participant to receive a
11 replacement card?

12 MONICA EALEY: Replacement cards are sent via
13 mail, so it takes up to 2 weeks. Uh, generally they
14 get it sooner, but it's up to 2 weeks.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And does HRA anticipate any
16 costs associated with this bill, Intro 825?

17 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Uh, we're still reviewing,
18 uh, the fiscal on this bill.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Resolution number 52,
20 state legislation expanding 50% fare discounts. Does
21 the Administration support state legislation to
expand 50% fare discounts to people with incomes up
to 200% of the federal poverty level?

REBECCA CHEW: Uh, the Administration is
currently reviewing the proposal.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Resolution number
4 143, unlimited transfers within 2 hours. Does the
5 Administration support unlimited subway and bus
6 transfers within the 2-hour fare window? I'm almost
7 certain we used to have free transfers.

8 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: We'll- yeah, I, I- we'll
9 have to defer to our transportation, uh, policy folks
10 on that, but we can get back to you on our, uh, where
11 the Administration stands.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, but I mean, I'm
13 talking about like back in the day. I, I think we
14 had-

15 CHRISTOPHER GONZALEZ: Yeah, but we're speaking
16 as HRAs, so I don't wanna get-

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay um, 2 hours, this is
18 for 2 hours. Yeah. Um, does MTA have an- Oh, well,
19 this is for MTA. Okay, so, could unlimited transfers
20 be implemented through OMNY without major changes?
21 That's also MTA, okay.

Alrighty, uh, any other questions for HRA from my
colleagues? Yes, my apologies, Council Member
Stevens.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Hi, good afternoon. Um,
I'll be very brief, um, because I just want to just

1 kind of second some of the stuff Council Member
2 Sanchez was saying. Obviously, I'm in the Bronx.
3 We- I'm one of those districts that, uh, has a very,
4 unfortunately low income and I, um, but I know Ride
5 Alliance gave us some information to my office
6 around, like, the low enrollment of Fair, um, Fair
7 Fares and just my question to you is- and forgive me
8 if I missed this- what supports do you guys give
9 folks when they need support around, like,
10 applications and things like that? Because I know,
11 like, specifically in my office, we do a lot of
12 support for folks for all HRA stuff.

13 So, like, people, you got- they have to make
14 copies and all the things. My office, I mean, we
15 used to be next door to you guys, so we've kind of-
16 we- you guys aren't there anymore. We were like
17 there's a default HRA, but now I'm just trying to
18 understand what supports- if I need support on
19 filling out this information and getting this, what,
20 what, what do you guys do around that?

21 REBECCA CHEW: Sure. So, um, you know, we have
offices in all 5 boroughs, and we're happy to also
partner with, um, you, Council Member Stevens to do a
pop-up, um, and have in-person support, um, you know,

1 at the office, um, at any kind of events or community
2 events to really help support and provide in-person,
3 um, you know, facilitation of the application
4 process.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, um, 'cause I'm
6 texting to my office right now because we've seen a
7 high number of Spanish speakers coming in our office
8 who need help and support on getting the support.

9 So definitely would love to do a pop-up, but I
10 think that that's something and we have to, like,
11 what does their outreach look like? Are we having it
12 in multi- multi-languages? Um, and then they also
13 are sending them a lot onto some of the CBOs in our
14 community to also support for, like, some of the
15 follow-up stuff that we sometimes just don't have
16 time to do.

17 So, um, and absolutely would love to partner, but
18 I think we also need to be creative about, like, how
19 are doing outreach, you know, in the Bronx
20 specifically. One in five- one in four folks don't
21 even have internet or broadband. So, you know, what
does that look like? And anybody who knows who-
going to the HRA office is very, it's very difficult
and it's not sometimes a friendly place to be. So

1 just to go there for application, I'm not sure that
2 is the best support where they would go, right?

3 So if I need to just fill this application out, I
4 don't know if I would go there because they're not
5 that nice. So we should really kind of talk about
6 that and what does that look like? And is there
7 other places that they can go to get the support that
8 they need, because my office now is becoming the
9 default. I wanna figure out- we love it, we'll do
10 it, but we also wanna just have additional support.
11 So thank you.

12 REBECCA CHEW: Yes. And our, uh, advertising
13 campaign is multilingual. Um, and also, you know,
14 targeting, um, you know, local and community and
15 ethnic, uh, newspapers and outlets and, uh, social
16 media to really, um, reach the hard-to-reach
17 communities um, in, in, uh, people's languages that
18 are, you know, familiar.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: But just like Council
20 Member Sanchez said, um, a lot of folks in our
21 district, you have to be on the ground with them. So
they might see an advertisement but don't understand
what that looks and how, like, how to go through that
process.

So love to do the pop-up, but also we need to think about what are the other strategies so that can be a continuous thing.

REBECCA CHEW: Great, we welcome working with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Absolutely, Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great, thank you so much Council Member Stevens. And Council Member Sanchez has a couple more questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Just a quick follow-up. Thank you, Chair. Um, a lot of folks, a lot of folks come to our districts. We help people all the time with the Fair Fares application. It would be really helpful if there was a field that we could mark that said that we help them to do that. Um, and my question is, do you track when, you know, when it's not somebody going to the Fair Fares office but, uh, folks getting external help with the Fair Fares application?

MONICA EALEY: Hmm. Thank you for the question, Council Member. Yes, we have a field at the end of the application that says, where did you receive support? And you can put other and say, your

3 district, whatever, and, and allow us to know that
4 you are helping your constituents.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So do you have, uh,
6 numbers on how many folks- they're submitting online,
7 but they're receiving help. Do you have that
8 information?

9 MONICA EALEY: We can get back to you with that
10 information.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you and I- I think
13 that's just, uh, proof that, you know, we're eager to
14 be partners with you all and trying to get our
15 constituents and all New Yorkers, um, enrolled in the
16 Fair Fares program.

17 Okay, um, I believe you all are off the hook for
18 now. Thank you so much for your testimony and for
19 answering all of our questions. We look forward to
20 continuing our work with you. I am going to ask John
21 McCarthy, Dara Goldberg, and Shanifah Rieara to come
up. Our general Counsel will administer your oath,
and I'm going to kick it over to Chair Abreu. Thank
you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, in accordance with the
rules of the Council, I will administer the

1 affirmation to the witnesses from the MTA, please
2 raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the
3 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
4 your testimony before this Committee, and to respond
5 honestly to Council Member questions? John McCarthy,
6 Dara Goldberg, and Shanifah Rieara? Thank you. You
7 may begin when you're ready.

8 JOHN MCCARTHY: Uh, th-thank you Chairs, for, uh,
9 the invitation to appear. Uh, my name is John
10 McCarthy. I'm the Chief of Policy and External
11 Relations at the MTA. I'm joined by Chief Customer
12 Officer Shanifa Riera to my right and Policy Director
13 Dara Goldberg to my left. We are very glad to be
14 here to talk about Fair Fares.

15 Mass transit is one of the things that makes New
16 York City affordable. Thanks to our vast transit
17 network, New Yorkers pay less for transportation than
18 almost anywhere else in the country. No need to
19 spend thousands of dollars buying, insuring, and
20 maintaining a car. A single tap is all you need to
21 get around New York City. But we know many people
still need help paying the fare, and that's where
Fair Fares comes in. At \$1.50 a ride, participants
are paying about 45% less per trip today than they

1 did a decade ago before Fair Fares started. That's a
2 rare cost in the city that has gotten cheaper over
3 time.

4 Since the program started, we've learned a lot
5 about how participants use the benefits— this
6 benefit. We actually published a policy brief, uh,
7 Dara's team did, with our findings this week. It's
8 available on our website, and I think we've sent it
9 to the team, to the, uh, to the members.

10 Let me run through a few of the headlines real
11 quickly. First, enrollment has steadily grown over
12 the life of the program and ticks up each time the
13 city raises the eligibility threshold. But recently,
14 enrollment growth has slowed as those increases have
15 been more modest.

16 Next, in our report, we found that Fair Fare
17 riders are frequently subway and bus riders, so
18 they're using both modes. Over one-third of
19 customers ride 5 days or more per week, and they're
20 twice as likely than non-Fair Fare riders to hit
21 their weekly fare cap of \$17.50.

Third, many rely on the subway, and they're more
likely to transfer between the subway and bus
compared to non-Fair Fare riders. And finally, over

1 30% of Fair Fare riders' first tap of the day is in
2 Brooklyn, followed closely by Queens and the Bronx.
3 Uh, but Manhattan has the highest Fair Fares usage
4 throughout the day, obviously people coming back from
5 work.

6 We believe more can be done. We know that many
7 low-income New Yorkers earn too much to qualify for
8 Fair Fares today. Even with a minimum wage job,
9 you're maxed out. That's why we support raising the
10 income threshold so that more people can get this
11 benefit.

12 Now, importantly, as decision-makers like
13 yourself weigh the next steps, there are trade-offs
14 between making the cost of transit even lower for the
15 existing eligible population and expanding
16 eligibility to make transit affordable for even more
17 New Yorkers. Broadening access would ensure Fair
18 Fares reaches more people who need it most.

19 We know that Fair Fares can change lives, and we
20 look forward to working closely with you on this
21 important initiative. And before we take some
questions, I'll turn it over to Shanifah for an
update on our marketing and outreach efforts.
Shanifah.

3 SHANIFAH RIEARA: Thanks, John. No question that
4 there are hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who
5 qualify for Fair Fares but haven't signed up yet. We
6 have been working to close that gap. For a few years
7 now, we have been mobilizing the MTA's own marketing
8 and outreach resources across all 5 boroughs to
9 spread the word and support the city to enroll more
10 customers.

11 Here's just some of the samples of our efforts
12 that we have undertaken so far. As mentioned
13 earlier, self-serve iPad kiosks are now available at
14 our— in our subway system 24/7 at 30 customer service
15 centers in subways, the mobile vans, and at 58
16 locations, um, we do monthly events and engagements.

17 We also have a kiosk at 3 Stone Street and the
18 Transit Adjudication, uh, Bureau office in downtown
19 Brooklyn, which we also refer to as the TAB office.
20 There, customers can check their eligibility and
21 start the application process. Every month, we host
4 Fair Fares outreach events in our station's
customer service centers with HRA at Coney Island,
Jackson Heights, Roosevelt Avenue, 125th Street and
Lexington Avenue, and 161st Street Yankee Stadium.

3 Monthly, we hold Transit Talks and Bus Talks
4 where MTA staff shares information about Fair Fares
5 and enroll customers on site. So far, we have
6 completed 40, subway and bus locations.

7 And as of yesterday, we launched a refreshed Fair
8 Fares marketing campaign that is directed to
9 customers to check their eligibility and start the
10 application. You'll see these ads across our 10,000
11 digital screens in the subway and on buses. Customer
12 service reps will have handouts available for
13 distribution.

14 We'll also give your offices a toolkit so you can
15 help us get the information out to your constituents.
16 We believe there is still room for improvement when
17 it comes to outreach and advertising. And as John
18 had said, we know that there are many working New
19 Yorkers who would stand to benefit from the Fair
20 Fares, um, program.

21 Addressing these needs is a worthy goal, and we
stand ready to support the city in raising awareness
and keeping New Yorkers informed. And now we're happy
to take any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you so much. I would
like to thank the MTA for joining us today. Fair

3 Fares New York City was launched in 2019 and is
4 administered by HRA. The program provides eligible
5 low-income New Yorkers with a 50% discount on subway
6 and eligible bus fares, including the Staten Island
7 Railway, Roosevelt Island Tram, Hudson Rail Link, and
8 Access-A-Ride trips.

9 As of February 2026, there were 379,354 Fair
10 Fares enrollees. Overall, how would the MTA
11 characterize the current state of the Fair Fares
12 program?

13 JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah, I'll take— uh, so, look,
14 Fair Fares compared to what we were dealing with
15 before it came into, uh existence, that's a success.
16 Not that long ago, people were paying the full fare,
17 2019, which I think at the time was \$2.75.

18 So we have a 45% discount. Where it's not
19 working is the amount of people who either don't know
20 about it, are not signing up for whatever reason, and
21 just not using this, you know, very important
program.

Um, the reason we look at this and say if you
raise the eligibility, uh, number, you'd have a big
impact, is— is because that working person who is,
who is at minimum wage is, is, is now above the

1 eligibility. Think about that. That's a person who
2 would be 10 times a day- that's the person who's
3 looking for this, who's going to your office, going
4 to our offices, signing up for this. They're very
5 motivated. So we're missing that.

6 So the- but, but I, I don't want to lose sight of
7 where we were and where we are today. That's a big-
8 it's a big jump, but there's definitely more could be
9 done.

10 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What are MTA's goals for Fair
11 Fares implementation and enrollment in fiscal year
12 2026 and fiscal year 2027?

13 SHANIFAH RIEARA: So, um, as Chairman Lieber has
14 mentioned, um, several times, you know, um, Fair
15 evasion- I mean, we tackled and meet about the
16 affordability concerns, um, that our riders face all
17 the time. Um, and when it comes to Fair Fare, I
18 mean, you have heard through the partnerships with,
19 um, HRA, we have really doubled down and amplified,
20 um, our efforts in using the resources within our
21 constraints to get the word out on our own about the
program.

Again, using- creating our own marketing
campaign, um, in addition to the paid ad buys that,

1 uh, the city runs, supplementing that, um, and- and
2 really making sure that that is well wide and seen,
3 um, across our buses and within our subway cars.
4 Bringing Fair Fares, um, representatives within the
5 system weekly, um, to to do sign-ups at the 3
6 locations that I mentioned, but arming our customer
7 service agents who are outside of the booth, um, with
8 information about the Fair Fares program and getting
9 them to enroll, but also bringing out members, um, of
10 our team to do, um, these transit talks and bus talks
11 in the system as well as above, um, at high-traffic
12 locations, bringing the Fair Fares team again into
13 the system and having people not only learn about the
14 program, but start the application process or enroll
on-site if they see our, um, ads, um, to bring the
qualifying materials and documents.

