

**Testimony of Administrator Scott French, New York City Human Resources  
Administration, New York City Department of Social Services  
Oversight: HRA's Career Services  
before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee**

**September 10, 2024**

Good morning Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Scott French and I serve as the Administrator of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) within the Department of Social Services (DSS). I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on the topic of HRA's career services. While we have faced challenging times in recent years, we are very proud of the work we are doing to connect low-income New Yorkers to a diverse array of workforce development services to further clients' education, training and employment goals.

Career services are an onramp to sustainability and independence for New Yorkers. We understand the job-search process can be challenging and as a City, we want to serve as a strong partner in helping New Yorkers achieve career success. Career services encompass the kind of career guidance and coaching any jobseeker might need – that includes exploring career goals, connecting to educational and training opportunities, building professional skills, and serving as a partner in job placement. HRA's career services are a key support in connecting New Yorkers on Cash Assistance with opportunities to secure steady income and live sustainable lives.

While I will be speaking to HRA's career services, I want to note that HRA's offerings exist within a broader network of workforce development programs New York City provides, including offerings led by the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD), the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA), and the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development. Under the leadership of Mayor Adams, we continually work to break down siloes and build networks across government and across our communities to connect New Yorkers to the career services they deserve.

Working with HRA, career services providers use their expertise to equip jobseekers with the tools they need to build skills and experience to remain engaged in what can be a daunting job-search process. By offering wraparound support services, HRA and our provider partners work to assist our clients whatever an individual's starting point.

I would like to spend some time walking through some of the career services available to our clients.

- Career Pathways is a suite of service programs that provide: orientation, intake, assessment, engagement services, job development, placement, and retention services.. Career Pathways has three components
  - o CareerCompass works with adult clients to assess their skills and experience. It helps clients find employment, training, education programs, internships, and community service opportunities that suit their abilities and goals.
  - o CareerAdvance offers career, education, and training services in specific New York City industries and neighborhoods or to groups, such as those with Limited English Proficiency, individuals who are involved with the Criminal Justice system, homeless households, survivors of domestic violence, or older adults.
  - o YouthPathways works with clients ages 18-24 to assess their skills and experience. It provides career, education, and training services and helps clients connect to programs, including internships and community service, tailored to the needs of younger adults.
  
- Note that the new iteration of the Career Pathways programs will be the Pathways to Access to Careers and Employment (PACE) Workforce Development Program, which I will speak further about in a moment..
  
- Business Link matches diverse employers with jobseekers through targeted outreach and skills assessments. Business Link hosts job fairs throughout the year and offers access to job opening alerts by text message through TEXT 2 Work.
  
- The Pathways to Industrial and Construction Careers (PINCC) program is a key initiative arising from the U.S Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge within the American Rescue Plan of 2021. This program bridges the gap between employers seeking a diverse workforce, and the public systems seeking to place high-need, disadvantaged populations in career track positions within the Construction and Industrial/Transportation sectors.
  
- Jobs Plus Program is a place-based employment program administered by HRA for residents in 40 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments or within proximity of the developments throughout the five boroughs. Jobs-Plus programs help residents build skills and connect to the labor market to increase their incomes and financial security. Jobs-Plus program sites are located within the developments they serve or within walking distance.
  
- CUNY Educate Develop Graduate Empower (EDGE) is a joint program between HRA and CUNY designed to help HRA clients enrolled at CUNY schools with academic counseling, support, and employment services so they can succeed in their studies and graduate in a timely manner.

- Alternative Engagement Programs (AE): AE assists clients interested in high-demand skill-based training in the fastest growing occupations such as green jobs, technology-based jobs, careers in the medical field and much more. Many of our Training Providers have employment linkages.
- The Wellness, Comprehensive Assessment, Rehabilitation, and Employment (WeCARE) program provides comprehensive services to assist HRA Cash Assistance clients with medical, physical, and/or mental health conditions that impact their ability to obtain employment. Our goal is to help clients achieve self-sufficiency through personalized assessments, rehabilitative support, and employment services.

Having provided that overview of career services available to our clients, I will now turn to recent RFPs and the underlying thought processes we are bringing to the future of HRA's delivery of career services.

HRA succeeds when we connect clients with the long-term financial stability and security that employment provides. Building on years of experience working to further hone our career services offerings, and building upon concept papers that included engagement with experts, providers, and the communities we serve, HRA recently released an RFP in August 2024 with an anticipated contract start date of July 2025; for the Pathways to Access Careers and Employment (PACE) Workforce Development Program and will shortly be releasing another RFP for the WeCARE program..

