

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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September 15, 2021

Start: 12:08 p.m.

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HELD AT: Remote Hearing, Virtual Room 3

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Stephen T. Levin  
Darma V. Diaz  
Vanessa L. Gibson  
Barry S. Grodenchik  
Brad S. Lander  
Antonio Reynoso  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

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

Erin Drinkwater  
Deputy Commissioner  
Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs  
DSS

Josefa Silva

Eric Lee

Gabriela Sandoval Requena

Deborah Birkman

Towaki Komatsu

Craig Hughes

@

1  
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: PC recording has  
3 started.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Recording to the cloud  
5 all set. Sergeant Sadowsky, you may begin with your  
6 opening statements.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS SADOWSKY: Thank you,  
8 and good afternoon, and welcome to today's remote New  
9 York City Council hearing of the Committee on General  
10 Welfare. At this time would all council members and  
11 council staff please turn on their video. To  
12 minimize disruption, please place electronic devices  
13 on vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to submit  
14 testimony you may do so at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).  
15 Once again, that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Thank  
16 you, Chair. We are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Sergeant.  
18 Um, I will gavel in [gavel]. Ah, good afternoon,  
19 everybody, and welcome to this hearing on the City  
20 Council's Committee on General Welfare. Today the  
21 committee will conduct a hearing on a series of bills  
22 related to improving program operations and service  
23 delivery in the city's social services agencies.  
24 Today we'll hear introductions that I am sponsoring,  
25 1641, 1642, and 149, as well as Intro 1794, which is

1 sponsored by Council Member Ampry-Samuel, and Intro  
2 2081, which is sponsored by Council Member Moya. As  
3 the city continues to resume in-person and on-site  
4 services following the pandemic, it is important that  
5 we do right by DSS clients, who have long reported  
6 issues, such as lengthy wait times, dropped calls,  
7 accessibility issues, and various difficulties  
8 accessing their benefits. Intro 1641 would improve  
9 efficiency at HRA centers located throughout the city  
10 by requiring all job centers and SNAP centers to  
11 always have an expeditor on site when clients are  
12 being served or are waiting to be served. Expeditors  
13 would be tasked with checking in on clients, or  
14 checking in clients, excuse me, performing a  
15 preliminary review of clients' documents to ensure  
16 clients have all necessary documents, and directing  
17 clients to the appropriate line or waiting area. The  
18 bill would also require all HRA centers be equipped  
19 with digital displays and an audio amplifier. Intro  
20 1642 would require the Mayor's Office of Operations  
21 to report on the exits from city-administered  
22 facilities and the financings starts and completions  
23 of permanent housing for those exiting city-  
24 administered facilities. Intro 149 would update  
25

1 reporting that is currently required on individuals  
2 utilizing emergency housing in the city, to include a  
3 cover page with pertinent information from the  
4 report. The data from both of these bills will help  
5 ensure that those in shelters throughout the city are  
6 getting the assistance they need to move into  
7 permanent housing. Intro 1794, which is sponsored by  
8 Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel, would require de-  
9 escalation and trauma-informed training for  
10 Department of Homeless Services employees. Introduce  
11 2081, sponsored by Council Member Francisco Moya,  
12 would enhance the application for and the  
13 transparency of the One-Shot Deal Program. These  
14 bills offer opportunity to improve the client  
15 experience in benefits application and assistance by  
16 alleviating some of the hardships based in navigating  
17 city services. The data reported from the two bills  
18 I am sponsoring will ensure that we can move more  
19 accurately and comprehensively address emergency  
20 housing utilization and move clients into permanent  
21 housing. I want to thank all the advocates and  
22 members of the public who are joining us today. I  
23 want to thank representatives from the administration  
24 from joining us, and I look forward to hearing from  
25

1  
2 you on these critical issues. Um, at this time I'd  
3 like to acknowledge my colleagues who are here today.  
4 Um, we are joined by, um, Council Member Barry  
5 Grodenchik, Council Member Darma Diaz, um, and we  
6 expect to be joined by additional colleagues as the  
7 hearing progresses. I would like to acknowledge my  
8 staff, Jonathan Bouchet, my chief of staff, ah,  
9 Elizabeth Adams, and Paul Hunt, who are my  
10 legislative directors, and Duvetry Kumar as well, who  
11 works on legislation. Um, I'd like to also, ah,  
12 acknowledge committee staff, Aminta Kilawan, senior  
13 counsel, Crystal Pond, senior policy analyst, Natalie  
14 Amari, policy analyst, Frank Sternof, financial  
15 analyst, and Julie Harmath, finance analyst. Um,  
16 and, um, I will also, um, be reading on behalf of  
17 Council Member Moya, who was unable to, um, be here  
18 at this, at this time, when I read his opening  
19 statement regarding Intro 2081. Um, so, on behalf of  
20 Council Member Francisco Moya, I want to thank  
21 everybody, wish everybody good afternoon. Facing,  
22 facing eviction is a harsh reality for too many New  
23 Yorkers, and while the moratorium in New York State  
24 has, um, has, ah, been extended, excuse me, has been  
25 extended, um, through, um, through January, um, ah,

1 [inaudible], ah, through January of next year, we  
2 need housing protections at all levels to be in  
3 place. This includes a process that best serves New  
4 Yorkers facing housing hardships. We need to make it  
5 easier and possible for New Yorkers to receive  
6 assistance in the ways that best makes sense for  
7 them, taking into consideration language preferences  
8 and access the technology. This means making sure  
9 that people are informed about the resources  
10 available in the spaces and platforms they frequent,  
11 that New Yorkers have support with the application  
12 process, and that there is follow-through. We also  
13 need to understand the populations and the locations  
14 where there is need and what the follow-through  
15 process looks like. The last thing New Yorkers need  
16 in facing hardship for the process is facing, sorry,  
17 the last thing that New Yorkers need is facing  
18 hardship with the process when facing real-life  
19 hardships. And we need to better understand how the  
20 process is working so we can evolve and iterate to  
21 better help New Yorkers. Thank you. To better help  
22 New Yorkers who are struggling. I want to, um, the  
23 committee for supporting Intro 2081. And with that I  
24  
25

1  
2 will turn it over to committee counsel Aminta  
3 Kilawan.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair  
5 Levin. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Aminta  
6 Kilawan, senior counsel to the Committee on General  
7 Welfare at the New York City Council. I am going to  
8 be moderating today's hearing and calling panelists  
9 to testify. I want to remind everyone that if you  
10 are not planning on testifying we are requesting that  
11 you please watch the live stream on our website,  
12 [www.council.nyc.gov](http://www.council.nyc.gov). I'm going to be calling on  
13 everyone who is logged in here to testify. So,  
14 again, if you are not planning on testifying we're  
15 kindly requesting that you please watch the live  
16 stream as opposed to be joining us here. Before we  
17 begin, please remember that everyone is going to be  
18 on mute until I call on you to testify. After you  
19 are called on, you will be unmuted by a member of our  
20 staff. Please note that's there going to be a delay  
21 of just a few seconds before you are unmuted and we  
22 can hear you. For public testimony, I'm going to be  
23 calling up individuals in panels. Please listen for  
24 your name, and I'm periodically going to announce the  
25 next few panelists. Once I call your name a member



1 of our staff, again, will unmute you. The Sergeant  
2 at Arms will set a clock and give you the go ahead to  
3 begin your testimony. All public testimony will be  
4 limited to three minutes. After I call your name  
5 please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that  
6 you may begin before starting your testimony. And  
7 for today's hearing the first panel will include a  
8 representative from the Department of Social  
9 Services, followed by Council Member questions, and  
10 then public testimony. I'm now going to call on Erin  
11 Drinkwater, deputy commissioner of intergovernmental  
12 and legislative affairs at DSS to testify. And  
13 before doing so, I will administer the oath to the  
14 administration. Commissioner Drinkwater, do you  
15 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
16 nothing but the truth before this committee and to  
17 respond honestly to council member questions?

18  
19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Deputy  
21 Commissioner Drinkwater. You may begin.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Thank  
23 you, and good afternoon. Um, I'd like to thank the  
24 General Welfare Committee and Chair Levin for the  
25 opportunity to testify on the several bills being

1 heard today. My name is Erin Drinkwater. I'm the  
2 deputy commissioner for intergovernmental and  
3 legislative affairs at the Department of Social  
4 Services. The legislation being reviewed today  
5 presents several important ideas that we are  
6 carefully reviewing, several of which cover elements  
7 of program and reporting topics that are already in  
8 motion or already in the process of implementation.  
9 Our staff at the Human Resources Administration, HRA,  
10 and the Department of Homeless Services, DHS, work  
11 each day to improve the client experience of New  
12 Yorkers we serve, and we take our existing reporting  
13 responsibilities to the City Council and other  
14 stakeholders seriously. As we discuss these bills,  
15 we also want to stress the importance of considering  
16 the fiscal and staffing resources needed to maintain  
17 our current programs, including the many reforms we  
18 have made under this administration and the impact  
19 these bills would have on our existing operations and  
20 staffing. With these considerations, we look forward  
21 to working with the council on several of the ideas  
22 being proposed today. Introduction 1641 -  
23 Introduction 1641 intends to maximize efficiencies at  
24 HRA centers by proposing several staffing and  
25

