

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL
WELFARE

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Thursday, July 13, 2023
Start: 10:38 a.m.
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Tiffany Cabán
Crystal Hudson
Linda Lee
Chi A. Ossé
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams

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

Catherine Trapani
Executive Director
Homeless Services United

Chris Mann
Director of Policy and Advocacy
Women In Need, Inc.

Oksana Mironova
Senior Policy Analyst
Community Service Society of New York

Robert Desir
Staff Attorney
Civil Law Reform Unit
Legal Aid Society

Murad Awawdeh
Executive Director
New York Immigration Coalition

Deborah Berkman
Founder
Shelter Advocacy Initiative

Jamie Pilovich
Executive Director
New York State Coalition
for Homeless Youth

Nicole McVinua
Director of Policy
Urban Pathways

Patrick Boyle
Senior Director
New York Office
Enterprise Community Partners

Ethel Brown
Safety Net Activists

Scott Andrew Hutchins
VOCAL and Neighbors Together

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning ladies and
3 gentlemen, and welcome to today's New York City
4 Council hearing for the Committee on General Welfare.
5 At this time we ask that you silence cell phones and
6 electronic devices to minimize disruptions throughout
7 the hearing. We thank you for your cooperation we
8 are ready to begin.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Morning. Can everybody hear
10 me? Can everybody hear me? Can you hear me now?

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We're hearing you,
12 Councilmember.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Great. Thank you so
14 much. My apologies for not being there this morning.
15 But I am currently in Puerto Rico. My grandmother
16 is-- is not doing very well. So I want to apologize,
17 because today's a really big day and I want to
18 recognize. But this hearing is started.

19 So good morning everyone and welcome to today's
20 hearing. My name is Diana Ayala and I am the Deputy
21 Speaker of the New York City Council, and the Chair
22 of the General Welfare Committee. Today our
23 committee will be voting to override the mayor's veto
24 of four bills, Introduction number Intro 878A, which
25 I have sponsored, Intro number 893A sponsored by

2 Councilmember Pierina Sanchez, Intro number 894A,
3 sponsored by Councilmember Sanchez, and Intro number
4 229A, sponsored by Councilmember Tiffany Cabán. We
5 will also consider whether to recommend that veto
6 messages M-0163-2023, M-0164-2023, M-0165-2023, and
7 M-0166-2023 be filed.

8 We heard three of these bills, Intro 879, 893,
9 and 894 in January of this year, and heard Intro 229
10 last September. The bills all passed in our
11 Committee with unanimous vote in May and the full
12 Council voted to pass the bills later this month with
13 a clear veto proof majority.

14 This Council recognizes that we are in a homeless
15 and housing crisis. Last month we hit a record with
16 more than 100,000 people in our city's shelter
17 system. These are numbers-- These are numbers that
18 we have never seen before. The crisis is only going
19 to get worse if we don't do something about it. This
20 is one of the single biggest challenges New York City
21 has had to grapple with in recent years. Rents are
22 through the roof, evictions are on the rise, and tens
23 of thousands of asylum seekers are arriving at our
24 door, people that we must embrace and welcome.

2 When we passed these bills in May, we did so
3 because we recognized that the expanding eligibility
4 for CityFHEPS Rental Assistance Program was one
5 logical step to help prevent and reduce homelessness
6 in New York City. The program can support thousands
7 of people to avoid being evicted, and it can also
8 help those who are exiting homelessness to secure
9 permanent housing.

10 It should be noted that 78% of those who were
11 exiting shelter in fiscal year 2022 used a CityFHEPS
12 voucher to do so. Among the bills in the in the
13 package, my bill Intro 878 ends the Giuliani-era 90-
14 day rule, an arbitrary policy that required clients
15 to remain in the Department of Homeless Service
16 shelter for 90 days before becoming eligible for
17 CityFHEPS. There's also-- There's absolutely no
18 reason that someone should have to wait three months
19 in the shelter system before being eligible for a
20 CityFHEPS voucher.

21 Providing a New Yorker with a voucher on the
22 front end would reduce shelter stays, free up
23 capacity in a system that is already overburdened,
24 and would result in significant cost savings. We
25 also know that there are significant economic and

2 societal benefits when people have permanent housing
3 and don't languish in homeless shelters.

4 To say the least, the Mayor's veto is short-
5 sighted. We need to think in the long term about
6 solutions to help New Yorkers exit and avoid
7 homelessness. This is one of the ways that we are
8 going to meaningfully shift the city's homelessness
9 and housing crisis. There were so many people who
10 played an instrumental role in helping us to get--
11 see this legislation to the finish line, and who
12 continue to advocate as the Mayor pushes his
13 opposition.

