

COMMITTEE ON AGING JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE 1

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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February 17, 2023
Start: 10:02 a.m.
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Crystal Hudson, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Linda Lee
Christopher Marte
Darlene Mealy
Shaun Abreu
David M. Carr
Shahana K. Hanif
Mercedes Narcisse
Lincoln Restler

COMMITTEE ON AGING JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE 2

A P P E A R A N C E S

David Goldin, General Counsel at Mayor's Office
of Criminal Justice

Sarah Cassel, Director of Diversion and Re-entry
Initiatives at Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice

Anna Calabrese, Executive Director of Re-entry
and Culture Change at Mayor's Office of Criminal
Justice

Julia Salazar, New York State Senator

Anya Herasme, Associate Commissioner Community
Services Program

Frederick Robinson

Jose Vega

Willa Lopez

Brad Hoylman-Sigal, New York State Senator

Roslyn Smith, Beyond Incarceration Program
Manager at V-Day, Brooklyn community leader at
RAPP, Release Aging People in Prison

Samuel Hamilton, Senior Re-entry Advocate at
Brooklyn Defender Services

Parrish Steward

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging
People in Prison Campaign

Christian Gonzalez-Rivera, Director of Strategic
Policy Initiatives at the Brookdale Center for
Healthy Aging at Hunter College

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

Rebekah Almanzar, Forensic Social Work Supervisor
at the Legal Aid Society

Tanya Krupat, Vice President of Policy and
Advocacy at the Osborne Association

Brianna Paden-Williams, Communications and Policy
Associate at LiveOn New York

Tara Klein, Deputy Director of Policy and
Advocacy for United Neighborhood Houses

Arielle Basch, Senior Director of Health Services
at Jewish Association Serving the Aging

Raji Edayathumangalam, Forensic Social Worker at
New York County Defender Services

Christina Green, Director of Marcus Garvey
Supportive Housing, Osborne Association

Ingrid Gordon-Patterson, Case Manager with the
Osborne Association at Marcus Garvey in Brooklyn

Laura Roan, Service Provider at the Osborne
Association

Julia Solomons, Senior Policy Social Worker at
the Bronx Defenders

Derick Bowers, Regional Director of Social
Enterprise in New York City for the Center for
Employment Opportunities

Imani

Andre Ward, Associate Vice President of David
Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at the
Fortune Society

1
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone
3 check for the Committee on Criminal Justice joint
4 with Aging recorded in Chambers by Nazly Paytuvi on
5 February 17, 2023.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon and
7 welcome to today's hearing on Criminal Justice Joint
8 with Aging.

9 At this time, please place electronic
10 devices on vibrate or on silent mode.

11 If you want to testify, please come to
12 the front to the Sergeant-at-Arms and fill out this
13 testimony slip. Thank you.

14 Chair, we may begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Good morning. I am
16 Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair of the Committee
17 on Aging. I want to thank Criminal Justice Committee
18 Chair Carlina Rivera, who is currently out on
19 parental leave, for agreeing to hold this extremely
20 important joint oversight hearing on justice in aging
21 re-entry issues for older New Yorkers.

22 I'd like to acknowledge that we are here
23 with Council Member Linda Lee.

24 Before going any further, I want to
25 acknowledge that today's hearing centers on a range

1
2 of very sensitive issues. Many incarcerated and
3 formerly incarcerated individuals, some of whom are
4 here today to share their personal experiences, have
5 been deeply affected by their incarceration. They
6 deserve a supportive environment at this hearing, and
7 so I ask my Colleagues and everyone in the room today
8 to speak and act with compassion and empathy.

9 I also want to take a moment to honor the
10 memory of 65-year-old Marvin Pines, who tragically
11 died in DOC custody on February 4th. Marvin Pines'
12 death was a product of a system that is completely
13 failing to provide adequate medical care. Mr. Pines
14 should be alive today. We grieve his loss, and our
15 thoughts are with his family and the dozens of
16 families grieving the loss of their loved ones in DOC
17 custody.

18 An increasing body of research indicates
19 that warehousing people for decades is a
20 counterproductive response to deterring criminal
21 behavior. Most older adults in prison were sentenced
22 in their teens, 20s, and 30s, and often were the
23 victims of violence or experienced trauma before they
24 committed harm. As a response to criminal behavior,
25 extreme prison sentences are inconsistent with

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2 scientific findings that have shown people age out of
3 crime by the time they reach their 40s. Imprisonment
4 rates for sentenced incarcerated people have steadily
5 declined since 2004. Despite this decline, the rate
6 of incarceration among older adults has surged in
7 recent decades. From 1999 to 2016, the number of
8 people 55 and older in state or federal prisons
9 increased by 280 percent. In New York State prisons,
10 despite an overall decline in the prison population,
11 the proportion of older adults in the system has
12 steadily increased. According to advocates, there are
13 currently approximately 8,000 individuals age 50 and
14 older in New York State prisons. This amounts to one
15 in every four incarcerated people being an older
16 adult, an increase from 12 percent of the prison
17 population in 2008. At the city level, as of February
18 2023, approximately 12 percent of the nearly 6,000
19 people in DOC custody are older than 50. One study
20 showed that over 50 percent of people 65 and older
21 have served more than 10 years consecutively. Between
22 1984 and 2017, the number of people serving life
23 sentences more than quadrupled. Parole is denied to a
24 large majority of parole applicants in the State,
25 further ensuring that the prison population ages and

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2 that older adults remain in prison. Older adult
3 incarcerated is a crisis, and the State needs to act
4 now. That's why we're considering my resolution today
5 in support of two important pieces of State
6 legislation, the Fair and Timely Parole Act and the
7 Elder Parole Act.