1 management systems. The administration is currently  
2 reviewing the legislation and its impacts. As we  
3 review this bill, we want to highlight the critical  
4 work and reforms that HRA has taken to improve the  
5 client experience across our system. Following the  
6 passage of Local Law 169 of 2019, we worked closely  
7 with the council to conduct a comprehensive audit,  
8 focused on our operations and procedures at HRA job  
9 centers and supplemental nutrition assistance  
10 program, SNAP centers, with the goal of identifying  
11 efficiencies and improving the client experience at  
12 these centers. This audit, published in March of  
13 2020, highlighted the many reforms HRA has put into  
14 place to improve center operations and how we have  
15 advanced our no wrong door services delivery  
16 approach, which focuses on breaking down benefit and  
17 service barriers [inaudible] vulnerable New Yorkers.  
18 Additionally, HRA has been implementing an aggressive  
19 plan to modernize the way our programs and services  
20 are accessed. With the launch of Access HRA we have  
21 opened up dozens of case-specific points of  
22 information online in real time for our clients,  
23 which expands access, increases flexibility, and  
24 opens up resources at our physical centers for those  
25

1  
2 New Yorkers who are most in need of the  
3 individualized, person-to-person attention. Our  
4 efforts to improve service delivery have also  
5 extended to our cash assistance program. Earlier  
6 this year we worked with the state legislature to  
7 make permanent our COVID-19 waiver, allowing clients  
8 the option to have telephone interviews to apply and  
9 recertify for cash assistance, without the need to go  
10 into one of our centers. This change now provides  
11 cash assistance clients with the same option that  
12 SNAP clients have had through our on-demand interview  
13 system since 2016, giving them the option to apply  
14 and recertify with, excuse, recertify for benefits  
15 without the need to travel to a center. Overall,  
16 these ongoing efforts have enhanced the client  
17 experience and we look forward to working with the  
18 council and bill sponsors to build upon this progress  
19 and ensure that modifications and the local law  
20 reflect the changes in operations and client access  
21 that have occurred following the audit required by  
22 Local Law 169 of 2019. And that will be implemented  
23 pursuant to the recent change in state law expanding  
24 cash assistance access. Introduction 1794 -  
25 Introduction 1974 would require de-escalation and

1 trauma-informed training for DSS employees and  
2 contracted providers. As reported in the client  
3 experience audit mentioned earlier and as we reported  
4 on previous anti-bias and anti, or, excuse me, anti-  
5 bias and trauma-informed service provision training  
6 is being rolled out for all 17,000 DSS, HRA, and DHS  
7 employees. The goal of these trainings is to improve  
8 staff professionalism and their response during  
9 challenging circumstances, all while being attentive  
10 to our clients' needs. Given this background and  
11 based on the preliminary analysis, we support the  
12 intention of this bill. We look forward to  
13 discussing the legislation and its impacts,  
14 implications with the council. Introduction 2081 -  
15 Introduction 2081 focuses on enhancing the  
16 application and transparency of the One-Shot Deal  
17 Program, or the Emergency Rental Assistance Grant.  
18 Among several proposals, the bill focuses on  
19 promoting the program on the HRA website, updating  
20 the application process, and conducting outreach.  
21 HRA has already taken several of the steps mentioned  
22 in the legislation, including promoting the Emergency  
23 Rental Assistance Grant on our website, and agency  
24 fliers, and advertising through various outreach  
25

1 channels. Moreover, through our info line, clients  
2 can call to receive information about the Emergency  
3 Rental Assistance Grant, oftentimes referred to as a  
4 One-Shot Deal, and other benefits for which they may  
5 apply. Throughout this administration, we have  
6 testified to our efforts and investments in  
7 increasing not only the payments of one-shot deals,  
8 but the amount paid to clients, reflecting the  
9 increased cost of rent and utility payments over  
10 time. For example, we have doubled the annual  
11 expenditure for rent arrear payment, rent arrears  
12 payments that were paid in 2013 for these efforts.  
13 We also understand that this bill was introduced a  
14 year ago, before the federally funded, state-  
15 administered Emergency Rental Assistance Program,  
16 otherwise known as ERAP, went into effect. Given the  
17 federal rental resources available through ERAP and  
18 the changing landscape brought on the pandemic, we  
19 look forward to discussing this legislation with the  
20 council to ensure New Yorkers have the most up-to-  
21 date information to assist them through these  
22 difficult times and that we maximize access to  
23 federal assistance as apposed to assistance with the  
24 city tax levy cost. In considering the legislation,  
25

1 we also need to take into account the fact that  
2 eligibility, eligibility criteria for cash  
3 assistance, one-shot deal, rent arrears grants are  
4 set by the state and not by the city. Introductions  
5 149 and 1642 - Introduction 149 would update the  
6 report on utilization of and applications for multi-  
7 agency emergency housing assistance. The legislation  
8 would require the report under Local Law 37 of 2011  
9 to be updated with a cover page listing the total  
10 number of individuals utilizing emergency housing in  
11 the city. While we understand the bill's intent, we  
12 look forward to working with the sponsor to ensure  
13 the reporting requirements of this bill are not  
14 duplicative of pre-existing requirements and reflect  
15 an accurate picture of clients in DHS shelters and  
16 other emergency shelters serving New Yorkers.  
17 Introduction 1642, a reporting bill focusing on exits  
18 from city-administered facilities and the financing  
19 starts and completions of permanent housing for those  
20 exiting city-administered facilities presents similar  
21 challenges as Introduction 149. We look forward to  
22 working with the council to ensure the reporting  
23 required is not duplicative of existing efforts and  
24 that the frequency of such new reporting requirements  
25

1 outlined in the bill are not burdensome to the  
2 agencies. Following the enactment of Local Law 37 of  
3 2011, the Mayor's Office of Operations established a  
4 streamlined process to support compliance with  
5 requirements of this multiagency reporting law. Each  
6 agency with reporting obligations separately collects  
7 relevant data from its program teams and compiles the  
8 data into tabular format. Each of the agencies then  
9 submits their data to both Operations and the  
10 Department of Information Technology and  
11 Telecommunications DoITT. On a monthly basis  
12 Operations combines the information provided by the  
13 agencies into a single PDF and posts it on  
14 Operations' website. DoITT separately posts  
15 agencies' tabular information to the New York City  
16 Open Data Portal, in compliance with both this law  
17 and the city's Open Data law. Consistent with their  
18 distinct reporting obligations under Local Law 37,  
19 each agency maintains a spreadsheet containing the  
20 dataset it collects and reports, which also contains  
21 information directing the reader to other relevant  
22 agencies' datasets for ease of navigation and  
23 transparency. After nearly 10 years of data  
24 reporting, Operations and the agencies are  
25



1 comfortable with this process. The additional  
2 requirement set forth in Intro 1642 will not be  
3 burdensome to Operations, which will continue to  
4 receive data from the agencies on a monthly basis and  
5 post it to the Operations' websites. The agencies  
6 will also continue to submit data to DoITT for  
7 posting on the Open Data portal. Operations will  
8 continue to monitor this process to see that relevant  
9 data is posted in both places in a timely manner. It  
10 is important to note, however, that the introduction  
11 sets forth new reporting requirements for the  
12 agencies. We look forward to, we look forward to  
13 understand which data are available and the impact  
14 these requirements have the agencies. We appreciate  
15 the opportunity to testify today and look forward to  
16 discussing these bills and how they impact our  
17 agencies. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Deputy  
19 Commissioner Drinkwater. Before I turn to Chair  
20 Levin for questions, I'd like to remind council  
21 members to use the raise hand function in Zoom to  
22 indicate that you have a question for the  
23 administration and this panel. And please remember  
24 to keep your questions and your answers to five  
25

1 minutes. And I'm now going to turn it back over to  
2 Chair Levin.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
5 ah, Counsel Kilawan. Um, so I just wanted to, um,  
6 ah, make sure that we're [inaudible] the  
7 administration's position. So, um, I'll go bill by  
8 bill, if that's OK. Um, so for 1641, um, is that, is  
9 the administration then supportive of the  
10 legislation?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: So, as I  
12 had mentioned in the testimony, um, sorry, 1641 or  
13 1642?

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, 41.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Sorry.  
16 Um, so there are elements contained within the bill  
17 that the agency is already doing. Um, for example,  
18 um, we currently, um, have done significant work, ah,  
19 in regards to some of the legislation passed, ah, on  
20 client experience, um, our no [inaudible] door  
21 service approach, um, as well as changes that have  
22 been made through the modernization, um, of our, ah,  
23 the way our programs and services are accessed  
24 through Access HRA. Um, you know, the change that we  
25 were able to advocate for and then work with the

1  
2 state legislature to pass and make permanent our  
3 COVID-19 waiver to allow clients to apply for and  
4 recertify for cash assistance using telephones is  
5 critically important, ah, and will change, ah, you  
6 know, in a similar way the way that our job centers,  
7 ah, transact with clients that we've seen in our SNAP  
8 centers. Um, and we've also done, um, significant  
9 work in terms of addressing issues of wait time at  
10 our centers. Um, we continue to monitor and report  
11 on, ah, those wait times. Um, and, ah, looking at,  
12 ah, when clients are utilizing Access HRA as opposed  
13 to coming into the centers, um, we know that it can  
14 alleviate some of the requirements on staff in the  
15 center to ensure, um, that those clients who most  
16 need person-to-person interaction, um, are able to  
17 gain that, um, in the center. Um, the requirement  
18 under the local law of having an expeditor, um, we  
19 have advised the council in our work, um, of a bill  
20 that was passed in the client experience package, um,  
21 sponsored by the speaker in regards to placing social  
22 workers, ah, in job and SNAP centers. That work had  
23 been delayed because of the pandemic but requires the  
24 agency to produce a pilot report based on that. And  
25 I think that's gonna give us some important

1  
2 information in terms of how better we can assist  
3 clients who are coming into the center and expedite,  
4 ah, you know, their, their transacting with the  
5 agency, ah, as they come into the centers.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, you know, part of  
7 this is that, um, you know, there is before COVID and  
8 then there will be after COVID, and so, you know, I,  
9 we have to kind of go on the assumption that, that  
10 emergency authorization for, um, recertifications is,  
11 you know, to be done remotely, will one day expire,  
12 um, and...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Not with  
14 the...