14 Today, I want to thank all of the advocates and
15 impacted individuals who informed and helped us to
16 shape this legislation. We'll be hearing from some
17 of these advocates today. At this time, I'd like to
18 acknowledge-- Well, at this time, I want to turn it
19 over to [inaudible] to acknowledge the colleagues in
20 the room because I cannot. I don't have access to
21 all of you.

22 COUNSEL: And I will actually-- Thank you Deputy
23 Speaker Ayala, and I will actually turn it over to
24 Councilmember Stevens to acknowledge the
25 Councilmembers that are here with us.

2 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Good morning. I would
3 like to acknowledge Councilmember Williams,
4 Councilmember Lee, Councilmember Ung, Councilmember
5 Ossé, Councilmember Restler, online Councilmember
6 Ayala, Councilmember Hudson, and Councilmember Riley.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. At this time, I would
8 also like to thank the committee staff who work to
9 prepare this hearing and veto override, Aminta
10 Kilawan, Senior Legislative Counsel, David Romero,
11 Legislative Counsel, Julia Haramis, unit head, and
12 finally my staff, Elsie Encarnacion, Chief of Staff.

13 Thank you, and I would like to turn it over to
14 our Senior Counsel, Aminta Kilawan, to call up
15 various advocates to testify before we do the roll
16 call for this hearing.

17 COUNSEL: Good morning, everyone. My name is
18 Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel to the Committee on
19 General Welfare of the New York City Council. I'm
20 going to be moderating today's hearing and calling on
21 panelists to testify. We are going to have two
22 panelists testify today before we do the roll call
23 for the vote, and those two panelists will be
24 Catherine Trapani and Chris Mann. And if you all can

2 also be sure to complete a witness slip for our
3 records.

4 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: I would like to also
5 acknowledge Councilmember Cabán.

6 COUNSEL: And just as a reminder, members of the
7 public will have two minutes to testify today. Two
8 minutes

9 You may begin.

10 MS. TRAPANI: Thank you so much everybody. My
11 name is Catherine Trapani. I'm the Executive
12 Director at Homeless Services United a coalition of
13 mission-driven, nonprofit service providers dedicated
14 to addressing and ending homelessness. I want to
15 sincerely thank Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala,
16 Councilmembers Sanchez and Cabán, for their steadfast
17 leadership on this package of legislation, and also
18 to thank the members of the General Welfare Committee
19 and the staff for allowing me to testify today.

20 On behalf of Homeless Services united and all of
21 our member programs, thank you. Reforming CityFHEPS
22 to ensure that everyone experiencing homelessness has
23 access to a voucher has been a long standing goal of
24 our coalition. Similarly, we long sought ways to
25 upstream access to preventive assistance and make

2 vouchers more usable. At a time when homelessness
3 and evictions are at all time highs in New York, the
4 CityFHEPS bills are a win-win for the city, saving it
5 up to \$730 million per year, will make our safety net
6 more comprehensive, compassionate, and humane.

7 The simple fact is that everyone needs a home.
8 It shouldn't matter which shelter system best meets
9 your emergency needs, how many hours you do or don't
10 work, whether you receive disability payments or
11 unemployment, or if you struggle in the margins
12 between public assistance eligibility and being able
13 to afford fair market rent. Everyone who is homeless
14 or at imminent risk of displacement should receive
15 the help that they need to get stable housing.

16 Thank you to the Council for your steadfast
17 commitment to these fiscally responsible bills which
18 will cut through needless city bureaucracy and
19 connect folks to stable housing.

20 Over the years the city has created a maze of
21 confusing requirements limiting who can get access to
22 vouchers. The administration will tell you this is
23 because they need to target aid and save city
24 resources, but the truth is these rules only serve to
25 prolong shelter stays and needlessly plunge people

2 into a cycle of instability and homelessness, which
3 actually costs the city even more money in emergency
4 services and untold human costs.

5 The rate of homelessness in New York City has
6 never been this high, the need to quickly procure so
7 much new shelter so quickly has driven the cost of
8 emergency services through the roof. Hotels are
9 expensive, and we're spending a fortune on them when
10 we could be focusing on providing long-term housing
11 options for those who have been languishing in this
12 system for years, ineligible for CityFHEPS due to
13 restrictive work, shelter system, and income
14 requirements.

