

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

1

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

----- X

Tuesday, April 29, 2025  
Start: 10:25 A.M.  
Recess: 1:47 P.M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room,  
16th Floor

B E F O R E: Pierina Ana Sanchez, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu  
Alexa Avilés  
Eric Dinowitz  
Oswald Feliz  
Crystal Hudson  
Lincoln Restler

## COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Ahmed Tigani,  
Acting Commissioner, New York City Housing  
Preservation & Development (HPD)

Emily Osgood,  
Associate Commissioner for Housing Services,  
New York City Housing Preservation & Development  
(HPD)

Meryl Block Weissman,  
Deputy Commissioner for Housing Access and  
Stability, New York City Housing Preservation &  
Development (HPD)

Jumelia Abrahamson,  
Director of Programs at University Neighborhood  
Housing Program (UNHP); AHORA – Affordable  
Housing Opportunities Right Away

Brendan Mitchell,  
Director of Real Estate at University  
Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP)

Arielle Hersh,  
Director of Policy and New Projects at UHAB  
(Urban Homesteading Assistance Board)

Eric Urquiza,  
Community Coordinator and Housing Specialist at  
West Bronx Housing & Neighborhood Resource Center

Joshua Stephenson,  
Executive Director of West Bronx Housing and  
Neighborhood Resource Center

Howard Slatkin,  
Executive Director of Citizens Housing and  
Planning Council

## COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

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

Brendan Cheney,  
Director of Policy and Operations at the New York  
Housing Conference

Milagros Salazar,  
Member of AHORA (Via Interpreter)

Brendan Benn,  
Business Representative for the International  
Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), Local 30

Shane Canada,  
Stationary Engineer Apprentice, IUOE Local 30

Richard Bess,  
Graduate of Stationary Engineer Apprenticeship  
Program from IUOE Local 30

Victoriano and Valentina Mejia (Via Interpreter)

Eric Lee,  
Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of  
America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY)

Karen Baez,  
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition

Robert Desir,  
Staff Attorney at Legal Aid Society

Alex Martinez,  
Representative from Kingsbridge Heights Community  
Center

Sonia Simpson,  
Member of Affordable Housing Opportunity Right  
Away (AHORA)

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS  
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Mbacke Thiam,  
Health Community Organizer at Center for  
Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)

Kevin Wolfe,  
Senior Government Affairs Manager at Center for  
New York City Neighborhoods (CNYCN)

Christopher Leon Johnson

1  
2 SERGEANT LEWIS: Microphone check, microphone  
3 check, this is a microphone check for today's  
4 Committee on Housing and Buildings. Today's date is  
5 April 29, 2025 – on the 16th Floor Committee Room,  
6 250 Broadway, 16th Floor Committee Room – recorded by  
7 Walter Lewis.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, good morning,  
9 welcome to the New York City Council Hearing on the  
10 Committee on Housing and Buildings.

11 At this time, please silence all electronic  
12 devices and do not approach the dais. I repeat,  
13 please do not approach the dais.

14 If you are testifying today, make sure you fill  
15 out a testimony slip at the back of the room with the  
16 Sergeant at Arms, even if you have already signed up  
17 online.

18 We also have translation devices in the lobby,  
19 Spanish translation, so if you need Spanish  
20 translation, you can pick one up in the lobby.

21 Thank you for your cooperation.

22 Chair, you may begin.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: [GAVEL] Good morning,  
24 everyone. I'm Council Member Pierina Sanchez, Chair  
25 of the Committee on Housing and Buildings. Today, the

1  
2 New York City Council is holding an oversight hearing  
3 on an issue that touches the lives of thousands of  
4 New Yorkers, the Affordable Housing Lottery, and the  
5 flawed platform that our city uses to administer the  
6 lottery, Housing Connect.

7 I've said it time and again as chair of this  
8 committee, and sadly, it is no less true today – New  
9 York City is in the throes of a housing crisis. We  
10 know the statistics, a 1.4% vacancy rate for rental  
11 units with more than half of renters rent-burdened  
12 and a third of low income renters severely rent  
13 burdened. If you want a low cost unit, you  
14 essentially cannot find one.

15 But today, I urge us to look beyond these  
16 statistics and remember the human cost of this crisis  
17 and the frustration that New Yorkers experience when  
18 even the few resources that we do have available are  
19 confusing and difficult to navigate.

20 Every day in my district office in the West  
21 Bronx, we serve dozens of our neighbors who are  
22 desperate to find an apartment, to find a safe,  
23 affordable place that they can call home. My staff  
24 works tirelessly to help these constituents gather  
25 their paperwork, navigate a platform that often

1 leaves them with more questions than answers, and for  
2 the lucky few, secure an apartment after months or  
3 sometimes years of trying.

4  
5 But for as much support as we provide, the  
6 reality is that for many, the technology has made it  
7 harder, not easier, for New Yorkers to find an  
8 affordable apartment that meets their needs.

9 Today, our hope is to shine a light on  
10 fundamental issues that continue to plague Housing  
11 Connect and turn our collective attention toward  
12 solution.

13 Some context, between January 2014 and June of  
14 2020, a six-year period, 29 million applications were  
15 received on Housing Connect compared to just 27,819  
16 leases signed. That means that just one lease was  
17 issued for every 1,000 applications that were  
18 submitted. The root cause here is, of course, that we  
19 have just a fraction of the affordable apartments  
20 that we need to meet the demand.

21 But the application technology itself also  
22 causes unnecessary delay. For instance, according to  
23 the Fiscal Year 2025 Mayor's Management Report, it  
24 takes HPD an average of 191 days to approve an  
25 applicant after the applicant has won the lottery.



1 learning about new housing lottery opportunities and  
2 responding to HPD's notifications in a timely manner.

3  
4 And although HPD's Marketing Handbook requires  
5 that paper applications for housing lotteries be  
6 accepted, anecdotal information suggests that few  
7 applicants are aware of or utilize this option.

8 I'm sorry, there's somebody who has something on  
9 speaker phone or something and it's very distracting.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Someone has translation  
11 services. It's just a little loud.

12 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Oh, okay. Okay, no problem.  
13 I'm just like, is it are they talking to me? Okay. No  
14 problem.

15 And although HPD's Marketing Handbook requires  
16 that paper application... okay, I already read that.

17 Okay. Proving that you are income eligible for  
18 an affordable housing is difficult enough and  
19 shouldn't be further complicated by barriers to  
20 computer literacy or access.

21 To address these issues with the housing lottery  
22 system, I've introduced a number of bills that we  
23 will hear today. They are:

24

25

1 Intro 1264, which would require HPD to allow  
2 users to apply directly to specific re-rental units  
3 on Housing Connect.  
4

5 Intro 1265, which would allow applicants or a  
6 designee of their choice to receive notifications  
7 concerning lottery applications by email or text  
8 message – So figure grandma can assign her grandchild  
9 to receive those notifications.

10 And Introduction 1266, which would establish a  
11 program to provide in person Housing Connect  
12 application assistance in publicly accessible spaces  
13 such as older adult centers, community centers, and  
14 recreation centers.

15 These three bills aim to improve the efficiency  
16 of the housing lottery system and ensure that more  
17 New Yorkers have a fairer shot at securing an  
18 affordable apartment.

19 I want to thank our partners at the universe  
20 University Neighborhood Housing Program or UNHP, the  
21 members AHORA (Affordable Housing Opportunities Right  
22 Away, for their collaboration on this legislation, as  
23 well as my staff, Maria Villalobos, Ben Ratner, Kim  
24 Castellanos, Gerard Fernandez, Paola Olivo,  
25 (INAUDIBLE), Carla Castellanos, and Gerard Fernandez.

1  
2 And, of course, our committee staff, Austin  
3 Maloney, Jose Conde, Andrew Bourne, Dirk Spencer,  
4 Jack Storey, and Reese Hirota.

5 I'm joined today by Council Member Eric Dinowitz  
6 and Crystal Hudson, and we will be joined by others  
7 shortly.

8 And before we hear from HPD, I'd like to read an  
9 opening statement from Council Member De La Rosa who  
10 could not join us today, but her bill 1207 is also  
11 being heard.

12 You ready? I'm gonna be Carmen. I'm gonna do my  
13 best impression. Okay. All right.

14 "Good morning, Chair, colleagues, and members of  
15 the public. Today, we'll be hearing my bill Intro  
16 1207, a common sense and urgently needed amendment to  
17 the administrative code of the city of New York, one  
18 that supports our workforce, strengthen city services  
19 and responds directly to operational challenges we  
20 face today. This bill would allow time spent in a New  
21 York State approved apprenticeship program to count  
22 toward the supervised practical experience required  
23 to obtain a high pressure boiler operating engineer  
24 license. Currently applicants must first complete a  
25 two-year apprenticeship and add at least three or

1  
2 more years of supervised experience operating high  
3 pressure boilers.

4 Intro 1207 eliminates this unnecessary  
5 duplication by recognizing the hand son supervised  
6 experience gained during the apprenticeship as valid  
7 toward the three-year requirement.

8 This change is not only logical, is essential.  
9 The Department of Buildings, which recommended this  
10 bill, is facing a significant backlog on licensing  
11 engineers. By streamlining the pathway to licensure,  
12 without compromising safety or quality, we can  
13 efficiently grow a skilled qualified workforce.

14 At a time when we are working hard to refill  
15 vacancies across our municipal agencies, this  
16 legislation is aligned with our broader mission to  
17 ensure that we have the personnel in place to deliver  
18 high quality, reliable services to all New Yorkers.

19 Intro 1207 is about removing unnecessary  
20 barriers, expanding opportunities for working people,  
21 and making government work smarter. I urge my  
22 colleagues to support this bill and help move it  
23 forward.

24 Thank you to Council Member Shekar Krishnan for  
25 your partnership; Thank you to IUOE Local 30 and

2 Department of Buildings for advocacy and work on this  
3 bill.

4 Thank you, Chair Sanchez, and Committee Counsel  
5 for allowing us the opportunity to have this bill  
6 heard today."

7 Thank you, Council Member De La Rosa.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: That impression was not  
9 good.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: It was not good? All right.  
11 Don't tell her, okay. (LAUGHTER)

12 Thank you so much, everyone. I will now turn it  
13 over to committee counsel to administer the oath.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand.

15 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
16 truth, and nothing but the truth, and to answer all  
17 council member questions honestly?

18 *PANEL AFFIRMS*

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin.

20 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Good morning, Chair  
21 Sanchez, members of the Committee, and all our  
22 partners that help make affordable housing possible  
23 in New York City. My name is Ahmed Tigani, and I'm  
24 grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today

1  
2 as the Acting Commissioner of the Department of  
3 Housing Preservation and Development.

4 Thank you for inviting me here and for allowing  
5 me to be joined by my team, the Deputy Commissioner  
6 of Housing Access and Stability, Meryl Block  
7 Weissman, and the Associate Commissioner Of Housing  
8 Opportunity and Placement Services, Emily Osgood.

9 We are grateful for the chance to discuss one of  
10 the most powerful tools in HPD's mission to expand  
11 access to affordable housing, the Housing Connect  
12 Lottery.

13 We talk to New Yorkers every day who are doing  
14 everything they can to stay in this city. Some have  
15 only ever known this place as home – people working  
16 one or two jobs to make ends meet, single parents,  
17 frontline workers, retired New Yorkers on fixed  
18 incomes who helped shape the neighborhoods we love.  
19 These residents are now seeking access to affordable  
20 housing opportunities that meet them where they are  
21 at a cost they can afford in a neighborhood that they  
22 love. We hear from children that grew up in this city  
23 and now adults returning home after college in search  
24 of new opportunity and families who want nothing more  
25



1                    This past fiscal year, we didn't just talk about  
2 removing barriers, we did it. We eliminated credit  
3 checks for voucher holders, because families with  
4 rental assistance should not be blocked by barriers  
5 that were never even necessary. We updated the  
6 Marketing Handbook, reducing paperwork, removing  
7 notarization requirements, easing documentation for  
8 federal benefit recipients, and making the process  
9 more accessible for people with disabilities.  
10

11                  We're even making marketing smarter. In addition  
12 to requiring most new lotteries to advertise in  
13 newspapers and conduct outreach to local community  
14 based organizations and elected officials, HPD and  
15 HDC, HDC is Housing Development Corporation and our  
16 sister agency in the housing work. We send email  
17 blasts to hundreds of thousands of active Housing  
18 Connect users whenever a new opportunity becomes  
19 available. We also email applicants directly when  
20 there's an update to their profile. Whether it's a  
21 reminder to submit documents, a status on an appeal,  
22 or a final determination, so they never miss a step  
23 in the process.

24                  Our website also offers Housing Connect  
25 trainings with short informative videos on how to

1 apply to lotteries, set up an account, income  
2 eligibility, and more – along with a FAQ, frequently  
3 asked questions document, answering New Yorkers' most  
4 often sought after issues and questions. We're  
5 already seeing results from those changes.

6  
7 In 2024, HPD helped more New Yorkers move into  
8 affordable housing than ever before – 14,654  
9 households, that's over 14,000 second chances, new  
10 beginnings, and families finally able to exhale. Of  
11 those, more than 10,000 secured homes through Housing  
12 Connect lotteries, and another 4,600 families moved  
13 out of shelter and into HPD's homeless set-aside  
14 units. In total, more than 300 affordable housing  
15 lotteries were advertised this year, opening up  
16 opportunities across the five boroughs. And  
17 currently, today, there are 31 rental opportunities  
18 available in Housing Connect resulting in 2,675 units  
19 across the city that people can apply to.

20 This work is about keeping New Yorkers housed.  
21 That's why we've expanded the programs and support  
22 systems that promote long term stability. We've  
23 refreshed our Retention and Stabilization Service  
24 Request for qualifications, which is our document  
25 that we refresh so that there are providers who

1 support formerly homeless clients, if they choose to  
2 maintain a stable tenancy after moving into  
3 affordable housing.

4 For families transitioning out of shelter, we've  
5 provided \$2 million in essential furniture vouchers,  
6 helping them settle in with stability and dignity.

7 And with the Council's and the New York City  
8 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection's help,  
9 we've issued the Ready to Rent program, pairing free  
10 financial counseling with hands-on application  
11 support, so more New Yorkers can successfully  
12 navigate the process from the very beginning.

13 We also coordinate educational campaigns,  
14 trainings, and in person events with the Department  
15 for the Aging, the Department of Veteran Services,  
16 ENDGBV, the Department to End Gender Based Violence,  
17 and other city agencies to work hand in hand and  
18 share the most up to date information with our  
19 communities.

20 Another key component of our outreach is the  
21 Housing Ambassador Program, a network of about fifty  
22 trusted community based organizations at over sixty  
23 locations across all five boroughs that work directly  
24 with New Yorkers to help them apply for affordable  
25

1 housing, maintain their Housing Connect profiles, and  
2 navigate the tenant selection process.

3  
4 Many of the council members here today represent  
5 districts with active Housing Ambassadors, and we're  
6 grateful for your partnership in connecting residents  
7 to those important services. This on the ground work  
8 is further supported by HPD's Housing Connect  
9 Outreach Team, which leads public facing lottery  
10 presentations and workshops in partnership with  
11 community organizations and in collaboration with  
12 elected officials.

13 In calendar year 2024 alone, this team helped  
14 coordinate nearly eighty events citywide, reaching  
15 more than 3,000 New Yorkers.

16 For residents who need help at and outside of  
17 these events, our Housing Connect Hotline offers  
18 another layer of support. Staffed by a dedicated team  
19 of 22 incredible public servants, the hotline  
20 represents to responds to over 10,000 calls annually.  
21 We also maintain a dedicated customer service email  
22 that fields hundreds of questions and complaints each  
23 week. Beyond this, HPD's Division of Neighborhood  
24 Development and Stabilization, which is a part of the  
25 Office Of Neighborhood Strategies, you normally work

1 with them on planning work, on our neighborhood  
2 plans, and individual public sites – they interact  
3 with the community and through that work also offer a  
4 venue for talking about Housing Connect, learning  
5 about Housing Connect. They regularly attend citywide  
6 events and speaking engagements to represent HPD's  
7 programs and respond to housing questions.  
8

9 But we also know there's more work to do. We're  
10 investing in the future of our systems, starting with  
11 a full scale overhaul of Housing Connect. We're  
12 committed to making it faster, clearer, and easier to  
13 use. This work is already underway and will continue  
14 over the next year.

15 As part of the broader transformation, we're  
16 carefully reviewing the legislation being considered  
17 today. Intro 1266 would require HPD to create an in  
18 person Housing Connect Assistance Program in  
19 coordination with other agencies. We recognize the  
20 intent behind this bill and it's something we believe  
21 in as well, to ensure New Yorkers can get the help  
22 they need navigating the affordable housing process.  
23 As mentioned before, we have a number of existing  
24 relationships with community organizations through  
25 our Housing Ambassador Program. Plus, we recently

1 launched a new Neighborhood Tech Help Initiative in  
2 partnership with the public libraries, providing the  
3 kind of in person support we believe the Council is  
4 seeking. From one on one digital guidance to  
5 multilingual application assistance and help with  
6 completed paper applications, these programs are  
7 connecting New Yorkers to housing opportunities every  
8 day. We'd welcome the opportunity to discuss ways we  
9 can work with the Council on these efforts.