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ... unless, unless,  
16 unless somebody is saying they're gonna be permanent,  
17 is anyone saying that?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
19 correct. We, we worked with the state legislature  
20 who passed legislation, ah, to make those changes  
21 permanent. So that way individuals who are applying  
22 for cash and recertifying cash are able to do so  
23 outside of centers.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that was, that  
25 was passed by the legislature?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
3 correct.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: OK. Um, and that's  
5 entirely...

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: We can  
7 say [inaudible].

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's entirely up to  
9 the legislature, you know, in other words that's,  
10 that's a state decision, not a, ah, federal  
11 requirements don't, don't, um, require certain in-  
12 person...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
14 correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Ah, interactions.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
17 correct, that's a, that's a decision that can be made  
18 at the state level. Um, there are states across the  
19 country who have already authorized this for, for  
20 many years. It's something that we've been  
21 advocating to the state for a number of years and  
22 we're pleased that they took action and the  
23 legislature passed that this year.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, so then are you,  
25 I mean, how is, can you speak a little bit to how

1  
2 then you anticipate the long-term, like what has that  
3 done, then, for, um, ah, for, for, ah, for job  
4 centers and, ah, and SNAP centers and [inaudible].

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Yeah,  
6 so, yeah, so we can speak to what we've seen as a  
7 result in regard to the change on the SNAP side,  
8 where we've seen significant decrease in foot traffic  
9 at our SNAP centers. Um, with the availability for  
10 clients to, um, utilize Access HRA and conduct their,  
11 ah, interviews over the phone. We saw a dramatic  
12 decrease in foot traffic at our SNAP centers. Um,  
13 that channel shift is what facilitated that. We can  
14 only expect that a similar change...

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you give, can you  
16 give a percentage, ah, decrease?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: It was,  
18 I believe, more than 90%. Um, it's, that data is all  
19 include in the audit as required under Local Law 169  
20 and it's posted on our website. Um, but I can get  
21 you that exact number.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So are there  
23 currently any, um, lines, then at HRA centers of any  
24 kind?

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Are  
3 there lines?

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, if you,  
5 it's...

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Ah,  
7 yeah, we continue to have...

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...what's the, what's  
9 the...

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: We  
11 continue to have wait times, um, at our centers. I  
12 haven't checked, ah, the latest monthly report, um,  
13 as we've communicated weekly throughout the course of  
14 the pandemic, um, there were HRA, job and SNAP  
15 centers that maintained, ah, their operating hours  
16 throughout the course of the pandemic, allowing  
17 clients to come in in person to transact with the  
18 agency. Um, they did not have to go to their home  
19 centers because many home centers, ah, were closed  
20 down. We maintained, um, seven open facilities  
21 throughout the course of the pandemic, ah, two in  
22 Brooklyn, two in the Bronx, and one in every other  
23 borough. Um, we are now slowly opening our, ah,  
24 centers back up. Um, we maintain the open locations  
25 on our, on our website and continue to utilize the

1  
2 weekly letter that we send out following the  
3 commissioner's call each week, um, to update on the  
4 reopening of centers, ah, as that reopening takes  
5 place. Um, so we do continue to monitor and look at  
6 wait times, um, and have seen, you know, I, I think  
7 it's hard to look at the wait time data currently  
8 because of the ways in which we adjusted our service  
9 delivery to respond to the pandemic. Um, so, again,  
10 because there are only...

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, how do you  
12 expect, how do you expect then service delivery to  
13 change as we come out of the pandemic? Are there  
14 gonna be changes from right now the current status  
15 quo to post COVID?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: So I  
17 think that's all, um, ah, information, or that,  
18 that's a question that we continue to look at. Um,  
19 one, we're focused on reopening the centers safely,  
20 um, for clients needing to come into the centers and  
21 our staff who are reporting to the centers, ah, for  
22 work, um, but as I mentioned, the change that we saw  
23 with SNAP was a pretty dramatic change in terms of  
24 individuals who are coming into the centers because  
25 SNAP clients were able to conduct their business with



1 the agency outside of the centers. So we saw a  
2 dramatic decrease in foot traffic in SNAP centers,  
3 but we recognize the importance of maintaining  
4 physical locations to ensure that clients who do not  
5 feel comfortable utilizing Access HRA or just felt  
6 comfortable, you know, transacting with the agency in  
7 person that that option remained available.  
8

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um-hmm. Does, now  
10 does HRA have digital displays and audio amplifiers,  
11 um, in the HRA centers to be able to, um, facilitate,  
12 um, ah, people knowing when...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Yeah, so  
14 the...

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...when their times  
16 are [inaudible].

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: So the,  
18 the layout of centers, um, varies depending on the  
19 center and what services might be co-located there.  
20 Um, so, you know, we have job and SNAP centers that  
21 are co-located with Medicaid offices that are co-  
22 located and as a result, um, you know, we have  
23 different client services areas. Um, we do utilize  
24 a ticket call in system that does include a digital  
25 display in client services areas. Um, but in terms

1 of the requirements set forth in the provision about,  
2 um, amplification systems, um, we want to be  
3 thoughtful about what those mean in terms of, you  
4 know, if it's creating confusion, um, as written, for  
5 example it states that the amplified system needs to,  
6 um, you know, transmit the announcement throughout  
7 every area of the center. If I'm waiting for, um,  
8 you know, my SNAP ticket to be called, um, and the  
9 information is being broadcast in, you know, the  
10 Medicaid customer service area that could create  
11 confusion for clients. I think we want to be  
12 thoughtful about...

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: ...what's  
16 required.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I suppose. I was, I  
18 was at the DMV yesterday, um, and, ah, you know, they  
19 have like a lot of different ticket windows, so  
20 they'll be like now calling L7549 at window 19, and  
21 then, and then it'll be like that's for one type of  
22 thing, you know.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Right.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, that window does  
25 enforcement. And then the other window does some

1  
2 other thing. You know, and it's, but it's, it's a  
3 digital display with an amplified announcement and,  
4 um, and, and it's fairly, you know, easy to navigate,  
5 um, because, you know, it's, it's not all that  
6 [inaudible]. I understand that there's different  
7 rooms, waiting areas, um, but I don't think that  
8 people will get that confused. If their ticket is  
9 called and told to go, you know, the Medicaid window,  
10 I imagine that...

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Sure.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...[inaudible].

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: The DMV  
14 analogy is a good one.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, I just happened  
16 to be there.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: [laughs]

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, ah, and then are  
19 they, are they informed of how long they can expect  
20 to wait when they arrive at an HRA center, the  
21 clients?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um, so  
23 that information, ah, is not provided to clients, in  
24 part because of, um, just the way in which that  
25 information, um, would be gathered. Um, but it's

1 something, um, that, you know, we continue to work on  
2 in terms of minimizing the wait times that our  
3 clients face. We recognize, um, you know, that there  
4 are times where individuals will reschedule work, um,  
5 to come in to, you know, resolve issues on their case  
6 and so we want to make sure that clients are able to,  
7 you know, be seen in an efficient manner.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, and then do you  
10 have a sense of how the closing of HRA centers during  
11 the pandemic impacted wait times for those  
12 [inaudible] that did come in?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um, I'd  
14 have to take a look at our wait times for the centers  
15 that remained open. Ah, so we can certainly get back  
16 to you. That information continues to be collected.  
17 Um, I'll get back to you on that.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, OK, moving on to  
19 1642, um, which is, ah, you know, the, requiring it  
20 Office of Operations to report on the exits from  
21 city-administered facilities and the financing starts  
22 and completions of permanent housing for those  
23 exiting city-administered facilities. Um, do  
24 agencies currently collect that data?

1  
2           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um, so I  
3 can't speak for other agencies. I think from an  
4 administration point of view, recognizing this report  
5 focus is on multiple agencies. Um, we, from a top  
6 line point want to be sure that the reporting  
7 requirements aren't duplicative of existing efforts  
8 and reporting, um, and making sure that we're  
9 aligning, ah, reporting metrics and, and timeframes.  
10 We think that that's important in terms of making  
11 sure, um, you know, that there's, you know, useful  
12 and comparable data. Um, I think we, you know, want  
13 to work with the council in terms of advancing this.  
14 Um, you know, I think having, ah, these additional  
15 metrics included in the, in the reporting is just a  
16 matter of making sure, ah, that we get those things  
17 right.

18           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, that would be  
19 helpful. I mean, you know, when we look at, ah, data  
20 in the NMR, um, you know, we're, we're, you know,  
21 it's sometimes difficult to glean what lessons we  
22 should be learning because some of the data is not  
23 necessarily as granular as we would need it to be.  
24 So, um, you know, length of stay tells one story, but  
25

1  
2 does not get into, um, you know, greater detail about  
3 why, you know, um, and...