15 With the Council's override the Mayor's veto that
16 can end. Your actions today deliver a message that
17 this Council is putting struggling New Yorkers first.
18 We thank you for taking the long view and making the
19 sound decision to invest in the people and
20 communities that makes York City a great place to
21 live, offering pathways and stability for all. Thank
22 you for the opportunity to testify.

23 COUNSEL: Thank you. Chris, you can begin.

24 Good morning. And thank you so much for the
25 opportunity to testify to chair Ayala and the members

2 of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for this
3 opportunity and for your courageous leadership on
4 expanding access to housing. My name is Chris Mann.
5 I'm the Director of Policy and Advocacy at WIN, the
6 nation's largest provider of shelter and services to
7 families with children experiencing homelessness. We
8 operate 14 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing
9 units across the five boroughs. Currently, 6200
10 people call WIN home every night, including
11 approximately 3500 children.

12 Unfortunately, the thousands of families in WIN
13 shelters are just a fraction of the more than 100,000
14 people in New York City shelters, including more than
15 30,000 children.

16 The current homelessness crisis far surpasses
17 anything that the city has ever seen. And we applaud
18 the City Council for taking the bold action necessary
19 to meet the moment, passing the CityFHEPS package
20 including Intros 878, 893, 894, and 229. This
21 package of bills represents a paradigm shift away
22 from just managing to actually solving this crisis.

23 Although we're disappointed in the Mayor's
24 misguided veto of the legislation, we're proud to

2 have a City Council that's willing to stand up for
3 what's right and override it.

4 Housing is a human right, and this package of
5 bills will bring New York City far closer to that
6 ideal than anywhere else in the country. We know
7 that CityFHEPS works, and expanding access to the
8 voucher means less people experiencing the trauma of
9 homelessness.

10 In the last year, WIN's trained program staff
11 helped move nearly 900 families into permanent
12 housing, and the CityFHEPS voucher was key to that
13 success. By overriding the mayor's veto, the council
14 is ensuring that approximately 92,000 New Yorkers
15 will avoid homelessness altogether, and thousands
16 more will be able to move out of shelter for good.

17 In addition to being the right thing to do, this
18 package of bills will save the city millions of
19 dollars per year. According to WIN's analysis, the
20 costs in New York City for shelter, medical care
21 juvenile justice involvement education, Child Welfare
22 Association associated with homelessness are far
23 higher than the costs of providing permanent housing
24 through CityFHEPS. We estimate that the homeless
25 prevention with CityFHEPS will result in a net

2 savings of more than \$730 million per year.

3 Overriding the Mayor's veto will spare thousands of
4 people the trauma of homelessness, while saving the
5 city's millions of dollars annually. It's the right
6 thing to do from a moral perspective and also sound
7 economic policy.

8 Thank you for your leadership, for your courage,
9 and for listening and taking action on behalf of
10 those whose voices are rarely heard. This is a
11 monumental day in the fight to end homelessness, and
12 we're proud to be here with you as you make history.
13 Thank you.

14 COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel for your
15 testimony.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

17 COUNSEL: Over now to the Deputy Speaker Ayala.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Aminta. I would
19 like now-- I will now like to turn it over to the
20 clerk to do the roll call for this vote.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK: One moment Madam Chair

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Making sure that you guys can
23 still hear me?

24 COUNSEL: Yes we can still hear you Deputy
25 Speaker.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright thank you.

3 COUNSEL: We're going to shift momentarily and
4 call up two other public-- members of the public to
5 testify for two minutes. Calling up Oksana Mironova
6 and Robert Desir.

7 Also going to call on Murad Awawdeh.

8 Right You may begin.

9 MS. MIRONOVA: Can you hear me? Thank you so
10 much to the New York City Committee of General
11 Welfare for holding a hearing of the-- on the four
12 CityFHEPS bills vetoed by the Mayor on June 23rd.

13 My name is Oksana Mironova, and I'm a Senior
14 Policy Analyst at the Community Service Society of
15 New York. And our research has repeatedly shown that
16 these four bills are a smart investment for New York
17 City and its people. Fewer evictions and shorter
18 shelter stays improve the life for everyone. That is
19 why we call on the Council to override the Mayor's
20 veto and ensure that the bills are implemented into
21 law with care and adequate funding.

22 Our recent analysis has shown that the cost of
23 expanding CityFHEPS vouchers to low-income households
24 facing eviction could cost \$8.6 billion over five
25 years. In the system as it exists today, the cost of

2 housing 20% of those same households in the shelter
3 system would be \$4 billion. The cost of using rental
4 vouchers to rehouse those households would be \$1.5
5 billion for the same period of five years.