Key concepts undergird HRA's career services model and inform our strategy in developing these RFPs. Both programs focus on client-centered assessment. That means assessments that identify client needs and interests, and counseling tools to meet the client where they are. Client-centered assessment connects with the concept of progressively improving workforce development practices. That means including an understanding that additional education and training may be the best pathway for a client to meet their goals; GED, ESL, training, vocational, or apprenticeship programs may serve as a pathway into the career a client may have in mind.

In authoring the RFPs, HRA acts as a catalyst to strengthen the network of career services providers, to include community-based organizations and local, small business partners. That is a step towards a neighborhood-centered model, allowing clients to receive services and supports within their communities. Strengthening the network of vendors also includes serving as a convener and platform for sharing best practices among vendors.

A final key concept included in our RFPs is a holistic understanding of client needs. Through Strategic Program Operation Target (SPOT) Goals, we gain a clearer picture of client advancement by taking into account areas beyond employment like educational and financial counseling. In addition, HRA intentionally shifted towards a One Door program model in the PACE Workforce Development Program; this model unifies the previously separate programs of CareerCompass,

CareerAdvance, and YouthPathways with the advantage of reducing referrals from one program to the next.

I turn now to the larger legal and regulatory framework in which HRA operates and the impacts on the return to mandatory engagement.

HRA operates in a legal and regulatory framework that obligates us to adhere to an extensive body of federal and New York State laws, rules, and regulations. In addition to oversight at the City level, the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) oversees our operations and provides directives. That serves as important context for the return to mandatory engagement and the imposition of sanctions on clients who do not meet federal and State standards for engagement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this mandatory engagement was paused. The federal and State government determined the timeline for lifting this pause. Alongside other localities, HRA was directed by NYS to resume sanctioning clients who do not participate in mandatory engagement. That said, over time, HRA has been a strong voice in seeking and obtaining a broader understanding of the rubric of mandatory work engagement to include training, education, apprenticeships, and other programs.

In implementing return to mandatory, we have focused on ensuring clients are not surprised by the end of the pause – communicating with clients ahead of time about the reimposition of engagement requirements and the potential sanctions we would be required by law to impose. Furthermore, within the sanction process, we offer opportunities for individuals to come into compliance with the requirements; or alternatively, clients may supply an explanation of the factors that prevent their meeting the work requirements under the Cash Assistance program.

HRA is also leveraging City contracting dollars to help secure employment for clients receiving Cash Assistance through HireNYC: Human Services. In brief, HireNYC: Human Services, administered by Business Link, requires contracted providers to hire a certain number of Cash Assistance recipients based upon overall contract value.

The programs require providers to offer work for at least 20 hours per week, paying at least the mandated minimum wage, and work being for at least one year. HRA also defines best efforts on providers' part; that ensures a provider that genuinely submitted job postings, interviewed candidates, and constructively engaged with Business Link on interviewees can have that work taken into account in seeking a modification or waiver of an unmet Cash Assistance client hiring requirement.

HireNYC succeeds in connecting Cash Assistance clients with career opportunities. When comparing the year-over-year number of Cash Assistance clients receiving employment through HireNYC, that figure has grown from more than 2,300 hires in FY21 to over 8,000 hires in FY24, representing an historic high for this program.

Expanding our optic to include the broader work Business Link pursues to match employers with job seekers, for FY24, there were nearly 10,000 (9,990) job placements through Business Link programs. That includes the more than 8,000 placements through HireNYC, more than 1,400 placements through the Park Jobs Training Program, more than 200 placements through the Department of Sanitation Jobs Training Program, and more than 100 jobs placements through Employer Incentive Plus.

I will close where I began. We understand job search anxiety – the search for the next step in one’s career can be daunting. We understand that job seeking is a process that includes the morale of the jobseeker, and building the skills and resilience necessary to overcome the challenges posed by a potentially very stressful process. Our message to jobseekers is there is universe of City workforce development and career services programs, including HRA, and our partners at SBS, DYCD, NYCHA, the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development, community partners, and many others. Collectively, we stand ready to assist job seeking New Yorkers.

On behalf of HRA, our partners in government, and our dedicated provider networks, I want to highlight that array of help and support to any feeling discouraged. Help is available. While what we speak to here today will necessarily focus on HRA and Cash Assistance client focused offerings – as a City, we seek to be strong partners in connecting New Yorkers to employment. As HRA’s fiscal year 2024 successes in connecting clients to employment demonstrate, we have made important strides forward. With the RFPs I have outlined, we lay out a pathway for building on that success. I want to reassure the Council that, alongside our partners, HRA will continue to work to help overcome the obstacles New Yorkers face to achieving greater sustainability, independence, and career success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, I welcome your questions.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness  
for Women and their Children

## **Testimony of Win (Formerly Women in Need, Inc.) for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Oversight Hearing September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

Thank you, Chair Ayala and the esteemed members of the Committee on General Welfare for the chance to submit testimony on behalf of Win. My name is Katie Masi, and I am the Director of the Income-Building Program at Win, the largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness in New York City. We operate 16 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Each night, nearly 7,000 people call Win “home,” including 3,600 children.