15 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: In the MTA's view, and I
16 think you were, uh, John, I think you were getting
17 into this, uh, what are the most significant barriers
18 preventing eligible New Yorkers from enrolling in
19 Fair Fares? You mentioned a lot of folks are- do not
know about the program, but can you speak to that?

20 JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah, I mean, I'll- you want to
21 go ahead, Dara?

1
2 DARA GOLDBERG: Um, so, you know, we obviously
3 defer to our HRA colleagues who are more closely tied
4 to administering the program and can directly
5 interact with folks who are applying. But when we
6 survey our riders and our customers count by annual
7 survey, and we ask them about their income and their
8 household size, which determines— and so we on our
9 own try to understand people who are eligible but not
10 enrolled.

11 Um, I think, uh, language barrier comes up, uh,
12 frequently, and then not really understanding the
13 income levels and not qualifying, even though some,
14 you know; and we put this in the brief that we shared
15 with you, a, you know, 2-parent household earning the
16 minimum wage with children don't qualify under this
17 program. So we think that the threshold being low is
18 also another barrier. But, um, I think as far as
19 when folks go to enroll and what they're
20 encountering, that's something that HRA would have a
21 closer understanding of.

18 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How many dedicated staff does
19 MTA currently have for Fair Fares Administration?

20 SHANIFAH RIEARA: So, I mean, it will be the
21 entire customer customer team. I mean, that is, um,

1 my mandate and my mission, um, and really leaning in
2 on our customer service department, which I would say
3 it's about, about 175 people.

4 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And should there be an
5 expansion of Fair Fares? Do you believe that the
6 current capacity you have would be sufficient?

7 SHANIFAH RIEARA: You're talking about the
8 eligibility levels?

9 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I'm talking about if we were
10 to expand eligibility for Fair Fares at the Council
11 level, um, through budget negotiations, I would
12 imagine there would be a lot more folks who would be
13 able to qualify for Fair Fares and I guess I'm trying
14 to figure out if that impacts whether or not MTA
15 would have sufficient staff to administer the Fair
16 Fares.

17 SHANIFAH RIEARA: I mean, so we don't administer
18 the Fair Fares. As you know, it's a city program.
19 We help amplify and advertise and promote and get the
20 word out.

21 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Alright. While HRA primarily
manages Fair Fares, the MTA ensures that Fair Fares,
OMNY cards, and OMNY Readers provide access to the
subway and bus system.

The city provides funding to the MTA for several programs, including Fair Fares, Access-A-Ride, school fares, reduced fares for seniors and disabled riders, and other transit subsidies. How do HRA and MTA coordinate Fair Fares implementation?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: So when, um, as mentioned earlier, when we, um, set out to retire the Metro Card, there was a lot of, um, conversation and planning, um, in ensuring that, um, especially Fair Fare customers are very part of that. So they were part of the, um, first constituency group that was part of the pilot in transitioning them, um, over to the OMNY Card, and that level of support have been-- remained high, um, as, as expressed in, in previous testimonies.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Is there a formal agreement governing the roles of HRA and MTA?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Um, as far as formal agreement, again, like our, um, you know, focus is about getting the word out. We don't have the ability to do the actual enrollment. Um, we create opportunities for people to start the enrollment process at our kiosk and our customer service centers, but ultimately HRA

1 is the one that has to verify and complete the
2 process, as well as disseminate the cards.

3 JOHN MCCARTHY: Fair but Chair, just so you know,
4 we educate even beyond Shanifah's staff in the
5 customer office our frontline employees are educated
6 on, on the program, station agents, others. Um, this
7 is something that, you know, we talk about a lot with
8 our team so that they can reach with the customer and
9 explain to the customer what opportunities are
available.

10 So, you know, we'll always look to do more in
11 that area because, you know, we have the people and
12 they're ready to talk more about this and get into
the hands of more people.

13 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: In the test- I believe in
14 HRA's testimony, they mentioned that there's meetings
15 that happen once a month with the MTA. Do you think
that's enough frequency?

16 SHANIFAH RIEARA: I mean, while we have a
17 standing monthly meeting, there is no shortage of
18 other conversation and interaction, especially as we,
19 um, plan and prepare and strategize for these
20 different programmatic events and activities within
the systems and in the community.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What data do HRA and the MTA share with each other regarding enrollment and eligibility?

DARA GOLDBERG: So the enrollment data is maintained entirely by HRA. If we are interested in receiving it, we can, you know, put in a one-off request to get some of the information. Typically, that's shared by zip code. Um, how we track, and in, in some of the research that we put out this week, uh, the program is on the usage side. So we look at the actual transactions and the taps of the Fair Fares cards to understand how riders are using it.

So, um, just- just to the point earlier on eligibility and use, even though there are 380,000 enrolled to today, on average, we're only seeing about 60% of those people active each month, so around, you know, 250, 225, uh, unique accounts are tapping with those Fair Fare cards at least once a month.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you for that. How are customer service responsibilities divided when a participant has a problem with enrollment, eligibility, a card, an OMNY account, or a fare charge?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: So they can, um, reach out to our customer service, um, um, you know, uh, centers, ah, but then ultimately we work closely with HRA to help remedy and resolve the matter.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you. Now I'm going to transition out to OMNY and Fair Fares OMNY cards. Upon approval, Fair Fare participants may receive a Fair Fares OMNY card through the mail or apply the discount directly to an existing OMNY card, bank card, or mobile wallet.

When money is added to a Fair Fares OMNY card, half of the current fare is deducted each time the card is tapped. If a Fair Fares enrollee takes 12 paid trips within a 7-day period with the same card, they automatically receive free rides for the rest of the week. How many Fair Fare participants currently use Fair Fares OMNY Cards?

DARA GOLDBERG: Um, I would believe that all of them do. The latest I checked in the transition to Tap and Ride is that we're close to 98.5% and the remaining payments are coins on bus where we have not retired that as a payment form. And a very small percentage of employees that still have Metro— like, our employees who still have Metro cards. But I- I

believe- I would have to check that the entire Fair
Fares program has transitioned to OMNY cards.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thanks for answering that
question. On average, how long does it take for Fair
Fares OMNY cards to be mailed to participants?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: That is administered through,
um, HRA.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Got it. So it is not done
through MTA. Is that fair to say?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Alright.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How is MTA assisting Fair
Fare participants with the transition from Metro Card
to OMNY?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Well, that was- that exercise
was done, um, you know, aggressively, um, last fall
into the winter as we were sunseting the Metro Card
and switched over to Tap and Ride. Um, and there was
a lot of correspondence, lots of customer-facing
campaigns, um, and lots of information sent to the,
the, the riders, wh- in partnership with HRA to get
the word out.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: It sounds like it's going
well if you have 96%.

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Yeah.

JOHN MCCARTHY: And it's similar to a senior, uh, half fare card.

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Reduced fare.

JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah, reduced fare. They've also transitioned over to OMNY.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How many reports of lost, stolen, or damaged Fair Fare OMNY cards has MTA received, and how does MTA handle those reports?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: I will have to get back to you on the exact number, but we - when we receive any, um, of those calls, we work with HRA or refer them to HRA, who will start the process, um, in getting and issuing new cards to the riders.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Great. Yeah, if you could just email us that when you can, that'd be great. Has the MTA identified any technical issues with applying Fair Fare discounts through OMNY readers?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: None that I'm aware of.

JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah. How does MTA coordinate its customer service response with HRA when participants experience problems with Fair Fares OMNY cards?

3 SHANIFAH RIEARA: So again, um, whether it's
4 through the, the weekly standing meeting we have, but
5 then also our ongoing daily engagement, um, through
6 our customer service centers, um, if there are calls,
7 there are calls, there's constant dialogue and
8 exchange in an effort to resolve the customer's
9 issues.

10 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Great. I'm now gonna ask a
11 few questions on Access-A-Ride and Fair Fares.
12 Access-A-Ride is an MTA-administered paratransit
13 service for customers with disabilities who are
14 unable to use public buses and subways.
15 Access-A-Ride customers may also enroll in Fair Fares
16 and apply the 50% discount to Access-A-Ride trips.
17 However, Fair Fare participants may only use the
18 discount on one transportation method at a time,
19 although they may request a switch through HRA. How
20 many Access-a-Ride customers are currently enrolled
21 in Fair Fares?

JOHN MCCARTHY: Chair, I'd have to get back to
you with that. I don't have an exact number.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: If you could get us that,
that would be great. How does MTA verify a Fair
Fares applica- applicant's Access-a-Ride status?

3 JOHN MCCARTHY: Uh, so that's - Chair, that's
4 done the same, you know, that's done the same way we
5 verify for reduced fare. Um, so we would- um, that's
6 my understanding. Yeah, so it's the same as we do
7 for reduced fare verification.

8 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And how long does the
9 verification process typically take? Do you have an
10 answer to that?

11 JOHN MCCARTHY: Um, I don't know the exact time.
12 I will get back to you on that.

13 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Alright. I'm now gonna move
14 on to MTA's reduced fare- Reduced Fare program. Fair
15 Fares is not the only program that offers half-price
16 transit fares to qualifying city residents. The
17 other program is the MTA's Reduced Fare program,
18 which is a separate program that offers a 50%
19 discount to New Yorkers that are 65 years or older or
20 that have a qualifying disability. How often do MTA
21 and HRA hear from New Yorkers who are confused about
the differences between the city's Fair Fares program
and the MTA's separate reduced fare program?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Um, as far as, I mean,
confusion, um, I mean, with Reduced Fare, we have
about 1.5 million, um, customers enrolled in that

1 program and they can visit our various— the 30
2 customer service centers, as well as Stone Street and
3 our mobile units, um, to, to get information and sign
4 up.

5 Um, and that is a distinct program, you know,
6 that has been marketed to those who are 65 or older,
7 or, um, with a disability. Um, as far as Fair Fares,
8 as we know and the purposes that why we're here today
9 is about, you know, this is a program that needs more
10 robust, um, engagement and, and, and program
11 awareness, um, given that there are far more people
12 eligible for the program but far less people
13 enrolled.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What happens if someone comes
15 to a Fair Fares office to enroll in the program, but
16 HRA determines that the person only qualifies for the
17 MTA's reduced fare program?

18 SHANIFAH RIEARA: So I could only speak about our
19 programmatic engagement that happens within the
20 system. Um, you know, on average when we do these
21 events, I mean, we have— like, if it's an in-station
transit talk, we sign up on average about 25 or up to
50 participants. Um, and when— if someone is not,
um, eligible, whether it is, you know, for— because

1 their income is not, um, it's, it's over the
2 threshold, or they don't have the information, we
3 have a team, uh, member who follows up with them.

4 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Likewise for the MTA, what
5 happens if someone comes to an MTA customer service
6 center to apply for the reduced fare program but is
7 only eligible to participate in Fair Fares?

8 SHANIFAH RIEARA: So, as I mentioned, we arm our,
9 um, customer service reps with lots of handouts, um,
10 and, and information, and we have the, uh, kiosks
11 that are literally, um, next to the, the, um,
12 customer service centers, and we encourage them to
13 sign up, um, and start the application.

14 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Public transit is essential
15 for New York- New Yorkers' access to jobs, schools,
16 healthcare, childcare, and other services.
17 Lower-income New Yorkers are more dependent on public
18 transportation than higher-income households, and
19 transportation costs have continued to rise over
20 time.

21 How does the MTA evaluate the role of Fair Fares
in addressing transportation affordability?

JOHN MCCARTHY: Well, it's part of a bigger
equation, which is, you know, the overall

1 affordability of the transit system. Um, and as I
2 said in the— at the start, it's, it's very much what
3 makes New York affordable. You can come to the city,
4 you're not buying a car, and you have access to the
5 entire city. Um, what we've done over the last few
6 years on student OMNY, expanding it from a couple
7 times a day during the school year to 4 times a day,
8 7 days a week throughout the year. City Ticket,
9 which was a weekend-only, uh, product for
10 20-something years, now it's available all week long.
11 It's completely changed what's available to people.
12 So yeah, this is front and center, the affordability
13 of transit. But, but we, you know, we, we're always
14 looking for finding more affordable products, getting
15 this product you know, making it available to New
16 Yorkers.

17 And so Fair Fares is a part of that but what we
18 see and what we found in our study is if you have 60%
19 of the people who have signed up, only 60% are
20 active. These are the people who have gone out of
21 their way to sign up. And they're the ones that— so
talking about the people who haven't signed up, I
think we get an idea. It means that the people who
are signed up are not using the system as much as

1 they need to, or they just don't— they're not making
2 those trips. If you change the eligibility threshold
3 and bring in those folks who are going to minimum
4 wage plus jobs, I think you're going to really hit
5 affordability and get more people into this program,
6 and word will spread.

7 DARA GOLDBERG: Um, if I could just add to John's
8 response, I think what's— what we are really focused
9 on is, um, widening the net for this tool to reach
10 even more New Yorkers. So I think one of the
11 decisions the Council is considering is whether you
12 go deeper on affordability for— in a world of limited
13 resources and funding, deeper for a smaller number of
14 people, or increase affordability to a wider number
15 of people as you, you know, have those budget
16 negotiations with the Administration. I think we are
17 very supportive of trying to make this tool as
18 accessible to as many people as possible.

19 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you. Does the MTA
20 collect data on how Fair Fares affects participants'
21 access to work, school, medical care, food benefits,
or other essential services?

DARA GOLDBERG: Yes, so I think, um, you know,
and we're happy to continue exploring this in more

1 detailed ways, but some of the preliminary research
2 that we shared with you is looking at where people
3 are tapping, um, first thing in the morning, and
4 where they're tapping at the p.m. peak., and we can
5 really try to break that down and understand those
6 locations in a really granular way. But it really
7 helps us understand what the purpose of travel— or we
8 can make some, you know, assumptions about the
9 purpose of travel based on these locations, um,
10 without directly speaking to the people who are
11 enrolled through HRA's program.

12 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Yeah, it would be interesting
13 to see that data for sure at a granular level.

14 DARA GOLDBERG: Yeah, happy to. Yeah, happy to
15 share.

16 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And then we can work with
17 that.