6 The net additional increase in cost for using
7 CityFHEPS as an eviction prevention tool is \$3
8 billion cumulatively over five years, or
9 approximately \$600 million per year. This would
10 prevent almost 200,000 families from enduring the
11 trauma of evictions and the instability of
12 homelessness.

13 The Mayoral Administration has argued that the
14 City Council's expansion of CityFHEPS will make it
15 more difficult for existing voucher holders to
16 compete for available apartments in a tight rental
17 market. Our analysis shows that by preventing
18 evictions an expanded CityFHEPS program will reduce
19 the number of households entering the system,
20 creating less competition. Other reforms to the
21 program as included in the council's package of the
22 four bills include the revision of the utility
23 allowance rule, which would make homes available to
24 voucher holders are seeking to move out of the
25 shelter system, also reducing competition for units.

2 Shelter savings will go a long way towards
3 deferring the cost of providing eviction prevention
4 vouchers, and the additional public money it still
5 costs to keep people housed is ultimately money well
6 spent by investing in our fellow New Yorkers.

7 Good morning. Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chair
8 Ayala, Councilmember Sanchez, Councilmember Cabán,
9 this committee, and the rest of the Council for
10 recognizing the potential of CityFHEPS and for
11 stepping up with solutions to address the
12 homelessness and housing affordability crisis. My
13 name is Robert Desir. I'm a Staff Attorney with the
14 Legal Aid Society Civil Law Reform Unit. We're
15 grateful to the Council for moving forward with this
16 important package of bills that will improve the
17 CityFHEPS voucher program and increase its
18 effectiveness as an anti homelessness program.

19 More than ever, it's critical that people are
20 able to leave shelter there are over 90,000 currently
21 in shelter. It's mainly because their incomes are
22 not keeping pace with rising housing costs and other
23 expenses. It's important that those-- it is also
24 important that those at risk of eviction are able to
25 avoid shelter. New York-- New Yorkers experiencing

2 rent burden should not have to wait until they lose
3 their homes before they can access a voucher. They
4 already have an apartment. The eviction will only
5 add to the number of people that are seeking an
6 apartment on the open market.

7 When these bills are passed into the law-- into
8 law, we urge the city to recognize the utility of
9 this legislation and take action to ensure that it
10 achieves its goals. There remains work to do before
11 CityFHEPS can realize its full potential.

12 The city has to attack the delays associated with
13 CityFHEPS. Voucher holders should not have to
14 navigate a Byzantine lease-up process where weeks or
15 months of delays often leads to loss of housing
16 opportunity. Delays only-- delays only compound the
17 collateral effects of homelessness such as
18 joblessness, mental health challenges, family
19 instability, and poor living conditions. The City
20 must respond by increasing staff that's adequately
21 trained to efficiently process and complete
22 applications, staff that takes a solution-oriented
23 approach. This involves comprehensive initial review
24 of application, improved proactive communication with
25 stakeholders like shelter providers, setting and

2 adhering to deadlines, expediting inspections,
3 avoiding unnecessary document information requests,
4 making-- and making timely payments to owners.

5 Unless HRA adopts affirmative regulations to
6 change the lease-up process CityFHEPS will not serve
7 its purpose of allowing New Yorkers to escape the
8 shelter system and live in homes with dignity.

9 We also urge the city to commit to enforcing
10 source-of-income discrimination.

11 The incident of source-of-income discrimination
12 is a large part of what is holding people back from
13 being able to access permanent housing. The city has
14 to devote resources to proactive measures of
15 enforcement, early intervention, and other actions
16 that will help stamp out this practice. We also urge
17 HRA to adopt the exception payment standard, which
18 would increase the payment standard for CityFHEPS
19 vouchers and put them on par with NYCHA Section 8 and
20 HPD Section 8, and allow voucher holders to access
21 neighborhoods of opportunity.

22 Again, I thank the Council for its work in this
23 regard, remaining steadfast in the face of
24 opposition, and its commitment to New Yorkers that
25 are in shelter and our housing unstable. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL: Thank you, Robert. At this time, we're
3 going to shift over now to call the roll. I'm going
4 to turn it over to Deputy Speaker Ayala.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you,
6 Aminta, and thank you to all of the providers that
7 came to testify this morning and for being you know,
8 such extraordinary leaders on these issues.

9 Before the clerk pulls the roll however, I forgot
10 to just clarify that the questions before the
11 committee or whether to re-adopt the bill's
12 introduction numbers 292A, 894A, 878A, 893A, and to
13 file the Mayor's veto messages. I will turn it back
14 over to the Clerk.