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER:

5 Absolutely.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ... doesn't tell us  
7 why, why a, you know, and, and frankly, you know, I  
8 mean, I was out at Ward's Island a couple weeks ago.  
9 I spoke to, um, an individual who is sight impaired.  
10 Ah, he's been in that shelter for four-and-half, five  
11 years. Um, you know, and, ah, that was just one  
12 person that I happened to meet, um, and, ah, actually  
13 it was, it was his, um, the other, the other man in  
14 the shelter directed me to talk to him because, you  
15 know, he's, he really needs the help. And, and so,  
16 you know, we want to understand for future  
17 administrations and future councils, um, you know,  
18 why, why we're seeing somebody like that in shelter  
19 for almost five years, um, um, when, you know, he has  
20 the wherewithal to, to be in permanent housing. Um,  
21 do agencies coordinate on best practices related to  
22 exits from temporary shelters? In other words, are,  
23 is, is there a, um, is there some type of interagency  
24 council or other type of coordinating task force of  
25 any kind, um, that between DSS and HPD, um, or any

1  
2 other, ah, ah, city agencies that may play a role in,  
3 um, in offering permanent housing?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Yeah,  
5 so, I mean, we certainly work together, ah, at the  
6 agency level, ah, with our partners, with NYCHA, with  
7 HPD. Um, we have regular convenings, ah, through the  
8 deputy mayor's team for the Interagency Council on  
9 Homelessness. That's, you know, a local law, um,  
10 that requires quarterly meetings, um, to, you know,  
11 share best practices, share information about the  
12 work that the respective agencies are doing. Um, so  
13 those conversations are...

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: When is the, when is  
15 the, when is the next, when is the next meeting of  
16 that coordinating council? Do you know?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: I would  
18 have to look. I believe the last one was in July,  
19 but I'd have to double check my calendar. Um, that's  
20 something that we can easily follow up on.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'd like to attend  
22 the next one, if that's OK.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: I would  
24 be happy to get back to you.

1  
2           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: All right. Um, you  
3 know, because it's, it's, there's been a long-  
4 standing, um, criticism, um, of the fact that, you  
5 know, homelessness and Social Services are under one  
6 deputy mayor and housing is under a different deputy  
7 mayor, and, um, and there is a lack of, um, of, ah,  
8 you know, a lack of synergy or a lack of, ah, um,  
9 understanding, a lack of communication between those  
10 two sides and, and so that's something that I think  
11 is, is, um, is not new, um, and, um, and I think  
12 continues to be a real problem. I mean, for example,  
13 I mean, just this gentleman I've been talking to, um,  
14 you know, I know that there are HPD set-aside units  
15 for people who are sight impaired. Um, so how on  
16 earth is it, there, there are not that many men in  
17 shelter, ah, who are sight impaired, um, so how is it  
18 possible that somebody could be sitting in shelter on  
19 Ward's Island for almost five years when we know that  
20 there are set-aside units for, for sight-impaired  
21 people in the HPD pipeline? Um, so, I'm actually  
22 going to be emailing you his information later today,  
23 so [inaudible].

24           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Thank  
25 you. I was going to say if you could email that



1  
2 information, um, but yeah, I mean, you know, we do  
3 coordinate across agencies and, you know, regular  
4 communication. Um, are there opportunities for  
5 improvement? Um, sure. I know you mentioned the,  
6 the sort of having the housing agencies and, and  
7 homeless agencies reporting to one deputy mayor. I  
8 know there was a big conversation, um, over the  
9 course of the last year. Um, so, we will see, um,  
10 sort of what the future holds on that.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, I am going to  
12 turn it over to any of my colleagues for questions.  
13 We've also been joined by Council Member Vanessa  
14 Gibson. Um, do any of my colleagues have questions?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And just a reminder,  
16 council members, if you would like to ask a question  
17 and you have not yet used the raise hand function in  
18 Zoom you can do that now if you do want to ask any  
19 questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: By all means, don't  
21 be shy. All right, seeing none, um, so, OK, moving  
22 on. Um, ah, Intro 149, um, which would be in  
23 relationship to updating the report on utilization of  
24 and applications for multiagency emergency housing  
25

1 assistance. Um, is the administration generally in  
2 support of this legislation?  
3

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um,  
5 yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: OK. Yeah, I think, I  
7 mean, one, one, one kind of just as a kind of 30,000  
8 foot view right now is, you know, we have obviously a  
9 very limited amount of time left in this term and so  
10 if, um, if, if the administration is, um, is not in  
11 favor of a bill, ah, or has serious reservations on a  
12 bill, um, you know, kind of like please let us know  
13 or forever hold your peace, because we're gonna kind  
14 of move forward pretty quickly on, on whatever  
15 legislation we can get passed between now and the end  
16 of the year.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER:  
18 Understood, and, and just as was stated in, in  
19 testimony, you know, we, we certainly just want to  
20 make sure that it's, it's not, ah, duplicative, um,  
21 and that does reflect, you know, from the position  
22 that, that I sit in, um, you know, certainly reflects  
23 an accurate picture of clients in, ah, DSS, HRA, DHS  
24 systems as opposed to our sister agencies.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it. OK, so  
3 moving on to Intro 1794, which is sponsored by, um,  
4 Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel. Um, is, what's  
5 the administration's position on this bill at this  
6 point, big picture?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um,  
8 yeah, big picture. So we certainly support the  
9 intent of the legislation. Um, I mentioned, ah,  
10 that, um, you know, the agency does provide training  
11 to, ah, the 17,000 anti-biased, or, excuse me,  
12 17,000, ah, DSS, HRA, and DHS employees. Um, this is  
13 the anti-bias and trauma-informed service provision  
14 training, um, and the goal of that is certainly to  
15 improve staff professionalism, um, and their response  
16 during challenging circumstances, um, during, ah, you  
17 know, client interactions, ah, interactions with  
18 their colleagues. Um, we do, um, want to be sure  
19 that we are sensitive, um, in terms of shifting  
20 unfunded mandates to our contracted provider, the  
21 legislation that's written would extend, ah, training  
22 requirements beyond just DHS employees to our  
23 contracted providers. Um, so that's something that  
24 we're very thoughtful about, um, in terms of making  
25

1  
2 sure that that's implemented in a way, um, that it's  
3 not an unfunded mandate.

4           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you explain to me  
5 what, what, um, how is the administration, um, ah,  
6 what, what is, what is the trauma-informed services  
7 look like, um, in terms of the training, um, for, for  
8 DSS employees?

9           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um, so  
10 this was, ah, training that, ah, was announced, ah,  
11 as part of our response to the, ah, excuse me. This  
12 was, ah, in response to the client experience, ah  
13 package of bills and the agency's response, ah, to,  
14 ah, Ms. Headley and her experience at one of the HRA  
15 job centers, um, and we worked, ah, to, ah, have a  
16 training developed. Um, it was, ah, there was a  
17 slowdown, ah, because of COVID. That training was  
18 then moved online and so we continue to implement  
19 that for all 17,000, ah, DSS, HRA, and DHS employees.

20           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um-hmm. Um, yeah,  
21 I'd be interested to know a little bit like more,  
22 more granularly. Um, one of the, one of the  
23 nonprofit providers that we work with in the council  
24 as part of our New York City, um, [inaudible]  
25 children in New York City homeless system, ah,

1 initiative, so we have an initiative out of the  
2 council, um, that we fund, ah, working with, um, Win  
3 and Henry Street, Project Hospitality, um, CAMBA, and  
4 Bronx Works, and, and HSU, and Win uses their  
5 allocation. They each use it for different things.  
6 Ah, Win uses their allocation for trauma-informed  
7 care for all employees, um, including security and,  
8 ah, ah, you know, really every, ah, central staff and  
9 everybody receives trauma-informed care, um,  
10 training. And so I'd be interested to know, ah, and  
11 I, and I encourage you guys to reach out to them to  
12 see how, you know, what is the protocol that they  
13 use, who is the trainer, um, you know, what is the,  
14 what is the curriculum, because I, I, I would want to  
15 make sure that, um, that that type of training that  
16 they've had some experience now for, you know,  
17 probably six or seven, six years now, so, ah, it  
18 would be worth looking at what they're, what they  
19 have been doing, um, and how it works.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Sure, we  
22 can certainly, we can certainly follow up and I know  
23 that, you know, we're aware of, of different  
24 providers and a variety of, of training obligations,  
25 um, that they have for their staff and for contracted

2 security. Um, so we'd be happy to continue those  
3 conversations.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And this is something  
5 that they did on their, you know, on their own. Um,  
6 um, so at the moment contract providers are not  
7 required to, to do that type of training, de-  
8 escalation, trauma-informed care?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Right,  
10 there are, there are elements of trainings, but I  
11 think what's required under this is a more  
12 comprehensive, ah, training requirement.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um-hmm. OK. Um, so,  
14 so currently, so the, the efforts that, um, that DSS  
15 is doing right now, um, that's not fully, it's not  
16 fully rolled out yet, is that right?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: The  
18 training of the 17,000 employees?

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Ah, no,  
21 that's not complete at this time.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, and this will be  
23 for, for all staff, including supervisors...

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
25 correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...um, security  
3 staff...