8 The Fair and Timely Parole Act would
9 create a presumption of release for parole-eligible
10 incarcerated persons unless there's a reasonable
11 public safety reason to keep them in prison. The
12 Elder Parole Act would establish parole consideration
13 for people at least 55 years old who have served 15
14 consecutive years in prison. It is estimated that the
15 parole justice bills together would save the State
16 522 million dollars per year which is larger than the
17 entire budget for the New York City Department for
18 the Aging. These are necessary and critical reforms
19 that will help ensure that the incarcerated older
20 adult population declines and that this population
21 can re-enter society and live their lives with
22 dignity. New York spends hundreds of thousands of
23 dollars annually per older adult in prison. This
24 money could be reinvested in our communities and used
25 to improve the health and safety of New Yorkers or it

1
2 could be used to provide resources, supports, and
3 education efforts to eliminate the school-to-prison
4 pipeline. It could be spent to help prevent us from
5 having hearings like this in the future because we
6 made a decision to invest in our communities instead
7 of a system rooted in racism that destroys lives and
8 does very little, if anything, to improve public
9 safety.

10 We are here today to hear from the
11 administration on how they are assisting older adults
12 to transition out of incarceration and back into our
13 communities, but we are also here to hear directly
14 from formerly incarcerated older adults on their
15 experiences, both while incarcerated and following
16 their release.

17 Today, we hope to learn more about the
18 re-entry services and supports that the city provides
19 this population as well as the work of direct service
20 providers and advocates on the ground who work with
21 formerly incarcerated older adults every day. We
22 cannot forget the incredible work that families,
23 friends, and communities do to support people in re-
24 entry. We see you and we thank you.

1
2 Let's be clear. Leaving people in prison
3 while we work to improve the re-entry landscape is
4 not a fair or viable option. The City must take a
5 holistic approach to ensuring that our communities
6 thrive and that we are not simply streamlining or
7 improving re-entry services while not addressing the
8 root issues of criminalization and incarceration. My
9 hope is that this hearing is a productive step
10 towards a more just future, but it cannot be the only
11 step.

12 Thank you to the advocates and members of
13 the public who are joining us today and thank you to
14 representatives from the Administration for joining
15 us.

16 I'd also like to thank my Staff, Casie
17 Addison and Andrew Wright, Aging Committee Staff,
18 Christopher Pepe, Chloe Rivera, Austrid Chan, and
19 Kelly Welch (phonetic), Criminal Justice Committee
20 Staff, Jeremy Whiteman as well as our Data Operations
21 Unit.

22 I will now read a statement by Chair
23 Rivera.

24 I will now be reading a statement on
25 behalf of the Criminal Justice Chair Rivera who is

1
2 unable to join us for today's hearing as she is out
3 on parental leave. "As a result of outdated and
4 racist law and order policies, the share of the jail
5 and prison population comprised of older adults has
6 been steadily rising in recent decades. Right now,
7 despite the fact they pose little to no risk upon
8 release, one in four New Yorkers in prison is an
9 older adult. Many of these individuals have been
10 scholars, teachers, and mentors while in custody and
11 yet they continue to languish and often die in unsafe
12 conditions. This trend towards a graying prison
13 population is a result of an unjust system badly in
14 need of reform that prioritizes endless punishment
15 over healthy communities. There's no justification
16 for having approximately 8,000 older adults behind
17 bars in New York. As we work to bring our elders
18 home, New York should also be assisting families and
19 communities by providing comprehensive re-entry
20 services. Studies show that incarcerated individuals
21 are nearly 10 times more likely to experience
22 homelessness or unstable housing. Our city must
23 ensure we have enough safe affordable housing without
24 appropriate social service support when necessary to
25 accommodate everyone returning from jail or prison.

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2 Given the accelerated aging process that occurs when
3 a person spends time in custody, New York City must
4 be diligent in ensuring this medically vulnerable
5 population has access to appropriate health and
6 mental health resources. Initiatives like MOCJ's
7 Community Justice Re-entry Network should serve the
8 needs of everyone who returns from custody, including
9 older adults who might need specialized training to
10 adapt to the modern workforce. These are just some
11 ways our city can enhance the re-entry landscape to
12 support older adults, but, again, our bedrock
13 conviction must always be to decarcerate. In New York
14 City, that means staying the course, reducing the
15 population, and closing Rikers Island. At that State
16 level, to ensure that more of our friends and
17 neighbors can return home and age with dignity in
18 their communities, our representatives in Albany
19 should immediately pass the Elder Parole and Fair and
20 Timely Parole Acts. As Chair of the Committee on
21 Criminal Justice, I'm proud to co-sponsor Resolution
22 241 which urges swift passage of these reform
23 measures. Passing these bills would save our State
24 money and reform the broke parole system that has
25 left too many of our elders behind bars."

1
2 I will now turn it over to Counsel to
3 administer the oath.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning,
5 everyone. When you're ready, if you could please
6 raise your right hand.

7 Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole
8 truth, and nothing but the truth and to respond
9 honestly to Council Member questions?

10 ADMINISTRATION: (INAUDIBLE)

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great. You can
12 proceed. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. Just before
14 you proceed, I just want to acknowledge that we've
15 been joined by Council Members Christopher Marte and
16 Darlene Mealy. Thank you.