11 Intro 1265, which proposes notifying applicants  
12 through Housing Connect and allowing them to  
13 designate a representative to receive updates  
14 presents a really thoughtful opportunity. Whether  
15 it's a daughter helping her mother, a case worker  
16 supporting a client, or a friend assisting someone  
17 without regular internet access, this flexibility can  
18 make a real difference. We'd love to explore how we  
19 can build this out together as part of the Housing  
20 Connect redesign. Our preference is to shape this as  
21 a flexible user informed feature, something we can  
22 adapt and improve over time. We're currently engaged  
23 in testing a set of new waivers and program  
24 processes, and we would like the opportunity to test  
25 and refine what works best for applicants. At this

1  
2 time, we'd like to see this process continue before  
3 determining if legislation is needed.

4 Intro 1264, which addresses how affordable  
5 housing units that become vacant are re-rented  
6 through the Housing Connect portal, touches on the  
7 process we are actively rethinking. We recently  
8 rolled out a new temporary update, the third update  
9 announced over the last few years to improve the  
10 process. Re-rentals will continue to be required to  
11 be posted publicly and accessibly, but it will not be  
12 necessary to send it through HPD's Housing Connect  
13 system, though many may continue to do so  
14 voluntarily. This added flexibility is one example of  
15 ways we're testing strategies to help fill units  
16 faster and reduce unnecessary paperwork. Over the  
17 next year, we plan to rebuild re-rentals, bring it up  
18 to speed using insights from the pilot, housing  
19 advocates, New Yorkers, building owners, marketing  
20 agents, and recommendations from the Council in this  
21 hearing to guide that work.

22 In closing, I want to be clear, this is a  
23 priority for me and we know that there's still more  
24 work to do. But we've seen what's possible when we  
25

1  
2 act quickly, listen closely, and stay focused on what  
3 matters.

4 Thank you for your partnership and for holding  
5 us accountable to the New Yorkers we serve.

6 Thank you to the New Yorkers who use our program  
7 every single day and provide us with feedback on how  
8 to make it better.

9 I look forward to working with you to keep  
10 pushing this work forward. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Commissioner,  
12 I'm taking the "Acting" out.

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: (LAUGHS)

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So, Commissioner, just to  
15 speak it into existence. How amazing would the world  
16 be (INAUDIBLE) had Ahmed as Commissioner of HPD?  
17 Like, let's make it happen. Okay, you heard it here  
18 first.

19 (LAUGHTER)

20 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Commissioner,  
21 for your engagement on this. Thank you also for the  
22 announcement that HPD made this week. I think that's  
23 a step in the right direction, of course, on dealing  
24 with the issue of re-rentals. And thank you for your  
25

1  
2 thoughtful testimony. I look forward to hearing,  
3 more.

4 I want to just start off with a couple of  
5 clarifying questions on your testimony, and then I'm  
6 gonna turn it over to my colleagues before I come  
7 back for my – you know, how we roll, the in-depth  
8 stuff.

9 So for starters, very excited to see a reference  
10 to a redesign of the Housing Connect System. Can you  
11 just talk a little bit more about that? What time...  
12 I know you, the agency has been engaging  
13 stakeholders. What's your timeline and time frame and  
14 sort of the scope of changes that you're considering?

15 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Absolutely. So we've  
16 already put in place maybe the hardest part of the  
17 work, is making sure that we have both the funding in  
18 place, the technical advisors in place, the contract  
19 in place to be able to have the team that works  
20 through the changes we want to work on.

21 We've also, again, I'm very grateful to the  
22 support of HDC, been able to bring on additional  
23 staff just to work through our scope of work and make  
24 sure that we have the team in place.

1  
2 Right now, we believe that the next year is a  
3 critical year for us in being able to not only ensure  
4 that we have the right business requirements through  
5 the conversations we've had with partners. Those  
6 conversations happen every day informally, but we've  
7 also launched a series of more formal round tables  
8 with marketing agents. Going back to last fall, we've  
9 had eight so far, and we'll continue to have more  
10 with a plan to bring in some subset for user testing  
11 when the appropriate time happens.

12 So from a timeline perspective, we had started  
13 this process from the research and analysis, you  
14 know, deep dive probably in the fall. We had been  
15 going much earlier in terms of building up what we  
16 thought we needed since probably the last launch,  
17 which was 2020, was the last time we refreshed  
18 Housing Connect.

19 We actually make updates to Housing Connect  
20 every two months or so because things come up. New  
21 technology is introduced by marketing agents or  
22 owners where they are changing the way that they are  
23 working with applicants. So are doing regular  
24 updates. But this overhaul is probably gonna be the  
25

1  
2 better part of next year, and we'll hopefully be able  
3 to stay track on that.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Can you explain  
5 to the to the public, where is Housing Connect  
6 hosted? Like who has control of the technology? What  
7 does it mean for HPD to make changes? Is that a third  
8 party or is that internal to the agency?

9 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So we, HPD is the owner of  
10 the technology with HDC as our partner in this work.  
11 The actual technology is hosted on hardware housed in  
12 a City building. We work very closely with OTI on  
13 that. And we are looking actually across our various  
14 systems, both the ones that we have, and new ones  
15 that we're building, on what the most nimble and  
16 flexible technology is.

17 So there's a lot of discussion about moving to  
18 cloud technology as a hosting solution. We just  
19 always have to make sure it's meeting our security  
20 requirements, that it allows us the ability to make  
21 adjustments.

22 The team that maintains it is the vendor that we  
23 have on board that acts as a maintenance partner. We  
24 have staff within HPD's Office of Technology that  
25 also supports this work. And we have colleagues at

1  
2 OTI, especially on the hosting component of it that  
3 supports it. So all three partners.

4 And then when changes have to be made or build  
5 out, they're the same partners, and now we have some  
6 additional support from HCC moving forward.

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

8 Can you share the size of the contract with the  
9 vendor that helps to maintain Housing Connect?

10 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I don't have that number,  
11 but we're happy to get that number to you  
12 immediately.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, noting that.

14 Just in terms of process, let's say that a  
15 constituent has identified that there's a radio  
16 button missing. There's no submit button here. Is  
17 that something that HPD and HDC work out together  
18 with OTI or that you have to go to the vendor to get  
19 changed?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So we would go to the  
21 vendor and this is actually something that happened  
22 recently. We've this happens, uh, people will notice  
23 either glitches with the system or will either get  
24 email from applicants - often we'll get feedback from  
25 marketing agents on, you know, there's a front side

1 of the system. There's also a back side of the system  
2 where the matching happens and applicants are drawn  
3 down. And if they see errors, they'll contact staff  
4 directly or incoming through our customer email or  
5 our phone line. Once we see that there's an issue,  
6 HPD Tech and our PruTech maintenance team work  
7 together to correct that issue. Sometimes it may  
8 involve being able to do it live, so they'll work in  
9 a test environment and then be able to migrate the  
10 solution into the live version of it. Or they may  
11 have to take down the portal for a certain number of  
12 hours, which a notice is provided. We send the email  
13 to marketing agents and put information up on our  
14 website.  
15

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much. It's a  
17 great segue to my next question.

18 My team, in the last two weeks, has flagged for  
19 me multiple times, multiple outages of Housing  
20 Connect, which is a really big problem because we  
21 have seniors, per persons that, you know, have  
22 they're digitally divided. Right? And they have  
23 appointments that they schedule months in advance  
24 sometimes because they're a very long waiting list  
25 for Housing Ambassadors. And now the day that their

1  
2 appointment is scheduled for, Housing Connect is  
3 down.

4 So what is this notice? How far in advance are  
5 you telling the public that Housing Connect is going  
6 to have an outage?

7 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So as soon as we find out  
8 that there's a problem, and I'm gonna actually ask  
9 Emily to build where I'm missing. As soon as we find  
10 out that there's a problem, often that's the moment  
11 we take action. If we realize that there's is an  
12 inability to correctly use the site or the site's  
13 malfunctioning, then – and if there's not something  
14 we can do to create sort of a safe mode environment  
15 for it to move forward with, then we'll take down the  
16 site and we'll notify people.

17 But Emily, you could explain for it.

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Sure. We're  
19 notifying marketing agent partners...

20 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yeah, bring it closer to  
21 you. Mm-hmm?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: I never want to  
23 be that person shouting into the mic...

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: What's wrong with *SHOUTING*?

25 (LAUGHTER)

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: (LAUGHS)

3 marketing agent partners, Housing Ambassadors, our  
4 teams, and putting the notice up on the website.

5 Usually when the site has to be down for just an hour  
6 or two, we're working up until that point. So it may  
7 be the day before, it may be the day of.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. I would like to  
9 acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member  
10 Abreu, and turn it Council Member Dinowitz for  
11 questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair.  
13 Hello, (INAUDIBLE) Commissioner...

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: (LAUGHS)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS) I hope all is  
16 well, *Commissioner*.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So I want to clarify  
18 something for ,you know, someone applies, people  
19 apply for housing on Housing Connect and then for a  
20 given unit you send out offers in batches of 250 is  
21 that accurate?

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So if someone is  
23 applying on Housing Connect, so someone submits an  
24 application, there's a period of time in which we're  
25 collecting applications, then those application...

1 then the window closes and the applicants are then...  
2 there are two parts of it - We have still existing  
3 preferences, and then we also have the general  
4 lottery. There's a log number built. Everyone's  
5 randomized. Right? You don't want to be penalized  
6 for...  
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Right, but I'm just  
9 asking, you send out... you don't send out, let's say  
10 10,000 people apply. You don't send out 10,000...

11 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, no...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You have batches of 50.

13 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. What percent of  
15 those people are rejected because they don't meet the  
16 qualifications in any given batch? What's the average  
17 percentage that people are rejected because they  
18 don't fit the criteria for a given unit?

19 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Emily...

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Let's get back to  
21 you on the percent that is rejected per batch.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: People are rejected  
23 though, correct?

24 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay.

1  
2 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And it could be something  
3 on the early part where there is, uh, it's  
4 eligibility for the unit. It could be income  
5 eligibility. It could... if it's in the preference  
6 category, it's a preference piece, and then they're  
7 moved into the general pool. There are a lot of  
8 different reasons why that happened. So we would... I  
9 think we will also try to break it down

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, I

11 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Around that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I'd love to see that.

13 And then how long between each batch of offers?  
14 You give a batch, how many weeks until the next batch  
15 is offered?

16 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I think it's a it's a back  
17 and forth, right? So we are providing...

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Like on average, like  
19 you guys send out a batch of 250...

20 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: On average how many  
22 weeks does it take to then offer the next batch?

23 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I mean, two things I would  
24 just say and I would...

25 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Sure.

1  
2 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I'm gonna give you a number  
3 for one of them. So they're different for different  
4 sized buildings, the lottery can be more or less  
5 complicated. So we provide a batch of applicants to  
6 our marketing agent. The marketing agent goes through  
7 that process. When you're done with files and decide  
8 whether an applicant is the right applicant or not,  
9 that's when we will give more information for them to  
10 flow through.

11 I think the number we're at is around... when it  
12 reaches the marketing agent is about 40 to 45 days...

13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay...

15 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: where (INAUDIBLE)...

16 (CROSS-TALK)

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I am going to tell you  
18 why I'm asking. Okay, but that's helpful. So 45 days  
19 between - we don't know the percentage of people  
20 rejected, because they don't qualify, but it's a  
21 number.

22 And here's why I'm asking, and because we do  
23 Housing Connect in my office, we work with a number  
24 of providers that we fund in the City Council. That  
25 the filters on the Housing Connect search, they don't

1  
2 properly remove listings that don't fall under  
3 certain criteria of the filter.

4 So a user may apply for filter, they say, "I can  
5 afford this much, I have this many people." But it  
6 pops up a bunch of other options, and they say,  
7 "Well, the filter tells me that I qualify. So I'm  
8 going to go ahead and apply for those apartments,"  
9 only to find out that, you know, within 45 days let's  
10 say, they don't qualify.

11 Additionally, a person's income is not relevant  
12 if they have a voucher, correct?

13 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: If they... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: If they have a voucher,  
15 right?

16 So there's no option to say, hey, I have a  
17 voucher and to block out the income and just show,  
18 you know, what your voucher amount is. That leads to  
19 confusion.

20 But I think the issue here is with a filter that  
21 doesn't actually filter properly, you have people  
22 applying for apartments who may not qualify. Now  
23 that's a pain in the butt for the, but what's worse  
24 is that someone in the second or third batch who  
25 would have otherwise qualified, their spot may have

1                   been taken up by someone who didn't qualify, who  
2                   could have been told beforehand if the filter were  
3                   properly working, that they're not going to qualify  
4                   for this apartment, so they should apply for  
5                   something for which they qualify for.  
6

7                   So can Housing Connect be amended? Can you guys  
8                   amend Housing Connect to make a more accurate filter  
9                   system?

10                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So I would – two parts,  
11                  yes. So this is actually something that we're looking  
12                  at, and I'll let Emily build on it.

13                  I'd say that on the on the voucher piece, it's  
14                  something that we've been talking about specifically.  
15                  We have actually seen some good success with voucher  
16                  holders in 2024. We had about a little over 2,600  
17                  individuals move into units in Housing Connect with  
18                  vouchers out of the shelter system. So we know there  
19                  is a pathway. But (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

20                  COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Which is wonderful...

21                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah, (INAUDIBLE)...

22                  (CROSS-TALK)

23                  COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: but what I don't want  
24                  to see is someone saying...

25                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah...

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: "Oh, I don't qualify,  
3 because the filter tells me I need to make a certain  
4 amount of money."

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: And I guess my  
6 follow-up there, is that through that work we're  
7 seeing that we can actually make it more clear.

8 So the frontend filter is one of the areas  
9 that's on our scope list...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And do you have a  
11 timeline for when that filter...

12 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Is gonna be updated?

14 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I don't have a timeline  
15 yet. We can come back to the Council as we would...

16 (TIMER) with updates on where we are in Housing  
17 Connect.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I would love to see a  
19 timeline on that. And I'd... you certainly love those  
20 percentages, because that is going to speak to how...  
21 one of the reasons people may be waiting so long is  
22 because other people who don't qualify for certain  
23 apartments are taking up those spots.

24 I just want to quickly ask about the efficiency  
25 of the system. As I mentioned earlier, we in the

1 Council – millions of dollars for housing providers.

2 I know we have Josh Stevenson from West Bronx Housing  
3 right here. Great work in our office, and my staff,  
4 our staff spent countless hours on Housing Connect,  
5 but one of the challenges our providers run into is  
6 doing the work for their clients.  
7

8 And they share with me that a Provider Portal  
9 would help the organizations work more efficiently  
10 with clients to check the status of applications and  
11 work through the lottery process as a whole. And it  
12 can include a list of ongoing applications by the  
13 provider's clientele.

14 Could HPD implement such a portal specifically  
15 for providers, that we fund with City dollars, to  
16 ease the lottery application process for residents of  
17 New York City and making their work more efficient?

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I'd be happy to talk more  
19 about it. I think one of the bills here also talks  
20 about information sharing between individuals and  
21 third parties. A lot... and we saw this when  
22 implementing the Emergency Housing Voucher Program  
23 and our Housing Choice Voucher Program, there are  
24 questions about technology, which we'll talk through,  
25 and then there's the security and the data privacy

1  
2 piece. How do you make sure that we ensure it's going  
3 to the right eyes, only the eyes that the applicant  
4 signed off on? And then if there is a separation  
5 between the applicant and the provider, how do you  
6 make sure that that information is no longer  
7 available?

8       These are questions we've answered before and we  
9 should just talk through.

10       COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. I would love to  
11 talk through that with you.

12       And just, secondly, because my time's up, and I  
13 appreciate the Chair for letting me extend, is there  
14 any barrier, or what barriers exist that can be  
15 broken down to port documents directly from Access  
16 HRA? Because again, people are already uploading  
17 documents to one system. This is New York City. It's  
18 the it should be the same computer system.

19       What barriers exist between the document sharing  
20 in those instances?

21       COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So I'll let my colleagues  
22 correct me if I'm wrong, but starting last year, we  
23 actually... Taking a step back, we are using federal  
24 dollars that we received during COVID to build on a  
25 set of recommendations and working group discussions

1  
2 to bring together DSS, HRA, HPD, DOHMH more closely  
3 together, especially as it relates to our homeless  
4 placement services. A lot of this work has resulted  
5 in us getting to over a 100% increase in placements.

6 So there are two parts of this – there is  
7 setting in place the legal framework for data  
8 exchange, which we've been working on since EHV and  
9 moving forward and putting those agreements in place.  
10 And now we have funding for and building toward a  
11 shared dashboard just to make sure that we're looking  
12 at the same numbers.

13 And then the next part would be being able to  
14 use document ,you know, reciprocity and documents.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes, I guess the same  
16 question – Could you provide a timeline for that  
17 document reciprocity?

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: We can come back to you and  
19 tell you where we are in the process.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

21 Very last thing, very last thing, very  
22 quick...(CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Ask him...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I've been informed by  
25 one of my community boards...

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Ask when he's coming back.

2  
3                   (LAUGHS)

4                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: When is he coming back  
5 to me? Thank you.

6                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I have to look... we will  
7 after this hearing, I promise, we will get back to  
8 you this week with a set of times that we think we  
9 can get back to you and information... on answers to  
10 all this information.

11                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

12                   And very last, one of my local community boards  
13 has reached out to schedule presentations by HPD on  
14 Housing Connect, and I've been told they've been  
15 having trouble getting that appointment.

16                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Oh?

17                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So...

18                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: We can reach out today.