Since its founding in 2014, Win’s Income building program has supported the multi-dimensional employment and training needs of families residing in WIN shelters. We assist with the transitions from unemployment to employment and from part-time to full-time employment. We also provide career coaching for improving job quality, including negotiating wage increases and obtaining healthcare and other benefits. Our work addresses the social-emotional and practical barriers to work, such as navigating logistics for child care, transportation, and workplace attire. Win's income-building program provides clients, from young adults to their parents, with a safe space to heal and rebuild their lives while gaining the skills and tools needed to move into permanent housing, maintain a job, and thrive.

As of yesterday, 77% of our clients had an active cash assistance case, meaning they are eligible for HRA’s career services. However, actual job placements through HRA’s career services are low. Our clients struggle to successfully connect with these career services due to antiquated communication processes. And our staff report that they find it challenging to support better engagement.

We commend HRA for their willingness to engage with Win on these issues and for their openness to feedback in our ongoing conversations. As we’ve noted in those conversations, Win recommends HRA take a more client-centered and trauma-informed approach to career services and are happy for our own income-building program to serve as a model. We believe HRA’s career services could better serve our clients through better communication and by ending benefits sanctioning.

- 1) Communication issues and obscure process for engaging clients



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness  
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Prior to the COVID Pandemic, the Shelter Exit Transition program (SET) was an especially successful HRA career service for our clients. Geared toward helping clients move out of shelter, the program reimbursed employers for hiring clients in shelter, assigning them the number of hours required by a rental assistance voucher, and allowing clients time off to search for housing. Clients received resume and interview workshops, business cards and MetroCards, and help applying for programs like CityFHEPS and Section 8. SET simultaneously facilitated stable employment and stable housing for clients, recognizing that each was key to maintaining the other.

We acknowledge that the COVID pandemic created challenges for HRA to engage clients and required the agency to quickly switch to relying on technology such as AccessHRA and TEXT-2-WORK. However, since the sunset of SET and the pandemic, HRA's engagement with clients, connections to opportunities, and communication with shelter providers through the job referral process have become increasingly challenging to navigate.

At present, after opening a cash assistance case, clients are called from a restricted phone number to receive career counselling. However, given the rise in telephone scams, and the high percentage of our clients with a history of domestic violence, expecting clients to answer unknown phone numbers is unrealistic. With no voicemail or callback number left, clients do not have a way to identify that HRA career services is calling them. When Win asked HRA about other communication methods, such as texts or emails, we were told that HRA lacked the technological capacity to enact those alternatives.

When clients go in person to HRA centers and ask about career services and job opportunities, they are frequently told to instead apply (or recertify) via AccessHRA. However, relying heavily on this automated process is deeply impersonal, removes opportunities for meaningful counselling, and can even discourage clients from utilizing services. Our non-English speaking clients in particular report finding the AccessHRA app difficult to navigate.

When referred to a potential opportunity, clients receive notice by mail (unless they conducted their employment assessment in person). However, communicating by mail is an unreliable communication method for working with clients in shelter, who frequently move around until they are deemed shelter eligible. During SET, our income-building staff recall being kept in the loop on where a client was in a job



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application process (whether they had been referred to a position, when their interviews were scheduled, etc.) and could help clients throughout a job application. Now, they report a lack of transparency into how clients engage with HRA career services and no knowledge or visibility into where clients are in the job referral process.

Our staff also report challenges in communication between HRA and employers once clients have started a job. Some clients have reported having their benefits adjusted for their new income before they received their first paycheck. Furthermore, many of the opportunities that clients are referred to by CareerCompass are temporary placements, and clients fear that, without HRA's intervention, they could lose these positions after the temp period.

However, one HRA communication method—TEXT-2-WORK—has worked well for our clients and staff. Through TEXT-2-WORK, clients enroll to receive messages approximately every other day for opportunities in industries that interest them. As our income building staff can also enroll to receive these messages, they can help clients engage in job referrals through the program.