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: All  
5 agencies, yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...all agency staff.  
7 Um, ah, and, and, and, ah, private security staff  
8 that, that, that, um, that works in, in city, in  
9 city, um, run centers, [inaudible] facilities?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Um, I  
11 will have to go back. I believe that the legislation  
12 that was passed does include contracted security, um,  
13 and those trainings are, are being rolled out.  
14 That's the HRA contracted security. That's the HRA  
15 security.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Um, I think in  
17 kind of further conversations over the next couple of  
18 weeks like it would be helpful to know specifically  
19 how many, um, you know, how many trainings have  
20 happened and where and, ah, and kind of what the  
21 timeline is. I'll, I'll, I'll speak with, ah, with,  
22 with Council Member Ampry-Samuel as well...

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: OK.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...and we'll  
25 coordinate [inaudible].

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Great.  
3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, and then finally  
5 the Intro 2081, Council Member Moya's bill. Um, so  
6 how is, how is, how is DSS, um, ah, changed its  
7 implementation of one-shots during COVID? Has it,  
8 has it changed it and, ah, maybe if you could speak a  
9 little bit to that? Um, and also just kind of on a  
10 bigger picture is, um, ah, you know, how, how is, how  
11 are one-shots working within the, um, the context of  
12 ERAP?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Sure,  
14 um, so we continue, um, our efforts, um, as I  
15 mentioned in testimony, um, under this administration  
16 we've made a significant investment in terms of  
17 doubling the annual expenditure for rent arrears  
18 payments, um, since 2013. Um, that both, ah, speaks  
19 to the number of clients reached with that as well as  
20 the total payment, um, reflecting the increased cost  
21 of rent and utility payments over time. Um, we do  
22 this outreach, um, through a number of channels. Um,  
23 we do have a flyer online that's been posted. Um, we  
24 conduct regular outreach through our outreach and  
25 advocacy unit, um, through my team going out and



1  
2 partnering with elected officials who have asked us  
3 to participate in tabling events, ah, town hall  
4 forums. Um, I, I have stated that, you know, almost  
5 every town hall forum on, on HRA does include  
6 questions about one-shot deals. Um, it's something  
7 that we recognize clients do have, have questions  
8 about. Um, the flyer that's posted on our website is  
9 very clear and helpful, um, in terms of providing  
10 information, um, about the program and how to go  
11 about applying, um, and what that, what that covers,  
12 um, as well as things that HRA considers while  
13 reviewing an application. Um, in regards to, ah,  
14 what we've been doing, ah, with one-shot deals, um,  
15 as it relates, um, to the ERAP program, um, as, ah,  
16 per state guidance New Yorkers must first apply for  
17 ERAP if they are in need in emergency rental  
18 assistance. Um, if their application is denied they  
19 then may apply for a one-shot deal. Um, and so based  
20 off of that state requirement, um, we've adjusted,  
21 um, our work in terms of, ah, reviewing and, and  
22 looking at those one-shot deal applications. Um, the  
23 ERAP program is moving forward. Ah, determinations  
24 are being made on ERAP applications. Um, clients  
25 need to show, um, that determination, ah, information

1  
2 so that way, um, if they have been denied for the  
3 ERAP program we're able to move forward, ah, their  
4 one-shot deal application.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Um, and, and can you  
6 talk a little bit about, ah, the administration's  
7 outreach, um, on, on one-shots, um, and, you know, if  
8 somebody is having trouble with technology is that a,  
9 is there, um, ah, options or a certain level of  
10 outreach that the administration is doing?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Yeah,  
12 so, I mean, our outreach, um, sort of runs the gamut.  
13 Ah, as I mentioned we have a flyer that's available  
14 on HRA's website. Ah, that includes information  
15 about one-shot deals. Um, we participate in town  
16 halls. Um, obviously over the course of the past 18  
17 months most of them have been remote, although we  
18 have gone to different tabling events, ah, that are  
19 outdoors to provide information about all HRA  
20 programs, including one-shot deals. Um, we also  
21 include information about both the ERAP program and  
22 one-shot deals, the changes that have been made to  
23 Access HRA in terms of what, um, ah, technological  
24 changes have been made to, to, to that application,  
25 um, to be able to accept one-shot deal applications

1  
2 using Access HRA. Um, so there's been a range of,  
3 ah, outreach that's taken place, um, both over the  
4 course of the pandemic, um, but, ah, before as well,  
5 recognizing the importance of payment of rent and  
6 utility arrears is a means of keeping people in their  
7 home.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I'm sorry, so you  
9 can apply for a, a one-shot in a, through Access HRA?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: OK. Um, OK, those  
12 are all my questions. Um, ah, I'm happy to turn it  
13 over to, we've been also joined by Council Member  
14 Lander as well. Um, if any of my colleagues have  
15 questions, ah, for the administration please let me  
16 know. Raise your hand, um, and, ah, you'll have the  
17 opportunity to do that right now. Um, if not we  
18 will, um, ah, let the deputy commissioner, ah, go.  
19 OK. Um, with that I want to express my appreciation.  
20 Thank you very much, um, Commissioner, and I will,  
21 ah, look forward to hearing from the public now and  
22 we'll be following you up with you, um, in the coming  
23 weeks, ah, to discuss moving these bills forward.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Right,  
3 thank you, take care, and, and representatives from  
4 my team will stay on.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair  
7 Levin, and thank you to Deputy Commissioner  
8 Drinkwater. We have concluded the Department of  
9 Social Services' testimony for today and we are now  
10 going to turn to public testimony. First, I'd like  
11 to remind everyone that I will be calling individuals  
12 up in panels. Again, I want to remind you all that  
13 if you have not, if you're not planning on testifying  
14 we're requesting that you please watch the live  
15 stream on our website, since I'm going to be calling  
16 everyone who is logged in to testify. Once your name  
17 is called a member of our staff will unmute you and  
18 you may begin your testimony once the Sergeant at  
19 Arms sets the clock and gives you the cue. All  
20 testimony will be limited to three minutes. Remember  
21 that there is a few seconds of a delay when you are  
22 unmuted before we can hear you. Please wait for the  
23 Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin  
24 before starting your testimony. In the first panel  
25 of public testimony in order of speaking will be

1 Josefa Silva, Eric Lee, and Gabriela Sandoval  
2 Requena. I will now call on Josefa Silva.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

4 JOSEFA SILVA: Good afternoon, Chair  
5 Levin and members of the committee. My name is  
6 Josefa Silva. I'm the director of policy and  
7 advocacy at Win. I'm here today to express our  
8 support and speak about Intro 1794, the bill  
9 requiring training in trauma-informed care, de-  
10 escalation, and professionalism for DHS and  
11 contractor staff. I'd like to begin by thanking  
12 Council Member Ampry-Samuel for introducing this  
13 bill. It recognizes that DHS needs to improve how it  
14 interacts with and treats the New Yorkers who look to  
15 the agency for services. We've been particularly  
16 troubled by the experiences that the families in our  
17 shelters have had when interacting with DHS staff,  
18 beginning at PATH, the intake center for families  
19 with children seeking shelter. What they have  
20 described is unacceptable and Intro 1794 can help  
21 change that. The bill can help ensure that families  
22 have support in healing from trauma and are not re-  
23 traumatized at intake or in shelter. At Win we know  
24 that it takes special knowledge and skills to truly  
25

1 support families who are in the midst of the terrible  
2 experience of homelessness and who are dealing with  
3 the circumstances and experiences that have led up to  
4 it. Um, that's why we launched an in-house training  
5 and professional initiative many years ago, which  
6 Chair Levin has already spoken to a bit. Um, this  
7 initiative equips our staff of over 500 with the  
8 knowledge, skills, and supports they need to provide  
9 trauma-informed care to the approximately 2000  
10 families that we serve each year across our shelters  
11 in permanent supportive housing. From this  
12 initiative we've seen a real evolution in the quality  
13 of client-staff interactions and in clients'  
14 experiences with us. Just as importantly, we've seen  
15 a shift in the entire approach to clients and  
16 services, a shift that supports families in healing  
17 and building a brighter future. These efforts have  
18 been possible thanks to funding from the City Council  
19 initiative, Children and Families in New York City  
20 Shelter. Um, thank you, Chair Levin, for  
21 establishing and leading that initiative and making  
22 that possible. This initiative has taught us many  
23 important lessons in what makes training effective.  
24 Um, we hope to have the opportunity to bring these

1  
2 lessons to bear in the trainings, um, that DSS has  
3 begun offering, as well as with Intro 1794. Um, we  
4 have learned that training needs to be reinforced and  
5 there needs to be hands-on coaching and support, so  
6 we recommend that this bill and any training being  
7 provided happen more than once a year, um, and that  
8 it happen in an ongoing way with professional  
9 development opportunities that support  
10 implementation. Um, we also ask that 1794 require  
11 DHS to provide nonprofit contractors with the  
12 resources they'll need to provide quality training  
13 for their staff. Um, in recognition of the problem  
14 with an unfunded mandate that was mentioned earlier  
15 in the discussion, um, we believe that DHS should be  
16 at the forefront of supporting trauma-informed care  
17 and of providing the resources, which may include  
18 [inaudible]...

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

20 JOSEFA SILVA: ...and others.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You, you can go ahead  
22 and finish.

23 JOSEFA SILVA: I'm just going to thank  
24 you for your time and for your attention today, and  
25 thank you for this bill, um, and helping protect

1 families and years experiencing homelessness and  
2 trauma.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Josefa.