19                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, we'll speak  
20 afterwards about that. Thank you very much.

21                   And, Chair, thank you, and I appreciate the  
22 time. Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you.

23                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Thank you.

24                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Commissioner.

25                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: (LAUGHS)

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (LAUGHS) Thank you, Council  
2  
3 Member Dinowitz.

4                   Okay, yeah, and I just, you know, to hammer on  
5 that point of timeline, you know, I think this this  
6 hearing is all about frustrations that constituents,  
7 providers, service providers, as well, have had with  
8 the platform. And this this feeling like, you know,  
9 when they have tried to share feedback with the  
10 agency, they've been met with, you know, a lack of  
11 engagement. Right?

12                   And we don't need to legislate all these  
13 changes. We can talk it out, but only, if and only  
14 if, you know, there's that real commitment to a  
15 timeline. Like, we want to know when... we're gonna  
16 sit down, when are we gonna be able to talk together  
17 about this? Because there's you know, Housing Connect  
18 was amazing about twelve years ago when it was  
19 created. And there was that update in 2020, but there  
20 are still these frustrations. And we see AI, we see  
21 what's happening in, you know, other technological  
22 advancements. So we want to understand how the agency  
23 is also taking advantage of these, you know, these  
24 available technologies and if there are any, you  
25 know, hindrances to doing so.

1                   So on that, I want to go back to this, the  
2 questions about the contract and the vendor. Who is  
3 the vendor? And can you just share if there are any  
4 hindrances with, you know, updating the technology  
5 more, you know, in a in a bigger way than just radio  
6 buttons or glitches? What does that look like? Do you  
7 have to recontract or anything like that?

9                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So, the vendor is PruTech,  
10 they've worked with us before. We're working with  
11 them on a number of different projects. They have  
12 worked with the City for a long time. They've, you  
13 know, we have talked to them about really having a  
14 pretty broad approach to making dramatic changes to  
15 the program. I do feel at this point that within  
16 scope there is a lot that we can do. Certainly a lot  
17 of what has been mentioned here at the hearing, has  
18 been things that we've talked to them about and  
19 wanted to work on.

20                   And as we continue to meet and talk, engage with  
21 both the public and regularly check-in with the  
22 Council on this, I think that we'll be able to fit  
23 within our scope what we need to do.

24                   There's always the opportunity. There's always  
25 the chance in a tech contract that what we want to do

1 goes further than where we are, and then it will be  
2 necessary to do a contract amendment.

3  
4 But I don't see that currently as an issue.  
5 Their expertise and their record of delivering in the  
6 past suggest that they are able to do that work. They  
7 gave very strong inferences about their ability to  
8 deliver on what we asked for. And so, I feel like  
9 they have the tools to do it, plus HPD staff and our  
10 colleagues at OTI.

11 So, I feel like we have the tools to get what we  
12 need done. We have a pretty broad approach of trying  
13 to really push the envelope, and especially in the  
14 things that have been discussed so far, and the  
15 feedback we've gotten from marketing agents, that is  
16 within the scope of what we want to do.

17 And then the last piece of it that's always, uh,  
18 it's both interesting, and will continue to keep us  
19 sharp, is that the marketing agents and the owners  
20 are also developing new technology and engaging  
21 either through the lottery process, or how they work  
22 with their re-rental work, or just how they manage  
23 their buildings.

24 We saw last year a couple of examples of new  
25 things that we learned that actually had interactions

1 with the system that caused us to pause and figure  
2 out how to make sure that we can work with them to do  
3 what they need to do to work well with applicants,  
4 but not create problems for our system.  
5

6 So that really put into focus the idea that as  
7 we build something, it needs to have the flexibility  
8 to incorporate new technology that the private market  
9 is also working on.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you,  
11 Commissioner.

12 And one more follow-up on the on the notice...  
13 the question of notice around outages.

14 So in my office, I just asked my team, what is  
15 the waiting list? So right now, if, you know, someone  
16 walks into my office and they say, "I want to apply  
17 for an affordable apartment," and we want to refer  
18 them to West Bronx Housing or KCC or Kings Ridge  
19 Heights Community Center or Arriva or UNHP, we're  
20 giving them appointments in July - *July*.

21 And so if on July 13th, there is an outage, it's  
22 a it's really harmful. So can you commit to not  
23 having the site go out without, say, a business day's  
24 notice or two business days notice, so that we can  
25 flag for our partners and troubleshoot?

1                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Two things. One, I'd like  
2 to talk a little bit about how the waiting list is  
3 formed, because... and what that is versus the mini  
4 lottery which has come up, and I'll let Emily talk  
5 about that.  
6

7                   But in terms of notice, sometimes... usually if  
8 it's a planned outage, yes, we can commit to creating  
9 a timeline that makes sense.

10                  The example I gave before about a new technology  
11 that was from the private side working within our  
12 system and creating issues was something that was  
13 developing in the moment and created a problem that  
14 we had to shut down. So if it's something external  
15 affecting our system, it would be very hard to give  
16 advance notice, obviously. But if we have a planned  
17 outage, we can work on giving as much time as  
18 possible. It may be there's an emergency, we have to  
19 shut down, or we know that there is an update we want  
20 to make, we're gonna give a nice long timeline.

21                  We also can talk more and think more about the  
22 appointment piece, because if there's an in-person  
23 interaction that relies on the system information,  
24 maybe there's another workaround, because as you  
25 pointed out, getting those appointments are very hard

1  
2 to schedule. So that should be on our list to  
3 continue to work through.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But you're going to support  
5 1264, and it's going to be great, and we're going to  
6 expand access to in-person appointment help  
7 everywhere in the city.

8 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And I would say that, as I  
9 testified earlier, we are doing in-person support...

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay.

11 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: in person support with our  
12 senior centers. I recently visited one, the Sarah  
13 Roosevelt Garden Senior Center, working with their  
14 deputy director who engages directly with senior  
15 center with seniors. We actually did a series of town  
16 halls just at senior centers last year based on  
17 feedback we got from one specific senior town hall.

18 So we just did Housing Connect seminars with  
19 DOF, US, DFTA. We are also doing similar outreach and  
20 work with the Department of Veterans Services and the  
21 VA hospitals themselves. We're doing, you know, we're  
22 doing work with domestic violence shelters. We're  
23 doing a lot of this now plus the Neighborhood Tech  
24 Help Initiative.

1  
2 So I would love to talk more about where the  
3 gaps are. I saw that there was a recommendation to be  
4 more involved with recreation centers. So there's an  
5 email out to the Department of Parks right now to see  
6 what we can be doing to work together there.

7 Again, we did nearly 80 events last year and  
8 that was a real highlight for us. We'd be happy to do  
9 more.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

11 Okay, I'm gonna hold you to that.

12 Okay, so to go back to your testimony, there  
13 was... you mentioned some changes that you were  
14 making to make marketing smarter, you wrote and you  
15 said.

16 So when were some of these implemented? For  
17 example, the email blast that you described emailing  
18 applicants when there's changes to their profile.  
19 When did you make those changes?

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Starting when we  
21 built this version of Housing Connect in 2020,  
22 there's been a regular quarterly reminder that goes  
23 to applicants notifying them, reminding them to keep  
24 their profile up to date.

1  
2 In the interim, if there are changes to Housing  
3 Connect that first... this doesn't happen often, but  
4 for some reason requires a person to update their  
5 profile. Let's say we've made technical change – we  
6 want them to confirm something, then we'll email  
7 everybody and put a notice up on Housing Connect.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you.

9 I understand, as I mentioned earlier, that HPD  
10 is hosting roundtables with housing providers and  
11 marketing agents to improve the system.

12 But how about similar roundtables with  
13 applicants, members of the public to understand the  
14 user experience? Have you been doing that? And if  
15 not, can you commit to engaging regularly with  
16 applicants to update the system?

17 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes. This is something we  
18 started talking about earlier this year. We just  
19 finished the latest round with the marketing agents  
20 and next is impacted individuals.

21 So we see this successful actually in our  
22 Section 8 work, where we have residents advising that  
23 work, and we're going to implement a similar model in  
24 our Housing Connect work.

1  
2 And we'll obviously keep you up to date on how  
3 many we've done and who we've talked to. I will say  
4 that, again, we get hundreds if not thousands of  
5 individual inquiries. I get them directly, personally  
6 and I find...

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Like now...

8 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah. Just now. And I...we  
9 do take those seriously. And much of that actually  
10 goes into the scope of works we build, either the bi-  
11 monthly updates or this larger overhaul we're doing  
12 now.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. I appreciate  
14 that.

15 Moving to the application process itself, on  
16 average, how many affordable housing applications  
17 does a does an individual development receive or  
18 units, whatever metric makes most sense to explain  
19 that? And is it possible for you to share breakdown  
20 per borough?

21 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes, we can share breakdown  
22 per borough. On average, there's about 16,000  
23 applications per development. But again, these are...  
24 It depends on the characteristics of the building,  
25 how big the building is, the unit distribution, the

1  
2 AMIs, the eligibility of applicants. But best guess  
3 is about 16,000 applications per borough.

4 You know, in 2024, we received about six million  
5 applications, and we marketed about 10,000 units and  
6 over 300 lotteries.

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Can you repeat those last  
8 numbers?

9 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Sure, in 2024, all  
10 lotteries received nearly six million applications,  
11 over 10,000 units marketed, over 300 lotteries. This  
12 does not include the homeless set aside units, which  
13 are also part of this process, but separate.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Are you noticing more  
15 demand in particular boroughs or areas?

16 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Emily...

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: We have a Local  
18 Law Report, Local Law 217 of 2019, that I'm looking  
19 at right now on my screen to show what we've reported  
20 on for applications by borough. And so I would  
21 encourage all of us to do that, we can share that  
22 with you more directly.

23 We do see a pretty even distribution across  
24 boroughs, generally speaking, with a few fewer in  
25 some cases, in Staten Island.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Is there a  
3 difference in wait time, or a time to fill units in  
4 by borough, by geography that you've observed?

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's an  
6 interesting question. I don't have that data in front  
7 of us, but we will look into it and get back to you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

9 For an affordable housing apartment, how long  
10 does the entire application process take from  
11 submission to move in?

12 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So there's two different  
13 ways we look at this. One, in our underwriting, the  
14 way we plan for it, we are looking at twelve to  
15 fifteen months for lease up, but as you mentioned,  
16 the MMR has 109 days. So there are two different ways  
17 - you can either measure it from when the applicant  
18 is selected, and we move through the process to get  
19 them in lease up, or from when the application  
20 period, the deadline ends, and we get to lease up.

21 There's the other part of it that sometimes  
22 changes this is whether the unit itself is using low  
23 income tax credits or not. There's an extra layer of  
24 review that goes into that. And that's actually some  
25 of the changes that you see in the marketing

1 guideline guidance that we put out yesterday or the  
2 day before, are things that we worked on through  
3 conversations with Treasury and the IRS last year to  
4 limit the number, the pieces of paper that are  
5 required to work with syndicators and work with  
6 lenders to make sure that they could be comfortable  
7 with a different review threshold.  
8

9 So that's part of what we're trying to do to  
10 reduce that time, especially that 40 to 45 day period  
11 with marketing agents where they have, you know, they  
12 have a lot on their plate, they're doing great work,  
13 and they're trying to get through different  
14 applicants who may have different requirements.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Commissioner.

16 On the on the application, on the provider  
17 interface or the landlord interface portion, who has  
18 who has access to these documents? So say I'm  
19 submitting, you know, I don't know... I don't know,  
20 my 2020 tax returns or whatever, who is... who is  
21 able to see those documents on the back end?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: It is just the  
23 approved marketing agents for that project that you  
24 are applying to in Housing Connect. Even though you  
25 may, we provide the opportunity to save some

1 documents on your own profile in Housing Connect,  
2 sort of in your document library if you wish for easy  
3 access, when you are applying to a specific lottery,  
4 and then notified that you've come up in the batch,  
5 you've come up on the lottery log, and now it's time  
6 to submit your documents to confirm you are in fact  
7 eligible, that is when you choose or upload what you  
8 want to send, and that goes directly only to that  
9 project specifically.  
10

11 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. So Treasury and IRS  
12 are not reviewing...

13 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, no...

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: IRS has the tax returns,  
15 but...

16 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No.

17 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (INAUDIBLE)

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: To get just a little bit in  
19 the weeds - So because low income tax credits have to  
20 be verified, in fact, occupants of those households  
21 go through annual compliance review, we... the  
22 marketing agents just has to make sure that those  
23 households are income eligible to be in a unit that's  
24 been funded with low income tax credits.  
25

1  
2 And so the handbook and the rules about how much  
3 paperwork you need and what the requirements lived on  
4 the federal level. So one of our early priorities,  
5 going back to 2022 when we issued Housing and Our  
6 Neighbors, was to cut paper that we don't need.  
7 Whether it's in the Section 8 application or in the  
8 marketing world. How hard do people have to prove  
9 that they're eligible for this department? How can we  
10 reduce it? One of the things was looking at the low  
11 income tax credit compliance and seeing if they need  
12 as much paperwork as we're currently requiring.

13 And that was the involvement on the federal  
14 level. Nothing at the at the intersection that we're  
15 talking about now involves that. That was just  
16 getting clarity on guidance that we can then give  
17 better guidance to our partners in Housing.

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

19 Switching gears to paper applications. According  
20 to the 2025 Marketing Handbook, the marketing agent  
21 may receive request from an applicant to submit a  
22 paper application. How does HPD keep track that the  
23 marketing agent is sending an applicant a paper  
24 application? Do you know how many paper applications  
25 were added to Housing Connect in 2023 or 2024?

1                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So I can give the numbers,  
2  
3 and I'll ask Emily to go through the process.

4                   But in 2023, there were 26,293 paper  
5 applications logged in Housing Connect. Yeah, 26,293  
6 paper applications.

7                   And Emily, you want to go through that?

8                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Sure. So the  
9 process for requesting a paper application for an  
10 individual lottery, also from that development, also  
11 means that development maintains a log of all of the  
12 paper application requests that they receive. And the  
13 agencies can access or request that log of  
14 applications.

15                   That is to your question about how do we make  
16 sure that everybody who requests a paper application  
17 got one?

18                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So are the marketing agents  
19 reporting to HPD?

20                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's right.

21                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: And at the user level, uh,  
22 how do I know how to contact the marketing agent?

23                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: The contact  
24 information... are we talking about paper  
25 applications specifically still?

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm.

2                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: The contact  
3 information for the marketing agent is on the lottery  
4 advertisement, so that you would see in a paper  
5 through advocates, or other services online, if you  
6 happen to be online, but certainly not necessarily.  
7 The contact information is on that public  
8 advertisement. And then the marketing agent responds  
9 with further contact information when they're  
10 providing you with your application and any follow-up  
11 correspondence through the mail. So you'll have more  
12 contact information directly from them.

13                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So the marketing agent  
14 requires you to mail in your documents?

15                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's right. You  
16 can also drop off documents. That's a requirement we  
17 have as well, that that has to be possible if that's  
18 easier or more convenient for folks.

19                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Are all marketing agents  
20 based in New York, New York City, or they have  
21 addresses available?

22                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Let me get back  
23 to you on that before saying definitively.  
24

25

1  
2           CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: That has, by the way, just  
3 anecdotally, as I mentioned in my opener, that has  
4 not been my understanding. My constituents will  
5 always complain that they can't get ahold of housing  
6 of paper applications, that they want to submit paper  
7 applications but they are not able to.

8           So I'd love to follow-up offline about what is  
9 happening in in those instances.

10           COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And just to add, so we  
11 actually, a couple years ago, moved the marketing  
12 agent... the ability to market in this work, you now  
13 have to be a qualified marketing agent. So there's a  
14 review, there's an ability for us to hold people  
15 accountable. So yes, if people are hearing that kind  
16 of feedback, we would work closely with them to see  
17 if there are any other... there's any issues that  
18 we're not aware of, but beyond that, we now have a  
19 way of being able to hold folks accountable.

20           CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. And sorry, last  
21 one on this. Who tabulates the paper applications?  
22 Who sort of enters them to where they need to be?

23           ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: After the lottery  
24 deadline date, when paper applications are submitted,  
25 mailed in, then the marketing agent staff enters the

1  
2 paper applications into Housing Connect as part of a  
3 structured organized event that the agency does  
4 virtual monitoring of to make sure that everything is  
5 going smoothly and that we can answer any questions  
6 or issues that may come up during that time.

7 When all of the paper applications are entered  
8 into Housing Connect, they're grouped together with  
9 all the online applications for that same lottery.  
10 That's when the system applies a random log number to  
11 each one, and the batch processing and eligibility  
12 review begins.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. So there's no  
14 different treatment in terms of preference for  
15 digital or paper applications. They're treated the  
16 same way?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's correct.

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Correct, that's right.

19 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. What is a  
20 marketing agent? Who is a marketing agent? What are  
21 their duties and responsibilities?

22 (LAUGHTER)

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That was such an  
24 energetic question.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Who are these people?

(LAUGHS)

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Who are these people? So marketing agents are company... they can be their own companies. They can be departments of housing developers we find. Some have simultaneous... some simultaneously work in property management or development. Others are specifically focused on this marketing process through the housing lottery. There are organizations that, as the commissioner mentioned, have to qualify by showing that they are trained and have capacity in running this lottery process. That means that they need to attend our fairly extensive HPD marketing agent training. That they are trained in low income housing tax credit eligibility, which drives much of our income qualification criteria, as many know, and that they are trained in fair housing by a qualified provider.