## 2) Benefit Sanctioning:

Beyond the budgetary impacts for the City, there are serious human consequences to these communication inefficiencies on the part of HRA. This July, HRA reinstated sanctions on cash assistance for clients failing to meet their work requirements. If clients are not able to benefit from career counselling or get their employment assessments conducted, they could lose vital benefits. However, the onus on clients to identify these resources, when HRA career services' outreach and engagement is so unsuccessful, is unjust. This is a fear- and intimidation-led policy, not trauma-informed, and it does not help clients overcome any real barriers to employment. For families in shelter, engaging in work activities is not as simple as "getting a job." Many of our clients have complicated care needs, either for themselves or for family members, have disabilities or serious mental health diagnoses, or lack legal work authorization in this country. Career services programs that do not accommodate or account for these multidimensional barriers to engaging in work activities, but penalize families for not participating, perpetuate an inaccurate and pernicious stereotype that people experiencing homelessness and receiving public benefits are "lazy" and "cheats."





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Instead, our income building program uses a trauma-informed, client-centered approach to understand a family's situation and find suitable training or employment opportunities for them and their interests. We are eager to continue working with HRA career services to help improve communication and engagement with our clients to ultimately facilitate the stable employment and housing they need.

Thank you!



**Testimony: New York City Council General Welfare Committee**

**Oversite—HRA’s Career Services**

**September 10, 2024**

Thank you, Chair Ayala, members of the General Welfare Committee, and other esteemed Council Members for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Daniel Hiraldo, and I am the Job Developer Retention Specialist for GMHC’s Workforce Development Program. I am here today to update you on GMHC’s ongoing commitment to people living with HIV and AIDS who are ready, willing and able to return to work, despite the loss of our \$400,000 per year Realizing Independence Through Support and Employment, or RISE, contract with HRA due to FY25 NYC budget cuts. On behalf of our clients, I want to thank you for your continued advocacy for workforce development amidst this loss in funding. I know firsthand how important it is: I was hired from GMHC’s workforce program eight years ago.

Founded in 1982 as Gay Men’s Health Crisis, the world’s first HIV and AIDS services organization, GMHC provides comprehensive services to over 5,500 New Yorkers living with and affected by HIV and AIDS every year. In 2023, more than 78% of our new clients lived under the Federal Poverty Level. This is among the reasons why our workforce development program, which supports clients living with HIV and AIDS who are ready, willing, and able to return to work, is so important. Training and linking clients to safe and stable jobs puts them on the path to financial independence and leads to better health outcomes like medication adherence and improved mental health.

Since 2014, GMHC’s RISE program had helped over 670 HASA clients find employment by providing culturally competent and individualized assistance, including resume building, vocational training, internships, employment and benefits counseling, and job placement and retention assistance for unemployed and underemployed workers at all stages of career readiness. Our SUNY Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking, or ATTAIN, computer lab enabled HASA clients to receive the practical skills training and certifications needed to succeed in the digital world, including computer skills development and literacy, language learning, including

ESL, academic and GED test preparation, and Industry-recognized certifications from Microsoft and Intuit.

I am grateful to be able to share with you today that, for now, GMHC has managed to continue supporting workforce development clients amidst this loss in funding, though we are no longer receiving referrals from HASA. In fact, GMHC is actively supporting 11 clients who became employed right before the RISE contract ended on June 30, by providing them with employment retention services such as Metro Cards to help ensure they can travel to and from work. Additionally, there are three former RISE program clients who achieved employment just after the program was terminated that we are also supporting. HASA tells us that we can voucher for expenses related to these employment retention supports in 2025, but that does little to help meet the needs of clients right now. In fact, there are about 40 clients on our waiting list who we cannot support unless more resources become available for this program.

As we forge ahead amidst this loss of funding, we are concerned about the HASA clients who would have been referred to us if not for this budget cut. In testimony before this committee when the FY25 NYC budget was being debated, HRA staff indicated that HASA clients would now be supported with existing HASA workforce services, but we do not know what those services are. With no disrespect intended to my HASA colleagues, whom I know were not in favor of this budget cut, we question whether and how HASA could provide the breadth and volume of services GMHC built over decades of experience and relationship building with communities justified in questioning whether government could truly meet their needs. Does HASA have a state-of-the-art computer lab like we do? Does HASA have long-term established relationships with internship and training programs and employers who can the support and environment needed by New Yorkers living with and affected by HIV and AIDS?

I hope that the New York City Council will continue to stand with GMHC and the HASA clients we serve by advocating for the full restoration of the RISE program in the next NYC budget. Vulnerable New Yorkers living with HIV and AIDS deserve to be provided with the training and tools they need to find employment and reach economic independence. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Good morning,

My name is Meryl Kordower, and I am the VP for Workforce Services at NADAP. I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Founded in 1971, NADAP is a private non-profit organization that services approximately 35,000 New Yorkers, both adults and youth, across all five boroughs and Long Island. The central focus of our work is helping New Yorkers who experience barriers to employment and a promising career, primarily due to long histories of unemployment, lack of education and training, vocational skills, histories of substance use and/or mental health orders.