17 : Good morning, Chair Hudson and Members
18 of the Committees on Criminal Justice and Aging. My
19 name is David Goldin, and I am the General Counsel of
20 the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, MOCJ. I'm
21 pinch-hitting here this morning of our Chief-of-Staff
22 Nora Daniel who had intended to testify but
23 unfortunately was unable to join us this morning. I
24 am joined today by Sarah Cassel, the Director of
25 Diversion and Re-entry Initiatives, and Anna

1
2 Calabrese beside her, the Executive Director of Re-
3 entry and Culture Change, my Colleagues at MOCJ.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to discuss
5 the re-entry services that help returning New Yorkers
6 restart their lives post-incarceration. Re-entry
7 services are a crucial component of our city's public
8 safety continuum, providing the supports that help
9 promote safety for all. The Mayor's Office of
10 Criminal Justice advises Mayor Adams on criminal
11 justice and public safety policies. MOCJ serves as
12 Mayor Adams' representative to the courts, district
13 attorneys, defenders, state criminal justice
14 agencies, and other system actors. Our office brings
15 together community and institutional stakeholders to
16 address the systemic issues that undermine the safety
17 and stability of our neighborhoods. MOCJ moves the
18 city forward by implementing Mayor Adams' vision for
19 a safe and fair city for all New Yorkers.

20 MOCJ has revamped and strengthened re-
21 entry programming to improve transition and release
22 planning services for those leaving city and state
23 custody. Our re-entry programming helps individuals
24 thrive and gives them the necessary resources and
25 opportunities to avoid future criminal justice

1 involvement. By providing these services and
2 addressing the needs of those re-entering their
3 communities, we aid in the individual's post-
4 incarceration success. The city has invested 30.5
5 million dollars into this programming, building on
6 the success of the Jail-to-Jobs Re-entry Services
7 Program launched in 2018. During incarceration,
8 individuals work with transition coordinators to
9 create discharge plans for when they are released and
10 also work with re-entry mentors who help facilitate
11 their re-entry process on an individualized basis.
12 Re-entry mentors develop relationships with released
13 individuals to encourage participation in relevant
14 services and programs. In January 2020, the program
15 was expanded to serve more people and increase the
16 breadth and depth of services offered, which included
17 the enhancement of services that begin in jail and
18 continue into the community post-release, expansion
19 of wraparound social services and connections to
20 care, creating additional supports for individuals on
21 the day of release from jail, and hiring more staff
22 at contracted non-profit organizations who have lived
23 experience in the criminal justice system to serve as
24 peer mentors.
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2 In January 2022, we expanded our re-entry
3 initiatives to also provide holistic re-entry
4 services to those returning to New York City from
5 state prisons. Through this expansion, we are now
6 able to provide discharge planning prior to release
7 from prison, transportation from prisons to non-
8 profit service provider organizations in the
9 community, and an array of vocational, educational,
10 and therapeutic services. This work supports
11 individuals impacted by the criminal justice system,
12 providing them a range of different services and
13 programming to deter re-entry into our criminal
14 justice system.

15 We partner with 10 non-profit
16 organizations that work to ensure that they provide
17 key holistic re-entry services. This network of non-
18 profit organizations offers employment services such
19 as paid transitional employment and internships, job
20 training and job readiness workshops, connections to
21 permanent employment, resume writing, and interview
22 prep. They also provide holistic supportive services
23 such as benefits enrollment, individual and group
24 counselling, legal services, case management, family
25 support and reunification, connections to mental,

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2 behavioral, and physical care, substance use
3 treatment, housing assistance, and more. This
4 initiative serves approximately 8,000 people per year
5 of all ages including older adults. Our re-entry
6 initiative is inclusive, also providing gender-
7 specific, TGNC-specific programming.

8 Effective and appropriate re-entry
9 services are necessary for people who are returning
10 from jail or prison. This administration is committed
11 to supporting older adults who are returning, and we
12 are eager to work with the Council to help provide
13 these critical services.

14 Thank you for the opportunity to share
15 some of our re-entry work, and we are happy to answer
16 any questions you may have at this time.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.
18 I'd just like to acknowledge that we've been joined
19 by Council Members Abreu, Narcisse, and Carr.

20 I'll start with some questions and then
21 turn it over to my Colleagues. New York State
22 classifies incarcerated individuals as older adults
23 starting at the age of 50. At what age does the City
24 Department of Correction consider a person to be an
25 older adult?

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2 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: To the extent
3 that there are questions for the Department of
4 Correction, we're going to defer to them because
5 we're not speaking for them, and I know that they
6 will be in contact with the Committee to provide
7 answers to those questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so let me ask
9 you then from a MOCJ perspective, is there a
10 particular age that you consider somebody to be an
11 older adult?

12 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Give me one
13 moment.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think
15 having listened to the work of advocates and experts
16 in this field, we use the same definition that you're
17 talking about, over 50.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 50? Okay, great.
19 Thank you. How many older adults are currently in
20 city custody and do you know if that population is
21 increasing or decreasing?

22 DIRECTOR CASSEL: In terms of current
23 population, as of February 8th, there were 333 people
24 who were between 51 and 55 years old..
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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. Can you repeat
3 that? 330 people?

4 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Yes, between 51 and 55
5 years old, and then 56 and above was 393 people.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. I'd like
7 to acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council
8 Member Hanif.