We take a look at that as part of the prequalification process, confirm that their facilities, their tools are accessible and up to our standards and meeting those thresholds, then we would approve them to be on our marketing agent pre-qualified list.

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Who is selecting the  
2  
3 winners of the lottery? Is that the marketing agent  
4 or is that happening at the agency?

5                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: It is both. The  
6 marketing agent is interacting directly with the  
7 applicant to do that income eligibility review, all  
8 of the detailed confirmation and documentation that's  
9 required, and then the agency is confirming that  
10 everything is in order before the applicant is  
11 offered the opportunity to sign a lease.

12                  CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Right. But who does this...  
13 there are... I think you said something insane, like,  
14 a couple million applications for 10,000 units that  
15 were went up for rental last year. That universe of  
16 applicants that were cycled through to get to those  
17 10,000 winners, who selected that universe?

18                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So if I understand  
19 correctly, the marketing agents are the ones  
20 reviewing the applicants, they are selecting the ones  
21 that are eligible, and we review the file to make  
22 sure that they're eligible. The log is how we make  
23 sure that they've gone through in the appropriate  
24 order based on the log number they were issued after  
25 randomization at the top end. The first step is to go

1 through the existing preference categories, whether  
2 it's municipal, mobility, the community preference,  
3 and then move into the general population.  
4

5 So those are the two tiers, but it's  
6 randomization, log number, cycle through, the  
7 applicants are selected, and then the files reviewed  
8 for confirmation.

9 We do a back end audit now, and that way we make  
10 sure – and that way we make sure that things are done  
11 properly. But we have at any point the ability to  
12 request information or review things that are in  
13 process.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. How many  
15 marketing... prequalified marketing agents are there?

16 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: There are about 63 right  
17 now on the list. We actually, yeah, we have about 63  
18 on the list, and we have made changes to the process  
19 to streamline that work in case there are other  
20 qualified teams in, you know, in the communities that  
21 want be part of this.

22 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you. Are  
23 there language proficiency requirements for marketing  
24 agents?  
25

1                   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: There are  
2                   language access requirements, so I can get back to  
3                   you on the specifics or they can be found in our  
4                   Marketing Handbook. Happy to provide those, but an  
5                   applicant needs to be able to access the services in  
6                   the language that they speak or read or use. And  
7                   marketing agents are responsible per for providing  
8                   that.  
9

10                  CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

11                  And can you just again, in terms of the user  
12                  experience, can you highlight how today HPD marketing  
13                  agents, how are you communicating with applicants to  
14                  a lottery from the moment that they apply to onward,  
15                  to the moment that the building is full or the units  
16                  are filled.

17                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So when you apply for an  
18                  apartment, if you are selected as someone who may be  
19                  a candidate for a unit, and there could be multiple  
20                  people who are looked at per unit, there are there  
21                  could be communications that come through the  
22                  process, whether it's reminders to submit  
23                  documentation or if it moves even further, to set up  
24                  a schedule to view the apartment. And then if it gets  
25                  even further down the line, possibly, you know,

1  
2 complete the process and be selected for the lease  
3 signing. At the end of the process, there is an email  
4 that notifies applicants that we have finished a  
5 lottery. If they have not been selected, then they  
6 are encouraged to apply for other lotteries that are  
7 available at that time.

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. And so how... what  
9 are the intervals of communication from the marketing  
10 agent slash/HPD to...

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Certainly. So it  
12 starts somewhat with the applicant's choices or  
13 preferences on your - if I'm an applicant on my  
14 Housing Connect account, I go to my account page and  
15 I choose what kind of notifications I want to get.  
16 And if I want to receive notifications about  
17 important milestones by email, if I want to be able  
18 to also do that by text message to my phone. So  
19 that's number one. The points at which the system,  
20 but based on actions that we and marketing agents  
21 take through Housing Connect, notifies applicants  
22 usually you have to avoid overwhelming people with a  
23 million text messages and emails, but also make sure  
24 that people are getting the key information they  
25 need, especially when an action needs to be taken or

1  
2 a decision needs to be made. Notifications happen  
3 when your application has been submitted. So confirm  
4 that your application has been received. If it's time  
5 for you if you've come up on the lottery log, right,  
6 your random number has come up in a batch, and it's  
7 time to confirm your eligibility by submitting  
8 documents, that's a notification.

9 If you set up an in person appointment or a  
10 phone appointment through the system, you'll get a  
11 notification related to that.

12 If you are approved for the unit, certainly you  
13 get notifications about that and information about  
14 move in. If you are not, and let's say it turns out  
15 that based on all of the detailed information you  
16 provide, your income does not qualify you for that  
17 unit. And you receive a rejection notice, you get a  
18 notification about that. You then have the  
19 opportunity to appeal if you disagree or have  
20 corrected information to provide. You get a  
21 notification when the response to your appeal has  
22 been processed with further instructions... (CROSS-  
23 TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I guess... thank you,  
25 that's helpful. And these notifications, I understand

1 from constituents and stakeholders that they do not  
2 occur via text message. So is there... are there some  
3 marketing agents and in some cases where there are  
4 text messages and other cases where there aren't?  
5

6 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: It wouldn't be by  
7 marketing agent. It would be in how each applicant's  
8 profile, how they've set up their account, what their  
9 preferences and contact information are in their  
10 account. So if they have provided a phone number for  
11 text messages and indicated that that's their  
12 preference, that's when they would be getting the  
13 text message alerts as well.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it.

15 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Often, many do it  
16 by email instead or in addition.

17 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you. Got it.  
18 Okay.

19 A couple more questions on marketing agents. Are  
20 there any incentives to fill units faster that the  
21 agency provides to the marketing agents?

22 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: There's not a clear  
23 incentive. I would say the biggest incentives, given  
24 the length of time, is that marketing agents who are  
25 most efficient and effective are often marketing

1  
2 agents that we see are able to do more of the work in  
3 in in our industry. And then the second part of it is  
4 that the market... there are two pain points. There  
5 are two places of suffering in the length of time for  
6 lottery. There are people who could be in housing  
7 faster and there are owners who are delayed the  
8 ability to get the revenue they need to operate the  
9 building, or they need to reach a certain completion,  
10 or sorry, move in rate to meet their LIHTC  
11 compliance.

12 So there's a couple of financial incentives on  
13 the part of both the marketing agent, the owner  
14 that's hired them, and then of course, the security  
15 and stability of the tenant in order to get this done  
16 as fast as possible. I think really the root of much  
17 of the frustration that we hear about it.

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Do you have any  
19 sense internally at HPD whether there's difference in  
20 performance between marketing agents that are also  
21 developers or affiliated with development companies  
22 versus those that are independent?

23 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: That's, I mean, this is  
24 information we're trying to get from our roundtables  
25 now. So we've just started this process of digging

1 in, and we're working with marketing agents to  
2 understand what, uh, when we look at the data, what's  
3 happening for them on their side. You know, one  
4 anecdote I'll point... well, it's actually based in  
5 more fact than that. During COVID, the result the  
6 last couple of years, the same kind of hiring  
7 challenges that we've had on our side of the real  
8 estate market on leasing and property management.  
9 They have had as well. We've seen turnover on both  
10 sides of the work. So there is a lot of newer staff  
11 and so that's the reason why we do bimonthly  
12 trainings in order to get people up to speed.

13 Additionally, you know, there is we are  
14 constantly there's a lot of new information and  
15 changes that we've made just in the last two years.  
16 So that's also something that we're watching to see  
17 if – and this happens in change in change a lot. Once  
18 you start introducing a lot of new things, does that  
19 affect the performance of how quickly you can go?  
20

21 So we're looking at those two things and  
22 watching the data.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

24 Turning to the issue of re-rentals staying  
25 vacant for long periods of time, can you just walk us

1 through the changes that were announced this week,  
2 and how these changes will be different from the mini  
3 lottery system that that existed prior to this pilot?  
4

5 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So for re-rentals, there  
6 were two options. They could either do the mini  
7 lottery, which allowed individuals who wanted to  
8 continue to get opportunities from Housing Connect to  
9 get notices about units that were available citywide  
10 through a lottery that we've drawn up based on  
11 preferences that they listed for units that became  
12 available through re-rental. Owners and marketing  
13 agents also had the option of putting together... or  
14 opting into a waiting list, that drew up a waiting  
15 list based on those units that they had available and  
16 they can draw from over time. This newer option is  
17 focused on looking at the work that our marketing  
18 agents and owners have done in other ways that they  
19 market and put people in the housing. So, they still  
20 need to be compliant with the marketing guidelines.  
21 However, they are able to use other ways of marketing  
22 those apartments. They can use StreetEasy, they can  
23 use waiting lists. Again, as long as they follow the  
24 transparency and fair access rules that's in  
25

1 marketing in our marketing guidelines, they can move  
2 forward with that.

3 That's gonna be the case for HPD buildings. We  
4 will have a slightly different focus on HDC  
5 regulatory buildings because of other dynamics having  
6 to do with their regulatory agreement.

7 So they can work through that process. We're  
8 also looking at trying to alleviate an issue around  
9 tenant in portfolio moves. So there was a lot of  
10 feedback that we got to try to allow for greater  
11 flexibility around that. There are buildings that  
12 will be able to lease up and bring people into  
13 apartments and then provide the file for that for  
14 review after the fact.

15 There are some buildings that, due to the rules  
16 that we have in place around some of our incentive  
17 programs and our zoning programs and our regulatory  
18 agreements, we'll have to provide those files in  
19 advance, but we have committed to a rapid review of  
20 those files to make sure that they're eligible.

21 And so those are some of the things that we've  
22 heard from the industry. Being able to use their own  
23 listing strategy, being able to work within their own  
24 portfolio to address, you know, in tenant moves and  
25

1 then, being able to have different ways of getting  
2 tenants into units, if they are able to, based on the  
3 rules and regs that exist. And then if they have to  
4 review it with us before, we commit to a rapid review  
5 of those applications.  
6

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. So...

8 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And sorry, there's one...

9 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm?

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: During this re-  
11 rental waiver period process, we also have the  
12 resources that marketing agents may use outside  
13 Housing Connect, it will all be listed on a page on  
14 HPD's website so that applicants can go to one place,  
15 see links to follow to access these resources even  
16 though they may not be on Housing Connect  
17 specifically. That's important to us.

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

20 And the application itself, even if it's  
21 advertised on StreetEasy or whatever company, it  
22 still has to be submitted through the housing connect  
23 portal?

24 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No. For this waiver, it  
25 will move through the housing company marketing agent

1 directly. They are responsible for maintaining the  
2 log, the paperwork necessary to prove that they have  
3 followed the marketing guidance. And that is  
4 something that we will be able to ask for upon  
5 request to make sure that people are compliant.  
6

7 At any point, if a marketing agent or owner is  
8 not compliant with these rules, the waiver can be  
9 rescinded.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. And so how is the  
11 agency thinking about... there's always, in our  
12 conversations, there's always this trade off between  
13 fairness and the amount of time that it takes to run  
14 through, whether it's a new building or the re-  
15 rentals. So what is your assessment in the pilot  
16 program of how fairness is gonna continue to be  
17 insured?

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: We've had pretty lengthy  
19 conversations with the marketing agents and owners. I  
20 think they understand, and many of them have been  
21 themselves longtime advocates for this kind of  
22 approach to housing. And they already have, within  
23 their framework, the rules and regs that they've  
24 built through either initial lotteries or rentals  
25 that we have. They will be applying that framework to

1  
2 an existing in house system and being able to execute  
3 thereafter. They understand that the responsibility  
4 to maintain that record is real, and that we would  
5 come in and check to make sure that that's happening.

6 We do believe that maybe more importantly, the  
7 system that we built around re-rentals did not live  
8 up to our expectations about where that is. And  
9 there's some percentage of units that are not being  
10 rented up fast enough, which is bad for people – we  
11 need to get more heads on beds, as I said before. And  
12 we also need to allow these buildings that are having  
13 their own difficulties with meeting operating costs,  
14 the ability to get in rental income so they can  
15 provide quality housing for those tenants.

16 And many of them have maintained connection to  
17 people who have been on a waiting list, have met a  
18 certain set of criteria and rules. And so this is  
19 something we think is worth evaluating, and we  
20 believe we are working with partners who have done  
21 this already with us in one way, and will transition  
22 to this pilot with similar, you know, efficiency.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you, I  
24 appreciate that.

1  
2           How will HPD, after the one year waiver, ensure  
3 that these units are better targeted to the relevant  
4 applicants and filled as quickly as possible?

5           COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So the, you know, the first  
6 thing I would say here is that, whether it's our  
7 initial or our re-rental, the main objective is to  
8 make sure that all our units, which are funded by all  
9 New Yorkers, are available to everyone who's looking  
10 for housing. The people from Brooklyn pay taxes that  
11 build housing and fund housing in the Bronx. So our  
12 first step is to make sure that we have a system that  
13 that rests on these fair housing principles and  
14 access mobility principles.

15           The last...the next bit of it, is that in the  
16 way that we set up re-rentals, we've already had a  
17 way to try to get people more clear about the type of  
18 housing they would move to and what type of housing  
19 is the best fit for themselves and their family.  
20 That's actually a key part of doing fair housing  
21 mobility work. And so we're going to be looking at  
22 that as a critical piece of making sure that we're  
23 matching people well.

24           In addition to the updates to update your  
25 profile if your circumstances change, so does your

1                   housing interest, and what kind of re rentals would  
2                   be a good fit may change. And then also, your status  
3                   as to whether or not you are currently continuing to  
4                   look for housing opportunities.  
5

6                   Some people have transitioned into different  
7                   situations. They moved out of the city, they've maybe  
8                   purchased a home, they are in a rental situation that  
9                   they are not looking to leave. How do we get that  
10                  information into the process, so that when we are  
11                  drawing that data down, we are matching people to  
12                  housing opportunities anywhere in the city that's a  
13                  better match for them.

14                 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you. We'll  
15                 continue to stay in touch about the timeline on all  
16                 of these pieces. That's very helpful.

17                 (PAUSE)

18                 Just running through my questions here, one  
19                 moment.

20                 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I will have water. This is  
21                 a good water break.

22                 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: This is a good water  
23                 moment.

24                 (PAUSE)

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'll flag for you that.  
2  
3 I'm gonna ask about wait list versus lotteries in  
4 general.

5                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Okay.

6                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But that's not my next  
7 question. I think I asked many of these.

8                   Housing Ambassadors, can you just walk us  
9 through how many Housing Ambassadors, Housing  
10 Ambassador partners are there, and what is their  
11 capacity to serve? Do you have numbers of applicants  
12 served on an annual basis?

13                   COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I'm not sure if we have  
14 numbers of applicants served, so we'll come back to  
15 you on that. But there's about 50 organizations and  
16 60 locations across the five boroughs. If individuals  
17 are looking to connect with a Housing Ambassador  
18 today, you can call 311 to get information. You can  
19 go on our website. And on our website, you're able to  
20 look by zip code, and they'll find in your borough  
21 where your closest Housing Ambassador is.

22                   Those are, you know, they're largely volunteer  
23 organizations, but they're organizations trained by  
24 us. They're given a wealth of access to us to help  
25



1  
2 examples. And then there's our 50 organizations, in  
3 60 spots across the five boroughs.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. And just to  
5 clarify, you said many of these are volunteer  
6 organizations, is there any level of financial  
7 support that HPD provides?

8 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So there is... so we, I  
9 mean, huge thanks to the Council who supports the  
10 Ready to Rent Program, which is a program that funds  
11 nine organizations to do even more in-depth  
12 preparation on getting people ready to apply and be  
13 successful in the application process if they're  
14 selected.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So outside of the Council's  
16 funding for nine organizations, there's no other  
17 administrative support... administration support?

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Again, we support it with  
19 multiple staff members both within... there's a  
20 Housing Ambassador... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But y'all don't get them  
22 money. (LAUGHS)

23 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: The Housing Ambassador...  
24 there are other ways that we support our housing  
25

1 groups in this program. No, there isn't a dedicated  
2 expense stream for it.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Okay. That's an  
5 issue.

6 Okay. (LAUGHS) I can confirm that that is an  
7 issue. I mean, I have organizations like UNHP in my  
8 district that do incredible work. You know, they work  
9 overtime. They're already operating on shoestring  
10 budgets, trying to do the best for a community that  
11 has so much need, and it would be very helpful if we  
12 could buttress what they do with financial supports  
13 for staffing.

14 You know, also, West Bronx housing is here. My  
15 organizations are in the house! Northwest Bronx has  
16 been on top of you for the whole hearing. I don't  
17 know if you know that.

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, I feel... I feel them  
19 (INAUDIBLE)

20 (LAUGHTER)

21 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But there is just so much  
22 need. So I would love to... Well, we have the bill,  
23 but we would also just love to have a conversation.  
24 Right?

25 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: We want to get these things  
3 right. And often it helps to have legislation to spur  
4 us in the right direction of conversation.

5 Just to make sure I make the – the formality of  
6 asking this, we are also hearing Introduction Number  
7 1207 today, by Council Member De La Rosa, which is a  
8 bill that would act on DOB. Are you all representing  
9 their position today?

10 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, you would defer to DOB.

11 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay. Does DOB have a  
12 position?

13 UNKNOWN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, can you say that  
15 someone said in the Administration... Because he's  
16 not under oath, that DOB supports...

17 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: My understanding, through  
18 my colleagues at City Hall, that my former agency,  
19 DOB, supports that bill.