18 DARA GOLDBERG: Yeah, absolutely.

19 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Work with you guys on that,
20 that would be great. Does MTA target its outreach to
21 neighborhoods with high poverty rates and high
transit dependence? If so, how?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Yeah, um, absolutely. I mean,
we, you know, working with the, the policy team, um,

1 with lots of data gathering, we- and also, um, with
2 engagement from- with our government relations team
3 and working with electeds and community stakeholders,
4 identifying those, um, location where there are large
5 pockets of eligibility, um, and we go out into the
6 system prior to our arrival doing, um, lots of effort
7 to get the word out by way of the electeds, the
8 community boards, um, or trusted CBOs and community
9 partners to let them know that we are in, um, the
10 neighborhood or in the community to sign up and
11 enroll folks.

12 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you for that. I'm now
13 gonna turn it over to my Co-Chair, Council Member
14 Kristal Hudson.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much, Chair.
16 Um, upon approval, Fair Fares participants may
17 receive a Fair Fares OMNY card through the mail or
18 apply the discount directly to an existing OMNY card,
19 bank card, or mobile wallet. When money is added to
20 a Fair Fares OMNY Card, half of the current fare is
21 deducted each time the card is tapped. If a Fair
Fares enrollee takes 12 paid trips within a 7-day
period with the same card, they automatically receive
free rides for the rest of the week. How many Fair

Fares participants currently use Fair Fares OMNY
Cards?

DARA GOLDBERG: Uh, thank you for the question. I
think we addressed this, um, while you weren't in the
room, but we have— we are now at close to a, like,
98.5% transition to Tap-and-Ride and that covers all
of our physical fare media programs. Essentially,
what's left are, like, around 2% for people who are
paying with coins on the bus and a very small number
of our own employees who still have Metro Cards. So,
the— all of these programs have already transitioned
to physical OMNY fare media.

SHANIFAH RIEARA: And to Chairman Abreu's, your
previous, um, question, we have 5,000— um,
Access-A-Ride customers that are currently enrolled
in Fair Fares.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Forgive me just
one second. Thank you. We're just comparing notes
here. Um, okay. The Council needs reliable data to
evaluate whether Fair Fares is reaching eligible New
Yorkers, reducing transportation hardship, and
operating efficiently. Do you have an understanding
of MTA ridership at different income levels?

3 DARA GOLDBERG: So, um, I would just, like,
4 generally characterize the ways we understand our
5 riders are by speaking with them in our surveys, or
6 where they can tell us that information about
7 themselves and demographic characteristics. And then
8 the other way we track folks, um, or try to
9 understand their travel patterns is through the way
10 they pay and where they're paying and what time of
11 day.

12 Um, with transactions, we don't know anything
13 about people's demographics or their income levels
14 other than those who are already in income-restricted
15 programs like Fair Fares. Um, but we do have
16 information about, uh, you know, the demographics and
17 travel proclivities of our riders through survey
18 data.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that's helpful. Thank
20 you. Um, what do you expect, or what does the MTA
21 expect you would expect the difference in ridership
to be between someone making 150 to 200% of the
federal poverty level and someone below 150%? Do you
have any idea?

DANA GOLDBERG: Yeah, I don't know that we have
an exact projection. I just think that we would

1 expect you would reach more people who would ride
2 more frequently. Uh, in the brief that we shared
3 with you all, you can see that, um, the travel
4 patterns of Fair Fares enrollees today already mimics
5 the a.m., p.m. peak of the broader system with
6 slightly more off-peak travel. I think you're just
7 reaching more working New Yorkers because the income
8 threshold today is so low.

9 JOHN MCCARTHY: And Chair, I would just add that
10 the- just the reality of the way our system works,
11 when you see weekday ridership versus Saturday and
12 Sunday, you- I mean, you have a significant drop-off,
13 students and people who are coming to and going from
14 work.

15 Um, and so the higher the threshold, I think
16 you're capturing people who are going to jobs, um,
17 more so than you do today, where it would either be
18 someone who's working part-time, um, or, or maybe
19 they're not working, or they're doing something, you
20 know, in the neighborhood, local. So, um, yeah, I
21 think you would see, uh, the sort of growth that you
would see whenever you pull in people who are coming
to and going from work.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 120

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for that. Do you
4 know on average what percent of New Yorkers living
5 below the federal poverty line use public transit?

6 DARA GOLDBERG: Yeah, I mean, I think the census
7 statistics are mostly about how you commute to and
8 from work. We have some of that in our survey data
9 for-- that includes leisure and other forms of travel,
10 so we can get back to you on the specific, like,
11 share relative to the poverty line.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That would be helpful.
13 Thank you. The MTA's data on Fair Fares rides by
14 station shows that subway ridership is almost twice
15 that of bus ridership. Do you know why this might be
16 the case, and is this consistent with public transit
17 ridership for non-Fair Fares users?

18 DARA GOLDBERG: Yes, that is generally
19 consistent. It is a much higher share-- I would say
20 slightly higher share of Fair Fares users than the
21 rest of the system use the bus and make bus-to-subway
transfers, but it's not a big differential, which is
in, I think, one of the, um, charts or graphs that we
shared with you all.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. How does
the MTA expect the weekly ridership of those on the

Fair Fares program to change if Fair Fares changes to
a 100% discount for those who qualify?

JOHN MCCARTHY: I don't think we know that. I
think, you know, just going back to how I responded
to a couple of questions ago, we don't know how much
usage is, um, you know, what, what usage
possibilities there are with somebody who's earning
below 100%, um, federal poverty. Uh, we already know
that at the rate it is today, 150%, there's 40% who
aren't active who have enrolled.

So it suggests that that is a factor, and that
going for getting people who are going to and from
work will- will make that number pop more than, um,
as Dara sort of went through the trade-off that
elected officials and policymakers face, um so.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Um, and then
just a couple questions about legislation. So for
Resolution Number 143, unlimited transfers within 2
hours, does the MTA have an estimate of how many
riders would benefit from this policy?

DARA GOLDBERG: Um, no, but I would say there is
like, a couple of different elements to that. So
one, on the subway system, it would be very- you
know, you can already make unlimited transfers as

1 long as you're within the system. So if the question
2 is, do you do unlimited travel within 2 hours, we-
3 and- and it's part of transfers, we would need a way
4 for folks to be able to tap out in order to register
5 that as a transfer if you were going to make some
6 kind of out-of-system transfer, and we don't have
7 that validator technology installed today, so that
8 would be a pretty significant change to the way the
9 subway system operates.

10 On the bus, we are piloting this on the Queens
11 Bus Network redesign, which is a time-limited, uh,
12 window of a universal transfer, and for that, I think
13 the bus is a little bit- because of the technology
14 and directionality that we're able to understand when
15 people tap onto those modes, it's a little bit more
16 feasible, but we're still trying to understand how
17 people are using that and what the broader
18 implication would be for the full system.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay and then, could
20 unlimited transfers be implemented through OMNY
21 without major changes, you think?

DARA GOLDBERG: It would require a lot of
programming, I think, to understand this.

1 JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah but in addition to
2 complicated programming, there's complicated
3 budgeting, um, attached to that, um, just because
4 with unlimited- it's not necessarily an unlimited
5 transfer, it's unlimited trips. That's a different
6 thing altogether, um, where you have, you have real
7 budgetary consequences that would have to be
8 addressed if that policy decision were to be
9 advanced.

10 That's why we've always done it with the
11 transfer, the transfer that you can get within
12 system, obviously, that we're all familiar with, and
13 then the bus to subway transfer. That didn't always
14 exist. It's another, you know, it's an amazing thing
15 looking back in time that there was a time when
16 people paid, you know, 2 fares.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yep.

18 JOHN MCCARTHY: Remember? So, um, so, but I just
19 would caution that there is, there are a number of
20 different issues related to that- that we have to
21 deal with.

 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah and I guess, um, one
example that I can think of that's specific to my
district is, and one of my biggest gripes with the

1 Barclays Center, um, that when it, when that whole
2 development came about, Atlantic Yards, not
3 specifically the Barclays Center, I shouldn't say
4 that, but with Atlantic Yards, was they invested all
5 of this money into redesigning the subway station
6 directly underneath the Barclays Center, but we have,
7 within just a few blocks, a G train station, a C
8 train station, and there was no tunnel created to
9 connect people within those— within that system. And
10 that, that, um, walk, I would estimate, to be similar
11 or shorter than the walk you have to do at Time
12 Square or something, you know, to move through.

13 And so I guess that's— it's thinking about— I
14 would think about trips as transfers, not necessarily
15 saying you're taking the train to go to work, then
16 you're hanging— you know, you're spending the day at
17 work, and then you're unlimited, you know, ride to go
18 somewhere else, or for lunch, or whatever. But
19 really more so if there's not a direct connection
20 available between different train routes, you know,
21 thinking about transfers available.

JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And so maybe there's like a way to geo-target or something that within a certain area you can—

JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah. So as opposed to a universal on-time transfer period.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah and this is just my own personal question. I don't want to— this is not my bill, it's not my legislation. I don't want to speak on behalf of the sponsor, but I'm just, you know—

JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah. Well, so the good news is with, uh, Tap and Ride, it's, you know, there's so much more possible, and it's— and that is, uh, Chair, something that we are, we are aware of, and we have people who are looking at exactly that sort of thing. So we should talk more about it.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I look forward to it and I'll, uh, turn it back over to Chair Abreu, and also want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Nurse. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: These are my last set of questions. What happens when someone who is part of the Fair Fares program hits 65 and transitions out of the Fair Fares program? How does HRA or MTA coordinate, if at all, to ensure a seamless and

timeless transition from the Fair Fares program to
the Reduced Fare program?

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Seamless? Um, so I would not
say it's seamless. I mean, again, um, you know, it,
it— there can and should be, um, better coordination
as, as, uh, Fair Fare participants are aging out of
the program and introducing and promoting and
encouraging, um, folks to, um, transition over to
Fair Fares. And that is something that we can all
collectively do a better job in coordinating.

JOHN MCCARTHY: Yeah, and it's about getting
information— I mean, it's, it's a date and time. So
people know when they're turning. So getting that
information into the hands of people who are in Fair
Fares who are coming up on that age. We do that with
seniors. We are, we are, you know, asking them
always to start preparing and planning. And so many
of them are, are so, you know, I have my own parents,
they're so aware of it. It's like, I'm gonna have
that in day one.

So, um, that, that window of somebody turning 64
and then 65 going on to, uh, Reduced Fare. It's,
it's— we, we gotta, we gotta all be better there.
That's, that should—

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I really appreciate you guys just being straight up honest about that because I remember when I was, uh, at the rally this morning, one of the advocates— I think she's here in the audience, uh, with the red hair back there um—

SHANIFAH RIEARA: Deborah Greif.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: What's your name?

DEBORAH GREIF: Deborah Greif.

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Uh, Deborah, thank you. You know, she mentioned to me that it doesn't make sense that when you're 64 years old as part of Fair Fares and you turn 65, you have to enter an entirely new, different program And I know it was a state-run program. But for these folks who benefit from this, they should just be able to have a seamless transition. I would even argue it should just be automatic. If you're part of Fair Fares and you turn 65, you should be automatically enrolled into Reduced Fare program. But if we can't do that, we need to find a way to coordinate better from HRA to the MTA. And so I'm glad that there's a sense of urgency here already. And I think it would make— it would improve the quality of life and also increase access to our mass transit system for those who really need it.

3 So thank you so much for testifying.

4 JOHN MCCARTHY: So there's, there's, you know,
5 there is complications with that and there's
6 litigation involved. So it's— but I, you know, we
7 will get back to you on more on, on that transition
8 and making sure it's smooth.

9 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Let's keep talking. Thank
10 you Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Excellent. Thank you so
12 much. We are going to move to public testimony, but
13 I do want to thank you and just note for the record
14 that you are not, um, legally mandated to be here.
15 And so we do really appreciate your time, um, and
16 willingness to answer the questions and to partner
17 with us. So thank you.

18 JOHN MCCARTHY: Thanks for having us.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Okay, we are now
20 opening the hearing for public testimony, and I wanna
21 remind members of the public that this is a
government proceeding and that decorum shall be
observed at all times. As such, members of the
public shall remain silent at all times. The witness
table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No

video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table.

Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized.

When recognized, you will have 2 minutes to speak on the oversight topic, Fair Fares or on Introduction 248, Introduction 825, Resolution 52, or Resolution 143.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted. And I want to ask if Little Flores is here. No. Okay.

So the first panel— the first panel will be Eduardo Rodriguez, Ruldolph Pongnon, apologies. Marie Pierre, Tenaiya Ortiz-Long. Thank you, thank

1 you, and we'll just start at my left, your right, at
2 the end of the table here. You can begin when you're
3 ready. You can begin when you're ready. You want to
4 just hit the microphone? Just hit the button at the
5 bottom. Perfect, thank you.

6 EDUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Uh, good afternoon Council.
7 Uh, thank you for, uh, holding this hearing and the
8 opportunity to be heard. My name is Eduardo
9 Rodriguez on behalf of Freedom Agenda and the
10 campaign to close Rikers Island. I'm here to support
11 Riders Alliance because I acknowledge the connection
12 between being economically disadvantaged and, um,
13 attempting to make a reintegration successfully. The
14 burden of hardship associated with accessing public
15 transportation has not allowed me to maintain, uh,
16 certain obligations as a result of my release.

15 Um, I'm gonna read a script that I worked on all
16 week, uh, because I only- I'm limited with time. Um,
17 as a justice-impacted individual, I recall my
18 inability to afford public transportation, leaving me
19 feeling entrapped, prejudiced, targeted, and
20 conditioned for criminalization.

21 I recently collaborated with Riders Alliance in
the push to improve access to public transportation

1 for all New Yorkers through a host of efforts because
2 it never made sense to me that a warrant would be
3 issued for my arrest because I couldn't afford to
4 travel to a legal appointment, whether it be court,
5 probation, parole, community service, jury duty, or
6 being presented with the dilemma of having to choose
7 between the most important meal of the day- for me,
8 it's coffee and a bagel- or hopping the turnstile at
9 the risk of being ticketed because I was being
targeted for arrest or paying my fare.