9 Do you know if that population is
10 increasing or decreasing?

11 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: We don't have
12 that information at the moment. We can check and get
13 back to the Committee.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that would be
15 great. Thank you. What, if any, screening and intake
16 is done to account for older adults in city custody?

17 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Again, that's
18 really a question for the Department of Correction to
19 answer.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I would add
22 Correctional Health Services, a very important piece
23 there too.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. How, if at all,
25 does MOCJ coordinate with agencies to prevent

1 ruptures in care and services for older New Yorkers
2 incarcerated in local jails?

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4 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Through the Community
5 Justice Re-entry Network and our network of 10
6 service provider organizations that we fund, they are
7 all in-custody, providing transitional planning to
8 folks who are leaving and going back into the
9 community and then are connecting with people,
10 linking them to services once they're back, and
11 individualized case management so connecting them
12 with services for all the needs that they have.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's with the 10
14 organizations but not necessarily other city agencies
15 that you're coordinating with.

16 DIRECTOR CASSEL: We're in close contact
17 with DOC, of course, since those providers are in-
18 custody. My Colleague will talk about our
19 coordination with CHS as well.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think
22 it's very important to note that for many of the
23 complex health and mental health issues that older
24 adults are facing coming out of jail and prison, a
25 lot of coordination happens through Correctional

1 Health Services so I think that they would be the
2 best equipped to speak to that larger really integral
3 coordination, but Sarah mentioned it from our end.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so MOCJ doesn't
5 coordinate with like DFTA or any other city agencies
6 to address the needs of older adults and the services
7 and the care...

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: We do
9 coordinate with DFTA, and we're a part of a taskforce
10 that I'm sure we'll talk about together with DFTA.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and any other
12 city agencies?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Well,
14 Correctional Health Services, Department of
15 Correction...

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, those I
17 understand, so just those three basically? DOC, CHS,
18 and DFTA?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think the
20 range of city agencies depending on the need so DSS,
21 DHS, DOHMH, depending on the particular issue that
22 we're talking about.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Just
24 trying to get a sense of whether or not there's
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2 coordination so it sounds like, you're underselling
3 yourself because it sounds like you're coordinating
4 with a lot of agencies so we just like to get that on
5 the record. Thank you.

6 Does the City track how many older adults
7 are coming to New York City each year following their
8 release from state prisons and, if so, can you share
9 those numbers?

10 DIRECTOR CASSEL: That's really a State
11 DOC question.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So the City doesn't
13 track that then?

14 DIRECTOR CASSEL: We don't have a way to
15 track it the way that State DOC does because they're
16 doing the releases, and they're mostly going to
17 parole but if people are just being released, there's
18 not a way to track everyone who's coming back.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. In the
20 testimony, you stated that you expanded your re-entry
21 initiatives to also provide holistic re-entry
22 services to those returning to New York City from
23 state prisons so how does MOCJ make the connection to
24 those serving state prison sentences?

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2 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Thank you for the
3 question. The Osborne Association is working in 24
4 state prisons, if you're interested we can get you
5 the list of those prisons afterwards, and they're
6 providing discharge planning so connecting with folks
7 while they're in custody and then making the
8 connections to our 10 organizations that are in New
9 York City as they are coming home. We also fund 6 of
10 those 10 organizations to provide transportation back
11 to New York City for folks who are coming back and
12 don't have family or friends that they want to come
13 pick them up, and one of our providers also has an
14 office right by Port Authority so for folks that are
15 coming back on public transportation from the really
16 far prisons then that provider is connecting with
17 them as soon as they're coming back.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so it sounds
19 like there is a way then for you to connect to the
20 people who are returning to New York City from state
21 prisons and that that is happening..

22 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Yes, it's absolutely
23 happening. They're contracted to serve 1,000 people a
24 year. We know that that's not the full number of
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2 people who are coming back, but that's what we're
3 able to provide now.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so my question
5 was does the City track how many older adults are
6 coming to New York City each year following their
7 release from state prisons so you would say roughly
8 at least 1,000 people a year is what you're tracking?

9 DIRECTOR CASSEL: The 1,000 isn't only
10 older adults. That's a re-entry initiative for
11 everybody.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

13 DIRECTOR CASSEL: So we know how many
14 people Osborne is able to connect with through this
15 initiative, but that's not everyone who's coming out.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Can you
17 describe the ways in which the incarcerated older
18 adult population differs from the general
19 incarcerated population, and are there any particular
20 considerations taken into account for incarcerated
21 older adults so essentially is everybody treated the
22 same or is there more care and consideration for
23 those who might be older adults?

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Thank you
25 for that question. It's a really important one and in

1
2 no way meaning to punt this back to other agencies,
3 but I just think it's very important to note that a
4 lot of the really deep-rooted services for complex
5 health and mental health care happen outside of the
6 auspices of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
7 and happen with Correctional Health Services so I
8 think that's just a really important thing to note.

9 Of course, our re-entry services are
10 tailored to the need of the individual as well so
11 when you're asking about specific needs of an older
12 population, of course we're talking about health,
13 we're talking about oftentimes mental health and the
14 sort of collateral construction of long
15 incarcerations, frequent incarceration, we're talking
16 about housing, family connections, all of which are
17 part of our suite of services, but, again, I just do
18 want to be clear that for some of the really clinical
19 services, that's not under our purview.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Understood, but my
21 understanding was that DOC prepped you all for the
22 hearing. If that didn't happen, did that happen? I
23 understand that you are not Department of Correction
24 or Correction Health Services, but considering the
25 topic, and you all are here representing the

1
2 administration so it would be helpful if we can get
3 some information for some of these questions.