20 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much,  
21 Commissioner.

22 Okay, last question, and I want to end on... I  
23 want to end on this bigger picture question.

24 Over the years, I've heard a lot of advocacy –  
25 or just thinking that we should actually consider as

1 a city moving from a lottery system to a universal  
2 waiting list for these affordable housing  
3 developments. There's a lot of issues that have been  
4 flagged - inequity of access, we've talked about the  
5 digital divide. There's the perception of unfairness  
6 or randomness because, you know, it's it feels like  
7 a... it is a crapshoot in in many ways, whether  
8 you're going to be selected. And there's even, you  
9 know, I can't tell you the number of conversations  
10 that I've had in my own community about, "Nah, man,  
11 it's rigged. They put their own people in!" And, you  
12 know, we have had these conversations, I try to  
13 explain to them the process. But, you know, there's  
14 all these different reasons why, you know, there are  
15 certain advocates that have pushed for a waiting list  
16 versus a lottery approach.

18 So can you share just what the thinking is?  
19 How... why do we, as a city, conduct housing  
20 lotteries versus having a wait list like NYCHA?

21 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah. I think- there's a  
22 lot there, but if one of the outcomes is to get  
23 someone into housing more quickly, uh, and given how  
24 extensive the need, and how long the list would be  
25 for - the waiting list for affordable housing, it is

1  
2 in fact numerically more likely that being part of a  
3 lottery, rather than waiting at the very long line of  
4 a waiting list, will put you in a chance to have  
5 access to housing faster.

6 You, every lottery, regardless of when you come,  
7 on whether it's, you know, a couple years ago or the  
8 day that you apply, there is an opportunity, based on  
9 your, you know, eligibility, et cetera, that you can  
10 be into housing. We have people who have applied for  
11 lottery, and then several months later they're able  
12 to get in the housing.

13 We do, unfortunately, also have people who have  
14 applied for lottery, and then they have waited a long  
15 time for their opportunity.

16 We've seen with other wait lists that there have  
17 been people on wait list for a very long time, and  
18 they have not had the opportunity, or even a chance  
19 at being able to move that position any further.

20 Additionally, some of the feedback that we've  
21 got on our re-rental program, for instance, is that  
22 waiting lists can go stale. And if you don't have a  
23 way of keeping that fresh, it could be very  
24 difficult. However, the strategies to keeping that  
25 fresh can also sometimes inadvertently remove people



1

(LAUGHTER)

2

3

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much,

4

Commissioner, members of HPD's leadership team. This

5

is an important conversation. I hope you can have...

6

I'm looking at you, Nicole. I'm looking at you, Matt

7

(LAUGHS) I'm looking... I hope that you could have

8

folks stick around to hear testimony from our

9

community members and organizations that have been

10

doing great advocacy.

11

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And if I can...

12

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Well, I don't know your

13

name yet, but if you can stick around, too...

14

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I do want to

15

introduce to everyone here in the audience and to the

16

Council, Mia Perez, is our new City Legislative

17

Deputy Director and point person, and has already

18

worked very much with communities, and looking

19

forward to her helping us do it better at HPD.

20

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Great. Mia?

21

MIA PEREZ: (UN-MIC'D) Yes.

22

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Welcome, Mia. Look forward

23

to working with you. Thank you.

24

(PAUSE)

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: We're gonna take a five  
3 minute recess, while I check on my child, and then  
4 we're gonna...

5 UNKNOWN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

6 (LAUGHTER)

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Nicole and I will check on  
8 my child, (LAUGHS) and then we'll resume.

9 (PAUSE)

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Hello, everyone. I am happy  
11 to report that Yaya is doing just fine.

12 Okay, I now open the hearing for public  
13 testimony. I remind members of the public that this  
14 is a formal government proceeding and that decorum  
15 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of  
16 the public shall remain silent at all times.

17 The witness table is reserved for people who  
18 wish to testify. No video recording or photography is  
19 allowed from the witness table.

20 Further, members of the public may not present  
21 audio or video recordings as testimony, but may  
22 submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant  
23 at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

24 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please  
25 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms

1 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will  
2 have two minutes to speak on Housing Connect, the  
3 topic of today's hearing, including the following  
4 legislation: Introduction Number 1207.  
5

6 If you have a written statement or additional  
7 testimony you wish to submit for the record, please  
8 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at  
9 Arms.

10 You may also email written testimony to  
11 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72 hours after the  
12 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings  
13 will not be accepted.

14 With that, I would like to call the first panel.  
15 Which I definitely have handy. Okay, so first,  
16 Arielle Hersh, from UHAB, Jumelia Abrahamson from  
17 UNHP, and Brendan Mitchell, UNHP.

18 (PAUSE)

19 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, and you... whoever  
20 can begin when ready.

21 (PAUSE)

22 JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Is this better? All right.

23 Hello, Chair Sanchez, and members of the  
24 Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
25 today. My name is Jumelia Abrahamson, and I'm the

1  
2 Director of Programs at UNHP and part of a Bronx  
3 advocacy group called AHORA, Affordable Housing  
4 Opportunities Right Away, that has been working with  
5 the Council Member. This group is made up of  
6 apartment seekers, concerned local affordable  
7 property managers, and nonprofit service providers.

8 You will hear from a couple of them today here  
9 in the room, and in the Bronx virtually, and others  
10 will make sure that they submit their testimony in  
11 writing, because they couldn't take the time off from  
12 work.

13 This group came together in 2022 out of  
14 frustration around New York City Housing Connect,  
15 even after the 2.0 remodeling.

16 University Neighborhood Housing Program has been  
17 working with many of these applicants, and we've  
18 submitted over 13,000 lotteries since then, because  
19 the main reason people come through our door is a  
20 need for permanent, affordable housing.

21 We've offered one on one sessions, workshops,  
22 webinars to help apartment seekers navigate the  
23 Housing Connect Portal. Even with this hyperawareness  
24 in this particular program, only 36 applicants have  
25 moved into a Housing Connect apartment since we've



Two, better communication and transparency between agent and applicants.

Three, additional fund funding for housing ambassadors and ready to rent providers.

Four, a dashboard that the community organizations can see and track the lotteries that we've been submitting.

So how do we do those four things? And I you guys, I don't know how much time I have, but I'm gonna continue. The current income...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I have to have to say it, though, so you may continue. (LAUGHS)

JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Okay, Thank you.

The current income ban used in Housing Connect lottery is often too high for Bronx residents. So we are urging the Council to look at and prioritize 0 to 30% and thirty to 50% AMI bans.

Right now, if you look, as the Commissioner said earlier from HPD, there's 28 lotteries on the portal, but there's only three that are for Bronx applicants, and most of our clients want to remain living in the Bronx. They work there. They worship there, so they want to stay there.

1  
2 And the starting income for two of those lottery  
3 is \$83,000 dollars, which is not affordable for the  
4 people we serve, even if they're doubling up or  
5 tripling up.

6 If we look even at Bruckner Boulevard, which is  
7 one of the lotteries currently on the portal, which  
8 is a 274-unit development, which is great with an  
9 income starting at \$19,372, but there's only 24 units  
10 within the 30% AMI. So only 24 families will be  
11 selected across the entire borough, and most likely,  
12 our applicants would not receive a very low log  
13 number.

14 So we joke in the office that to win that golden  
15 ticket, you have to put a lot of prayers and a lot of  
16 good energy to make sure that you get a low log  
17 number enough that it's 24. Number one through 24s  
18 are gonna be the ones that are gonna be first  
19 selected.

20 So this system is not really working for the  
21 people we serve. We also demand better communication  
22 and transparency. There's a lot of emails that I know  
23 the HPD has recently implemented in communicating  
24 with applicants, but those emails are being filled up  
25 with spam messages on lotteries that are not fit for

1  
2 our clients. So they're getting frustrated with the  
3 process even further.

4 If I'm getting an email for a lottery that  
5 begins with an income (INAUDIBLE) of \$83,000, I feel  
6 like...people are feeling that it's a joke, that the  
7 City is laughing at them, because they are never  
8 going achieve that income.

9 So these emails should be personalized. When...

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Jumelia, if you can  
11 conclude...

12 JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'm sorry, if you can  
14 summarize...

15 JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Yeah, I will summarize  
16 real... real quick.

17 And then, so better communication, additional  
18 funding. Right now, the Ready to Rent Program is  
19 serving several organization, but it's only one  
20 organization receiving the money, which is Ariva to  
21 my understanding. So spreading more money towards  
22 that. And then we need a Housing Connect system that  
23 lives up to its name, one that truly connects New  
24 Yorkers to those that need permanent and affordable  
25 housing.

1                   So thank you for the time, and we look forward  
2  
3 to further conversation.

4                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.

5                   BRENDAN MITCHELL: Thank you, Council Member  
6 Sanchez, and your entire team for engaging with us at  
7 on this issue.

8                   My name is Brendan Mitchell. I'm the Director of  
9 Real Estate at University Neighborhood Housing  
10 Program in the Bronx. Among other things, UNHP is a  
11 nonprofit community developer and operator of  
12 affordable housing.

13                   I wanted to use this time to share about our  
14 struggles with the housing lottery from the  
15 perspective of a nonprofit developer.

16                   For the last four years, we've had very large  
17 units, with very low rents, sitting vacant through a  
18 pandemic and a housing crisis. This is not because  
19 these units are in troubled buildings. It's not  
20 because they're too small or overpriced or for lack  
21 of trying on the part of our various marketing  
22 agents, but because the housing lottery, in its  
23 current form, could not connect interested parties  
24 with the housing we have available. As a result,  
25



1  
2 to 60% AMI with 27 units reserved for homeless  
3 families. We like to believe that most people remain  
4 in these units for so long because although our  
5 buildings may (TIMER) Can I?

6 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You may conclude.

7 BRENDAN MITCHELL: Thank you, I'll be quick.

8 Because although these buildings may not have  
9 the amenities architectural frills of new  
10 construction, they do provide decent, quality housing  
11 at an affordable price to low and moderate income  
12 families in the community.

13 The applicants that we've consistently been  
14 connected with through the lottery for re-rentals  
15 have been uninterested in moving to the Bronx,  
16 disappointed that they are being selected for a  
17 building that was built over a hundred years ago,  
18 unhappy or physically unable to move into a building  
19 that does not have an elevator.

20 By contrast, every single day, we have low  
21 income people in the community, walking into our  
22 management office asking to rent these units and  
23 calling the super for information on how to rent  
24 them. And in addition to the people that Jumelia  
25 works with at the Northwest Bronx Resource Center,

1  
2 our direct services arm, to rent these units because  
3 they live and work in the community. We also get  
4 calls from other nonprofit housing providers looking  
5 to place existing tenants in larger units, looking to  
6 checkerboard while renovating for existing tenants,  
7 or relocating existing tenants due to a fire or a  
8 flood.

9 Working together with these partner  
10 organizations in creating, preserving, and  
11 maintaining affordable housing is how we get this job  
12 done. This is why we believe that nonprofit  
13 organizations should be permanently exempt from the  
14 re-rental lottery requirement moving forward. The  
15 delays involved with filling our vacant units have  
16 hurt our projects financially at a time when  
17 buildings like this are up against rapidly rising  
18 costs and historically low collection rates.

19 We are grateful that New York City HPD has heard  
20 our concerns and recently announced a one-year pause  
21 on requiring re-rentals to be filled through the  
22 lottery. This will provide us much needed financial  
23 relief in the short term, as we can quickly fill our  
24 units with income-qualified tenants – like we have  
25 for thirty years prior to this requirement.

1  
2 We look forward to participating in discussions  
3 with our agency partners around re-rentals, and the  
4 lottery over the next year, and welcome any changes  
5 that allow us to fill our empty units quickly and  
6 efficiently. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

8 ARIELLE HERSH: Hi, Chair Sanchez, members of the  
9 Committee, good to see you. I'm Ariel Hirsch; Thanks  
10 for the opportunity to testify.

11 I'm the Director of Policy And New Projects at  
12 UHAB. For fifty years, UHAB has empowered low to  
13 moderate income residents to take control of their  
14 housing and become homeowners in the buildings where  
15 they already live.

16 I'm going to submit larger written testimony.  
17 And so I'm going to go over like a really quick  
18 summary of points. And I'll try to keep it brief. I  
19 might go over, but we'll see.

20 We want to really appreciate the attention to  
21 this topic for this hearing, but also wanted to call  
22 attention to one aspect of HPD marketing and the  
23 Housing Connect process that I don't think we've  
24 talked about too much today – which is the subset of  
25 Housing Connect that works for homeownership, and

1 specifically HDFC cooperatives, which are the vast  
2 majority of buildings that we serve and also to help  
3 develop and create – especially with this waiver  
4 process, which includes re rentals as well as  
5 resales. I think that this is a really good  
6 opportunity for us to have this conversation.  
7

8 The sort of broad scope here is that most HDFC  
9 cooperatives, around like 80% of the 1,200 in the  
10 city, don't have any requirements to market using  
11 Housing Connect. They use other means. They use a  
12 known broker, who understands HDFC cooperatives, in  
13 compliance perhaps with their monitor and their  
14 property manager. UHAB has a marketing and match  
15 program that works very well.

16 And so there... we know that there are other  
17 ways to do this fairly and to do this in compliance  
18 with all laws and regulations.

19 There are also some HDFC cooperatives that now  
20 have this requirement because of the regulatory  
21 agreement. And there are a subset of new HDFC  
22 cooperatives that are being created through programs  
23 like ANCP, Open Door, or TPT that will have these  
24 requirements going forward.  
25

1  
2 Generally, for buildings that are coming out of  
3 those programs, newly created HDFC co-ops, we find  
4 that the issues with Housing Connect mostly have to  
5 do with the development process and have, you know,  
6 it's a little messy. There's some coordinating that  
7 needs to happen. But for the most part, things work  
8 smoothly. I'm at time (TIMER) So may I continue?

9 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Please conclude, yeah.

10 ARIELLE HERSH: Thank you.

11 Where we see real issues are for resales, as I  
12 think has been illuminated a lot during this hearing.

13 There is that one lump category for, you know,  
14 when you're creating your application, you check a  
15 box and you say, "I would be open to re-rentals."  
16 That box also includes resales for home ownership  
17 units throughout the five boroughs, which is a huge  
18 category. And so the issues that you are well aware  
19 of in having marketing agents working on re-rentals  
20 go through thousands and thousands of applicants are  
21 also true for resales of HDFC cooperative apartments  
22 in the Bronx, in Upper Manhattan, in Brooklyn.

23 And it is just not necessarily set up or  
24 equipped to handle these applications. Housing  
25 Connect also doesn't collect critical information

1  
2 around like asset information for homeownership to  
3 understand whether an applicant has sufficient  
4 savings for closing costs and down payment.

5 And it doesn't screen for folks who are  
6 affirmatively selecting to participate in an HDFC  
7 cooperative, which is something that requires  
8 participation. It requires maybe stepping up to be on  
9 the board one day and requires some education and  
10 training. We want an affirmative sort of pool of  
11 folks who have self selected to do this and are  
12 interested in participating, interested in  
13 homeownership. But the current system that we have is  
14 not getting us those folks and also is not helping  
15 those folks find the housing that they want and  
16 deserve.

17 I also want to illuminate that the mini lottery  
18 process that's been in place for the last five years  
19 has not worked for a single resale of an HDFC  
20 cooperative - in all three examples that we have  
21 worked on - and I believe those are the only three  
22 examples that have taken place, it is not possible.  
23 And each HDFC that went through this process needed  
24 to exhaust a full six month attempt to market through  
25 the mini lottery with HPD before they were granted a

1 waiver to go to the private market and work with  
2 their marketing agent to do this. It's added cost.  
3 It's added time. It's added headache. And where there  
4 are hardships, someone needs to sell quickly for  
5 whatever reason, uh, or you have a vacant unit that's  
6 owned by the HDFC Cooperative, where they're not  
7 getting that essential maintenance to keep a building  
8 running on slim margins, this really makes a  
9 difference.  
10

11 And so just to say that with this opportunity to  
12 really rethink Housing Connect and our HPD marketing  
13 system, I want to call attention to the specific  
14 needs and challenges of homeownership and HDFC  
15 cooperatives and keep this conversation open. Thanks.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. In those three  
17 examples, were there waivers issued by the agency?

18 ARIELLE HERSH: Yes, there was waiver issued by  
19 the agency after about six months of attempting to  
20 run the mini lottery through the process that was set  
21 up, that yielded no qualified or willing applicants  
22 for either of the three units, uh, that was  
23 attempted.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Goodness. Thank you. Thank  
25 you for that. And I also just want to thank you UNHP,

1  
2 I want to thank the members of AHORA for meeting with  
3 me in 2022, for highlighting this conversation or  
4 this problem. I think... I understand that the  
5 article that was written about the issue of re-  
6 rentals and the massive delays, was one of the most  
7 highly viewed and clicked on articles in *Gothamist*  
8 and in sort of recent memory. So it just highlights  
9 that your experience with re-rentals sitting vacant  
10 for 16 months at a time, uh, is just one that  
11 frustrates New Yorkers, and just highlights ,you  
12 know, the problems, the challenges with Housing  
13 Connect.