6 Now I'm going to call on Eric Lee for testimony.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 ERIC LEE: Hi, good morning. Um, my name  
9 is Eric Lee and I'm the director of policy and  
10 planning at Homeless Services United. Ah, thank you,  
11 Chair Levin and members of the General Welfare  
12 Committee for allowing me to testify today. Um, I  
13 will summarize my written testimony for time. Ah,  
14 the package of bills being considered, ah, could help  
15 to more fully measure the breadth of homelessness in  
16 New York City and how families and individuals access  
17 services and shelter. Um, for Intros 149 and 1642,  
18 ah, we appreciate the council's commitment to  
19 improving reporting, ah, both around shelter  
20 utilization and placement outcomes, as well as exits  
21 from shelter. Um, providers and advocates would like  
22 to see additional transparency around the data for  
23 both. Um, our top-line recommendation is that both  
24 bills should seek to implement the same tracking and  
25 reporting requirements for all city agencies that are



1 serving families and individuals experiencing  
2 homelessness. Currently both bills have slightly  
3 different, ah, requirements, which could make  
4 implementation challenging for local law. It's been  
5 a long-held frustration that current reporting  
6 requirements do not allow for a full picture of how  
7 many people in New York City are currently in each  
8 shelter system on any given night and over the course  
9 of a month. Um, the inability to count across  
10 systems has stymied the efforts to accurately measure  
11 the scope of the crisis of homelessness as well as  
12 how well each system supports access to permanent  
13 housing and how equitably, ah, resources are or are  
14 not shared across the systems. Um, for Local Law 37  
15 reporting a uniform tracking methodology should be  
16 utilized across DHS, DYCD, HPD, and HRA, which  
17 holistically includes head counts in all facilities  
18 where clients stay overnight, um, not just  
19 traditional shelters. Um, HSC recommends three  
20 reporting figures specifically be tracked across the  
21 agencies and programs. Ah, that would be actual  
22 overnight, um, actual daily overnight census, the  
23 average daily overnight census, and total monthly  
24 unduplicated numbers of families and individuals.  
25

1  
2 Furthermore, we specifically want to point out that  
3 DYCD-administered facilities should specifically be  
4 included, not excluded, in average and daily  
5 overnight censuses and unduplicated numbers. Um, for  
6 1642, ah, we also have recommendations for improving  
7 the exits from shelter, ah, report, including  
8 creating a new section just for Section 8 that  
9 disaggregates by NYCHA, HPD, and HCR, and further  
10 disaggregating by project and tenant-based vouchers,  
11 um, creating a new category for people not medically  
12 appropriate for shelter, disaggregated by hospitals,  
13 medical rehab, medical respites, and long-term care.  
14 Ah, create a new category for individuals utilizing  
15 the subsidy for either a private room or unsubsidized  
16 [inaudible] that isn't supportive housing, and  
17 further defining made your own arrangements category.  
18 Ah, for 1794 we want to echo Josefa's thanks to Chair  
19 Levin and members of the council for your support of  
20 the Children and Families Initiative.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and  
23 finish, that's no problem.

24 ERIC LEE: Thank you, Chair Levin. Um,  
25 so HSC was long supported and promoted the use of

1 trauma-informed care and deescalation techniques.

2 Um, we recommend that the bill, ah, 1794, should  
3 allow contracted providers the flexibility to train,

4 um, either internally or externally and ensure that

5 equivalent trainings currently being held count

6 towards meeting this new requirement and ensuring

7 that there's sufficient funding given, um, for DHS

8 budget modifications in case shelter budgets may not

9 have enough to accommodate for two additional

10 trainings for all additional staff. Um, and then for

11 2081, for improving one-shots, um, we support the

12 creation of new locations in community to assist with

13 applying for one-shots. We also think that it would

14 be helpful if HRA could accommodate on-demand phone

15 applications for special circumstances where people

16 have difficulty with paper applications or there is

17 extremely, ah, urgent emergencies where a paper

18 application would not be possible. Um, HRA denial

19 notices should also include additional information if

20 they're citing lack of client response, including

21 date and time of the calls made to clients, as well

22 as the number called, um, so that they can verify

23 that they did receive those calls, and for the one-

24 shot reports we have a few recommendations in terms  
25

1  
2 of, um, the number of applications should be listed  
3 that did not result in a one-shot disaggregated by  
4 the reason for the denial. Um, one-shot recipients,  
5 ah, should be further broken down by the number or  
6 percentage that resulted in a one-shot as a result of  
7 a fair hearing and the reason for the overturned  
8 denial, and, ah, a report and number, report and  
9 percentage of, ah, recipients that received a one-  
10 shot, um, that applied multiple times, whether two,  
11 three, four plus times, before they actual got an  
12 approval. And then just making sure that this  
13 reporting for one-shots is disaggregated to protect  
14 client confidentiality, um, by aggregating by ZIP  
15 code rather than the actual location of the client.  
16 Thank you for the opportunity for testifying today.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
18 Eric.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks for your  
20 testimony, Eric. I will now call on Gabriela  
21 Sandoval Requena.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 GABRIELA SANDOVAL REQUENA: Good  
24 afternoon, Chair Levin and members of the General  
25 Welfare Committee. Thank you for your leadership and

1  
2 for the opportunity to provide testimony and on  
3 behalf of New Destiny. My name is Gabriela Sandoval  
4 Requena and I am the senior policy analyst of New  
5 Destiny Housing. Our mission to end the cycle of  
6 abuse and homelessness for domestic violence  
7 survivors, and we do by developing supportive housing  
8 for homeless DV survivors, assisting survivors who  
9 are fleeing DV to obtain subsidies and find  
10 apartments, and by advocating for more housing  
11 resources for survivors. Um, first of all I'd like,  
12 ah, express our gratitude to Council Member Levin and  
13 the committee members for their demonstrated  
14 commitment to help improvement the lives of New York  
15 City's most vulnerable by introducing these five  
16 bills today. We are submitting written testimony, so  
17 I'd like to use this time to share with you our take-  
18 aways on two of the proposed bills. Particularly, we  
19 commend the council for Intro 1642, which would  
20 require the Mayor's Office of Operations to report on  
21 exits from all city shelter systems. This bill would  
22 create a transparent, centralized mechanism that  
23 tracks shelter exits and bring the city one step  
24 closer to implementing a system that allows for  
25 interagency collaboration and to meet the federal

1 mandates for coordinated entry. This reporting will  
2 also provide information about service gaps to  
3 improve strategies and identify the need for  
4 additional resources. New Destiny supports Intro  
5 1642. We are grateful to Council Member Levin's  
6 leadership and your staff for Intro 149 and support  
7 its goal to increase transparency and accessibility  
8 to all city shelter systems by centralizing shelter  
9 census data. It is long overdue for the city to  
10 create one combined census that shows the true scope  
11 of homelessness in New York City. We simply cannot  
12 solve a problem that we fail to measure correctly.  
13 Currently the administration city code Local Law 37  
14 of 2011 requires city agencies that provide temporary  
15 housing to produce multiple reports of emergency, um,  
16 housing assistant utilization, yet this reporting  
17 lacks uniformity, specifically in the methodology.  
18 Some agents use report unique individuals and others,  
19 ah, a nightly average. And this inconsistency makes  
20 it impossible to combine the various reports into one  
21 census count of all New Yorkers experiencing  
22 homelessness. Furthermore, these reports are only  
23 released on a monthly basis. Ah, we're the only city  
24 agency that currently provides daily shelter census,  
25

1  
2 being the Department of Homeless Services. And far  
3 less data available for the thousands of families and  
4 individuals in the city's other shelter systems,  
5 including HRA domestic violence shelters. This  
6 discrepancy and data hides from view of the city's  
7 most vulnerable people, including domestic violence  
8 survivors, people living in the streets, homeless  
9 youth, homeless individuals living with HIV/AIDS, and  
10 those in HPD shelter system. Ah, this results in  
11 budget and policy decisions focused on those that are  
12 in public view and with less attention and  
13 accountability for those that are not. Ah, New  
14 Destiny respectfully suggests that the council  
15 considers the following recommendations for Intro  
16 194, if I may proceed.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course, yes.