15 CLERK: Thank you William Martin, Committee
16 Clerk, roll call vote Committee on General Welfare.
17 All items are coupled.

18 Chair Ayala?

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I vote aye.

20 CLERK: Restler?

21 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: The solution to
22 homelessness is housing. I am deeply proud and
23 honored to be a part of this Council today as we
24 advance real solutions to homelessness by expanding
25 access to affordable housing. Thank you to the

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

21

2 Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Councilmember Cabán, and
3 Councilmember Sanchez for your leadership.

4 CLERK: Thank you. Riley?

5 COUNCILMEMBER RILEY: Aye.

6 CLERK: Cabán?

7 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: I proudly vote aye.

8 CLERK: Hudson?

9 COUNCILMEMBER HUDSON: Aye.

10 CLERK: Thank you. Lee?

11 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Aye on all.

12 CLERK: Ossé?

13 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: An emphatic aye on all.

14 CLERK: Stevens?

15 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Aye on all.

16 CLERK: Ung?

17 COUNCILMEMBER UNG: Aye on all.

18 CLERK: Williams?

19 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Aye on all.

20 CLERK: By a vote of 10 in the affirmative, zero
21 in the negative, and no abstentions, all items have
22 been adopted as indicated by the Chair. Madam Chair.
23 That is a full committee.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And with that
25 this vote is adjourned.

2 COUNSEL: Oh, no. Councilmember--

3 CLERK: One moment.

4 COUNSEL: We're going to now move on to
5 additional public testimony.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sorry about that.

7 MR. AWADDEH: No worries. Deputy Speaker. I
8 appreciate you and your leadership in this moment.
9 Good morning. My name is Murad Awawdeh. I'm the
10 Executive Director of the New York Immigration
11 Coalition. I am proudly here to congratulate you on
12 moving forward this agenda of putting forward New
13 Yorkers in this moment that we see an increase in
14 affordability crisis, and increase in housing crisis.

15 New York's number one asset is its people. And
16 when we invest in our people across the board, the
17 rate of return is tenfold.

18 I want to thank the New York City Council for
19 prioritizing this first step and actually addressing
20 our homelessness problem that we are seeing. Without
21 the support of the Council and these four bills that
22 will be moved and hopefully voted and instated today,
23 and overridden, overriding the veto, we will actually
24 be removing hurdles and expanding eligibility for
25 those who need CityFHEPS the most.

2 This administration's emergency footing has
3 ultimately exacerbated the load on already
4 overburdened shelter systems, and has left shelter
5 residents with few pathways to get out of the system.
6 New Yorkers-- All New Yorkers deserve permanent
7 housing, not more temporary shelters or HERRCs. By
8 relieving pressure on our shelter system, we
9 anticipate a reduction in the use of the costly
10 emergency expanded shelter system as well as HERRCs,
11 which are often in lope located in neighborhoods with
12 poor access to transportation, essential services,
13 and don't always have basic amenities like showers
14 and proper access to bathrooms.

15 I again thank the New York City Council for this
16 vote today. And I look forward to seeing more
17 expansive steps taken to ensure that all unhoused
18 individuals in the city of New York have access to
19 supports like CityFHEPS vouchers and other supports
20 to get them into housing and keep them in permanent
21 housing.

22 If the City Council's plan is a cost-- The City
23 Council's plan is cost effective and the right thing
24 to do to ensure the health and dignity of all New
25 Yorkers. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL: Thank you Murad, and thank you to this
3 panel for your testimony. We're now going to call on
4 our next panel, which will be Deborah Berkman, Jamie
5 Powlovich, and Nicola McVinua.

6 And before this panel testifies, I'd like to call
7 on Councilmember Sanchez to deliver brief remarks.

8 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you so
9 much. I just wanted to read into the General Welfare
10 Committee's record just a tremendous thank you to
11 Speaker-- Deputy Speaker Ayala, Speaker Adams, all of
12 my colleagues who today voted in the affirmative on--
13 on behalf of this, these bills that are really going
14 to make a difference for New Yorkers. The CityFHEPS
15 legislation that is voted out of Committee today, and
16 that is going to be voted on at the Stated Meeting
17 this afternoon is long overdue, after nearly a year
18 of inaction by the Administration, despite repeated
19 calls for action by the City Council. And I can
20 speak from my own personal experience asking for
21 feedback and reaching out to the Administration
22 through our Committee Council, that we did not hear
23 feedback until there was decisive action by our
24 Speaker to move the legislation forward. So thank
25 you to our Speaker for doing this.