10 I remember having to hop a turnstile to get to an
11 interview for employment that only required that I
12 turn in documents. I never made it to the interview.
13 Instead, I wound up in cuffs. My eager plea to be
14 released so I could make it to the interview led the
15 officer to believe that I was evading the law. He
held me in hopes that a warrant would pop up in the
system.

16 Some things never change. About 2 weeks ago, as
17 I was leaving a Riders Alliance meeting that prepared
18 me for this hearing, I entered the Fulton Street
19 Train Station, tapped my OMNY card courtesy of Riders
20 Alliance, it wasn't until I turned the corner onto
21

the platform that I noticed an officer peering around
the corner waiting for someone to beat the fare.

Most New Yorkers struggle with the burden of
hardship associated with the cost of public
transportation. Denying New Yorkers access to public
transportation limits our citizens' rights to
liberty, interests, and pursuit of happiness. No one
should face arrest, miss opportunities, or be pushed
deeper into hardship simply because they cannot
afford to swipe into a subway system that this city
depends on.

I urge City Council to act now and make Fairs
Fare truly fair for the millions of New Yorkers who
keep this city moving every day. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your
testimony.

TENAIYA ORTIZ-LONG: Good morning, Chair and
members of the Committee. My name is Tenaiya
Ortiz-Long. I'm a lifelong New Yorker. I've lived
in Brooklyn, Queens, and now the Bronx. I'm here
today to advocate for affordable transit and the
expansion of Fair Fares.

In my lifetime, I've watched the fare go from
\$2.25 to \$3. That 75- 75-cent increase may sound

1 small, but it adds up, and it's pricing people out.
2 Right now, I qualify for Fair Fares, but the moment I
3 get a full-time minimum wage job at \$17 an hour, I
4 will lose that support. After taxes, that is about
5 \$28,000 a year, just over the current eligibility
6 cutoff for around \$23,000 a year.

7 Somehow that's considered too much to qualify,
8 even though it's nowhere near enough to survive in
9 this city. Let's be real about math. Rent for a
10 studio can be \$1,800 a month. Phone bill is around
11 \$120. Wi-Fi, \$75. Groceries can range from \$200 to
12 \$600. Utilities added can be another \$150 to \$300,
and the costs keep rising. After paying for basic
needs, there's nothing left.

13 In fact, I'd be in the negative before even
14 paying for transit. At 21, I hopped the turnstile
15 after work because I had no money left and was
16 waiting to get paid. Instead of getting home safely,
17 I was given a \$100 ticket and threatened with arrest.
18 I was forced to choose between being stranded or
19 being criminalized. That is not a real choice. Fair
20 Fare should not disappear the moment someone starts
21 earning slightly more.

I'm asking you to expand it so working people are not punished for trying to get ahead. Thank you for listening to a New Yorker who just wants to afford to stay in the city she calls home.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your testimony.

RULDOLPH PONGNON: Uh, I want to, uh, thank the, uh, honorable members of the City Council for, uh, giving me the opportunity to, um, provide my testimony. Um, I was particularly inspired, uh, to come here to speak on behalf of, uh, the swath of, uh, New Yorkers who, um, are experiencing abject poverty.

Um, my name's, uh, Ruldolph Pongnon, and, um, it wasn't easy for me to, uh, show up here. I'm, I'm feeling a bit, uh, emasculated, ashamed, and, uh, depressed by, uh, my current, uh, circumstance. And, um, I've been in, uh, I've been an activist since, uh, 2016, and, uh, I've dedicated myself to, uh, speaking truth to power.

Uh, so while I had consternations about showing up here, um, and, uh, talking about, uh, the, uh, the ugly reality of living in, uh, abject poverty in New York city. Um, someone has to do it, and um, one of

1 the commandments that I live by is, uh, be the change
2 that you seek and so I'm here.

3 Uh, I haven't worked, uh, since the shutdown of
4 April of, uh, 2020. Uh, I did- I used to have a
5 career. Uh, I have a bachelor's degree in Business
6 Administration with, uh, a major in Accounting. Um,
7 I, uh, I was eventually, um, I was diagnosed in, uh,
8 I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, uh, in
my mid-30s, and I have other, uh, comorbidities.

9 Uh, I've also been, uh, diagnosed with, um, major
10 depressive disorder, uh, generalized anxiety
11 disorder, um, adult selective mutism, sleep apnea,
12 and, uh, ADHD. And, um, eventually all of this, uh,
pushed me out of the workforce.

13 Um, I have, however, been making, uh, incremental
14 improvements over the years. And, um, I have, uh, a
15 little more, uh, confidence- confidence that I, um,
16 will be able to eventually have a, ah, relatively
normal standard of living.

17 Um, what I wanna say is that, um, anyone, uh,
18 like myself, who's on cash assistance, um, I believe
19 they should receive, um, a free, uh, Fair Fare, uh,
20 OMNY card. Um, and, uh, I think it would be bad
21 policy not to do it. Um, I think it would be

inhumane, and I think, um, it, it would punish the poor simply for being poor.

What I get from, uh, cash assistance, which is my, um, sole source of income, uh, I get \$59.05 twice a week. So that comes up to \$118.10— I'm sorry, uh, twice a month. I'm sorry. I get \$59.05 twice a month, and that comes up to, um, \$118.10.

That's my only, uh, source of income. Um, so my, uh, my phone bill and internet, uh, that comes up— while it's - it's discounted, it comes up to roughly, uh, \$15, um, a month. Uh, doing the laundry, on a weekly basis for a month about \$50, and, um, uh, incidentals, toiletries, cleaning supplies, uh, pest control, roaches and rats, uh, another \$50.

So I'm already at \$150 and, um, my monthly income is \$118.10. Um, so this is, uh, this is how this whole dynamic, uh, works out for me in practice. Um, I don't actually do the laundry, uh, every week, uh, even if I could. Um, my incidentals, I address that only when it's, uh, absolutely necessary, so when I'm in a situation where, uh, I'm running out of a bar of soap, then I gotta go buy another bar of soap. And, uh, just gotta be that frugal.

Um, as far as my Fair Fares, uh, Reduced fare Fair Fare card, um, so I— whenever I put money on it, I put, uh, \$10 on the card, and, um, I, I call it my, uh, what-if money. And the reason why I call it my what-if money, it's, um—

CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Excuse me, you're gonna have to— if you could just wrap up shortly. Thank you.

RULDOLPH PONGNON: Yes, uh, yes, uh, so the reason I, I call it my what-if money is in case, um, I, I'm in the subway and I see law enforcement, and I don't have time to beg for a swipe, so then I use my, uh, my Fair Fare, uh, card. And, um, I, I can't imagine if I had to use, uh, public transportation every day. And, um, I, I hope the— my testimony encourages you to make this program, uh, more robust and thank you for the time.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your testimony.

MARIE NADINE PIERRE: Hi, good afternoon. Um, my name is Marie Nadine Pierre. I just want to preface what I'm about to read just briefly, inspired by my co-panelists. Um, I was born in New— in Brooklyn to immigrants from Haiti. Hard work is part of our DNA, and I've actually worked since I was 14. I never

1 thought I'd be in a low-wealth situation because I
2 did earn a college degree at 20, and I went to earn
3 my master's degree at UC Berkeley and went on to an
4 Ivy League institution for a doctorate.

5 I've attempted 3 doctorates so far, but I'm still
6 in the low-wealth cat- category, most likely because
7 of my lifestyle in this city. That keeps changing
8 and welcoming new people that look more like the,
9 the, um, the neoliberal economy prefers to hire in
either service sector or the private sector.

10 So it's been impossible to get a job. I lost my
11 4 children. We was- we stayed in a family shelter
12 in, um, in Queens, and they wouldn't keep us after 3
13 months. So my poverty issues have been enormous,
14 even though I did everything I was supposed to since
I was 16 years old.

15 So, um, right now I end up having to beg online
16 and on the streets for- for- to people to- for money
17 to afford the basics. I am on HRA benefits, but they
18 are not enough, because I suffer from a bunch of
19 different problems, health problems, because my
20 immune system has deteriorated over the years, and I
21 require a lot of vitamins that the insurance does not

cover, so I have to buy those out of pocket. This is what I wrote.

Um, my name is Marie Nadine Pierre, and I live in New York City. I support expanding Fair Fares because affordable transit directly affects my ability to meet basic needs. I rely on the subway and bus to get to medical appointments in Manhattan and Queens, as well as Brooklyn. And when I cannot afford the fare, I have to- I have had to ask other riders for a swipe, including this morning to get here.

No one should have to depend on strangers to just to reach- to reach necessary healthcare. Fair Fares also helps people stay connected to work and opportunity. The cost of transportation can keep me from job searching, attending interviews, and participating fully in my community.

I currently have a reduced fare, but I feel that a free fare would let me travel consistently and with dignity while I work to stabilize my income. I respectfully urge the Committee to expand Fair Fares by increasing the income limit to at least 300% of the federal poverty level, so more low-income and near-poor New Yorkers like me can afford to ride.

1 Fair Fare assistance is an investment in public
2 health, access to employment, and equity. Thank you
3 for your consideration.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. And I
5 want to thank you all, uh, again for your testimony.
6 I know it's not always easy to come up in front of a
7 panel, um, and put on the public record your
8 circumstances and situations, but one of the many
9 reasons why we always ask for directly impacted folks
10 to go first is because we think it's incredibly
important for people to hear your testimony.

11 Um, and so thank you again. We should not be
12 criminalizing poverty. Um, and so I know that, you
13 know, the City Council will do everything we can to
14 work directly with the Administration to address some
of the issues that you all have brought up here
today. So thank you again for your time.

15 CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I agree with our Co-Chair and
16 everything she said.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, our next two panelists
18 are from the Independent Budget Office, Claire Salant
19 and Emily Promick— Pramik, apologies, um, and our
20 general counsel will swear you both in.
21

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 141

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, in accordance with the
4 rules of the Council, I will administer the
5 affirmation to the witnesses from the Independent
6 Budget Office. Please raise your right hand. Do you
7 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
8 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this
9 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
10 questions. Claire Salant and Emily Promick. Okay,
11 you may begin when ready. Thank you.

12 CLAIRE SALANT: There we go. Good afternoon, uh,
13 Chair Hudson, uh, Chair Majority Leader Abreu, and
14 other members of the Committee. My name is Claire
15 Salant, and I am a lead and budget and policy analyst
16 at the Independent Budget Office. I am joined by
17 Emily Pramik, another lead budget and policy analyst
18 at IBO.

19 IBO is a government agency whose mission is to
20 enhance understanding of the New York City budget,
21 public policy, and economy through independent
analysis. We appreciate the opportunity to testify
at today's hearing on the city's Fair Fares program,
including the Council's proposed changes in Intro 248
and Reso 52.

1 You've already heard from the Administration
2 about how the program works, so we'd just like to
3 highlight a few things building off their testimony.
4 First, in thinking about eligibility, the program has
5 a few limitations. Currently, the program covers New
6 Yorkers 18 to 64 who make up to 150% of the federal
7 poverty level. Adults 65 and older and those with
8 disabilities are covered by the MTA's half-price
9 program, meaning many older adults and disabled New
10 Yorkers are not eligible for Fair Fares.

11 Access-A-Ride users can use this program since
12 the MTA discount does not cover paratransit, but they
13 lose Fair Fares eligibility when they turn 65, like
14 all older New Yorkers.

15 Second, because Fair Fares is a wholly
16 city-designed and funded program, the city can change
17 these eligibility requirements and has already done
18 this several times in the past. Uh, since the
19 program began in 2019, the city has raised the income
20 eligibility threshold from about 100% to 150% of the
21 federal poverty level, or from about \$12,500 to about
22 \$23,500 for a single adult. These changes have
23 increased the number of income eligible residents
24 from 615,000 in 2023 before the first income

eligibility increase to about 940,000 with the most recent change in November.

Um, however, as you've heard today, just about 41% of eligible New Yorkers are enrolled in the program as of December of last year. So to understand why take-up of this program remains so low, we need to consider the structure and setup of the program as well as the community needs of low-income residents. So individuals enroll in the program on one of two tracks depending on how they're connected to city systems.

So for those who receive temporary assistance through HRA and already have Access HRA accounts, the process is relatively simple and just requires replying to system notifications. So if you, if you miss that first notification, the system will automatically email you a reminder every quarter, and you just have to click some buttons, uh, and then you'll be mailed an OMNY Card in 2 to 3 weeks. But if you're not already connected to Access HRA, the process is more complicated.

So first you have to know about the program, and then you have to make, ah, an Access HRA account to go through what's called open enrollment. So you

1 make an account, you have to verify your identity,
2 your residence, and your income, and you have to
3 submit documentation like tax returns or other
4 paperwork the city does allow you to use, um, before
5 HRA can then determine your eligibility.

6 Um, since this process is more involved,
7 households do not always finish their application, as
8 you heard earlier, or documentation submission. Um,
9 we also wanna note that households, even when they do
10 eventually qualify, they do have to pay for full
11 transit during that whole application process. Um,
12 it's possible that HRA and the Department of Finance
13 could, ah, work to facilitate some data sharing, um,
14 to both avoid some households having to submit all
15 that documentation and expedite some eligibility
16 determinations.

17 Um, but most of what we focused on today, and in
18 general, the conversation around Fair Fares is about
19 enrollment and these challenges for enrollment, and
20 there's less discussion on transit use. Um, however,
21 IBO finds that when individuals do successfully sign
up for Fair Fares, they don't use it very much. So,
IBO estimated the total number of weekly trips per

participant based on expenditures and program enrollment.

On average, Fair fares users took just 2.8 trips per week in fiscal year 2025 and an estimated 3.3 trips in fiscal year 2026. So—

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. If you could just try to wrap. We have the full written testimony.

CLAIRE SALANT: Okay, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So we'll make note of it. But if you wanna—

EMILY PRAMIK: I can take it from here. Um, so why are so few people using the Fair Fares program? Uh, So, we know many factors could be contributing to low participation. First, qualifying individuals may not know about the program. However, recent Community Service Society data, uh, survey data is showing that awareness is improving. And we can say from our own research in the budget that HRA spends about \$2 million per year on advertising, which is the largest advertising budget for a single program in the agency.