4 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Chair, if I could
5 just explain. We have been in touch with DOC and we
6 have prepared with them for this hearing, but we have
7 not elicited from them and they have not provided us
8 with the kind of detailed answers to those kinds of
9 questions so where we're referring a question over to
10 DOC or saying that we'll get back to you, that's why.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I just
13 wouldn't want to misspeak on the specificities of
14 those services, but I think what we have said is, of
15 course, re-entry services for this population need to
16 take into account robust health and mental health
17 services, connections to community care, connections
18 to housing, and that's something that we coordinate
19 across our agency and with other agencies like DOC
20 and CHS.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, I appreciate
22 that. Thank you. The incarceration rate for
23 individuals age 50 years and old has surged in recent
24 decades. The share of this population in state
25 prisons has more than doubled from 2008 to 2021. A

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2 2018 Osborne Association report outlined racial
3 disparity, long sentences, parole denials, and a
4 punitive rather than healing centered and trauma-
5 informed approach to addressing uncertainty regarding
6 violence and risk as reasons behind the incarceration
7 of older adults. What's the City's response to the
8 contributing factors identified by Osborne?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think the
10 response is sort of in the programs that we run.
11 We've invested heavily in a community-based response
12 with 10 really robust providers with deep expertise
13 in the needs that arise from the terrible
14 circumstances so I think our response is sort of in
15 our action.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so can you
17 describe the efforts to reduce the proportion of
18 incarcerated individuals age 50+?

19 DIRECTOR CASSEL: I think a part of it in
20 that was highlighted in the Osborne Report is also
21 around parole and individual judicial decision and
22 length of sentences so that's a lot under the State
23 purview, and we, of course, have pretrial diversion
24 programs and alternative-to-incarceration programs
25 that aim to divert people from incarceration,

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2 everyone, but, of course, older adults as well, and
3 there are case-processing initiatives that are meant
4 to reduce the length of stay so that folks who are
5 held pretrial are able to get to disposition sooner.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Before I
7 continue with my questions, I'm just going to turn it
8 over to a couple of my Colleagues. Council Member
9 Mealy. Just to remind folks that the time for Council
10 Member questions is three minutes. Thank you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, Chair,
12 for this important hearing. I only have a quick two
13 questions, but it seems like they are very unprepared
14 for what I need to know in regards to our older
15 population.

16 You say the wraparound services in
17 housing, so are you telling me that these programs
18 will pick up the individuals, drop them off in the
19 city, and then just leave them? Is there any
20 preparation for them to go into stable housing? These
21 are seniors.

22 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Yeah, so it's sort of a
23 two-part question I think that you're asking. First,
24 while people are incarcerated, they're getting
25 programming inside and then also discharge planning

1 services so it's not the first time that they're
2 meeting someone when they're being picked up.

3 Obviously, it works a little bit differently from the
4 State or from the City, but when folks are picked up
5 then they're brought to where they're going to be
6 residing or to their parole officer...

7
8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Excuse me. I'm not
9 speaking about that. We have asylum-seekers here now.
10 When they come here, they have a place to go
11 directly, housing somewhere. What has the City done
12 for senior incarcerated individuals? Some people come
13 out 85 years old. Are you telling me the City does
14 not have anything in the works or data to say we know
15 they can't find housing, they know they practically
16 can't find a job, we're going to at least put them in
17 stable housing. That's all I want to know. If not,
18 someone should be getting some data on this. They are
19 not just people that you just discard. We have to
20 have some kind of track record, of who, where they're
21 going, and if we don't do that, this City is not
22 doing a great job. That's the same way with our
23 seniors. They build this city, and now once they get
24 older, you just discard them and not have stable

1
2 living conditions where they can know I did 20 years,
3 now at least I have a roof over my head.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Thank you
5 for that and your points are very well-taken. MOCJ
6 has a 50-million-dollar transitional housing
7 initiative that we're currently in the process of
8 standing up.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So we're just
10 starting to do it now?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: No, we've
12 been doing it for many years.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So how many people
14 have you put in stable housing coming directly out of
15 a state prison?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I can get
17 back to you with those exact numbers. I don't want to
18 misspeak on the state...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Or city? Give it to
20 me. The city right here.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: We'll have
22 to get you back to you with those numbers. It's very
23 doable to do, but what I just want to...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It's very doable to
25 do, but this was the opportunity for you to give it

1
2 to us now, and I feel people have a lot of things to
3 do and once you come to these hearings, we need the
4 information now that we don't have to keep
5 recidivism, keep coming back, coming back. Come on.
6 Thank you, Chair. This is not enough information for
7 our seniors.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
9 Member. Council Member Narcisse.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning and
11 thank you for being here. These are older adults that
12 we're talking about, right, would obviously have an
13 increased need in health, right, services when
14 they're incarcerated in there. Could you estimate the
15 cost of housing a chronically ill incarcerated adult
16 in the prison, in our jails in New York City,
17 approximately, estimating?