14 And I do want to highlight, Jumelia, for your  
15 points about that mismatch, the deep, deep mismatch  
16 between the level of subsidy that the city of New  
17 York, and the federal government and everywhere in  
18 the state government, the level of support that we  
19 are subsidizing for affordable apartments is just  
20 nowhere near, doesn't get us anywhere near the  
21 affordability levels that we need to reach members of  
22 our community up in the West Bronx. So ,you know, we  
23 have been trying to push the Administration, HPD, to  
24 be more creative in getting to those tiers of  
25 affordability. Of course, if Council passed the

1 voucher legislation, that would provide more vouchers  
2 to low income people, and that's part of the  
3 solution. Also, HPD capital, getting deeper. But I  
4 just want to welcome your partnership. We know this  
5 is a problem of dollars and cents. Right? We partner  
6 in the city of New York with the private market -  
7 and nonprofits - but also the private market to make  
8 ends meet for buildings. So to get more affordable,  
9 to get more deeply affordable, we have to put more  
10 money in. So I just want to emphasize that for the  
11 public, and also welcome your partnership on, how do  
12 we build toward ,you know, applying the right amount  
13 of pressure to get that outcome that need - more  
14 affordable apartments.

15  
16 But, thank you so much for your work on this.  
17 This is really... this wouldn't be happening if it  
18 weren't for all of the work that you put into Housing  
19 Connect. Thank you.

20 I would like to now call on the second panel,  
21 Joshua Stephenson, from West Bronx Housing, Eric  
22 Urquiza, West Bronx Housing, and Howard Slatkin from  
23 Citizens Housing & Planning Council.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Hey.

25 ERIC URQUIZA: Hey, good morning.

1                   Good morning, Council Members. My name is Eric  
2  
3                   Urquiza, I'm a Housing Specialist and Community  
4                   Coordinator at West Bronx Housing. I've helped  
5                   hundreds of people in the Bronx apply for Housing  
6                   Connect through... for housing through Housing  
7                   Connect.

8                   The system is not working the way it should for  
9                   our clients. Many clients don't have computers, don't  
10                  use emails, and can't reset passwords. They change  
11                  phone numbers or emails, then they get locked out.  
12                  When I try to help, the system thinks it's a  
13                  duplicate account and blocks them. There's no real  
14                  person to talk to. A text alert or a helpline will  
15                  help a lot.

16                  I met seniors who worked their whole lives, paid  
17                  taxes, raised families, and now they're sleeping in  
18                  shared rooms because rent is too high. Their Social  
19                  Security isn't enough to live in New York City. They  
20                  can't just leave, this is the only home they know.

21                  For many, Housing Connect is their only hope for  
22                  decent housing. I can pay my rent now, but when I  
23                  stop working, Social Security won't be enough for me  
24                  either. I worry about that, and I know others do too.

1                   We need a system that's easier to use with text  
2 alerts, live help, and something that really works  
3 for the people it's meant to serve.

4                   Thank you for your time and for your standing up  
5 for housing in our communities.

6                   JOSHUA STEPHENSON: Okay, I need about... I timed  
7 it out, and it's about two and a half minutes.

8                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'll allow it. (LAUGHS)

9                   JOSHUA STEPHENSON: Good morning, afternoon... or  
10 good afternoon to the members of the New York City  
11 Council's Committee on Housing and Buildings, and  
12 Chair Sanchez.

13                   My name is Joshua Stephenson, I'm the Executive  
14 Director of West Bronx Housing and Neighborhood  
15 Resource Center. So we're a very small organization  
16 that provides one on one in person, bilingual,  
17 English and Spanish language services to about 1,200  
18 Bronxites per year. That's with a staff of two and a  
19 half full time caseworkers.

20                   Setting aside the issue of affordability, which  
21 a lot, you know, much smarter people than me have  
22 talked about already, I'm here to talk about how  
23 prohibitively difficult the Housing Connect process  
24 itself is and why my organization no longer regularly  
25

1 provides Housing Connect assistance – despite doing  
2 about 500 applications in the last three years. Of  
3 course, unless I get a referral from a council  
4 member.  
5

6 Most of our clients don't really know how to use  
7 computers. They barely know how to use their phones.  
8 I can't tell you how many times I've logged in to  
9 their account and seen them miss four to five  
10 opportunities because they just didn't know – and  
11 believe me, I've tried to show them and teach them.

12 You know, we heard HPD say that they send out  
13 thousands of text messages. Our clients are receiving  
14 thousands of text messages just from scams. Right?  
15 These are senior citizens.

16 What that means is if we created 500 Housing  
17 Connect accounts in three years, we'd have to log in  
18 to 450 separate accounts every two weeks just to make  
19 sure they don't miss opportunities.

20 What I believe would make our job far easier is  
21 a provider portal to which we could link a new  
22 Housing Connect account that we just created, instead  
23 of having to log in to dozens or hundreds of separate  
24 accounts every two weeks.  
25

1  
2 Attachment One of my written testimony gives an  
3 example of a landing page for a current client. In  
4 this specific example, all seven of the completed  
5 applications were rejections: Three, because they  
6 missed the window of opportunity to upload documents,  
7 four because there were no more units.

8 Attachment Two of my testimony is admittedly  
9 hideous cut and paste using (TIMER) old school  
10 windows, paint.exe. - so don't judge me too hard- of  
11 how I imagine a landing portal could look like.

12 Another glaring issue is the refined search  
13 function. So an example, if I filter using the  
14 following parameters, two person household, two  
15 bedrooms, max rent of \$3,500. The first selection is  
16 111 Willoughby Apartments. This two bedroom lottery,  
17 uh, is the two bedroom rent for this lottery is  
18 \$4,347. I just set the parameters for \$3,500. What's  
19 going on? Why is this filtering apartments for which  
20 I don't qualify and or can't afford?

21 So attachment Three is a screenshot from Housing  
22 Connect of the first two lotteries that pass that  
23 same filter. Neither of them qualify.

24 So absent, uh, any major changes in the online  
25 process, my organization simply doesn't have the

1  
2 capacity to help with Housing Connect, which is truly  
3 a shame, because the number one question we get from  
4 phone calls and walk ins is, "(SPEAKING FOREIGN  
5 LANGUAGE)" "Hey, can you help me get an apartment?"

6 So with that being said, thank you for your  
7 time. I also want to thank Council Members Dinowitz,  
8 Feliz, and Chair Sanchez for their continued support  
9 of West Bronx Housing. You know, we've worked with  
10 each of your offices to save dozens of people from  
11 outright eviction. It's an honor to work with each of  
12 you and your offices.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Josh.

14 HOWARD SLATKIN: Good afternoon, Chair Sanchez  
15 and Council Members, I'm Howard Slatkin. I'm  
16 Executive Director Citizens Housing and Planning  
17 Council, a housing and planning policy research  
18 organization.

19 I'll try to give the best one-minute and fifty  
20 seconds of my written testimony, which is submitted  
21 in its entirety.

22 CHPC is in the midst of a research project about  
23 the range of approaches to matching residents with  
24 affordable housing units used in other global cities.

1  
2 We look forward to publishing, this research, but  
3 I'll share some key takeaways of relevance.

4 In defining a fair and efficient system, every  
5 city strikes a different balance between speed and  
6 choice. It's really important to put people in homes  
7 quickly as well as fairly. These goals relate in  
8 complex ways and policy often strikes different  
9 balances in different situations, as well as over  
10 time as cities adapt their processes to evolving  
11 needs and conditions.

12 One of the things that we have found is that  
13 rigidity and proceduralism pose risk, not just  
14 because of the wide range of individual  
15 circumstances, the allocation process in New York  
16 City in particular needs to address, and the  
17 incredible depth of need for affordable housing and  
18 the limited supply of units to meet it.

19 But also, I should... I'm sorry... I'm gonna  
20 move forward.

21 The long lease-up times that we have identified  
22 in our brutal bureaucracy analysis of the lease-up  
23 process as well as the delays and re-rentals recently  
24 documented, by others here, highlight the need for  
25 continuous monitoring and improvement of the process,

1 as well as the need for an agile and adaptable  
2 process for administering this process.  
3

4 So our recommendations here are that the lottery  
5 procedure should not be fixed in law, but that the  
6 Council should, as it is doing today, and we  
7 appreciate this, use its oversight authority to  
8 ensure (TIMER) clarity of goals for the lottery and  
9 allocation process, the measurement of results, and  
10 that there's an ongoing practice of monitoring and  
11 improving upon the process. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: And, thank you. Thank you  
13 so much.

14 HPD, I think it's really cool that Josh actually  
15 drew this out for you. So, please bring to, what are  
16 they called? I already forgot the name of the vendor  
17 for Housing Connect.

18 So just, Josh, and I wonder your feedback on  
19 what works in terms of breaking through. You know,  
20 our constituents receive many scam texts, many scam  
21 calls. Some folks won't understand the difference  
22 between WhatsApp and a text message. They'll never  
23 check the text message, but they will check WhatsApp.  
24 You know, there's so many different examples of the  
25 digital divide and how it gets in the way of

1                    notifications. Right? So what do you think is the  
2                    best way to reach people?

3                    JOSHUA STEPHENSON: I honestly, I think it would  
4                    be provider portal because that way I'd be able to  
5                    log in and then actually call them myself. We could  
6                    call them ourselves and let them know, "Hey, you need  
7                    to come in, because we just got a notification that  
8                    you need to upload documents." We are a trusted  
9                    agency in our neighborhood. Our clients usually  
10                    answer our phone calls, but a lot of times, you know,  
11                    because they're getting so many texts, because  
12                    they're getting so many calls, it just... they just  
13                    don't see it, because they're getting so overwhelmed.

14                    So I really think a provider portal where we  
15                    could actually, instead of responding, we could  
16                    actually preempt the issue. Because one thing that  
17                    happens a lot, is a client will find, out on the last  
18                    day that they have to upload documents, that it's the  
19                    last day, and they'll come in without an appointment.

20                    You said your office has a wait list until July?  
21                    People just show up... so do we. But people will show  
22                    up on the last day, and we can't help them.

23                    CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. That's really  
24                    helpful.  
25

1  
2 And I really appreciate your comments about how  
3 making fixes to the interface would also allow you to  
4 have the capacity to serve more people, because the  
5 filters are just not working.

6 Howard, thank you so much, good to see you. I,  
7 you know, taking your comments to heart on the  
8 details of the lottery procedures should not be fixed  
9 in law. Right? They also shouldn't be fixed in  
10 contract. Because my understanding is that the  
11 contract that we have, or that the city has, with the  
12 Housing Connect provider, also limits what changes we  
13 can ask for and what upgrades. And so I certainly  
14 welcome you to share feedback with us, share feedback  
15 with HPD about how to write the goals and the, you  
16 know, the goals for these procedures and processes in  
17 a way that would allow HPD to write contracts the  
18 best way also.

19 HOWARD SLATKIN: I would love to be able to  
20 provide sort of more substantive response to that,  
21 but I think you've highlighted a really important  
22 issue, which is that the procurement process that the  
23 City has to use to procure tech services to do these  
24 kinds of things, it's a, you know, I am not familiar  
25 with the details of this contract, this vendor, or

1  
2 any of those things – But from my experience in years  
3 in in city government, which ended just a couple  
4 years ago, these things could be really challenging,  
5 and it's... having a tech platform that needs to  
6 change and adapt and evolve over time is not the  
7 traditional model for how those contracts work, and I  
8 think it's worth looking into ways to make that model  
9 of adaptable tech work better for this purpose.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: And one question that I was  
11 trying to get HPD to respond to, but I don't think I  
12 quite got them to is, or maybe I didn't ask it well,  
13 but this question about where do you have the talent?  
14 Do you have the talent in house to, you know, have  
15 web developers, have designers, user experience  
16 experts, that sort of thing? Do you have that inside  
17 of an agency, inside of city government, or do you  
18 contract it out? And if you contract it out, how do  
19 you write the, you know, the document that's gonna  
20 govern the relationship in a way that's flexible  
21 enough?

22 HOWARD SLATKIN: Yeah. I certainly would not  
23 presume to answer in in terms of, like, that that the  
24 talent that HPD themselves have. But from my own  
25 experience, it was in years at the Department of City

1  
2 Planning, where actually the agency had done some  
3 really innovative things with creating a new tech  
4 development team. It is a very... in terms of the  
5 staffing and labor market challenges that exist for  
6 city government in general, it's like the most  
7 challenging corner is keeping the tech workforce sort  
8 of stable and secure and fully staffed.

9 And I think it poses a particular challenge for  
10 agencies to try to do those kinds of things in house,  
11 I think, you know, in this moment and in even in  
12 ordinary times.

13 So I think it's worth looking at the procurement  
14 process as well as, you know, what is the staffing  
15 component that's sort of a permanent agency fixture  
16 and how much of this process is done through  
17 procurement?

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Absolutely. Thank you,  
19 thank you so much. I really appreciate your  
20 testimonies.

21 The next panel is Milagros Salazar, Brendan  
22 Cheney, and Jeffrey Gardner.

23 BRENDAN CHENEY: Good afternoon, my name is  
24 Brendan Cheney, I'm the Director of Policy and  
25

1  
2 Operations at the New York Housing Conference. Thank  
3 you for the opportunity to testify.

4 And Chair Sanchez, I want to especially thank  
5 you for your leadership and your advocacy here. We  
6 always appreciate your advocacy around housing  
7 issues, and especially today sort of highlighting  
8 issues to Housing Connects, we really appreciate it.

9 So I'm going to start by talking about the three  
10 pieces of legislation. We very much support the goals  
11 of the of the legislation. We really want to see a  
12 single portal that has all affordable housing and re-  
13 rentals on the portal. We really want to see a portal  
14 that has notifications, and we really want to... and  
15 we do support a robust housing ambassadors program,  
16 but we are concerned about legislating these three  
17 things.

18 We're concerned about unfunded mandates,  
19 especially in an environment where federal housing  
20 funding is really under threat. And then for 1264,  
21 especially, I think just concerned about legislating  
22 something that the Housing Connect Portal isn't  
23 prepared to do effectively right now.

24

25

1  
2 But obviously very much support the goals of  
3 those three bills and really appreciate your  
4 leadership on that.

5 So look, Housing Connect should provide  
6 transparency and access to affordable housing, but  
7 right now between the functionality that exists, and  
8 bureaucratic hurdles, it's not meeting those goals.  
9 It's leaving units vacant for months at a time.

10 We appreciate HPD's willingness to grant waivers  
11 for re-rentals right now. As you've heard, and as  
12 you've heard before this, the re-rentals are causing  
13 a lot of long vacancies and revenue issues for the  
14 providers. We appreciate HPD's pause on this while  
15 they're working on a longer term fix.

16 As they work for a longer term fix and longer  
17 term solutions to those issues, we request the  
18 changes – prioritize speedy and efficient re-rentals,  
19 and really increase the capacity of the (TIMER)  
20 portal to meet all the goals that we really want to  
21 see Housing Connect have.

22 So I think, just to wrap up, over the next  
23 years, they're looking to make those changes. We want  
24 to make sure those changes really do deliver Housing  
25

1  
2 Connect that we all want to see. So thank you. Happy  
3 to answer any questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

5 MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 TRANSLATOR: Ms. Sanchez, do you want me to  
7 translate from now?

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You have her testimony,  
9 right? Why don't we let her finish, and then you can  
10 do yours.

11 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 (TIMER) (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) (TIMER)

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 TRANSLATOR: (UN-MIC'D) Before I translate, I  
16 just want to (INAUDIBLE) give me a second just  
17 before.

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Sure.

19 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) (TIMER)

22 Okay. Hello, Ms. Sanchez, and Members of the  
23 Housing Committee here in New York.

24 First of all, thank you for the opportunity to  
25 allow me testify today. My name is Milagros Salazar,

1 a member of the group called AHORA. AHORA means "now"  
2 in Spanish.

3  
4 And in the day of today, I had come to share my  
5 testimony with Housing Connect about my experience  
6 submitting the application for this program.

7 This is the eligibility process, the accessible  
8 process in order to obtain an apartment for people  
9 with low income like I am.

10 I live and I work in the Bronx for more than ten  
11 years. I'm a member of Housing Connect since the year  
12 2017. The moment before I did that, I applied for  
13 around 63 lotteries in total, according to my  
14 earnings, according to my yearly earnings. And after  
15 I submitted all these applications, I never got any  
16 responses. Finally, after I was doing all this, I  
17 obtained my own apartment.

18 I'm one of the few people who was lucky about  
19 this. And the reason is, yeah, community preference  
20 that was in that area where I was living that helped  
21 me.

22 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 TRANSLATOR: Yes. I'm working as a health worker.  
25 I am working as a homecare aide. As you know, my

1 earnings are low because of my job, and I'm working  
2 regularly in different runs since (INAUDIBLE) Housing  
3 Connect.  
4

5 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 Okay, I was working with two patients in the  
7 home health agency, and I was working for more than  
8 fifty hours per week in order to be able to afford  
9 things. In order for me to achieve the income (TIMER)  
10 that they were requesting for me to have in order to  
11 have the apartment.

12 This is not really to be accessible for  
13 somebody. This is not right for people that have a  
14 low income like me. We are working very hard for a  
15 better future.

16 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17 So we deserve to have a (INAUDIBLE) housing for  
18 people like us and also for our families. And saying  
19 thanks to God and thanks to UNHP that they are  
20 helping me with the complex process, and these  
21 processes are very demanding for all the people who  
22 are applying.

23 My monthly rent, or the apartment I have now is  
24 \$1,245 U.S. dollars. And the days like today...

25 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1                   And the days like today, I came here to testify,  
2  
3                   and I'm not getting paid for the day of today only  
4                   for me to come in to testify.