So we think there are other factors at play here. Uh, another factor could be the low enrollment and

transit use could reflect underlying rates of employment and transit commuting in the eligible population. According to the U.S. Census data, those currently eligible for Fair Fares, uh, use, uh, transit to commute to work and actually work much less than New Yorkers who are at even slightly higher income levels.

According to 2024 data, just 1 in 5 of those at Fair Fares income levels use transit to commute to work. That jumps to 1 in 3 at the 150 to 200% of the federal poverty level. So just that next step up that's proposed in Reso 52. Uh, so we absolutely expect higher enrollment and transit use as this program expands to, uh, New Yorkers at, uh, higher incomes.

This is not to say that those currently eligible don't need or want to use transit more, um, but another factor could be the program's, uh, 50% discount is just not enough to support this population's transit use. Uh, there is some research to support this. A recent randomized controlled trial of transit subsidies for SNAP recipients in Allegheny County, uh, which includes Pittsburgh found that half-price discounts had no effect on how much

1 individuals use transit, but, uh, free programs in
2 fact increased their transit use by 43%.

3 So we think there is, uh, evidence for some
4 affordability issues at play. Uh, we've shared a lot
5 of information, so just wanna sum -sum it up for you.
6 Uh, even with multiple in- increases to the budget,
7 participation in Fair fares remains low. So this to
8 us suggests that there are problems with the program
structure and not just the level of funding.

9 Uh, the city of course has multiple options to
10 increase participation. As the Council debates these
11 changes, we want to emphasize its important to
12 consider who qualifies, their transit needs, and
13 their experience in the current program. Higher
14 income populations have higher transit use and
15 especially, ah, use commuting to work, so we expect
16 program costs to increase if they join the program
and use the transit more.

17 Uh, if automatic enrollment leads many more
18 people to participate in the program, we also expect
19 program costs to increase with that. Uh, and
20 finally, if the Council makes transit free for those
21 who currently qualify, but makes no other changes,
that change will leave out, uh, uh, adults who are

1 older and those with disabilities who currently
2 qualify for the MTA's half-price program.

3 So they would be left paying half price, uh,
4 while others received a free benefitS. So we just
5 wanna make that clear. Um, we are tracking all of
6 these proposals. We're keeping track of the
7 conversation. We are working on an analysis of Fair
8 Fares expansion and an increased subsidy, including
9 cost estimates. We do not have those available
10 today, but we will share those with the Council and
the public very soon.

11 Uh, but in the meantime, we would be very happy
12 to take your questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. I don't
14 have any questions at this time, but I do look
15 forward to hopefully getting that- the budget
estimate from your office. And thank you so much for
your testimony.

16 EMILY PRAMIK: Okay, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The next panel consists of
18 Adam Schmidt, Brian Fritch, Deborah Wright, Rachel
19 Swaner, Beth Williams, and Alia Soomro. Adam
20 Schmidt, Brian Fritch, Deborah Wright. No,
21 W-R-I-G-H-T. No problem.

3 We'll start to your right at the end of the table
4 here. Thank you.

5 ADAM SCHMIDT: Good afternoon. I'm Adam Schmidt,
6 Senior Research Associate for Transportation at the
7 Citizens Budget Commission. Thank you for the
8 opportunity to testify about the Fair Fares NYC
9 program.

10 Today, CBC released More Aboard, which recommends
11 raising the Fair Fares income eligibility threshold
12 from 150% to 250% of the federal poverty level. This
13 would make life more affordable and increase economic
14 opportunities for low-income New Yorkers. We
15 estimate this expansion would cost \$146 million,
16 bringing the total— the program's total annual cost
17 to \$232 million.

18 Yes, the Citizens Budget Commission is
19 recommending the city spend more money on this
20 program. At about 1/6 the cost of fare-free buses,
21 this expansion would be a far more impactful and
cost-effective use of city resources during a time of
budget stress. With this expansion, an additional
722,000 New Yorkers would be eligible, bringing the
total population to nearly 2 million eligible
individuals. The program would reach 1 in every 4

working New Yorkers and cover households earning 20% more than full-time minimum wage.

It would also increase the program's effectiveness. As you've heard, Fair Fares suffers from low enrollment and utilization, with only a third of those eligible currently enrolled, and each enrollee only averaging 3 rides per week.

Transportation affordability poses the greatest challenges to working commuters with travel needs but limited financial resources.

Currently, full-time minimum wage workers are not eligible for the program, and this expansion would rectify that. Fair fares has advantages over other transit affordability programs like free buses.

Namely, it gives riders the choice to use either the subway or the bus, whichever works best for them.

Raising the Fair Fares eligibility threshold preserves this choice and is a smart way to reduce the cost of living without subsidizing those who can afford transit.

While it expands eligibility, the city should also improve education and outreach as you've heard, and simplify enrollment to increase utilization.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your testimony. Uh, next.

BRIAN FRITCH: Good afternoon. I'm Brian Fritch, Associate Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. I have a longer written testimony that I'm happy to share with a lot of our details on our proposals, but I just wanted to take a moment to highlight a few really interesting things that I think we heard in the hearing today. I wanna, you know, start by saying thank you to the Speaker and to you, uh, Chair Hudson and, uh, Chair Abreu for holding this hearing. This is the most attention that the Fair Fares Program has gotten since it was implemented in 2019, and we're deeply appreciative of shining a light on, on some of the, the issues with the program and how we can make it the transformative one that we'd like to all- to all see.

I think two points that, that came up that were really interesting were, you know, the number of people that HRA is interacting with regularly, you know, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who are in their system in one way, shape, or form because

1 they're getting some type of benefit but are not
2 receiving Fair Fares. And secondly, and this was
3 news to me today, the 50% drop-off rate on program
4 renewals. Is really abysmal. Both of these
5 highlight how difficult this process must be for
6 families, and, you know, structurally how it's
7 failing, failing New Yorkers.

8 So, you know, thank you for shining a light on
9 this. I think your plan of automatic enrollment
10 really gets to the heart of how we can improve the
11 Fair Fares program for these families, get them
12 access to the benefits that they are already entitled
13 to, and ensure that they can travel around the city
14 in a way that opens up doors of opportunity for them.
15 Um, so I th- I think that, that's really wonderful
16 that you were able to, to really focus on that today.

17 I wonder if HRA might consider breaking down some
18 of these barriers, particularly, you know, having
19 people opt out of not getting the program as opposed
20 to forcing them to opt in and jump through a bunch of
21 hoops. I think there's a lot of ways we can be
creative about ensuring that New Yorkers have access
to the benefits that they deserve.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Next,
Can you just— yeah, perfect.

DEBORAH WRIGHT: Good afternoon. Thank you so
much, Chair Hudson, for giving us the opportunity to
testify today. I'm Deborah Wright. I'm the national
political director for the Retail, Wholesale, and
Department Store Union, RWDSU, and we're here today
to speak in favor of the Council's proposals to
expand the Fair Fares.

RWDSU represents over 100,000 workers nationally.
We work in industries such as retail, retail supply,
grocery stores, food processing, food distribution,
agriculture, cannabis, building services, nursing
homes, car washes, and more. Simply put, our members
keep— help our economy moving every single day. Our
retail members work in a challenging industry that is
demanding physically and mentally.

They open stores early in the morning and close
them late at night. They spend hours on their feet
assisting customers, stocking shelves, and
maintaining stores with little rest. During
weekends, major sales, and holidays, the pace becomes
frenetic and exhausting. Our members do all of this
while constantly interacting with the public,

managing frustration, de-escalating conflict, and
maintaining professionalism no matter what they face.
Increasingly, they also face real threats to their
physical safety on the job.

Yet despite strong union contracts, many of our
retail members are struggling to make ends meet. The
cost of transportation is not a small inconvenience,
it's a daily burden that forces impossible choices.
Our members rely exclusively on public transit to get
to and from work in a timely and safe manner. They
are not asking for luxury, they are asking for
fairness. At the program's current income threshold,
many of our members are now excluded. In a city
where rent, groceries, health care, child care, and
transit costs are among the highest in the country,
the current threshold is disconnected from how people
live.

Expanding Fair Fares would include more low-wage
workers, which in turn would mean more stable
employment and a stronger workforce for the city. It
would mean dignity for our members and countless
workers across the city by knowing that getting to
work will not push them further into financial

stress. We urge the Council to act diligently,
please.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. And for
everyone who submitted written testimony, we have the
full testimony for the record.

RACHEL SWANER: Um, thank you, Chair Hudson,
Chair Abreu, and to all the Committee Members for
this opportunity. My name is Rachel Swaner, and I'm
the Vice President of Policy, Research, and Advocacy
at the Community Service Society of New York, an
organization dedicated to helping everyday New
Yorkers achieve economic security and well-being.
And Fair Fares is one of the city's most important
tools for making New York more affordable. For
hundreds of thousands of low-income New Yorkers, it
reduces the cost of getting to work, school, medical
appointments, and other essential activities,
including staying connected to family and friends.
But our latest research shows that while the program
is making a meaningful difference, it is still not
reaching everyone who needs it. And for many who are
enrolled, the discount is not enough.

In January and February of this year, we surveyed
1,653 New Yorkers receiving SNAP, cash assistance, or

City FHEPs, populations that closely overlap with those eligible for Fair Fares. We asked whether they were enrolled in Fair Fares and how the program affects their daily lives.

First, on Access, more than 1 in 3 respondents did not have Fair Fares. These are New Yorkers who are already connected to public benefits and interacting with city systems. If the program is not reaching a third of people in this group, it is unlikely to reach the many eligible residents who are not connected to services, at least not without changes to how the program is administered.

Second, on impact, for those who do have Fair Fares, the program is clearly helping. Nearly all respondents said the discount makes it easier to get around, and more than 4 in 5 said it helps them cover other essentials like housing, food, and utilities. These are meaningful improvements to people's ability to manage daily life. But the data also make clear that the current 50% discount is not sufficient. 64% of Fair Fares users told us that even with the discount, it is hard to— it is still hard to afford public transportation when they need it.

3 In other words, even at half price, transit
4 remains out of reach for many of the city's
5 low-income residents. These findings point to two
6 clear priorities. First, the city should
7 automatically enroll eligible residents in Fair
8 Fares. Eligibility closely overlaps with programs
9 like SNAP and cash assistance, which are administered
10 by the same city agency.

11 For that reason, we support Intro 248, um, and we
12 applaud Chair Hudson for championing this issue. And
13 second, the city should make transit free for the
14 lowest-income New Yorkers. Um, Fair Fares has
15 already proven its value. The next step is to ensure
16 that it reaches everyone who needs it, and the cost
17 of getting around the city is no longer a barrier to
18 stability and opportunity. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

20 BETH WILLIAMS: Thank you, Chair, for holding
21 this vital hearing today. Uh, my name is Beth
Williams, and I'm the New York State Policy Director
at Hunger Free America, a national direct service and
advocacy nonprofit group headquartered in Manhattan
with a field office in the Bronx. I'm honored today
to speak on behalf of the 1.2 to 1.4 million city

1 residents who now struggle against hunger, living in
2 food insecure homes. Our message is simple: New
3 Yorkers face massive hunger and affordability crises
4 citywide, made worse by the recent passage of HR-1,
5 which aims to systematically remove federal nutrition
6 program participants.

7 We need a massive response from the city that
8 addresses all areas of cost of living for low-income
9 New Yorkers. Every dollar that struggling New
10 Yorkers can save on transportation is one more dollar
11 they can spend on food. We've heard from multiple
12 New Yorkers today how they often are choosing between
13 transit and food costs.

14 Uh, first of all, we support fully expanding Fair
15 Fares, um, and providing, uh, free fares for
16 households that are under at least 150% of the
17 poverty level. Uh, we also support Intro 248, which
18 would require, um, the Commissioner of Social
19 Services to create a system to automatically enroll
20 individuals in city-created benefit programs.

21 Uh, economists often apply the term opportunity
cost to high and middle income people, meaning that
the time they spend on one task is time not available
to perform other potentially more valuable tasks.

1 Most social scientists and program administrators
2 rarely apply the concept of opportunity cost to low
3 income people, acting as if their time is essentially
4 worthless. The reality is, applying for benefits in
5 New York City, as we've heard today, is usually a
6 time-consuming, humiliating, and costly process.

7 We also support Intro 825, which would require
8 HRA to issue duplicate transfer benefit cards under
9 the Fair Fares program. Uh, we also support
10 Resolution 52, um, requiring anyone who's eligible
11 for Fair Fares or whose income is 200% of the federal
12 poverty level to receive a 50% discount on trips.
13 Lastly, we support Resolution 143, which would
14 require unlimited transfers within the 2-hour period.
15 Um, we hear from many folks we work with, um, at our
16 office in the Bronx, the stress of transferring, um,
17 and not having transfers between the subway and the
18 bus.

19 Um, and just once again, anything we can do,
20 including these measures, to greatly help cut
21 unnecessary costs for low-income New Yorkers is
important. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 160

3 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is Alia
4 Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New York City
5 Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters,
6 a statewide environmental organization. Thank you,
7 Speaker Menin, Chairs Abreu and Hudson, and Committee
8 Members for holding this hearing today and continuing
9 to prioritize expanding Fair Fares.

10 NYLCV stands with advocates calling for
11 increasing eligibility to 300% of the federal poverty
12 level. We appreciate that Speaker Menin, in the
13 Council's Preliminary Budget Response, called for an
14 expansion of the program to make subways and buses
15 fully free for households under at least 150% of the
16 FPL, so that the lowest-income New Yorkers can count
17 on accessing public transportation without economic
18 strain.

19 Additionally, we need more investment for
20 outreach and education in multiple languages to make
21 sure residents who qualify are using this program.
Equity and, uh, economic justice is key, but I do
wanna highlight that expanding Fair Fares is also a
climate solution. Dismantling barriers to public
transportation by making it more affordable

encourages the shift towards a more sustainable future.