18 GABRIELA SANDOVAL REQUENA: Thank you.

19 Ah, require a combined daily census that counts, ah,  
20 that acts New Yorkers experiencing homelessness.  
21 Second, ah, to mandate a consistent methodology of  
22 all city agencies to report shelter census, and, ah,  
23 ensure that the definition of HRA domestic violence  
24 shelter inputs both emergency nights and [inaudible]  
25 shelters. And lastly, but not least, try and report

1  
2 the same outcomes in the Mayor's Management Report.  
3 We thank the council for the opportunity to testify  
4 and welcome the opportunity to further, ah, for  
5 further collaboration. I'm happy to answer any  
6 questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
8 Gabriela. Thank you. And we'll be following up and,  
9 and seeing what we can, what we can get done before  
10 the end of the year. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Ah, I just want,  
13 sorry, before we proceed I just want to, ah,  
14 acknowledge Council Member Riley also [inaudible]  
15 joined us as well.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this  
17 entire panel for your testimony. Now I'm gonna call  
18 on our next few panelists. Our next panelists will  
19 be in this order of speaking - Deborah Birkman,  
20 Towaki Komatsu, and Craig Hughes. I will now turn to  
21 Deborah Birkman.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 DEBORAH BIRKMAN: Thank you. Chair  
24 Levin, council members, and staff, and good  
25 afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak



1 here to the Committee on General Welfare. My name is  
2 Deborah Birkman and I'm a coordinating attorney in  
3 the public benefits unit in the shelter advocacy in  
4 the [inaudible] at the New York Legal Assistance  
5 Group, or NYLAG. The shelter advocacy initiative at  
6 NYLAG provides legal services and advocacy to people  
7 experiencing homelessness, including helping them  
8 with their public benefits. The proposed local laws  
9 introduced today would dramatically have a positive  
10 effect on my clients' lives and NYLAG wholeheartedly  
11 supports them. We are submitting written testimony,  
12 so today I would like to focus my oral testimony on  
13 Intro 1794, which, although is a necessary step, does  
14 not go far enough. The city also must create an  
15 effective oversight mechanism to investigate, ah,  
16 complaints about staff and to enforce compliance  
17 with, ah, conduct policies. Unfortunately, my  
18 clients routinely report negative experiences with  
19 staff at intake centers and at shelters. Many of my  
20 clients have suffered from extreme physical or  
21 emotional trauma and discrimination, and the  
22 experience of homelessness itself can be deeply  
23 traumatic. Shelters and intake centers are strongly  
24 policed, either by DHS police themselves or by  
25

1 private security providers. Overwhelmingly, clients  
2 report that their interactions with shelter and  
3 intake staff are either emotionally or physically  
4 aggressive. I have many clients who are forced into  
5 street homelessness because interactions with shelter  
6 staff are so stressful. Clients report that staff  
7 particularly at intake centers is rude, are rude and  
8 aggressive and, at worst, can be physically  
9 threatening. And as this council is no doubt aware,  
10 clients can spend upward of 24 hours at the intake  
11 centers. Many of my clients experience street  
12 homelessness because although they are willing to go  
13 inside they cannot make it through the intake process  
14 itself. I recall one client who had been  
15 experiencing street homelessness and wanted to apply  
16 from shelter. He suffered from debilitating anxiety  
17 and was treated particularly poorly by the staff at  
18 the 30th Street Intake Center for single adult men.  
19 DHS was well aware of his condition as he had been  
20 granted a reasonable accommodation based on it.  
21 Nonetheless, he was at the intake site for over 24  
22 hours and only fed once during this time. He was  
23 told that if he left for any amount of time he would  
24 have to start the process again. The client then had  
25

1 a major panic attack while waiting and staff would  
2 not allow him to use any of his mitigating  
3 strategies. Despite the fact that his requested  
4 accommodation had been approved as medically  
5 necessary, staff had no knowledge of it and refused  
6 to look into its own system for it. He reports he  
7 that he was mocked and yelled at it repeatedly. The  
8 client was not able to speak about the experience  
9 without crying. I have another set of clients who  
10 had a violent encounter at the Adult Family Intake  
11 Center, or AFIC. This couple had been, ah,  
12 discovered sleeping outside scaffolding by a DHS  
13 contracted outreach team, and one of the outreach  
14 workers escorted the couple to AFIC for shelter  
15 intake. Both individuals live with mental illness,  
16 but were willing to try sleeping inside. While in  
17 AFIC one of the members of the couple experienced  
18 extreme anxiety and PTSD and reacted by raising their  
19 voice. In response DHS police rushed over,  
20 surrounded them, and would not allow the outreach  
21 worker to help deescalate the situation.

22  
23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 DEBORAH BIRKMAN: The client kept  
25 yelling. I'm sorry.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 60  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and  
3 finish, Deborah.

4 DEBORAH BIRKMAN: Thank you. The client  
5 kept yelling, at which point a DHS police officer  
6 punched both members of the couple in the face,  
7 resulting in the other member of the couple losing  
8 consciousness. Throughout the incident the outreach  
9 worker tried to deescalate the situation, but was  
10 told repeatedly by DHS police that he needed to walk  
11 away and wasn't allowed to help. Unsurprisingly, the  
12 couple returned to street homelessness. While Intro  
13 number 1794 is a very important step in the right  
14 direction and one that we wholeheartedly support, ah,  
15 we also recommend that workers be trained in the  
16 needs of clients with mental illness and that DHS  
17 maintain a robust complaint system where reports of  
18 abuses are reported, investigated, and, if warranted,  
19 penalties are imposed for bad actors. We thank the  
20 Committee on General Welfare for the work it has done  
21 to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers and  
22 for taking this opportunity to continue to improve  
23 the conditions for our clients.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
25 Deborah.

2 DEBORAH BIRKMAN: Thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
4 testimony, Deborah. We'll now call on Towaki Komatsu  
5 for testimony.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Can you hear me?

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

9 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Can you hear me?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

12 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Um, so, um, Mr. Levin,  
13 um, in 2017 in October you had a public town hall  
14 meeting in Brooklyn. Um, as you were, ah,  
15 approaching to that school at St. Francis I told you  
16 that I was being illegally prevented from attending  
17 that town hall meeting. Um, Mr. Banks was among  
18 people that, ah, conducted that meeting with you.  
19 Um, on February 1 of this year I got discovery  
20 material in federal litigation confirming that he  
21 actually sparked the incidence in April of 2017 that  
22 caused me to be blocked from attending those public  
23 town hall meetings. My, the first time I testified  
24 to you was on, um, April 20 of 2017. I told you I  
25 had litigation against, ah, HRA [inaudible]. Um, I

1  
2 got information from OTA, specifically NYCHA Works,  
3 on August 27 of this year, ah, stating with regards  
4 to fair hearings that if I request, ah, discovery  
5 material from HRA, um, OTA is condoning the fact that  
6 HRA will not provide me that discovery material. So  
7 with regards to, ah, what Ms. Drinkwater stated today  
8 about town hall meetings, there was a public resource  
9 room meeting on August 24 of this year in Staten  
10 Island. I talked to Mr. Banks yet again. He lied to  
11 my face yet again. I previously talked to you about  
12 FOIA requests. You said that you would do something  
13 to try to help me get FOIA requests. Um, you lied to  
14 my face then. The conversation I had with Mr. Banks  
15 on August 24 of this year [inaudible]. Can you hear  
16 that? [inaudible] One second. [inaudible] so  
17 basically what Mr. Banks said to me at the end of our  
18 conversation is please turn my audio recording off  
19 and step away from the table in that public resource  
20 room meeting. So the point is if it's a public  
21 meeting, if it's a public forum, I'm conducting  
22 myself lawfully, why is that the commissioner of DSS  
23 is violating my First Amendment and Fourteenth  
24 Amendment rights, um, as well as New York City  
25 Charter 111-16, ah, while you as the chairman of the

1  
2 General Welfare Committee have known about this and  
3 have done nothing about it? I also met with DOI. I  
4 talked to New York State, um, Attorney General  
5 Leticia James about that. So the bottom line is, um,  
6 I followed an order to show cause application on  
7 Monday this week in the New York State Supreme Court  
8 litigation I had against HRA in 2017. HRA actual  
9 violated the sealing order of that New York State  
10 Supreme Court judge, ah, Barry Ostrager issued on  
11 January 17 of 2017. Jessica Ramos [inaudible], so  
12 did Jacqueline Rothenberg. I've got the emails pre-  
13 discovery. So Ms., um, Birkman, Deborah Birkman, can  
14 we have a conversation after this meeting such that  
15 your organization will agree to provide me pro bono  
16 legal representation to have a subpoena issued  
17 against HRA? I would certainly love that. I talked  
18 to Legal Aid last Friday. They told me there's  
19 nothing they can do. The problem is they're getting  
20 funding from HRA so there's a conflict of interest.  
21 I'm hoping that your organization won't have that  
22 conflict. Because, like I said, um, more people than  
23 just me do fair hearings with OTA. They ask for  
24 discovery materials, so if Nigel Marks is telling  
25

1  
2 everybody else, you know what, sorry, but, um, we're  
3 not, we're going to condone the fact that HRA...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 TOWAKI KOMATSU: ...[inaudible] not  
6 providing you the discovery material that you need to  
7 prevail with your fair hearings. What can you do  
8 about that, Mr. Levin? Oh, by the way, the building  
9 that I live in is still not registered with HPD.  
10 I've told you previously it's, ah, run by Urban  
11 Pathways. HRA just gave them another 14 million  
12 dollar contract. I talked to Mr. Banks about that,  
13 too, on August 24. He told me that if I what I was  
14 telling them was, ah, false he wouldn't be able to  
15 register that new contract with the comptroller's  
16 office. Check, check HPD's website. Ah, take a look  
17 at 802 Fairmount Place in the Bronx. See for  
18 yourself whether it's currently registered with HPD.  
19 It's a fair, it's a fair request.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 802 Fairmount?

21 TOWAKI KOMATSU: It's in my, ah,  
22 testimony. Fairmount, F-A-I-R-M-O-U-N-T Place. I  
23 talked to Vito, I talked to Vito Mustaciuolo back  
24 then, too. He told me that HPD would do something  
25 about it. The person directly below my apartment



1  
2 still doesn't have hot water for the last six months  
3 and yet HRA is giving them a 14 million dollar new  
4 contract. How do you reconcile that?

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I have it up, um,  
6 I'll look it up right now, um, and, but I don't have  
7 it, I don't have the information.