2 You know, the scale of the crisis is known, and
3 it is growing. It is-- It continues to grow. Last
4 month, New York City reported more than 100,000
5 people housed in our shelters, which is a record
6 number. And the important thing here is that of
7 these 100,000 people, a record number, 50,000 are
8 long-term New Yorkers who were unhoused, and the
9 number has been continuing to grow.

10 In addition to that, you know, I am the Chair of
11 the Committee on Housing and buildings, which is
12 about to vote next door on different legislation. I
13 am the representative for District 14 and the sponsor
14 for the-- for two of the bills that are being voted
15 on today. But the most important piece is being the
16 representative of District 14, the epicenter of the
17 eviction crisis in our city of New York, with 10468
18 leading the city. We have an additional 100,000
19 households who are facing eviction in our courts
20 right now.

21 So we're taking decisive action as a City
22 Council, and I could not be more proud to work with
23 all of you, with all of our advocates here today --
24 Homeless Services United, WIN, Make The Road, Legal

2 Aid, Vocal, New Destiny Housing, New York Immigration
3 Coalition, and so many others. Thank you so much.

4 COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Councilmember
5 Sanchez. And now I'll turn it over to the panel for
6 your testimony.

7 Your mic-- would have to--

8 MS. BERKMAN: Okay. Deputy Speaker Ayala,
9 Councilmembers, and staff, good morning. Thank you
10 for the opportunity to speak today. My name is
11 Deborah Berkman, and I'm the Founder of the Shelter
12 Advocacy Initiative, and the Supervising Attorney of
13 the public assistance and SNAP practice at New York
14 Legal Assistance Group or NYLAG.

15 I want to very much thank this Committee for
16 bringing this legislation to a vote today again. I
17 work with numerous individuals and families
18 experiencing homelessness and near homelessness, who
19 are trying to access rental subsidies, as it is the
20 only way they can transition to and remain in
21 permanent housing. From that experience, I know that
22 all the legislation that is here today is so vitally
23 important to mitigate homelessness.

24 The City cannot maintain a system where more
25 people need to reside in the shelter system just to

2 obtain private housing. As Deputy Speaker mentioned
3 [background voices] it's not an overstatement to say
4 that the shelter system is in crisis. One week this
5 past June there were over 100,000 people in there.
6 Allowing more people to access rent assistance
7 subsidies without a shelter stay will prevent
8 senseless evictions and new entries into the shelter
9 system, thus increasing the system's capacity.

10 People at risk of experiencing homelessness
11 should always have been and should be eligible for
12 rental subsidies. Households are being evicted from
13 stable and affordable apartments because there aren't
14 enough programs available that help them maintain
15 their housing. When they're not eligible for a
16 rental assistance program to prevent evictions, they
17 must enter shelter where they may languish for years.

18 For example, in city fiscal year 2022, the
19 average length of stay in a DHS shelter system was
20 509 days for single adults, 534 days for families
21 with children, and 855 days for adult families. This
22 often trauma inducing experience could be avoided by
23 making rental subsidies available to more households
24 in the community to preserve their homes.

2 Next source of income or employment status should
3 not be an eligibility factor in rental subsidies.
4 Not only will Intro 894A create a space in an
5 overburdened shelter system, it will expand access
6 to-- the expanded access to rental subsidies will
7 provide stability to individuals and families
8 experiencing homelessness.

9 And finally, we strongly support Intro 229A that
10 increases the amount-- that mandates that a utility
11 allowance shouldn't be deducted from a rental
12 allowance, and that a tenant contribution should be
13 reduced when the rent is below the maximum rental
14 allowance. This is very important legislation that
15 will effectively increase the amount of-- increase
16 the amount of rental assistance provided, which is
17 sorely needed to assist people experiencing
18 homelessness to pretend transition to permanent
19 housing.

20 Thank you very much on-- for your vital work on
21 this topic.

22 Good morning. My name is Jamie Powlovich. I use
23 she/her pronouns, and I'm the Executive Director of
24 the New York State Coalition for Homeless Youth. CHY
25 has advocated for the needs of runaway and homeless

2 youth for 45 years and has a statewide membership
3 including 29 members here in New York City.

4 I would like to start off by expressing our
5 deepest thanks to Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker
6 Ayala, and all of the members who sponsored and
7 supported these bills, which we support
8 wholeheartedly.