When public equitable transit is accessible to all New Yorkers, New Yorkers who are most likely to choose the bus and subways, uh, over fossil fuel-based vehicles that helps lower emissions and improves air quality. Equitable transit is vital as we fight for environmental justice in New York City. Lower-income communities are disproportionately reliant on public transit, and they deserve the ability to ride without banking the brink— bank— uh, breaking the bank, as we've heard today.

Fair Fares is an opportunity for city leadership to ensure that the city is fully committed to investing in low-income residents and public transit. NYLCV also supports Intro 248. Uh, automatically enrolling individuals into programs like Fair Fares ensures that policies, uh, are, you know, I mean, making sure that people are enrolled.

Um, so I just want to wrap up and say that we look forward to working with the City Council, the Admin and advocates here today to ensure that Fare Fares is being, uh, expanded, um, and people are utilizing it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you all so much. We appreciate your testimony and your expertise. The next panel will include Norm Miller, Angel Rosas, Bishop Mitchell Taylor, Christopher Grief- Grief- excuse me? Deborah Grief and Judy Wang. And Khalija Hayslett.

Hi there. You can start on your right and move through.

KHALIJA HAYSLETT: Well, good afternoon, Chair Hudson and Council Members. My name is Khalija Hayslett. I'm not here today just as an executive director and member of the Transit Riders Council, or an advocate. I'm here as a single mom. I feel like I need to bring some practicality to this conversation. As I have assisted applicants applying for Fair Fares through the HRA website, what I've come to realize is people are not relying their daily transportation trips on a candidate's promise of free buses. They are thinking, I hope the eggs are on sale so I have enough money to feed my children and to pay to get to work. All this political red tape that limits eligible access is punitive. We need to change the culture of thinking that people who need assistance are entitled or lazy. As we take- as they

1 take the risk to fare evade just to get to work.

2 They are not criminals. We live in the greatest city
3 in the world, but it's expensive. Oh, only \$3 for
4 the fare? That \$3 is a copayment for an elderly
5 person's life-sustaining medication or how about the
6 \$3 for their meal at the senior center?

7 One OMNY fare can be a child not getting a candle
8 on their cupcake in their school? Why are we
9 punishing people? PCAC has been providing elected
10 officials with report after report for the need to
11 deepen affordability and creating a direct route to
12 eligibility through the Access HRA website and other
13 avenues. As I listened to the answers from HRA, the
14 passing the buck of responsibility to MTA was
15 exhausting. When they have the eligible information
16 to automatically enroll. When we talk about
17 enrollment in the brick-and-mortar locations, it is
18 still an applicant in front of a computer to apply.
19 Council Members that support and champion Fair Fares,
20 there has been no real reassessment on how to update
21 the app and make it easier for applicants.

As an advocate and a mentor, I look forward to
working together to sustain the program and expanding
it in the near future that doesn't just include

subways and buses, but also more readily data for
Access-A-Ride users. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Bishop
Taylor.

BISHOP MITCHELL TAYLOR: Good afternoon, Chair
Shaun Abreu, uh, Chair Crystal Hudson, Council Member
Sandy Nurse, and members of the Committee on
Transportation, Infrastructure, and General Welfare.
My name is Bishop Mitchell Taylor. I'm the
co-founder and CEO of East River Development
Alliance, better known as Urban Upbound, a nonprofit
organization that works to break cycles of poverty by
providing underserved and often overlooked New
Yorkers with the tools and resources needed to
achieve economic self-sufficiency.

First, I want to strongly commend Speaker Julie
Menin and the New York City Council for proposing in
their preliminary budget a major expansion of the
Fair Fares program to make buses and subways fully
free for households earning up to 150% of the federal
poverty level. Under Speaker Menin's leadership, the
Council has put on— put us on a path towards
achieving this long-fought goal. This proposal
recognizes a simple truth: transportation is not a

luxury in New York City. It's a necessity tied directly to economic opportunity.

At Urban Upbound, we work diligently with public housing residents and other low-income New Yorkers across the city to ensure that they have the tools and resources to achieve economic success. Thanks largely to the City Council's Food Access and Benefits Initiative, our benefit access counselors screen and certify and recertify New Yorkers with Fair Fares and other critical public benefits such as SNAP.

During fiscal year 2025 alone, nearly half of New Yorkers served by our benefits access counselors were enrolled in Fair Fares. That number is way too low. As a result, we see firsthand how reducing transit costs lowers barriers to employment, job retention, career advancement, and ultimately economic self-sufficiency.

Too often, hardworking New Yorkers are forced to choose between paying for transportation and paying for groceries, rent, or even childcare. We have seen clients struggle to get to interviews, job training programs, or even their current jobs because full fares are just too high.

1 So expanding Fair Fares is an investment in
2 workforce participation. And the rest of my
3 testimony is written and submitted, and I just want
4 to let all the Council Members know and the Committee
5 know that we fully support the expansion of the half
6 fare prices for New Yorkers earning between 150% and
7 300% of the federal poverty level. Thank you so much
8 for this time to speak.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

10 CHRISTOPHER GRIEF: Good afternoon. Just for the
11 record, my testimony was already emailed and it was
12 sent.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great.

14 CHRISTOPHER GRIEF: I sent it at least 4 times.
15 Uh, good afternoon. I'm Christopher D. Greif, as you
16 may see me at other titles, but I'm here as an
17 advocate for people with disabilities. Um, hmm,
18 since 2019, Fair Fares and HRA made promises they
19 were gonna upgrade. I have not seen them upgrade. I
20 have not seen them show respect. What I heard today
21 was lies.

I didn't like the way they lied, and they're all
saying, oh, go to Reduced Fare. They're forgetting
that seniors and their— I mean, people with

1 disabilities who have the low income who may cannot
2 get a chance to go to work, or if they are, they're
3 having a hard time getting Fair Fares. And remember,
4 they use Access-A-Ride. It's not fair for a senior
5 or a person who has a disability with a senior has
6 the right to go on to Fair Fares. But HRA always
7 forgets this is the 21st century, not the 18th
8 century.

8 They need to show the respect of every person.
9 Seniors who may be still living in NYCHA right now.
10 You know, they can be— they may don't want— they
11 can't get on the subway or bus, but they want to get
12 on Access-A-Ride. They pay \$3. It's not the MTA's
13 fault. If the MTA can do something, yeah, they can
14 do it, but the MTA is not here. It's HRA. Is the
15 city gonna take it seriously for seniors and people
16 with disabilities? The disabilities have the Fair
17 Fares, but once you become age 65, that's not fair to
18 them.

17 So I am asking the City Council and all elected
18 officials to please tell Fair Fares, keep the Fair
19 Fares for seniors because they also have the issue
20 too. And I fully support PCAC and TRC and my
21 colleague Khaliya Hayslett on this. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

3 DEBORAH GRIEF: Good afternoon. My name is
4 Deborah Grief. I'm not going to tell you every title
5 I have because I'll take up 2 minutes. I'm here
6 today for myself as a person with disabilities. I
7 became disabled much— uh, way before I turned 65, and
8 I did qualify for the MTA's Reduced Fare for persons
9 with disabilities. The day I turned 65, yes, my
10 reduced fare stayed as reduced fare, except 4 months
11 before I turned 65, they said, oh, you can go try for
12 Access-A-Ride to get reduced fare.

13 I said that wasn't worth it because it's only
14 gonna be 3, 4 months, because the day I turned 65, my
15 birthday present from HRA was I had to pay \$3 on
16 Access-A-Ride and I blame the former Mayor Bill de
17 Blasio, who didn't realize— people are under the
18 misconception that when we're 65 and we're using
19 Access-A-Ride for our disabilities, that we pay
20 reduced fare.

21 I've been told by people all over on— like, why
are you with your walker on the bus? Why aren't you
on Access-A-Ride? Okay, hand me \$3 and I'll go. It
is ridiculous. HRA told a lie to everybody today.
First of all, they do not— I've had HRA services.

1 Not once did they say, do you wanna— do you need to
2 use Fair Fares? Not once was I contacted. Their
3 app, Access HRA, is a joke. I don't know how many
4 times I've been kicked out or claiming I didn't
5 submit my paperwork. I'll tell you how I submit— um,
6 sorry— my SNAP and my Medicaid. I go in person. I
7 will not ever trust that app. The way it is now, it
8 doesn't work.

9 So please, please fix for us people with
10 disabilities who are seniors. The day we turn 65, we
11 still can pay \$1.50 on Access-A-Rite. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

13 JUDY WONG: Hello, my name is Judy Wong, and I'm
14 a daily rider of the Q46 and Q64 buses and the E and
15 F trains. I'm here today, like many others before
16 me, to share my story. I am a first-year PhD student
17 in molecular and cellular biology. Every day I take
18 the bus and subway to conduct complex biological
19 research, engineering bacterial strains and studying
20 how viruses interact with their hosts at the
21 molecular level, work that contributes to our
understanding of human disease and tech— and that
takes years of training to do.

1 And yet I am financially constrained in a way
2 most people would find surprising. PhD students in
3 my program are paid a stipend of around \$36,000 a
4 year. We are expected to live off this in a city
5 where a one-bedroom apartment can cost upwards of
6 \$4,000 a month. I work part-time jobs on top of my
7 research, including serving as a home health aide for
8 my elderly parents, and still it is not enough.

9 Under the current Fair Affairs Program, a
10 single-person household can earn no more than around
11 \$24,000 to qualify. By that measure, I make too
12 much, but \$36,000 in New York City is not enough.
13 The proposed expansion we're calling for would raise
14 that threshold to about \$48,000, and for the first
15 time, I would qualify for a half fare card.

16 That would change how I move through the city.
17 Right now, I think twice about every swipe. I track
18 how many trips I've taken, whether I can afford to
19 take the bus to work, or perhaps I should just walk
20 instead. Whether it's worth it to make an extra
21 trip.

With the half fare card, I wouldn't have to do
that math anymore. I could just ride. We are not
asking for charity. We are asking for a city that

recognizes the value of the people who live and work
and study here, who do essential, skilled, complex
work, and makes it possible for them to actually
stay.

I'm a proud member of Rise Alliance, and I urge
the City Council to expand Fair Fares. Let the
people who keep this city running afford to actually
live here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

ANGEL ROSAS: Hi, my name is Angel Rosas. Um,
I'm a current student at Bronx Community College and
part of the NYPRG program, New York Independent
Research Group and we advocate for our students to
receive— every CUNY student should receive a free
OMNY card to go to school. Because we shouldn't have
to decide, are we gonna go to school or are we gonna
eat today? And that is my basic thing because I've
seen personally a lot of people go hungry because
they can't get to school.

So many people that are so smart and can't get to
school 'cause they can't afford it. And I don't feel
like that, that's fair. We are the future of this
generation. So I wanna know what MTA's plan is for
CUNY students.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: We'll be sure to ask them
that question. Thank you.

ANGEL ROSAS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for your
testimony. Thank you all for your testimony. I'm
just confirming there's no Norm Miller here. I
called Norm Miller before. Okay, thank you.

The next panel is Rodney Deduce, Susie Kamara,
Hildalyn Colon, Juan Serrati, Nicholas Pearson, and
Allison King. Okay, thank you. And Javier Chavez.
We can start to your right with you. Thank you.

RODNEY DEDUS: Hi, my name is, uh, Rodney Dedus.
Uh, I'm a student at Queens College, uh, and I live
in, uh—

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Wait, I'm sorry, hold on one
second. Brian, did you say?

RODNEY DEDUS: Rodney. Oh, Rodney. Gotcha.
Okay, thank you. Um, I'm here, uh, today to expand
for the expansion of Fair Fares. Um, I, like many
New Yorkers, are— work for minimum wage, uh, which
means from one week to another, depending on how many
hours I have, uh, I can lose my Fair Fares. Uh, it's
happened to me before. It happened to me last year.
Um, and, um, you know, some weeks I work more hours,

1 and this creates instability in my, um, uh, in my
2 life more than, you know, more than financial
3 stability.

4 Um, a few months ago my bank account was empty in
5 the middle of the week. Um, I still had to get to
6 work. I had no money. Only choice I had was to
7 sneak into the back of the bus or jump the turnstile.
8 Um, and I, it, and I don't feel good doing that
9 because I'm on the edge of my seat hoping I don't get
10 caught by the Eagle Team. Um, and I just, I I don't
11 think that's fair. Like, how many other people in my
12 situation, like, are— could have gotten, you know, I,
13 I could have gotten arrested or fined just because I
14 was broke that week. Um, and I don't think poverty
15 should be criminalized.

16 Um, I remember during the pandemic when buses
17 were free and it just, like, I didn't have to ration
18 trips. It was like freedom. I remember I can just—
19 it was like an extension of walking. I just move
20 around the city without having to calculate my, uh,
21 er, like, you know, I mean, my trips. I can just go
anywhere I want. Um, so even when fares are reduced,
there is some psychological barrier that does remind
me that every trip is costing me. Um, and in the,

1 in, in- So I think it absolutely should be expanded
2 because I think \$24,000 is within the range of
3 minimum wage. The threshold shouldn't be there, it
4 should be much higher and at least, uh, for the
5 poorest New Yorkers, it should be free.

6 So, uh, thank you very much, and, uh, hmm.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

8 NICHOLAS PEARSON: I am but one voice in a chorus
9 of millions named Nicholas Pearson, a man caught in
10 the teeth of a system that demands my labor but
11 denies my passage. New Yorkers ride this system and
12 work through this system. I depend on this system
13 with my very breath, and yet I am weary. Yet I am
14 bone tired because I have done everything in the
15 world asked of me. I have labored and I have
16 contributed and I have shown up, and still the math
17 does not balance.

18 And when the math fails, the people do not simply
19 evaporate into the ether. No, they adjust, they
20 adapt, and they endure. They do what the holy law of
21 survival demands. So if you are going to brand
jumping the turnstile as a crime, then you better
look at the streets and realize you are calling a
whole city of God's children criminals. I journey

1 from Fordham to Staten Island, a pilgrimage of
2 subways and ferries and buses that take \$6 out of my
3 pocket before I can even say good morning at work,
4 and 6 more to get back to my bed. \$12 a day just to
5 be a man of responsibility. And you might think \$12
6 is a small thing, but \$12 is a mountain when it sits
7 on top of rent and groceries and the heat and the
8 kinfolk who need you.