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I hate to
19 say this, but I think we'll have to get back to you
20 on that. Again, that's a question that requires some
21 coordination with other city agencies and some deeper
22 analysis but understand the impetus behind your
23 question and it's a good one.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I wish we had it
25 today because that would lead me to something else

1 because I want to know the data because how much it
2 costs for healthcare for an older adult in our jail,
3 let's say over 75 or 80, so that will lead me to
4 something else. I guess you don't have it. I have to
5 move on.
6

7 How many incarcerated older adults access
8 the City's job programs that you have?

9 DIRECTOR CASSEL: We can speak just for
10 the MOCJ-funded Community Justice Re-entry Network
11 job services, but there are, of course, so many job
12 programs through Small Business Services and other
13 agencies that we don't have the data on, but in terms
14 of the Community Justice Re-entry Network, we have
15 about 1,700 individuals between the ages of 50 and
16 64, and then 65+ would be about 200 for the last
17 year.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. What
19 metric is used to determine the success of such
20 programming?

21 DIRECTOR CASSEL: We look at what needs
22 they have coming in and what needs are met.
23 Obviously, the population overall have various needs,
24 and it depends on the individual so some things as
25 basic as getting your ID when you come out of

1
2 incarceration, technology support if you've been away
3 for a long time, housing of course, medical care,
4 behavioral health services so all of those things,
5 and we're checking to make sure that the needs that
6 folks have when they come in are met.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Understand that
8 as a nurse I used to do re-entry programming and a
9 lot of adults come out, they don't know how to use a
10 phone, they're frustrated, they're telling them
11 everywhere they go that you can get it online, you
12 can get it on your phone, and they can hardly even
13 use the new technology that we have so one of the
14 things that I think we should focus on before we let
15 people come out, the human being, at least give them
16 the basics.

17 One more question if I may, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sure.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Are any special
20 accommodations made in the City programs for formerly
21 incarcerated older adults? I'm asking again because I
22 heard it before too. Thank you. Can you answer that?

23 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Can you say a little bit
24 more about what you mean by special accommodations?
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah, because
3 they're older so when they come out, like she was
4 saying before, what accommodations do we make for
5 them because technology, educations, because a lot of
6 the program, I used to be a re-entry nurse, but a lot
7 of programs are working in silo, they're not
8 collaborating for someone that's been in there for
9 20, 30 years so what do you do before you release
10 them? What accommodations that you actually make
11 besides saying this is a number, this is a program to
12 go?

13 DIRECTOR CASSEL: DOC and State DOCS would
14 be able to speak more to what they're doing inside,
15 but in terms of the transition of coming out and
16 being in the community, all of the re-entry services
17 are very individualized and so case management is
18 responding to those particular needs that folks have
19 that you're, of course, very well aware of. In terms
20 of the technology question, we're also funding John
21 Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity.
22 You might be familiar with them. We're funding them
23 to do a Tech 101 course, and that's specifically for
24 people who really have been away for a long time and
25 need those basic tech needs. Now, they've also

1 started a Tech 201 because we know that there's
2 really that technology gap and folks need a lot of
3 support there.
4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: My time is up,
6 but I want to know how many people you have that
7 actually use those kinds of programs.

8 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Absolutely. We can get
9 that for you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. Thank
11 you, Chair. Appreciate it.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Non-profit. I'm going
13 to go to State Senator Salazar who I believe is
14 joining us via Zoom.

15 SENATOR SALAZAR: Hello. Can you hear me?

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes, we can.

17 SENATOR SALAZAR: Excellent. Thank you. I
18 just want to say thank you, Chair Hudson, Chair
19 Rivera, Members and Staff of the respective City
20 Council Committees on Aging and Criminal Justice for
21 holding this hearing and also for giving me the
22 opportunity to testify.

23 I'm State Senator Julia Salazar. I
24 represent New York's 18th Senate District including
25 parts of North and East Brooklyn as well as question.

1
2 I serve as the Chair of the State Senate's Crime
3 Victims Crime and Correction Committee and I also am
4 the sponsor of the Fair and Timely Parole Act and a
5 co-sponsor of the Elder Parole Bill.

6 Parole is ostensibly a mechanism for the
7 State to decide whether or not an individual
8 convicted of a crime with an indeterminate sentence
9 of incarceration should be released from prison into
10 community supervision. The New York State Board of
11 Parole is the sole entity with the authority to grant
12 or deny release to eligible individuals incarcerated
13 in our state's prisons. If the parole board decides
14 to grant parole to an eligible person, they also set
15 the parole conditions including terms under which
16 that person's parole could be revoked due to
17 violation. A fully staffed parole board in New York
18 consists of 19 parole commissioners, but there are
19 currently only 15 commissioners or board members
20 right now as there are currently four vacancies on
21 the board. Data from the Department of Correction and
22 Community Supervision shows that every year the
23 majority of incarcerated individuals legally eligible
24 for parole are denied parole by the board. The
25 percentage of incarcerated New Yorkers granted

1 release after a parole hearing has declined since
2 just before the COVID-19 pandemic with only about 36
3 percent of all interviewed parole candidates granted
4 conditional release by the board in 2021 compared to
5 40 percent granted release in 2019. Both of these
6 statistics reflect failures in our state's carceral
7 system which should be preparing individuals for
8 parole and reintegration into society after release
9 and also reflects systemic failures in the parole
10 process. Today, New York has the third largest
11 population in the country of people serving terms of
12 life imprisonment. Of all the counties in the state,
13 the highest percentage of individuals serving a
14 life sentence right now are from Brooklyn. The Elder
15 Parole Bill would provide that a person of age 55 or
16 older who has served at least 15 years of a sentence
17 would have an interview with the board of parole to
18 determine whether or not they should be released to
19 community supervision, and that interview would be
20 scheduled to occur within 60 days of their 55th
21 birthday or the last day of the 15th year of their
22 sentence, whichever date is later for that
23 individual. If release is not granted, that person
24 would have a subsequent parole interview no more than
25

3 24 months, two years, after the denial. The bill
4 would also require the parole board to report
5 quarterly to the Governor and State Legislature and
6 the public about the outcomes of elder parole.