5                   In December of the year 2003, after six years, I  
6                   was able to obtain my first apartment, and I'm here  
7                   to be the voice for the ones who are going through  
8                   the same process I went through, and the ones who  
9                   need a house like the day of today, and who wanted to  
10                  request help with these entities.

11                  (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12                  And the entities that are present today, so they  
13                  need to improve the process so we can have more  
14                  affordable homes and affordable apartments here in  
15                  New York City – especially for people who have a low  
16                  income like me, and who deserve to live in a good  
17                  home and in a decent home.

18                  Before obtaining my apartment, before getting  
19                  this apartment, I suffered from a lot of anxiety.

20                  (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21                  And I was paying attention every day to receive  
22                  an email message from Housing Connect. And I obtained  
23                  two opportunities to do selection interviews, but I  
24                  was very disappointed and I was very discouraged.

25                  (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1                   It's just an explanation, one more second.

2                   MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3                   TRANSLATOR: Okay, okay. (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
4                   LANGUAGE)

5                   I went to two interviews, and the first one I  
6                   had was a building that was divided in three parts.

7                   Ms. Sanchez, basically what she tried to  
8                   explain, those apartment buildings are divided in  
9                   three different apartment buildings, similar to co-  
10                  op, but for people with low income. Uh-huh.

11                  (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12                  And the building was right next to the other.  
13                  The first building, I had to put together many of the  
14                  requirements that they were asking for me, many of  
15                  the documents that they were putting together, and I  
16                  was only denied because of my earnings. At the moment  
17                  of the interview, I only had \$100 missing. So, when I  
18                  tried to say was only \$100 less than the requirements  
19                  that they were asking for, and I was only denied the  
20                  apartment only because of this.

21                  Okay. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) They were  
22                  saying that I needed to demonstrate that we'll be  
23                  able to pay the monthly rent, and this apartment was  
24                  just \$550. So basically, because it was only \$100  
25

1 less than the requirements, I was denied the  
2 apartment. And I was paying \$700 to rent just a small  
3 bedroom in one of the apartments for several years  
4 and with all the (INAUDIBLE) the place.

5  
6 Okay, when I finished the third building of the  
7 same project, they communicated with me, and they  
8 wanted to know if I was still interested in obtaining  
9 this apartment. And they also wanted me to know there  
10 were also some apartments that were available in that  
11 area, and also in my income will qualify for those  
12 apartments. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 TRANSLATOR: This was one of the same apartments  
15 or the three apartments I mentioned before. So  
16 quickly, I put all the documents together. I asked my  
17 employer to give me a free day so I can go to the  
18 (INAUDIBLE), and I called my employer to explain  
19 everything to him, right? I was also looking for my  
20 income tax returns, and I was also looking for the  
21 pay stubs. But again, when they review everything,  
22 the answer was again the same. I didn't qualify  
23 because I didn't live in the community in (INAUDIBLE)  
24 priority community.

1                   Miss Sanchez, what she means to say is the place  
2 where they're supposed (INAUDIBLE)

3                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'm sorry...

4                   TRANSLATOR: Yes?

5                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I understand...

6                   TRANSLATOR: Yes.

7                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But we need to move on. If  
8 you could just try to summarize little bit.. (CROSS-  
9 TALK)

10                  TRANSLATOR: Yes, we're almost finished. My  
11 apologies. The letter is very long, Ms. Sanchez.

12                  It's where the community is located, they didn't  
13 have priority, that location, okay?

14                  I was very surprised about the situation,  
15 because this building was located right next to the  
16 other building. I feel very frustrated. I feel very  
17 depressed, and I was confused at the same time. And  
18 how it's supposed to be that they are looking at your  
19 profile, right? And they're looking at the profile of  
20 every applicant, and they're just denying you like  
21 that. You know, they know where you live. They  
22 already know your year earnings and your monthly  
23 earnings. And after that, they wanted to verify your  
24 application request, and after that, they were just  
25

1  
2 rejecting you on purpose, only to be able to prove  
3 that those digital data was not available. So this  
4 made me question myself about the clarity of this  
5 housing process.

6 Okay. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7 Okay, a very low percentage of housing lotteries  
8 require an income of less than \$40,000 U.S. dollars.  
9 These processes are very long. They are not clear.  
10 And something very important, they have a lot of  
11 bureaucracy. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 And they only give you ten days to put all these  
13 documents together and to hand all these documents to  
14 them. When in the majority of the offices, they take  
15 a long time to surrender these documents, they're  
16 only giving you ten days there. Some of them also  
17 require you to manage technology very well, because  
18 you have to submit the application to a webpage,  
19 right? You have to... I would load all these  
20 documents to the portal of Housing Connect, and also  
21 to send many email messages in order to qualify for  
22 this. And sometimes it's very difficult, because they  
23 don't give you the (INAUDIBLE) for people who don't  
24 know how to use this technology well.

1  
2           Lastly, where I live right now, not perfect,  
3 it's a mixed place, and there are many apartment  
4 units that are rented for people who have subsidies.  
5 Like, subsidy means like housing vouchers. And some  
6 of these people who have these housing vouchers are  
7 people who are mentally ill, people with mental  
8 problems. So, it's very... this makes for you  
9 difficult ways to live in these buildings, because of  
10 the kind of people who are living in these buildings,  
11 and because there's a lot of insecurity, and also  
12 it's a big mess inside of these buildings.

13           We need assistance of housing that makes the  
14 owner for the name that they're offering, right? We  
15 need a program that will make the New Yorkers to  
16 connect each other, especially the ones who are very  
17 vulnerable, right? And the people who have options to  
18 have real houses, not only temporary housing, but  
19 permanent houses, and also that's accessible to  
20 people in New York who have low income. Because on  
21 the contrary, the people with low income will have so  
22 many problems, especially in places like the Bronx.  
23 And we will live without any home, and we will not be  
24 able to live in a place with dignity or a (INAUDIBLE)  
25 place.

1  
2 Thanks to all of you for the opportunity to  
3 share my story and to be able to talk about the big  
4 necessity and the big need that we had to simplify  
5 this housing process.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. (SPEAKING  
7 FOREIGN LANGUAGE) So I'll just say that in English:

8 I think that when she and I met for the first  
9 time, she was actually still living in the in the one  
10 bedroom. And, you know, it was such a hardship, six  
11 years of waiting. But I am just so thankful for the  
12 work that UNHP does in the community that we have  
13 these success stories, but we want to make this the  
14 rule, not the exception. So I look forward to working  
15 ,you know, working on these, uh, maybe bills, maybe  
16 just reforms. Sometimes we move legislation in order  
17 to get policy changes. And I don't think it's a  
18 coincidence that there was an announcement by HPD  
19 earlier this week on re-rentals. But we do what we  
20 can, right, to make policy move and to deliver for  
21 New Yorkers.

22 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So... (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
24 LANGUAGE)

1  
2 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) I was  
3 answering so she could understand... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yeah, yeah. No, you, you go  
5 ahead. No, go ahead. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 TRANSLATOR: Ms. Sanchez, is it possible to send  
7 the testimony in Spanish, right? It will be okay,  
8 right?

9 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yes.

10 TRANSLATOR: So, she doesn't have to translate  
11 everything into English now, right?

12 MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 TRANSLATOR: Oh, yes, they have translators  
14 in the organization to...

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you. Thank you  
16 so much.

17 And New York Housing Conference, thank you for  
18 your policy brief in February that also was very  
19 helpful in moving this along, thank you.

20 Okay, I now want to call on the next panel:  
21 Shane Canada; Shashir Sammy, from Local 30; Brendan  
22 Benn, Local 30; and Richard Bess.

23 And thank you for your patience.

24 (PAUSE)

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So the way you determine  
2  
3 who goes next, is you have to fight to the finish -  
4 I'm kidding...

5                   (LAUGHTER)

6                   BRENDAN BENN: Good afternoon, Chairperson  
7 Sanchez, and members of the Committee, you for the  
8 opportunity to testify.

9                   I am Brendan Benn, Business Representative for  
10 the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local  
11 30, representing stationary engineers who operate  
12 building systems throughout New York City. I express  
13 our strong support for Intro 1207, which corrects the  
14 qualifying experience requirements for high pressure  
15 boiler operator engineer license. This legislation  
16 addresses a critical issue by allowing apprenticeship  
17 training to count concurrently with supervised work  
18 experience. This restores the original intent of the  
19 code, which was altered by a grammatical correction  
20 in previous revisions.

21                   Currently, apprentices must complete their  
22 program and then accumulate three additional years of  
23 experience before qualifying for a license. Our  
24 apprentices already gain valuable, hands on  
25 experience during the training. As the only New York

1 State Department of Labor approved apprenticeship  
2 program in our field, our three-year program ensures  
3 an apprentice works forty hours weekly under the  
4 direct supervision of a licensed engineer, plus  
5 attend unpaid schooling after work hours.  
6

7 The current code prevents counting their  
8 supervised work time towards their experience  
9 requirement, creating an unnecessary barrier at a  
10 time when skilled trades face workforce shortages.

11 This amendment maintains all safety standards  
12 while creating a more efficient pathway to license.  
13 Applicants will still need three years of supervised  
14 work experience within seven years preceding the  
15 application. We are simply acknowledging that  
16 apprenticeship work is qualifying experience.

17 (TIMER) Can I finish?

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yes.

19 BRENDAN BENN: I speak on this issue not just as  
20 a union representative, but from personal experience.  
21 I, myself, went through the apprenticeship program,  
22 and at the time, my supervised work experience was  
23 counted concurrently with my training. This  
24 opportunity made a profound difference in my life and  
25 for my family. It provided me with the economic

1 stability, career advancement, and ability to support  
2 my loved ones while developing valuable skills that  
3 serve our city's infrastructure needs.  
4

5 The current interpretation of the code has  
6 created unnecessary barriers for the next generation  
7 of engineers who deserve the same opportunity I had.  
8 This change is not about lowering the standards, it's  
9 about restoring the original intent of the licensing  
10 requirements while maintaining safety protocols.

11 On behalf of the International Union of  
12 Operating Engineers Local 30 and the next generation  
13 of stationary engineers, I urge this committee to  
14 support Intro 1207. Thank you for your consideration.  
15 I am happy to answer any questions.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

17 SHANE CANADA: Good morning, Chairperson Sanchez  
18 and committee members.

19 My name is Shane Canada; I was accepted into the  
20 stationary engineer apprenticeship program 17 years  
21 ago. This program was a catalyst for understanding  
22 theory and principles of HVAC, electrical, plumbing,  
23 and the like. The immersive method of learning while  
24 working in the field helped hone my trade skills in  
25 real time versus the traditional route of attending

1 college but lacking the hands-on skills obtained by  
2 applying what I'd learned immediately.

3  
4 The apprenticeship program has served as a  
5 bookend in my life. I was constantly searching for a  
6 career that either provided a sense of purpose or a  
7 career that would allow me enough financial security  
8 to become a homeowner and raise a family in these  
9 inflationary times. I have been afforded both, a true  
10 blessing.

11 It's challenging to believe that any of the  
12 things I have accomplished to date would have been  
13 possible without the apprenticeship program. Prior to  
14 applying, I wasn't aware of what a Stationary  
15 Engineer was nor the importance of the position in  
16 the day-to-day workings of facilities. I have not yet  
17 obtained my high-pressure license. With the passing  
18 of this legislation, I will be eligible to sit for  
19 the exam this coming September of 2025. This change  
20 would recognize that my apprenticeship work  
21 experience counts toward my licensing requirements.  
22 Removing two years off my eligibility requirement at  
23 the age of 43 is immensely beneficial. It's giving me  
24 a leg up in achieving my own financial and career  
25 goals.

1                   I strongly urge you to support Intro 1207, as it  
2 will make a meaningful difference for apprentices  
3 like me. Thank you.

4                   RICHARD BESS: Good afternoon, everyone. Good  
5 afternoon, Chair Sanchez, good afternoon, Committee.

6                   My name is Richard Bess, and I graduated from  
7 the Stationary Engineer apprenticeship program in  
8 June 2023. The apprenticeship program has taught me  
9 all the necessary skills and hands on experience to  
10 excel in this trade. With practical experience  
11 provided by Local 30, I am now able to handle various  
12 types of machinery safely and properly.

13                   During my time in the apprenticeship program, I  
14 was able to earn two years of steam time from the  
15 program, which pushed me ahead to qualify for my high  
16 pressure boiler license. If this were not done, I  
17 wouldn't be able to sit for my license; therefore,  
18 extending the waiting period an extra two-years and  
19 six months, rather than six months.

20                   The apprenticeship program gave me the  
21 opportunity to get my high pressure boiler license at  
22 accelerated pace. And I am grateful for the  
23 apprenticeship program, as it helps to achieve my  
24 goal of becoming a high pressure stationary engineer.  
25

2 I urge the Committee to support Intro 1207 to  
3 recognize the experience gained from the  
4 apprenticeship program, thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. The only thing  
6 is that there's no way you can be 43, I thought you  
7 were actually 17.

8 (LAUGHTER)

9 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: No, thank you. It's so  
10 helpful to see the real life example of what we're  
11 changing when we pass these corrections. So I want to  
12 thank you. I also want to thank you for your great  
13 advocacy to get this bill supported by so many  
14 council members so quickly and to have us move. I'm  
15 very glad that we could move it through the process,  
16 because it's an important change. So thank you for  
17 being here, and thank you for your patience.

18 PANEL: Thank you

19 UNKNOWN: Thank you, and, uh, (NO AUDIO)

20 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: No, thank you, she's  
21 usually my co-chair, but she gave me a chance today,  
22 so thank you. (LAUGHS)

23 UNKNOWN: (NO AUDIO)

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: There you go, I get that,  
25 thank you.

2 I will now call the next panel: Eric Lee from  
3 Volunteers of America Greater New York; Victoriano  
4 Mejia; and Valentina Mejia.

5 (PAUSE)

6 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, you can begin when  
7 ready. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)  
10 Are you translating for her?

11 TRANSLATOR: (UN-MIC'D) Yes, (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
12 LANGUAGE)

13 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

16 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. Thank you for the  
17 opportunity. My name is Valentina Mejia, and his name  
18 is Victor Mejia.

19 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 TRANSLATOR: So I have a question. I have one  
21 question for you. So since 2012, I've been submitting  
22 applications. So I submitted an application for  
23 \$175.00. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

25 (TIMER)

2 TRANSLATOR: (UN-MIC'D) (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
3 LANGUAGE)

4 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 TRANSLATOR: So, I get an application and there  
6 are two buildings. (INAUDIBLE) apartments.

7 VALENTINA MEJIA: Uh-uh.

8 TRANSLATOR: And I actually had to take a train  
9 to get there. So, I remembered that I used to go to  
10 Ms. Sanchez's office. And, then, they were following  
11 up with my applications. And I remembered that  
12 commission then transferred me to Ms. (INAUDIBLE)  
13 office, and then I remember that I just started to  
14 apply over and over and again. And I did get a call  
15 back for a couple of applications, maybe three of  
16 them.

17 VALENTINA MEJIA: Mm-hmm. Okay, (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
18 LANGUAGE)

19 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 TRANSLATOR: So, I had a voucher, and we went  
22 through the process. But the thing is that, since we  
23 are a couple, they were only approving me for one  
24 bedroom. And then I was asking his doctors to get two  
25 bedrooms instead of one. But I wasn't able to.

1  
2 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)  
3 (TIMER)

4 TRANSLATOR: And, then, since I had to take the  
5 train, uh, I had to take the train or the subway to  
6 go to Ms. Sanchez's office, then I actually only  
7 stayed at Ms. (INAUDIBLE) office, because they were  
8 following up on my case. So I applied for an  
9 apartment that at 3001 Grand Concourse, (SPEAKING  
10 FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 TRANSLATOR: That's next to where I actually  
13 live. It's nearby to where I live.

14 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 TRANSLATOR: So I submitted the documents twice.  
16 And then they told me that I had to appeal. And I  
17 actually submitted the documents to her office twice.  
18 Then, they told me that I had to appeal after I was  
19 rejected.

20 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 TRANSLATOR: So I actually had to start working  
22 as a home health aide, even when I had another job.  
23 So I had to change my schedule. I had even to work  
24 with three different agencies. And I had another job.  
25 But I had to be able to work even up to 50 hours with

1 three different agencies just to be able to apply or  
2 meet the qualifications. So even though when he has  
3 two vouchers, and he is receiving Social Security, I  
4 have been on the waiting list for two years.

5 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7 TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 TRANSLATOR: And that is a very tedious process.  
10 You have to work a lot. And you have to be submitting  
11 documents, you have to apply, and it's (INAUDIBLE)  
12 half days such to apply for it and submitting the  
13 documents.  
14

15 And I want to ask you, why? Why do I have to be  
16 on a waiting list for two years? And I have to  
17 (TIMER) to be processing this for over six months.

18 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

19 TRANSLATOR: Since 2012, I have been applying and  
20 paying my own money, for example, and I have a job.  
21 Like, I had... I have had a job all this time at  
22 (INAUDIBLE). I used to work at a school. I worked at  
23 a school, and even having the vouchers, having his  
24 vouchers, and I just couldn't achieve anything on the  
25 applications. And I want to say that both of us, we

1  
2 are living between cockroaches and mice – between  
3 cockroaches and mice even when we are able to pay and  
4 we are paying the money. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 (TIMER)

7 TRANSLATOR: So we live between cockroaches and  
8 mice. And I don't have any shame to say this. And I  
9 just ,you know what? I just can't keep doing this,  
10 because even having the money, I can't just submit it  
11 and put the money into the applications. Because the  
12 thing is that, he almost does not go out. And I can't  
13 kill him, right?