9 It stacks and weighs until your back begins to
10 break. I work and I strive, yet they tell me I'm too
11 rich for Fair Fares, but too poor to live with
12 dignity, stuck in that hollow valley between help- a
13 helping hand and a hard place where so many New
14 Yorkers are currently gasping for air. We are
15 talking about a movement as survival, and when you
16 put a price on movement, you are manufacturing
17 conflict. And we know exactly where that hammer
18 falls. It falls on the Black and the Hispanic. It
19 falls on the Bronx and it falls on Brooklyn. The
20 same shoulders that have always carried the heaviest
21 load.

I remember when a Metro Card felt like a key to
the kingdom, but now the kingdom is gated and the
toll is tears. This is the hour of decision, not

tomorrow, but right now. Expand the mercy of these fares and make it automatic so a man does not have to beg for what should be his right.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Beautifully written. Thank you.

JUAN SERRATI: Good afternoon. My name is Juan Serrati and I hail from Bushwick. I'm a regular rider of the L train and B60 buses, and I'm here, as with others, to advocate for the expansion of Fair Fares. I really don't believe anyone in this city should be criminalized or stranded because they can't afford a fare.

I have a Fair Fares card currently and as someone that is living proof of the goodness of this program, I want other people to enjoy that benefit. I have a relative who I always think about who goes to school, and they were part of Fair Fares, but because they increased his salary a little bit, he can no longer afford a Fair Fares card. He no longer qualifies and that's unjust. And in hearing that the City Council is excited about this expansion, I, I hope a lot of consideration is given to doing something that brings justice to, to our communities and does what's fair. A lot of working people help the city run, and the

1 money that we save is money that we use to survive.
2 It's money that we are able to put back to the
3 economy. And I love that someone mentioned the
4 opportunity cost of working-class people because
5 there is a positive trade-off when we're not paying
6 so much into a fare. And I know this does very
7 little, but we need— we need partners within our City
8 Council, within our neighborhoods to advocate for
9 this. And I stand here with all of the members of
10 Riders Alliance and every advocate who sees a benefit
11 in expanding Fair Fares, and I'm calling all riders
12 to unite in this moment. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

12 JAVIER CHAVEZ: Hi, good afternoon. My name is
13 Javier Chavez. I'm a community advocate at Mixteca.
14 It's a nonprofit, uh, located in Sunset Park. We
15 have provided services to the Latinx and indigenous
16 community for over 25 years, and I'm here today to
17 share the story of a member of our community. Uh,
18 she has authorized me to share her testimony.

18 Hello, my name is Araceli Marmolejo Salinas. I
19 live in Queens. I take the train several times a
20 day. I am here to advocate for more accessible train
21 service and for the expansion of Fair Fares. No

1 person should be criminalized for not having enough
2 money to pay for transportation. I hold a reduced
3 fare OMNY Card. This is proof that affordable
4 transportation works. However, even with this card,
5 many of my neighbors remain excluded. We need to
6 expand this program so that more people can
7 experience the financial relief that I currently
8 enjoy.

9 I am a volunteer domestic worker for several
10 organizations here in New York, and I have worked
11 alongside more than 100, perhaps 150 fellow
12 volunteers. The majority of them do not have the
13 great blessing that I currently have in possessing
14 this reduced fare card. Yet given the soaring costs
15 of basic necessities such as groceries, rent, and
16 utilities, paying for transportation places a
17 tremendous financial burden on us. We are sometimes
18 forced to choose between purchasing a necessity such
19 as a medication and attending an organizing event.
20 We have even missed medical appointments because at
21 that moment we simply did not have the funds to pay
for transportation. I appeal to your noble arts
Council Members, you who are here to support our New
York community, this initiative will have a profound

1 impact on us, the workers who build the economy of
2 this beautiful city. Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you very much. Thank
4 you all for your testimony. And I just want to, um,
5 call Susie Kamara and Hildalyn Colon, just make sure
6 they're not here. Okay. Okay, thank you.

7 The next panel is Judith Prado, Dana Dennis,
8 Rebecca Ahn, Carolina Moreno, Ashley Chen, and Talia
9 Crawford. We can begin on my left, your right, and
go down the line. Thank you.

10 JUDITH PRADO: Good afternoon, Chair, members of
11 the committee. My name is Judith Prado. I am here
12 on behalf of La Colmena. I am the program's
13 director. La Colmena is a nonprofit community-based
14 organization that works with day laborers, domestic
15 workers, and other low-wage immigrants. Our mission
16 is to empower workers through education, organizing,
17 culture, and economic development.

18 For Staten Island, transportation is not
19 optional. Our borough relies heavily on buses, and
20 access to affordable transit is essential for workers
21 to get their jobs, support their families, and
participate in daily life. Expanding the eligibility
to 300% of federal poverty level would better reflect

1 the economic reality of New York City. It would
2 ensure that working-class and immigrant communities
3 are not excluded from the programs designed to
4 support economic stability. Many essential workers
5 in Staten Island, homecare workers, construction
6 workers, delivery workers, and others, earn about
7 200% of the federal poverty level, yet still struggle
8 to afford the basic necessities like rent, food,
9 child care, and transportation.

10 These are the very workers who keep our city
11 running, but they are often left out with- out of
12 critical support. At La Colmena, we see every day
13 how high transportation costs create real barriers.
14 When transit is unaffordable, it impacts their
15 ability to work, arrive on time, and maintain stable
16 employment. Affordable and reliable transportation
17 is not just about mobility. It is about economic
18 stability and dignity. We urge the New York City
19 Council and state legislature to expand eligibility
20 for these programs to 300% of the federal poverty
21 level so they truly meet the needs of the New
Yorkers. Thank you all for the opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your
testimony.

3 DANA DENNIS: Good afternoon. Uh, thank you,
4 Chair Hudson, for staying- I know we had Chair Abreu
5 here also and the Speaker, and I saw some other
6 Council Members as well and I'm thankful that you all
7 were able to host this hearing today. Um, I also
8 want to say shout out to the Speaker. It's been
9 great to, like, have her support on this but thank
10 you once again for last time we had this hearing,
11 asking the members of the various agencies to stay.
12 And once again, I feel like they have abandoned us.
13 If we look around, um, those who are most impacted
14 are still here, and I'm, like, looking for you know,
15 HRA and MTA, and it's- I'm glad they were here and
16 I'm glad for all the questions, but we really do need
17 them to be in the room to hear these stories. It
18 shouldn't just be on you all who are already, like,
19 fighting to get the best out of this program.

20 With that said, uh, my name is Dana Dennis. I'm
21 a senior organizer with Riders Alliance, um, and I
wanna start with something really personal and I
heard a few other people speak to this dynamic.
There was a time in my life when I was offered a
promotion at my job, and instead of feeling really
excited about it or happy, I felt extremely afraid.

1 Um, I went home and I really looked through the
2 numbers, and because I knew that small increase would
3 push me over the eligibility level for a lot of the
4 support that I was already receiving, and I'm in my
5 40s, I've been on SNAP, I've been on cash assistance,
6 I've been on everything that has been out here most
7 of my life.

8 Um, and it was really terrifying for me to be
9 over that level and no longer qualify for a lot of
10 the help that I had been receiving at that time. And
11 it really just does need to be a stronger, um,
12 transition to get folks out of these programs. It's
13 not that folks don't wanna aspire to more, but that
14 transition sometimes feels like a cliff that just
15 drops you. And I remember the difference from when I
16 didn't make enough to get, um, SNAP anymore and then
17 it was like, you're on your own. Um, but I had to
18 ask myself, right, is moving forward actually going
19 to set me back? And the reality is that that happens
20 for thousands of New Yorkers.

21 Oh, and I'm at time. I'll just say quickly, um,
you all have already heard the numbers. Fair Fares
is capped, as we know, at 150% in the federal poverty
line and that means individuals who are right around

1 just over \$23,000 a year. And the truth is, people
2 are making more and they're struggling every single
3 day. And I just wanted to uplift again the need for
4 the 300% and for those folks and we know those are
5 home health aid workers, store clerks, Amazon stock,
6 um, workers, as we've heard, restaurant workers, and
7 various other New Yorkers. And there's just such a
8 need and I'm thankful for today because it's been
9 years coming of slow increments of this program being
increased.

10 And finally, it feels like things are aligning
11 where the program can be its robust full self, and
12 hopefully we can get it pushed out where people who
need it hear about it. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

14 CAROLINA MORENO: Good afternoon. My name is
15 Carolina Moreno, and I am a community advocate at
16 Mixteca. I am here today to share a community
member's testimony.

17 Hello, my name is Lisette Rincon, and I live in
18 Brooklyn. I take the subway and the bus every day,
19 and I am here every day to advocate for more
20 accessible transportation services and for expansion
21 of Fair Fares. No one should be criminalized or left

1 behind or unable to get around simply because they do
2 not have enough money to pay the fare. I hold a Fair
3 Fare OMNY Card and it has been truly an enormous help
4 to me. I am a mother, I am a housewife, and I am
5 constantly on the move to fulfill my personal
6 professional responsibilities.

7 Currently, I do not earn any income of, um, of my
8 own, so this card is the only way I can get around in
9 the city on a daily bus. I save approxima-
10 approximately \$60 a month, and that money has made a
11 huge difference in our household. We use it to buy
12 groceries, to pay utilities and other bills, or cover
13 basic needs of the household, or baby, baby
14 necessities.

15 The City Council must understand that
16 transportation costs are just one part of a much
17 larger economic crisis. Many of our families are
18 struggling every day against higher rent costs,
19 rising food prices, and high cost of basic utilities
20 and child care. That's why we need the city to
21 continue protecting programs like Fair Fares.
Transportation, housing, and food must be accessible
rides for all of us, not a privilege. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

3 ASHLEY CHEN: Thank you, Chair Hudson, Chair
4 Abreu, and members of the City Council for holding
5 this hearing today and continuing to prioritize
6 expanding the Fair Fares program that would improve
7 equitable access to affordable transit for hundreds
8 of thousands of New Yorkers.

9 My name is Ashley Chen. I'm the policy and
10 research manager at the Chinese American Planning
11 Council, CPC. CPC is the largest Asian American
12 social service organization in the country, providing
13 vital resources to more than 80,000 people each year
14 through more than 50 programs, from after-school
15 programs and child care to senior services and
16 workforce development at over 30 sites across
17 Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens.

18 In one of the wealthiest cities in the world, a
19 \$3 fare is not a small expense. It's a barrier. As
20 the cost of living continues to climb, even the basic
21 act of getting around the city has become a daily
financial calculation for too many New Yorkers. For
low-income and working-class residents, including the
communities we serve, access to work, school, or
medical care often comes down to impossible
trade-offs. I know this firsthand. During my

1 undergrad- undergraduate studies here in New York
2 City, there were days when my peers and I had to
3 calculate dollar by dollar what we could afford,
4 whether we could take the subway, or whether that
5 meant sacrificing something essential like food or
6 textbooks. These are not isolated moments. They are
7 constant compounding pressures that create stress,
8 restrict mobility, and limit opportunity.

9 No one should have to ration their movement in a
10 city that depends on their labor, their presence, and
11 their civic participation. Fair Fares is one of the
12 most effective tools that we have to address this
13 inequity. In fact, about 130 of our community
14 members are currently enrolled in the program. It
15 has opened pathways to employment, education, and
16 stability. Yet today, it reaches only a fraction of
17 those who need it most, largely because eligibility
18 is too limited. To truly meet the scale of need, the
19 city must expand Fair Fares eligibility to households
20 earning up to 300% of the federal poverty line.

21 In a city as expensive as ours, families well
22 above the current threshold still struggle to afford
23 basic transportation. Expanding eligibility would
24 recognize the realities of the modern cost of living

1 and ensure that more working New Yorkers are not left
2 behind. At a time when affordability is a defining
3 challenge and the criminalization of low-income and
4 communities of color is more prevalent than ever, we
5 need to fully fund and expand Fair Fares, including
6 raising eligibility 300% of the federal poverty
7 level.

8 We urge the City Council to fully invest in this
9 program, um, and thank you for your time.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

11 TALIA CRAWFORD: Good afternoon. My name is
12 Talia Crawford. I'm the advocacy and organizing
13 manager at Tri-State Transportation Campaign. Thank
14 you for holding this joint hearing and for the
15 opportunity to comment, uh, and support the expansion
16 of New York City Fair Fares program. Uh,
17 affordability is top of mind for everyone right now,
18 and the rising cost of nearly everything is putting
19 pressure on households.

20 It's more important now than ever to take
21 meaningful steps to keep New York City affordable for
all. We urge the City Council to expand the program
even further by introducing half-price fares to
residents earning up to 300% below the federal

1 poverty line. This new threshold is a direct
2 investment in human dignity and a lifeline for New
3 Yorkers who earn too much to qualify for aid, but too
4 little to keep up with the rising cost of the
5 survival in the city.

6 It would extend relief, put money back into
7 pockets in order to afford the essentials, and regain
8 some financial security. Additionally, we need
9 automatic enrollment to reduce barriers and get more
10 New Yorkers the benefits they deserve. We need to
11 ensure that these accessible and affordable programs
12 are easier and not harder to access. We appreciate
13 Chair Hudson's leadership in advancing this important
14 issue through her legislation.

15 All of this can complement Mayor Mamdani's push
16 for free bus service by expanding access to the
17 subway system. In 2025, 65% of Fair Fare swipes were
18 on the subway, double the rate of buses. Fair Fares
19 expands network access throughout the entire system.
20 Thank you again, and looking forward to the continued
21 work ahead.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Thank
you all for your testimony. I just want to make sure
that Rebecca Ahn is not here. Okay. Thank you.