Over the past seven years, NADAP has had the privilege of working closely with HRA and operating two Career Compass Programs, in Harlem and Bushwick/East Williamsburg. Our Career Compass programs, part of HRA's Career Pathways Initiative was initially designed as in-person services offering cash assistance applicants and recipients an introduction to HRA and the Career Services programs including its overall training, job placement and educational offerings.

In 2020 and because of COVID, we pivoted to a fully remote and voluntary program. During that time NADAP created an on-line Learning Management System, LEARN@NADAP where participants in all our programs had access to more than 100 employment preparation, financial literacy, skills building and vocational assessment workshops that were available 24/7. Currently, we are back to mandatory participation providing a hybrid model service delivery and continue to use these on-line resources.

Career Compass offers:

- A comprehensive Orientation of all services offered by HRA within the CP models.
- Vocational, educational and career assessment,
- Individual service planning,
- Referrals to education and training opportunities, internship and community service, as well as job placement and retention.
- 1-year post-placement support and retention service.

Since the program began, we have worked with tens of thousands of individuals including those receiving cash assistance, justice involved participants, individuals from the LGBTQI+ community, older adults, homeless individuals or those living in shelters, and those with limited English proficiency. One of the strengths of the initiative is the strong community partnerships with HRA, other vendors as well as external agencies providing support, training and other needed services for our participants.

With the new Pathways for Access to Careers and Employment (PACE) RFP, NADAP looks forward to continuing our relationship with HRA, working together on a revised model to deliver program services and assisting our fellow New Yorkers needing Workforce Development support.

Thank you for your time.

Meryl Kordower  
Vice President, NADAP



Testimony before the New York City Council  
Committee on General Welfare  
September 10, 2024

Lanette Chever  
Senior Director of Workforce Development  
Project Renewal

*Project Renewal's mission is to end the cycle of homelessness by empowering individuals and families to renew their lives with health, homes, and jobs.*

[www.projectrenewal.org](http://www.projectrenewal.org)

My name is Lanette Chever, and I am Senior Director of Workforce Development at Project Renewal, a New York City homeless services nonprofit agency. Thank you to Chair Ayala and the City Council for convening this hearing.

For over 55 years, Project Renewal has provided shelter, housing, health care, and employment services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. We are grateful to the City Council for supporting our programs.

Our vocational training, job placement, and job retention services help individuals who face significant barriers to employment, including histories of substance use disorder, homelessness, justice involvement, and mental illness. These programs ensure all New Yorkers have the opportunity to support themselves in careers with growth potential.

Investing in workforce development programs generates a strong return on investment for all of New York City by creating conditions for entire families to thrive. Organizations like Project Renewal need continued support from the City Council, as well as agency funding from HRA and DHS in order to sustain and grow these programs.

For example, our Next Step Internship Program serves many individuals who are HRA benefit recipients themselves. Our social services sector-based training programs like Next Step provide on-the-job training for New Yorkers interested in working in shelters or housing programs, many of whom have personally experienced homelessness. This lived experience, in combination with our training, helps them thrive in difficult-to-fill, yet essential social services roles. After completing intensive vocational and life skills classes and a six-week internship, 89% of graduates are placed in jobs, earning \$23.74 per hour on average.

Our Culinary Arts Training Program provides New Yorkers with a world-class culinary education and a pathway to a fulfilling career. Graduates go on to secure in-demand roles in corporate kitchens, local restaurants, and for City Beet Kitchens, Project Renewal's social enterprise catering company that prepares food for other New Yorkers in need.

Including our programs the Jobs NYC talent portal would go a long way towards expanding the reach of the Culinary Arts Training Program and Next Step. We would love the City to help us get the word out to even more New Yorkers who face barriers to employment.

Our Career Advancement Program provides retention and advancement services tailored to helping our clients build careers. Programs like this ensure career growth and maximize earning potential so participants can attain financial independence. In 2023, the average wage increase for our Career Advancement Program participants was over \$15,000 a year.

We know the Council and the City are true partners to the nonprofit sector. Thank you for your support.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SCOTT FRECH

Address: 4 WTC

I represent: DSS / HRA

Address: 4 WTC, NY, NY

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Katie Masi

Address: [REDACTED] NY 11356

I represent: WIN

Address: 1 State St NY, NY 10001

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/5 sept 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DANIEL HIRALDO

Address: GMHC

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: 9/10/24

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Name: Touaki Kouatsy

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