14 (LAUGHTER)

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: That's what she said...

16 (LAUGHTER)

17 TRANSLATOR: I know, but...

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (LAUGHS)

19 TRANSLATOR: So I just (INAUDIBLE) the  
20 cockroaches and the mice just walk in between us. And  
21 I do have money. So actually, I went to work at 7:00  
22 p.m. yesterday. And I went out of my job at 7:00 a.m.  
23 So, even working twelve hours, I can't keep going on  
24 like this. So I just let the (INAUDIBLE) roam around  
25 freely.

1                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. (SPEAKING  
2 FOREIGN LANGUAGE)  
3

4                   Is there anything you want... Do you want to  
5 come up?

6                   JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: (NO MIC) Yes, I will just  
7 add that...

8                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You have to speak into the  
9 mic.

10                  JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11                  So I just want to say that she has highlighted  
12 her story. She's worked a twelve hour shift. She's a  
13 senior. They're both elderly. They don't want to be  
14 working so much, but they have to, because they feel  
15 that that's the only way to afford the rent that they  
16 have right now.

17                  And they are constantly denied after being  
18 invited to multiple interviews. So they're confused  
19 with why this process is not working for them after  
20 applying to so many applications, after getting help  
21 from so many different agencies, and still not  
22 winning that golden ticket that I spoke about  
23 earlier.

24                  CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yeah.

25                  JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: So thank you.

1 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

2 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm.

5 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm?

9 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

11 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you. We're

13 good. Thank you (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 Thank you so much. She is highlighting that we

15 met before, and my office said that we would help

16 her, and here we are today, and she still doesn't

17 have a unit. So ,you know, it's just such a common

18 story and a painful one. So we hope to make changes

19 that help us to meet this challenge.

20 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 (LAUGHTER)

22 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You go ahead.

23 I said, they're not keeping you company. You

24 kept them company.

1                   ERIC LEE: It's okay, but, yes.

2                   Thank you, Chair Sanchez and members of the  
3                   Committee for allowing me to testify today. I'm Eric  
4                   Lee, I am the Director of Public Policy for  
5                   Volunteers of America-Greater New York or VOA-GNY for  
6                   short.  
7

8                   I will submit written testimony following the  
9                   hearing. We greatly appreciate the Committee for  
10                  holding today's hearing on improving access to  
11                  affordable housing and the Housing Connect system.

12                  My organization, VOA-GNY, is one of the largest  
13                  human services providers in the region and an active  
14                  developer of affordable and supportive housing. We  
15                  are extremely proud of two of our most recent  
16                  projects in the Bronx, including East Clarke Place  
17                  Senior Residence, which is newly renovated in the  
18                  Jerome Avenue Highbridge Concourse neighborhood in  
19                  the Bronx, as well as our YP Senior Residence, is  
20                  actually in your district, Chair Sanchez. We would  
21                  love to have you come visit.

22                  We are currently just beginning to start moving  
23                  tenants in. When we finish, we will be fully occupied  
24                  with a 117 low income seniors, including 37 formerly  
25                  homeless senior households.

1                   Affordable housing is extremely limited, as  
2 we've heard today. It's an extremely precious  
3 resource, and we must do everything we can to  
4 maximize use of every single unit within the city  
5 given the overwhelming need.

6                   We understand the Council and the  
7 Administration's shared goal of making the affordable  
8 housing process more equitable, but until the City  
9 can ensure that Housing Connect is positioned to  
10 effectively achieve this goal, the City must continue  
11 to use more flexible options, like the one-year  
12 waiver which HPD implemented, to more quickly match  
13 qualified candidates to affordable housing.

14                   VOA-GNY staff are currently being trained by HPD  
15 to become qualified marketing agents to gain access  
16 to Housing Connect. However, the training process and  
17 the approval process for prospective agents can take  
18 well over half a year to complete. (TIMER) We welcome  
19 the Committee's support in prioritizing additional  
20 funding for HPD.

21                   Sorry, do you mind if I wrap up? Thank you.

22                   So we appreciate the Committee's support in  
23 prioritizing additional support for HPD to both  
24 increase the frequency of the scheduled trainings for  
25

1 marketing agents – because we heard there's only 63  
2 citywide currently – as well as shorten the timeframe  
3 to approve them once they go through the training  
4 process. More frequent trainings and faster approvals  
5 means that there's more hands to do the work. It  
6 would allow us to be able to list and lease up our  
7 own units. This is especially important for re-  
8 rentals, because at any given time, there's a very  
9 few number of units within our entire portfolio that  
10 are being turned over. And it's just simply not cost  
11 effective to hire a third party to do the re-rentals  
12 as marketing agents. We imagine more providers would  
13 also want to do this themselves, given the HPD's  
14 stance to move towards Housing Connect as the main  
15 way to do re-rentals in post April 2026.

17 With regards to the legislation heard today,  
18 VOA-GNY supports 1265 to require email or text  
19 notifications. This can be especially helpful for  
20 shelter residents, as our case managers or housing  
21 specialists could help track pending documentation  
22 requests.

23 We know that our clients often have many things  
24 that are time intensive, including full time jobs,  
25 and being able to have active eyes on this is really

1 helpful to make sure their application does not  
2 stall.

3  
4 And we also support Intro 1265 to require in  
5 person assistance from HPD in the community. Elderly  
6 and low income households have very limited access or  
7 familiarity with the online platform, and we  
8 recognize bringing the services to them in the  
9 communities they need can make sure that it's not a  
10 barrier to them. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you so  
12 much, I appreciate your testimony.

13 (PAUSE)

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, we will now turn to  
15 remote testimony. Once your name is called, a member  
16 of our staff will unmute you, and the Sergeant at  
17 Arms will give you the go ahead to begin. Please wait  
18 for the sergeant to announce that you may begin  
19 before delivering your testimony.

20 I will now call Karen Baez.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

22 KAREN BAEZ: Good afternoon, Housing Chair  
23 Sanchez, and members of the Committee.

24 My name is Karen, I am testifying on behalf of  
25 Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, a 50-

1  
2 year-old member-led organization organizing for  
3 racial justice and economic democracy.

4 As you might know, Northwest Bronx started  
5 around housing decades ago, in response to redlining  
6 and disinvestment. Unfortunately, is still one of the  
7 most important issues facing Bronx residents that are  
8 facing displacement, poor housing conditions, and a  
9 lack of affordable housing.

10 I have helped multiple Bronxites apply through  
11 the Housing Connect system, and they've all always...  
12 we always experience, like, difficulties, navigating  
13 the system.

14 We strongly support the package of reforms being  
15 considered today to improve Housing Connect and the  
16 affordable housing lottery system. Every day, our  
17 members experience profound frustration with the  
18 system that often feels inaccessible, confusing, and  
19 unresponsive, especially for low income Black, brown,  
20 immigrant, and older residents.

21 Filing vacant re-rental units more quickly is a  
22 critical common sense step. It is unacceptable for  
23 units to sit empty while families desperately search  
24 for affordable homes. And streamlining re-rentals

1  
2 will move us closer to a system that serves people,  
3 not bureaucracy.

4 We also applaud the proposals to require text  
5 and email notifications and provide in person  
6 application assistance. Access to information is  
7 access to housing. Too many residents miss out on  
8 opportunities because they never receive updates or  
9 because they face technological barriers they cannot  
10 overcome alone.

11 These bills move us toward a more just,  
12 transparent, and accessible system. We urge the  
13 Council to pass these bills and continue to build a  
14 Housing Connect system (TIMER) that really connects  
15 our communities... (CROSS-TALK)

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
17 expired.

18 KAREN BAEZ: Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Karen, I was  
20 wondering who was behind the Northwest Bronx logo.  
21 You have been up on the screen the entire hearing by  
22 the way. Thank you, Karen.

23 I will now call on Robert Desir.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.  
25

1  
2 ROBERT DESIR: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
3 Robert Desir; I am speaking on behalf of the Legal  
4 Aid Society and speaking in strong support of Intros  
5 1264, 1265, and 1266.

6 First, I want to thank Council Member Sanchez  
7 and the Committee for taking time to address these  
8 issues with care and urgency. These bills reflect a  
9 deep understanding of the real barriers New Yorkers  
10 face, especially seniors and vulnerable residents,  
11 that they face when they're trying to access truly  
12 affordable housing. And the testimony that we've  
13 heard has been a testament to those experiences.

14 Intro 1264 would make the process more  
15 transparent and accountable by requiring that  
16 applicants be notified clearly and directly when a  
17 unit matching their preferences becomes available. It  
18 shifts responsibility off the individual and puts it  
19 where it belongs on the system.

20 Intro 1265 improves transparency and usability  
21 by allowing applicants to receive updates by email or  
22 text and to designate a trusted representative.  
23 That's empowering. A simple, standardized consent  
24 form would ensure applicants understand and approve  
25



1  
2 has been a housing ambassador since 2017. And in that  
3 time, we have supported over 2,000 constituents with  
4 Housing Connect.

5 The reality is that the need community members  
6 have for navigating the process and portal exceeds  
7 CBO's capacity as little to no funding is provided by  
8 HPD. In our experience, annual funding has only been  
9 made available three times since 2019. And the  
10 reality is that the fifteen to twenty (NO AUDIO)...

11 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Oh, you froze...

12 ALEX MARTINEZ: (INAUDIBLE) efforts made by HPD  
13 to clarify the housing lottery definition of  
14 affordable housing, many constituents are often  
15 frustrated by how high the income requirements are  
16 for the buildings, often requiring incomes over a  
17 \$100,000 (NO AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE) not meet a lot of the  
18 needs that we see in the Bronx.

19 The portal has grown more and more glitchy, and  
20 the website is often down. It is a disservice to the  
21 clients who come to our weekly walk-in hours, only to  
22 be turned away because the website is not working.

23 The constituents who need the most support are  
24 those with limited access or comfort with technology.  
25 This is especially challenging and true for

1 constituents to navigate when there is a limited  
2 digital literacy or language barriers.

3  
4 As housing ambassadors, KHCC is most qualified  
5 to speak on the legislation proposing the email text  
6 notifications and in person application assistance.  
7 Many constituents unintentionally miss critical  
8 updates and deadlines if they are unable or unaware  
9 to log in to the portal, or they do so (TIMER) but  
10 are unable to...

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
12 expired.

13 ALEX MARTINEZ: (INAUDIBLE) the... Thank you for  
14 your time.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. And please do  
16 submit your testimony, because we lost you for a  
17 little bit, and we want to make sure to capture that,  
18 thank you.

19 We now call on Sonia Simpson.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 SONIA SIMPSON: Thank you for the opportunity to  
22 testify today.

23 My name is Sonia Simpson, and I am part of a  
24 Bronx advocacy group called AHORA, Affordable Housing  
25 Opportunity Right Away.

1  
2 I have been applying through Housing Connect  
3 since my children were young. I have been selected  
4 for a unit, but the time allowed was not able to put  
5 the document in a timely fashion due to the crunch  
6 time and the poor communication.

7 I have a fixed and limited income. There are  
8 very few apartments on Housing Connect for which I am  
9 eligible. I need an affordable, clean, and healthy  
10 apartment. I find the Housing Connect portal  
11 difficult to use. I tried to use my phone to update  
12 my application; I have worked with UNHP to get help.  
13 I receive constant emails from Housing Connect for  
14 apartments that I cannot afford and I'm not eligible  
15 for it. This is frustrating, and I can only imagine  
16 how frustrating this must be for the elderly or non  
17 English speakers.

18 Going forward, I would like to be able to talk  
19 to a person when I am selected for a unit. Email  
20 should be sent only to those who are eligible for the  
21 unit. We need more units for low income families and  
22 individuals. There needs to be more help on Housing  
23 Connect in communities.

24 Thanks for your time (NO AUDIO) thanks for your  
25 time.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you so  
3 much, Sonia. Let's try to make those changes, thank  
4 you.

5 Next, I would like to call on Mbacke Thiam.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

7 MBACKE THIAM: Hello, everyone. My name is Mbacke  
8 Thiam. I am the Housing & Health Community Organizer  
9 at Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New  
10 York. We advocate for people with disabilities in the  
11 five boroughs of New York City, and thank you for  
12 having this.

13 A large number of our consumers use this housing  
14 lottery portal to find housing. We advocate for a  
15 fair and just proceeding of housing applications to  
16 combat discrimination that people with disabilities  
17 may encounter when their disabilities are being  
18 disclosed. This discriminatory, that is why we  
19 strongly advocate for fairness in selecting  
20 applicants for apartments and homes without people  
21 with when they live with disabilities.

22 Individuals with disabilities are entitled to  
23 reasonable accommodations and modifications so that  
24 they can fully enjoy their homes. Denying special  
25

1 services, refusing modification, and not accepting  
2 service dogs can be seen as ableist.

3  
4 And (BACKGROUND NOISE) (INAUDIBLE) we support  
5 Intro 1207 in relation to allowing for time spent in  
6 apprenticeship to count toward the supervised  
7 practical experience time requirement for granting of  
8 high pressure boiler operating engineer licenses.

9 We also support 1264 in relation to affordable  
10 housing unit, which subsequently became vacant and  
11 rented through the housing portal.

12 We also support Intro 1265 in relation to  
13 notification regarding application in the New York  
14 City Housing Portal and designation of representative  
15 to receive notification.

16 We also support intro 1266 in relation to  
17 requiring the Department of Housing preservation...

18 (CROSS-TALK)

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
20 expired.

21 MBACKE THIAM: (INAUDIBLE) to recreate an in  
22 person housing portal assistance program. It...

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Mbacke, we  
24 really appreciate your testimony.

25 I would now like to call on Kevin Wolfe.

1                   SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

2                   KEVIN WOLFE: Great, good afternoon, and thank  
3 you, Chair Sanchez. I can everyone hear me okay?  
4 Okay, great, thank you.

5                   My name is Kevin Wolfe, and I'm with the Center  
6 for New York City Neighborhoods. And I would like to  
7 thank you for holding this hearing on Housing  
8 Connect.

9                   I thought there was a lot of good testimony  
10 specifically on rentals, but we wanted to talk about  
11 homeownership and how Housing Connect impacts  
12 homeowners.

13                   The top line message that that we have today for  
14 the hearing, is that Housing Connect 2.0 needs  
15 reform. It's not working for home buying and  
16 purchasing affordable homes in New York City. And we  
17 would like to see some significant reforms.

18                   Notwithstanding, we understand that HPD just  
19 sent out an email last week saying that they'll be  
20 temporarily offering a waiver for the re-rentals and  
21 the resales. We understand that and that's good. But  
22 we want to see a comprehensive overhaul, since  
23 Housing Connect 2.0 was designed (NO  
24 AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE) not homeownership. And so what we  
25

1                   would want a do is have something that is designed  
2 specifically for home ownership.  
3

4           Before I get to the recommendations, do want to  
5 say this, Chair Sanchez, the City already provides  
6 ample resources for home buying, but right now it's  
7 not connected, ironically. And so we have HomeFirst  
8 and a huge commitment of over \$40 million to home  
9 buying. (NO AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE) That the City Council  
10 funds of nonprofits that provide first time home  
11 buying counseling. They're not connected to a Housing  
12 Connect. We'd actually like to see training and  
13 funding (NO AUDIO) will be one of our  
14 recommendations.

15           We have affordable housing programs offered by  
16 the state through Housing Connect. (TIMER) And so  
17 what we would like... (CROSS-TALK)

18           SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
19 expired.

20           KEVIN WOLFE: (INAUDIBLE) more synergy and more  
21 connection between those two items. And I have my  
22 written testimony, so we can submit that as a follow-  
23 up.

24           CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you so  
25 much, Kevin.

2 I would now like to call on (INAUDIBLE) Salas.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

4 (NO RESPONSE)

5 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, hearing no one, I  
6 would like to call on Christopher Leon Johnson.

7 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, uhm, hello?

8 Sorry. (BACKGROUND NOISE) Hello, my name is

9 Christopher... Hello, my name is Christopher...

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (BACKGROUND NOISE)

11 (INAUDIBLE) you in person, but I don't... okay.

12 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, I'm in... I'm

13 inside the, uhm, the City Council Hearing for

14 Housing. (BACKGROUND NOISE) So for housing... And so

15 I want to speak on... I mean, so just speak on

16 support of the Housing Connect, but at same time,

17 they need to make sure that these nonprofits are not

18 involved with this stuff. These nonprofits are not

19 involved with this with this... with this type of

20 projects. So I'm gonna (INAUDIBLE) the Kevin Riley

21 zoning hearings. I'm kind of, like, I'm kind of,

22 like, yeah... I'm kind of, like, kind of busy. So but

23 thank you. I'm here showing my support. Okay? Thank

24 you so much. I'm here showing my support. Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.

2 If we have inadvertently missed anyone that has  
3 registered to testify today, and has yet to be  
4 called, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, if  
5 you are testifying remotely, and you will be called  
6 in the order that your hand has been raised.

7 If you are testifying in person, please come to  
8 the dais.

9 (PAUSE)

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Seeing no one, I will now  
11 close the hearing. Thank you to the members of the  
12 Administration and the members of the public who have  
13 joined us today.

14 This hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

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 May 29, 2025