

Good afternoon, Chair Cabrera and members of the Committee on Governmental Operations. I am Lisette Camilo, Commissioner of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). Today, I am joined by representatives from the Office of Labor Relations (OLR) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department), two agencies that have been critical partners with DCAS throughout the pandemic and have helped shape city workforce policies in response to this public health emergency.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an enormous toll on the people of New York City and communities all over the world. This burden has not been evenly distributed, and Black and Brown New Yorkers have been disproportionately harmed. From the terrible loss of human life, to the economic pain felt by millions of our neighbors, the reality we live in today is very different from anything we could have imagined just a few short months ago.

To meet this unprecedented challenge, the city has had to marshal its resources and rethink all aspects of government operations. By implementing teleworking policies, facilitating the widespread use of face coverings, promoting healthy hand hygiene, instituting social distancing, and other health and safety precautions, we've kept city government functioning while protecting our workforce. We are working diligently to ensure we continue to do so.

Today, despite enormous progress, there continues to be community transmission of COVID-19 in New York City. Slowing the spread of coronavirus and preventing a new wave of cases requires that all New Yorkers, including city employees, maintain what the Health Department calls the Core Four:

- Staying home when sick;
- Wearing face coverings;
- Practicing healthy hand hygiene; and
- Staying six feet apart

These four fundamental practices also guide the city's plan to return to the workplace and expand operations. For those employees who do not have to physically be at work, this means ongoing telecommuting, which helps keep them safe and reduces density on public transit and at worksites for those that must return to the workplace. For employees who work out in our neighborhoods, it requires reimagining certain protocols. And for those who must work in the office, it means reconfiguring our space, increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfection, and expanding communication. As city employees adjust to a new normal, it will include daily health screenings and reinforcing habits designed to help keep ourselves and others safe. As we know from the experience of the last several months, our understanding of this disease is changing rapidly and recommendations evolve. We will likewise adjust plans when warranted by the facts.

Planning for a return to the workplace is ongoing, and we are working collaboratively across city agencies to examine best practices and develop policies that protect the health and safety of city employees. We intend to maintain the steady state – teleworking for those who do not need to

be at a worksite – and reevaluating, as necessary, based on the trajectory of the virus. We acknowledge that there are staff who cannot perform their required tasks from home, and we are reviewing mandates and recommendations from New York State and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure a return to the workplace is grounded in a health and safety approach. Based on this work, the administration is developing formal guidance and protocols that will be issued to all city agencies before any return to the office occurs.

The administration has approached this guidance with four categories in mind:

- Preparing buildings;
- Preparing workspaces;
- Preparing the workforce; and
- Communication

Preparing buildings includes inspecting and preparing building systems, entrances, and common areas. It includes establishing and implementing new building policies and practices to control access, promoting social distancing, and maintaining building health.

Preparing the workspace is a closely-related category that also includes establishing and implementing policies and protocols for promoting social distancing through a strategic approach to the configuration and use of workspaces.

Preparing the workforce means developing and implementing policies and practices related to the return of staff – which staff will return, how staff will return, policies with respect to working remotely, and steps to protect employee health and well-being.

Also, communication will be key in tying all of these categories together. City employees need to understand the steps their agencies have taken to protect their safety and ensure an orderly process for returning to work. It's important that agencies are transparent, accessible, and make extra efforts to answer questions and address challenges through two-way communication.

This administration is taking a holistic approach to the planning and execution of a process for returning employees to worksites, and we want to make sure this process is orderly and safe above all else. The city cannot effectively serve its constituents unless its workforce is safe, healthy, and equipped for success. This has been a collaborative effort between the mayor's office and city agencies, and no single individual has been at the helm of these efforts. We welcome the city council's input and believe that Intro 1950 supports the administration's goal of creating a safe and healthy workplace for city employees across every agency. We look forward to further dialogue with the city council on this important matter.

There will be more to say as guidelines are formalized, but I'm happy to take questions about the categories of actions and information that may be included in the city's guidance to agencies.

Thank you.

Good Afternoon.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

My name is Liz Eastman and I am a City worker and a union member. In mid-March, my colleagues and I began to work from home due to the health crisis created by covid-19. As of today, we are still working from home.

As the City reopens, my colleagues and I have heard mixed messages regarding our return to work. We have heard that there are some work units in our Agency that are scheduled to return to the building within the coming days and weeks. We have also heard that the Agency is has already asked some employees to return to the office.

What we have not heard is anything about a clear, concise plan to protect the safety of workers in the building. Most of us are familiar with the guidelines from the CDC, and while we are aware that those guidelines have been changing as more is learned about covid-19, what we do know is that the offices that we left behind in March are for the most part ill equipped to keep workers safe from the virus.

Some of the concerns that we have are about testing and whether employees will be tested before they return to work and whether they will be subject to temperature checks upon arrival at the office each morning.

We are also concerned about our colleagues who are afraid to return to work, perhaps they have an underlying condition or a family member at home who is at risk should they contract the virus. How will these workers be protected? This virus has serious ramifications for people with a variety of conditions and workers should not be forced to choose between a paycheck and their health and the health of their loved ones.

Many of the employees who were working for the Agency on 9/11 have found themselves with health conditions caused by exposure to toxins that were in the air in the weeks and months after to World Trade Center Towers fell.

The workers whom I am referring to were not directly involved in the recovery efforts at Ground Zero, these workers got sick simply by coming down to Lower Manhattan and going into their office building which was located a few blocks from the site.

These workers came to work because they were told that their work environment would be safe. Years later, they found out that it was not safe and they have paid a steep price with their health due to this misinformation.

Covid-19 is a new health crisis and the City must avoid making the same mistakes with the health of its workers that it did after 9/11.

There needs to be a comprehensive plan to address the safety of all City workers and a strategy to bring workers back to their jobs safely and that plan must involve dialogue across all agencies and must take into consideration all of the guidelines set forth by the CDC.

As such, I stand in support of Int 1950-2020. This bill is a strong first step in protecting the workers of this City. I thank the City Council for taking action on this important issue.