9 This is truly a historic moment that will have
10 extraordinary impact for all of the reasons that have
11 already been expressed by my colleagues. But I would
12 like to expand on what overriding the veto of these
13 bills will mean for young people experiencing
14 homelessness in the DYCD youth homelessness system.
15 In addition to expanding access to those facing
16 eviction and reducing wait times to qualify for those
17 in DHS and DV shelters, these bills will also for the
18 first time, make homeless youth and young adults in
19 the DYCD system categorically eligible for CityFHEPS
20 vouchers, which is truly amazing. With this vote the
21 council will make right all of the broken promises
22 that young people have been made by past
23 administrations and follow through with a fight that
24 was started by the late Councilman Lew Fidler, and
25 carried on by former Councilman Steve Levin.

2 Homelessness is not an acronym or a trauma quota that
3 those with privilege and power should get to decide
4 when is met. Homelessness is an experience that
5 since being initially promised vouchers in 2016,
6 almost 10,000 young people have had to endure because
7 they were not given the support they needed to exit.

8 Since being given access to time-limited federal
9 emergency housing vouchers in 2021, available Data
10 shows that there has been a 350% increase in the
11 amount of youth that have successfully exited DYCD
12 shelters into their own apartments.

13 We know how to solve youth homelessness. It is a
14 policy choice that it persists, and by voting yes
15 today, all Councilmembers are actively choosing to
16 work towards the solution. Thank you.

17 MS. MCVINUA: Good morning Chair Ayala and
18 members of the committee. My name is Nicole McVinua
19 and I'm the Director of Policy at Urban Pathways, a
20 nonprofit homeless services and supportive housing
21 provider serving over 2000 single adults annually.
22 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in
23 support of the CityFHEPS bill package.

24 We fully support the passage of this bill
25 package. Housing subsidies are a critical tool to

2 create access to apartment rentals in the private
3 market for low income New Yorkers. The changes to
4 the CityFHEPS program made by these four bills will
5 strengthen the subsidy to both make it more usable to
6 obtain permanent housing for people currently
7 experiencing homelessness and to prevent households
8 from losing their housing in the first place.

9 These are critical changes for promoting the
10 efficacy of the CityFHEPS voucher program, by
11 providing access to more rentals on the market,
12 removing barriers that keep people in shelter for
13 longer without reason, and preventing unnecessary
14 evictions. Reaching more New Yorkers in need of
15 housing assistance must be prioritized, and the
16 current housing affordability and homelessness crisis
17 faced by our communities at a time when 50% of
18 working-age households across the city do not make
19 enough to cover their basic needs. The City must
20 move away from ideologies that we need to make people
21 wait to receive assistance to ensure that they really
22 need it, and that there will be competition between
23 households whose homelessness is being prevented and
24 those in shelter. It's simply not true. Expanding
25 the CityFHEPS program will cost money up front.

2 However, the cost of sheltering people is far more
3 expensive, and comes with long-term costs across
4 systems well beyond the cost of shelter itself.
5 WIN's recently-released a report demonstrates that
6 preventing homelessness will have significant cost
7 savings to the city. Across the system, it's
8 estimated that expanding the voucher to prevent
9 eviction will result an annual savings of over \$730
10 million dollars.

11 I have more details in my written testimony but
12 want to conclude by thanking the Council for your
13 support of the CityFHEPS package, and your commitment
14 to ensuring all New Yorkers have permanent stable
15 housing. Thank you.

16 COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel for your
17 testimony. I'm now going to call on our last public
18 panel for today. And that will be comprised of Scott
19 Andrew Hutchins, Ethel Brown, and Patrick Boyle.

20 And just as a reminder, you will have two minutes
21 to deliver your testimony, and we will of course
22 accept all written testimony, however long it may be.

23 You may begin when ready.

24 MR. BOYLE: Good morning. My name is Patrick
25 Boyle and I'm Senior Director for the New York Office

2 of Enterprise Community Partners, a national
3 nonprofit that exists to make a good home possible
4 for the millions of families without one. We support
5 community development organizations on the ground,
6 aggregate and invest capital for impact, advanced
7 housing policy at every level of government, and
8 build and manage communities ourselves.

9 We are also members and co-conveners of the
10 Family Homelessness Coalition.

11 On behalf of Enterprise I want to thank Chair
12 Ayala and the Committee on General Welfare and the
13 full Council for the opportunity to submit testimony
14 at this important hearing today. As we all know,
15 homelessness, housing insecurity, and a scarcity of
16 affordable housing is one of the central issues
17 facing our city today. The solution is multifaceted,
18 including greatly increasing the supply of new homes,
19 preserving our existing stock, stabilizing tenants,
20 and streamlining government processes. It will
21 require all levels of government, robust funding of
22 new and existing resources, and creative solutions
23 from both the private and public sectors.