7 Separately, the Fair and Timely Parole
8 Bill would direct the parole board to grant
9 discretionary release on parole unless the eligible
10 individual poses a current and unreasonable risk that
11 cannot be mitigated by parole supervision, and those
12 factors would not be the sole basis of the board's
13 decision. The board would be required to explain in
14 writing the basis for denial of parole and how risk
15 factors were considered and weighed.

16 I just want to note that neither of the
17 bills if they were to become law would automatically
18 grant release to any individual as they were not
19 circumvent the parole process. The impact of these
20 bills instead would be to increase fairness in parole
21 hearings and allow opportunities for individuals,
22 particularly older adults and people already subject
23 to long-term incarceration, to receive a fair parole
24 interview and no longer be condemned to perpetual
25 punishment. I realize that I may have used my three
minutes.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: No, you're fine. You
3 can continue.

4 SENATOR SALAZAR: Okay, thank you. In
5 short and looking forward to answering any questions
6 about the legislation, I fully support both the Fair
7 and Timely Parole Bill and the Elder Parole Bill.
8 Both of these pieces of legislation are urgent. It is
9 incumbent upon on us in the State Legislature to
10 bring these bills to a vote and make sure that they
11 are enacted into law and adequately implemented, but
12 I want to just close by reading a very brief
13 statement from an individual who would not be able to
14 testify at any hearing about this as they're
15 currently incarcerated. His name is David. He's been
16 in prison for nearly 35 years in New York State on a
17 25 year to life sentence. He's been denied parole six
18 times. He said that "the parole board has made it
19 crystal clear that the only reason I am still in
20 prison today is because of the nature of my crime. If
21 that is the case, and the record shows unequivocally
22 that it is indeed the case, that means I will die in
23 prison because the nature of a crime will never
24 change, even though I, myself, have changed. It means
25 I will never be released no matter what level of

1
2 rehabilitation or transformation I achieve." This is
3 the sentiment of many individuals who are serving
4 long sentences that are effectively death sentences
5 in our state prisons and we have the opportunity to
6 act to finally end this injustice.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
8 Senator, for your powerful testimony. We appreciate
9 you carrying these bills and your support and for
10 being at the hearing this morning. Thank you.

11 SENATOR SALAZAR: Thank you, Council
12 Member.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Does anyone have any
14 questions for the Senator? No? Okay. No questions at
15 this time. Thank you.

16 I'm going to go back to your program on
17 emergency re-entry hotels. It's our understanding
18 that the City has been quietly phasing out the MOCJ
19 Emergency Re-entry Hotel Program which helped reduce
20 the jailed population at Rikers Island and provided
21 housing with supportive services that was normally
22 reserved for those who are able to obtain supportive
23 housing. We've heard that MOCJ is in the process of
24 converting the four existing emergency re-entry
25

1 hotels into transitional housing. Where are you in
2 that process?

3
4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Thank you.
5 Yes, we're very actively engaged in that process. The
6 goal has always been to transition to more
7 sustainable forms of housing, and we expect to have
8 the vast majority of our capacity up and running this
9 summer.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so summer 2023?
11 The vast majority but not all?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I want to
13 be honest. We're working toward being fully online,
14 but there's many moving pieces with setting up new
15 housing of course.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so just bear
17 with me here, for existing emergency re-entry hotels,
18 so vast majority is like three of them roughly?

19 DIRECTOR CASSEL: The four emergency re-
20 entry hotels are sort of the part of the larger
21 Transitional Housing Initiative so all in all there
22 will be around 950 beds set up through the
23 Transitional Housing Initiative. The re-entry hotels
24 are a piece of that so when Anna is talking about
25

1
2 standing up the full program, that's the full 950
3 beds by the summer.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I see. Okay, thank
5 you. If this program ends this summer, what will
6 happen to the hundreds of people on the waiting list
7 and the many more languishing at Rikers Island due to
8 lack of housing and can you tell me how many people
9 are on the waiting list?

10 DIRECTOR CASSEL: I'll let Anna speak to
11 the waiting list and I'll take your other part of the
12 question.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sure, thank you.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Yeah, I
15 would like to get back to you with the exact number
16 of folks on the waiting list, but I know we have over
17 100.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

19 DIRECTOR CASSEL: In terms of the other
20 part of your question, the housing is not ending in
21 the summer. It will be fully ramped up we're hoping
22 by the summer and then it's continued baseline
23 funding going forward.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. I think the
3 program ending in the summer which is the Emergency
4 Re-entry Hotel Program, that's...

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think
6 ending is probably a disingenuous way to say it.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: It's
9 transitioning. The idea has always been to transition
10 from the existing hotel sites into, again, more
11 sustainable sites for the City. To your really
12 important point about folks coming out of Rikers,
13 this housing is responsive to those needs for
14 immediate placement so we are currently sort of
15 working on how to continue that need for immediate
16 placement for folks coming out of Rikers so just to
17 know that that is a big part of what we are standing
18 up is continuing that off-ramp from Rikers directly
19 to housing.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right. I can
21 appreciate that, but how will eligibility criteria be
22 different and maybe it won't be?