Okay. The next panel will be Adrian Cacho and
Christopher Leon Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Uh, yeah, hello, my
name is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thank you, Chair
Hudson for doing this hearing. Um, I'm calling on
the City Council to call for the MTA to remove the
household, um, household requirement, uh, provision
within the MTA Fair Fares program. Um, I wanna know
why that these so-called nonprofits such as Riders
Alliance had not said not one thing about telling the
MTA to remove the household requirements that really
hinders a lot of families. That household
requirement, um, really holds, like, really makes it
where the families that really need those, um, Fair
Fares can't even get the, um, can't even get the Fair
Fares. Because you make, if you make a certain
amount of money and you have 4 people in your house,
you can't even get the— you're not eligible for the
program.

And I'm gonna say this right now, that a lot of
people said that we need, we need to expand the Fair
Fares but the thing is that the Mayor's office, they
don't have— they, they say they don't have the money,
but they have the money. They don't want to because

1 we have a mayor that's scared of the governor, and we
2 have a mayor that's scared of Janet Lieber. But I'm
3 gonna say this right now, I said it's the best plum
4 outside, and I'm gonna say this right now on the
5 record, that the, um, New York City Council need to
6 make-- need to call the mayor's office to remove the
7 NYPD from helping out the Eagle Team when it comes to
8 fare evasion in one of the most-- in some of the most
9 impoverished districts in New York City, such as the
10 South Bronx, the BX12, and such as the B46, which is
11 in, um, Crown Heights, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the
12 BA2 bus, which covers Canarsie and, um, Coney Island.

13 But the Riders' Alliance is not gonna say
14 anything about that. I told them, I said, you know
15 why? Because they're so captive to, to, to General
16 Lieber, they're so scared of losing that access to
17 General Lieber. That's all they care about.

18 Um, and I'm gonna say this right now, that, uh,
19 going forward, like I said, we could-- I say we need
20 to make the buses faster and free. The only way-- the
21 mayor had the power to do it. He just don't want to
do it. He's just scared of doing it. He's scared of
MTA TWU, and he's scared of the MTA, um, bosses, Jim
Lieber. I'm not scared. I'm not scared of them.

1 I'm getting in their face, telling them in their face
2 what they need to— I'll tell them about themselves.
3 But like I said, going forward, like I said, the City
4 Council, what they need to do is make— introduce a
5 bill to bar the NYPD from helping out MTA Eagle Team
6 for enforcing fare evasion. I think that needs to go
7 forward with the City Council if they really care
8 about the poor in those districts, because that's a
9 big hinderer with the people over there. Thank you
10 so much. Enjoy your day.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

11 ADRIAN CACHO: Good afternoon, everyone. So my
12 name is Adrian Cacho, senior organizer at Open Plans,
13 where we promote people-first street culture that
14 prioritizes community, active mobility, and
15 connection. Thank you to Speaker Menin, Chair
16 Hudson, Chair Abreu, and all the committee members
17 for holding this hearing today and for continuing to
18 prioritize expanding this program to improve
19 equitable access to affordable transit for hundreds
20 of thousands of New Yorkers.

21 So I was at the rally earlier, and we heard
stories from folks about their experiences with the
Fair Fares program and how important it is to them.

1 And we've heard stories just now from those— from
2 these same folks. And it should be clear by now how
3 instrumental this program is not just in making
4 transit affordable, but also in expanding access to
5 job opportunities and education across the city. If
6 done right, the Fair Fares program can also deliver
7 faster commutes to millions of subway, bus,
8 paratransit, and commuter railroad riders in New York
9 City right now, transforming how people get around.
10 A lot of what we hear from our communities is not
11 just about the lack of investment in our public
12 spaces but also about how hard it can be to get to
13 them. And the standard fare can add up quickly,
14 especially for low-income families, older adults, and
15 essential workers who are already facing high costs
16 of living.

15 The overlap between affordable transit and safer
16 streets shows up in countless ways across the city.
17 Most New Yorkers rely on public transit to get
18 around, and we must maintain this accessibility,
19 which in turn keeps our streets less congested and
20 easier to navigate. This is why we must expand the
21 Fair Fares program, expand the eligibility up to 300%
of the federal poverty level, and reduce

3 administrative burdens so that more New Yorkers can
4 utilize this program. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your
6 testimony. We will now move to virtual testimony.
7 Please wait for your name to be called to testify,
8 and please select unmute when prompted. Charlton
9 D'Souza.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

11 CHARLTON D'SOUZA: Good afternoon, everyone. My
12 name is Charlton D'Souza. I'm the president of
13 Passengers United. We're a 501 C3 nonprofit, and we
14 support, uh, all the proposals for Fair Fares but I
15 want to bring some issues. So a lot of minimum wage
16 earners, they make like close to \$40,000 a year, and
17 they-- the, that threshold should be \$40,000 to
18 qualify for Fair Fares up to that amount. Because
19 right now a lot of people are struggling in New York
20 City. They cannot afford mass transit, and the MTA
21 lied to you guys. So a lot of the empty kiosks in
the customer service centers are iPads that can
actually be tampered with. They're in front of the
public, and most of them are broken at stations.

So a lot of times the station agents cannot help
people qualify for Fair Fares. Um, I also want to,

1 uh, point out that I could not find information on
2 when an enrollment term starts and ends, or what the
3 year is, on the, uh, Fair Fares website. And also,
4 like, they need to get rid of the household income
5 criteria for Fair Fares. That is ridiculous. Um,
6 and, you know, the station agents are not properly
7 trained on Fair Fares at customer service centers.
8 But I will say this: why is it that the MTA cannot
9 allow Fair Fares to come inside the, uh, cab summons
10 office in Brooklyn where people have to— you know,
11 when they get arrested or when they get a citation
12 for fare evasion, they should be a Fair Fares officer
13 there so people can just apply for Fair Fares there
14 as well. Because then you would get a lot of the
15 people who are struggling with poverty, um, and that
16 is a big issue.

17 And then the other issue that I want to raise is
18 I want to thank David Jones from Community Service
19 Society. He is an MTA board member, and he was the
20 one who really got Fair Fares going, um, and we at
21 Passengers United, we're a nonprofit. Fair Fares has
never reached out to us.—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time expired.

CHARLTON D'SOUZA: Nothing. Yeah, alright, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Iman Rahmani-Doster.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

IMAN RAHMANI-DOSTER: Hi, thank you so much. My name is Iman Rahmani-Doster, and I'm a senior community organizer for the Disability Justice Program for New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. And, uh, thank you so much for allowing me to uh, present my testimony today.

Public transportation is a lifeline for New Yorkers with disabilities. Many disabled New Yorkers are on fixed incomes, making this lifeline difficult to afford, which is why Fair Fares is vitally important. People may think \$3 isn't a lot of money, but if they only receive \$900 a month in benefits and have a ton of other expenses and no support, \$3 can be a lot. I remember being on a fixed income and how not only that there were times that I had to scrape together pennies to use Access-A-Ride back when it was \$2.25, but I'd also have to skip vital appointments and meetings because I did not always have those pennies to scrape together.

When the city initially introduced Fair Fares, it was not available to Access-A-Ride users. New York Lawyers for the Public Interest advocated for and secured the extension of the discount program for Access-A-Ride but the benefits, um, that Fair Fares provides to Access-A-Ride is still too limited, as it only covers low-income individuals under 65, as has been mentioned earlier.

Accordingly, we call on the city to remove the age cap from the Fair Fares program so that Access-A-Ride users over the age of 65 can qualify. Further, not only should this hearing have, uh, captions available on the Zoom option but also according to what I heard a couple— at a couple of other town halls that included disabled New Yorkers, they still don't even know about Fair Fares.

I also appreciate the Council Members bringing up how nasty some of the HRA staff have been. Um, but the HRA folks didn't respond to that, and so I'm hoping that that can also be worked on because I think that some people don't wanna be disrespected and dehumanized in some of these offices, like I was.

Additionally, Fair Fares cannot be used on the city's express buses, which cost—

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 197

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time expired.

4 IMAN RAHMANI-DOSTER: Thank you so much.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Eric
6 McClure.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

8 ERIC MCCLURE: Thank you, Chair Hudson. I
9 appreciate you and Chair Abreu for holding this
10 hearing today. My name is Eric McClure. I am the
11 executive director of StreetsPAC. We join transit
12 riders and our many colleagues in advocacy, including
13 Riders Alliance and the Permanent Citizens Advisory
14 Committee, today in calling for the expansion of the
15 Fair Fares program to 300% of the federal poverty
16 level, fully free transit for families earning less
17 than 150% of the FPL, the inclusion in the program of
18 express buses and the commuter railroads, automatic
19 enrollment of qualified participants, and the closing
20 of loopholes for seniors and disabled riders.

21 While we're very supportive of Mayor Mamdani's
efforts to make the city buses fast and free, it's
clear that it will take time to fully realize the
elimination of bus fares. And the fact is that about
two-thirds of Fair Fares use is on the subways.

3 While a \$3 transit fare may seem trivial to some,
4 the cost to commute regularly to work or to make
5 other necessary trips adds up quickly. The Community
6 Service Society reports that 1 in 5 New Yorkers
7 struggle to pay transit fares. Working-class New
8 Yorkers are too often forced to choose between paying
9 for a bus or subway ride or paying for a meal or, uh,
10 another vital expense. And the expansion of the Fair
11 Fares program as outlined will save more than 2
12 million New Yorkers nearly \$1,000 a year.

13 We strongly support Committee on General Welfare
14 Chair Hudson's Intro 248, which would require
15 creation of a system to automatically enroll
16 eligible, uh, people in city-operated benefits like
17 Fair Fares. Automatic enrollment would increase
18 participation in the Fair Fares program
19 significantly, eliminating the need to complete a
20 laborious enrollment process that creates an
21 unnecessary barrier to usage.

22 We're also highly supportive of expanding Fair
23 Fares coverage to the MTA's express buses and
24 commuter railroads, which would be especially helpful
25 to people who live in parts of the city that aren't
26 well served or served at all by the subway system.

1 Similarly, we support the closing of program
2 loopholes like the age cutoff for Access-A-Ride,
3 which forces qualified participants to start paying
4 the full fare when they turn 65. We're well aware of
5 the fiscal headwinds the city faces today, but a
6 relatively modest investment in a robustly expanded
7 Fair Fares program will vastly improve the lives of
8 the most impoverished New Yorkers, and unlocking
9 barriers to mobility will benefit everyone in New
10 York City.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time expired.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. I, I
13 clocked your speed reading there Eric, thank you.
14 Uh, Ramona Ferreira.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 RAMONA FERREIRA: Good afternoon. Um, Fair Fares
17 is a lifeline and equalizer for New Yorkers. Uh, as,
18 like, myself, uh, this program makes it possible for
19 me to engage the city fully. Without it, I would not
20 access to medical, social, and cultural activities.
21 It would also limit my civic participation. I am a
tenant organizer within public housing and attend
NYCHA developments, um, for meetings where they are

1 facing privatization. This is something that is
2 allowed under public housing rights and encouraged.
3 Each meeting, I meet tenants that have heard about
4 the harms caused by privatization of public housing
5 only through other tenants.

6 NYCHA hides from tenants the statistics on
7 eviction and displacement, increases in rent, and
8 doesn't tell them how their federally protected
9 rights and benefits under the PAC program, um, would
actually harm them.

10 So instead, uh, we are promised new appliances
11 and flooring, but for those of us trying to save
12 public housing, we know better and we show up, um,
13 while not getting paid to do so. So this mayor
14 actually wants to not only stop the expansion of Fair
15 Fares, but also wants to privatize public housing
16 further by allocating \$662 million towards PAC. He's
17 also supporting the demolition of 18 buildings in
18 Chelsea, and tenants will have to continue to fight
19 against him and his budget and will continue to
20 depend on public transportation to do so, all while
21 not getting paid to do this work.

So I urge the Council to shift all funding away
from privatization of public housing and towards

Section 9 comprehensive modernization, and we urge you to automatically enroll folks in Fair Fares and expand the program.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. Thank you to everyone who's testified. If there's anyone present in the room or on Zoom that has not had the opportunity to testify, please raise your hand. Are you Norm Miller? Okay, great. We can call you up to the dais. Apologies, I called you twice before, but I don't think you were in the room. Okay, no problem. You're on.

NORM MILLER: Alright, good afternoon, Transportation Committee. My name is Norm Miller. I am a student at CUNY's New York City College of Technology, which is City Tech, which is right on the opposite side of the Brooklyn Bridge, located in downtown Brooklyn. I am also, um, part of the New York Public Interest Research Group, also known as NYPIRG. I'm also on the student board of directors.

Um, I just wanna say that I am a full-time undergraduate, and being a full-time undergrad comes with a lot of financial burden, as I have to struggle between paying for transportation, \$24 a week, and paying for tuition every semester. Having a— sorry.

1 Having a program such as Fair Fares can help
2 alleviate that burden. It can give opportunities for
3 jobs and education and a better quality of life.
4 People ages— people between 16 and 64 years of age
5 qualify for Fair Fares, but only under \$375,000
6 people are enrolled.

7 Transit costs should never be a blockade for
8 either— for education or, or opportunities. I'm
9 also— I'm calling on the expansion of Fair Fares so
10 that more low-income and more working-class New
11 Yorkers can get 50% discounts on buses, subways,
12 paratransits, and the MTA's two commuter railroad
13 systems, the Long Island Railroad and Metro North.
14 Thank you for your time.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your
16 testimony.

17 NORM MILLER: You're welcome.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, is there anyone else
19 on Zoom that would like to testify? If so, please
20 use the raise hand function.

21 Seeing no one else, I'd like to note that written
testimony, which will be reviewed in full by
committee staff, may be submitted, uh, to the record
up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by

1 emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. I wanna
2 thank everyone again for their testimony today. I'd
3 like to thank, uh, Chair Abreu and Speaker Menin for
4 partnering with me on this hearing. I think it's
5 incredibly important that we heard the testimony that
6 we heard from folks today, specifically those who
7 have been criminalized for poverty, uh, where, uh,
8 Fair Fares, um, card or being in the Fair Fares
9 program would have prevented something like that from
happening.

10 And so, uh, I'd also like to thank the
11 Administration for coming out, and with that, I will
12 adjourn today's hearing. Thank you.
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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 30, 2026