24 The package of bills advanced and passed by this
25 council will strengthen one tool in the city's

2 toolbox, the CityFHEPS voucher, and we support the
3 Council's moving forward with this package.

4 This legislative package will alleviate pressure
5 on the shelter system by steering fewer families into
6 the shelter system unnecessarily. It will lessen the
7 burden on housing court system by providing a more
8 upstream solution to eviction prevention. It will
9 ensure fewer families fall through the cracks and
10 find themselves unable to access this assistance. In
11 short, it's not the full solution to the housing
12 crisis, but it is a powerful step in the right
13 direction. Enterprise thanks the Council for this
14 bold and meaningful action today. Thank you.

15 COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. You may
16 begin, Ethel.

17 MS. BROWN: [inaudible]. Thank you, and I'm a
18 leader with Safety Net Activists. I'm also a
19 CityFHEPS voucher holder. I live with my daughter
20 and two grandkids in the Bronx. I was unhoused. And
21 now we're housed thanks to receiving the CityFHEPS
22 voucher.

23 I've lived in the Bronx for most of my life and I
24 have two degrees. I'm now involved as an advocate

2 who's trying to make sure that CityFHEPS voucher is
3 accessible to everyone who needs it.

4 Unfortunately, last year, my family was facing
5 eviction and I had to leave where we were forced to
6 leave. CityFHEPS helped my family avoid going into
7 the shelter system. Because we had a shelter
8 history, we were able to get help from CityFHEPS.
9 The voucher really helped us once we had the right
10 people doing what was needed to be done in order to
11 get the paperwork rolling. But I want other people
12 to not go through the housing mill and go into the
13 shelter system. It's really hard out there right
14 now. People are facing eviction and need this help.
15 All of the four sponsored bills, Intro 878, Intro
16 893, Intro 894, and Intro 229 are critical to helping
17 people avoid homelessness and helping homeless New
18 Yorkers get housing.

19 People shouldn't have to go into the shelter in
20 order to get help. Going into shelter causes so much
21 trauma.

22 It is so difficult. It splits families. I know
23 that personally. PATH split up my family when we had
24 to go there for help. The 90-day rule also has to be
25 ended permanently. It keeps people stagnant and

2 keeps them from moving forward. It makes no sense.

3 And it shouldn't matter what type of homeless shelter
4 system that you are in. You are still homeless.

5 People in DV shelters, homeless youth, fire victims
6 in HPD shelters, and people facing vacate orders all
7 should have access to CityFHEPS vouchers.

8 It's also so important to make sure that people
9 who are working as well as those who are not working
10 have access to the voucher.

11 This is very important. And I appeal to Mayor
12 Adams to make sure he implements all of these bills.
13 And thank you to all of you who allowed us to speak
14 here today.

15 MR. HUTCHINS: Good morning. Thank you for these
16 bills. I'm Scott Andrew Hutchins. I represent
17 VOCAL, and Neighbors Together, and Picture the
18 Homeless and other organizations. I currently have a
19 CityFHEPS voucher, and I really appreciate what
20 you're doing. It is-- I would definitely say it's a
21 first step. I became homeless in 2012 going through
22 a long eviction process in 2011.

23 I have a master's degree, a herniated disc, and
24 various other health challenges, and Social Security
25 says that I'm not disabled because I can do desk

2 work. So I spent eight years in the shelter system
3 before I was able to get housing on the CityFHEPS
4 voucher. And now I'm dealing with challenges because
5 of how much money the landlord-- the landlord keeps
6 asking for more money, like in terms of the-- the
7 utility bill, so I'm trying to deal with that.
8 Because it's coming out to be like more than half of
9 my income as it is.

10 So CityFHEPS, as it is, is not perfect, but it's
11 definitely a step in the right direction. And we
12 need to we need to work hard, especially on this
13 utility issue. Thank you.

14 COUNSEL: Thank you, Scott. And thank you to
15 this entire panel for your testimony. I am now going
16 to turn it back over to Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I want to thank all of
18 the panelists for coming again to testify today's
19 really telling just how many individuals have reached
20 out and really supported this package of legislation
21 and really spoken to the need for-- for change. And
22 so I'm really proud of this package. I'm really
23 proud of my colleagues and want to thank the Speaker
24 for supporting us in this endeavor and allowing this
25

2 package up for a vote. And with that this hearing is
3 concluded.

4 COUNSEL: And I will actually turn it now over to
5 Councilmember Pierina Sanchez, to close us out.

6 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Deputy
7 Speaker. Thanks to everybody who testified. And
8 with that this hearing is adjourned.

9 [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date 07/18/2023