8 TOWAKI KOMATSU: And last point, too.  
9 Um, I previously [inaudible] right. Um, I testified  
10 to you also on, what, February, I think the 9th of  
11 2019 about a disabled military veteran who suffered  
12 six strokes. He passed away in this building on  
13 August 10 of 2020 because HRA deprived him of a air  
14 conditioner during a very hot and humid summer. So  
15 if someone has six strokes and this building is very  
16 humid why in the heck was he not provided an air  
17 conditioner when I emailed Mr. Banks more than a week  
18 prior to his death if HRA could, you know, arrange  
19 for him to be provided that AC. I mean, think about  
20 it. If your father, if your child needed some  
21 reasonable accommodation that wasn't provided to them  
22 and then you came home, found out that your child was  
23 no longer, you know, among the living, you would  
24 seriously have a major problem with that. And yet  
25 you're not doing anything against HRA about this and

1 I told you about it repeatedly since 2017. Again,  
2 that's the end of my, ah, testimony. Go forward with  
3 the next person.  
4

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
6 Mr. Komatsu.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Towaki,  
8 for your testimony. I am now going to call on Craig  
9 Hughes for testimony.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 CRAIG HUGHES: Ah, thanks, um, ah, Chair  
12 Levin and the committee for holding the hearing  
13 today. Um, I have a, we're submitting written  
14 testimony, um, so I will do a summary. Um, but I, I  
15 would be remiss, um, in a discussion of trauma-  
16 informed care with the city, um, to not know that in  
17 my, ah, about 15 years of working in social services,  
18 um, in New York City I have not seen, ah, anything IT  
19 quite parallels the sort of mass production of trauma  
20 that DHS has overseen, ah, and the mayor hasn't  
21 required, ah, in the mass transfers back to  
22 congregate shelters. Um, I have never received the  
23 sheer number of phone calls crying, ah, the fears,  
24 the terror, um, and our office has been inundated,  
25 ah, by quite literally hundreds of cases like this.

1  
2 Um, we now know from resources that came out in a  
3 Freedom of Information request that the city in fact  
4 did not have health guidance to do the transfers  
5 back. Um, this, ah, the level of trauma that's been  
6 produced is palpable, um, and, ah, was not matched  
7 during [inaudible]. Ah, with that said, I will just  
8 make a few notes, um, about particularly in regards  
9 to, ah, Intro 149. Um, it's really important to hold  
10 why the numbers matter so much. People sometimes say  
11 that, that the homeless count numbers just don't  
12 matter. Um, they matter, ah, in large part because  
13 of the resources. Um, in New York City we have a,  
14 ah, vast inequity in how homelessness, how homeless  
15 service bureaucracies get access to resources. So  
16 under de Blasio, ah, the CITYFEPS voucher program,  
17 for example, um, DYCD has been able to get almost no  
18 subsidies. HPD has zero. So if your, ah, home burns  
19 down, ah, you have no way out of an HPD shelter. Ah,  
20 there are no CITYFEPS resources, and the reason that,  
21 ah, we would argue that this is happening is because  
22 the definition of what are sometimes called municipal  
23 shelters or city shelters is really, ah, reduced to  
24 include only DHS shelters. Um, but there are  
25 actually five shelter systems, five municipal shelter

1  
2 systems at four, ah, that are administered by four  
3 city agencies, and if we don't have a full tally or  
4 an honest accounting of those five municipal shelter  
5 systems then we end up in a situation where some  
6 resources, some, ah, people get access to resources  
7 by one bureaucracy, ah, by entering into a shelter  
8 system in one bureaucracy but not in another. Um,  
9 and that's, ah, just a terrible way to do, um, ah,  
10 homeless policy. Um, the, ah, most problematic of  
11 the reports isn't addressed by Intro 149, ah, and we  
12 think it should be. And that is the DHS daily census  
13 report. Um, the DHS daily census report is the  
14 report that the press goes to. It's the report the  
15 city uses [inaudible] homeless people, and the DHS,  
16 ah, daily census report is, I know my time is up.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's OK, no, no, go  
18 ahead and finish.

19 CRAIG HUGHES: OK. The DHS daily census  
20 report, um, is probably the most important accounting  
21 document and it is deeply misleading. Um, in  
22 particular the, um, ah, I don't have the document on  
23 the screen, obviously, but, um, there's a total  
24 shelter census box, or total individuals in shelter  
25 in that document, and that leaves out everyone

1 that's, you know, a drop-in or in a stabilization bed  
2 or in a safe haven, or in application processes of  
3 PATH or AFIC and that sort of thing. And so what you  
4 end up with is a DHS, ah, shelter census document  
5 that the press looks at, that, ah, politicians look  
6 at, that policy people look at, ah, and it actually  
7 systematically downplays. Um, in 2010 Council Member  
8 Palma, then Palma, ah, then Council Member, ah,  
9 Palma, um, got then Commissioner Hess to say that  
10 yeah, he, he knew stabilization beds, for example,  
11 weren't even mentioned on that report and he would  
12 try to fix it. Eleven years later nothing has been  
13 done and it's because the city is nervous about what  
14 happens when you create a document that everyone  
15 looks at that actually includes a higher but accurate  
16 number of homeless people. Um, with, with that said,  
17 ah, you know, we do hope that there would be a  
18 consideration before you leave, Council Member Levin,  
19 to mandate an accurate DHS daily census report  
20 because that's the most important document, ah, that  
21 we can get, um, in terms of the DHS numbers. Um,  
22 with that said, Local Law 37's report, ah, is the  
23 most important current document, and that document,  
24 um, should be, ah, the document that everyone turns  
25

1 to. Um, but unfortunately because of how, ah, the  
2 city compiles and presents and reports the data, ah,  
3 it's very, very hard to figure out what it actual  
4 means much of the time. And so there's a few  
5 specific things that can be done, um, and I'm gonna  
6 echo some of what my colleagues, ah, have said here.  
7 Um, first, for the cover page, ah, the reporting  
8 should include two major things. One, a point in  
9 time count for every single system. So what is on,  
10 say, the last day of month what the number of people  
11 in every, ah, shelter bed or every chair or every,  
12 um, you know, overnight setting, what's that count  
13 across the five systems, um, and then an average  
14 census across the five systems. And so you get a  
15 shot of exactly what, ah, it looks like on one day  
16 and what it looks like over the course of a month.  
17 Um, secondly, there needs to be, ah, accurate  
18 methodology across, ah, a uniform methodology across  
19 the systems. Right now, for example, DYCD uses a  
20 methodology that only includes new entrance into its  
21 system. So all the people that were there the day  
22 before the month started aren't included. Um, so  
23 there needs to be uniformity across the, ah, across  
24 the methodologies so that you can actually, ah, get a  
25

1 count, ah, that can be honestly assessed by people  
2 looking at it. Um, and we also need to make sure  
3 that, you know, when DHS does the reporting in its,  
4 ah, Local Law 37 report, um, what it does is that,  
5 ah, it, it kind of parses out between facility, what  
6 it calls a facility and what is called, um, you know,  
7 a bed or a shelter, um, and, you know, it's a way of  
8 making the document far less transparent than it  
9 needs to be. So DHS should be held to reporting the  
10 exact number of people in, ah, church beds, the exact  
11 number of people in drop-ins, and so on, and then  
12 tallying that up so you can get a full number. Right  
13 now the, the agency just doesn't do it, ah, obviously  
14 for political reasons. Finally, and I'll stop after  
15 this, um, that, you know, we have, ah, a new, ah, we  
16 have an opportunity at the end of this administration  
17 to make sure the next administration doesn't fail  
18 where this one did. And one of the places this  
19 administration has failed so badly, ah, is in the  
20 area of homeless policy. Ah, it has been a true  
21 historic disaster. And, um, you know, the way out of  
22 that, that includes being honest about how many  
23 people have no home and come to the agencies, to the  
24 city's doorstep, and if we don't create an accurate  
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2 number it's not the next administration that's gonna  
3 do it, because they're gonna say the exact same thing  
4 Commissioner Banks said when he testified here months  
5 ago, which is you'd have to go back in history and  
6 revise everything. You don't. You can start now,  
7 and then we can start with an honest assessment of  
8 what the count is to divide resources appropriately.  
9 Thank you. Sorry for taking so long.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Craig.

11 Um, is there any other members of the public that,  
12 ah, would like to testify?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Just echoing Chair

14 Levin, if anyone has inadvertently been missed who is  
15 logged in right now and wants to testify you can use  
16 the Zoom raise hand function and I'll call on you in  
17 the order your hand is raised.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Going once, going

19 twice. OK. I want to thank everybody for your time,  
20 ah, this afternoon. Um, ah, we look forward to  
21 working on incorporating your recommendations to the  
22 legislation and hopefully moving forward on these  
23 bills, um, in the coming weeks. And I want to thank  
24 everybody once again, and have a great day.



2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Levin, before  
3 you...

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, yes, go ahead.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I just want to note  
6 that written testimony, um, will be reviewed in full  
7 by committee staff and you can submit that up to the  
8 record, up to 72 hours after the close of this  
9 hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.  
10 Now I'll turn it back over to Chair Levin.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

12 Um, and I want to thank committee staff and, ah, the  
13 sergeants at arms for conducting the hearing today.  
14 And with that at 1:31 p.m. this hearing is adjourned.  
15 Thank you. [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date September 17, 2021