23 DIRECTOR CASSEL: We're not expecting the
24 eligibility criteria to be different from the
25

1
2 Emergency Re-entry Hotels. It's really just moving to
3 a more sustainable form of that housing.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. If and when the
5 Emergency Re-entry Hotels are converted to
6 transitional housing, sorry, just asked that.

7 Does the City plan to have any
8 transitional housing beds dedicated solely for
9 emergency re-entry needs and, if so, how many?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Yeah, thank
11 you for that question. That's something we're
12 currently working on, the exact sort of right size,
13 but yes, that's a very important part of this whole
14 plan and always has been.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you currently have
16 a definition of emergency re-entry, like how that's
17 defined?

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think
19 similar to what you, yourself, said is someone
20 directly incarcerated coming out to the community
21 with no other housing. That is a big piece of the
22 definition.

23 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Yeah, and I would just
24 add I think it's about the speed of placement so
25 making sure that as soon as they have a release date

1
2 that they are immediately able to access that
3 housing.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Especially
5 for older adults. Just wanted to say, that's always
6 been part of the genesis of this program was working
7 with folks who were especially vulnerable to the
8 effects of COVID-19, many of whom were older New
9 Yorkers coming out of jail and prison so to the
10 earlier point that was made, that immediacy and that
11 sort of warm handoff has always been a part of the
12 creation of this program.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and so I know
14 that some residents of hotels are only able to be
15 released from Upstate DOCS' custody because certain
16 hotels offered SARA-compliant housing so what will
17 happen to this population of people who are waiting
18 to return home, or I guess another way of asking is
19 all of the housing going to be SARA-compliant?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: We
21 currently have one site that is SARA compliant, and
22 that's always something that the City is looking for,
23 sites that are workable and that are also SARA
24 compliant. We currently have one.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many
beds that is or how many units it will be?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: It's
approximately 150.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: We can get
back to you with more specifics on that.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you. I'm
going to go back to Council Member Mealy who I think
has a couple more questions then I'll come back.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, Chair. I
only have two questions. How many adults end up in
the city homeless shelters after being discharged
from local and state custody? Does New York City
Aging provide any direct services in homeless
shelters?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I think
those are questions best asked to DHS and to DFTA who
are here today too.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. You say six
months, does the City agree that older adults may
have specific needs to cater to their potentially
more vulnerable health status? If six months, you say
these programs start helping the individuals

1
2 incarcerated coming out, if someone is in a
3 wheelchair, do you get them permanent housing with
4 ADA compliance? Do you have a data of how many people
5 that you have put in stable housing with
6 disabilities?

7 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Again, we'll have to get
8 back to you on the number of people that have gone
9 from our transitional housing into stable housing and
10 how many of those are older adults.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We definitely don't
12 have any data really on this population?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Again, we
14 can only speak to what is within our purview as an
15 agency and when you're talking about folks coming
16 home from jail and prison with the need for something
17 like a wheelchair, again that would be part of their
18 medical needs which would be covered by Correction
19 Health Services who I know are preparing written
20 testimony, I know there's a response coming.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you describe
22 the financial support, describe all financial support
23 options available to formerly incarcerated
24 individuals?

1
2 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Sure. Through the
3 Community Justice Re-entry Network, folks are
4 provided paid transitional employment, job training
5 which is often paid, they get hygiene kits and...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: They get what?

7 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Hygiene kits so things
8 with basic needs...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Finances? How much
10 money do that get?

11 DIRECTOR CASSEL: It's hard to say because
12 they're also being set up with all their public
13 benefits and so...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: SNAP, everything?

15 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Exactly, that's right.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So they get all
17 these resources but what avenue do they go through,
18 instead of going into the shelter in permanent
19 housing, because the majority of the formerly
20 incarcerated ends up in our city homeless shelters so
21 do you have a percentage of how many people did not
22 go to the shelter and went into permanent housing?
23 Someone has to have this information.

24

25

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: These are really great questions. They're complicated questions and they're multiagency questions...

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: But imagine how many people had COVID in the Upstate, Downstate, and they were set to be released and they'd rather stay in a facility instead of going on the streets because they didn't have permanent housing. We still haven't addressed, imagine how many people are incarcerated and do not have family members or you can see they have someone on record that they have a home to go to, where do you put those individuals? You keep them, they go straight to the shelter and stay?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: What you describe is really the goal for our transitional housing programs. It's to divert someone from having to...

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: And we only have one?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: SARA, well SARA is the main one right now, right?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: No, that's only for folks that have that designation.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. So how do you
3 get that designation?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: The SARA
5 designation, you're asking? That's for folks whose
6 charge is related to a sexually based offense. That
7 has to do with sort of the geographical constraints
8 on where folks can live.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. I'll
10 look it up.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
12 Member. I'm going to go to Council Member Hanif.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much.
14 Thanks for being here this morning. I want to get
15 into about the therapeutic housing units at Bellevue,
16 Woodhall, and North Central Bronx Hospitals. Would
17 you be prepared to respond to questions which I
18 prepared for DOC, but I know that you coordinated in
19 some capacity?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: I'm sorry.
21 Those are Correction Health and DOC questions.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Could you describe
23 a little about how the coordination between DOC
24 occurs, and not just in preparation for hearings but
25 just in general?

1
2 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Yeah, in terms of in-
3 custody programming and discharge planning, we are
4 very, very closely coordinated, talking all the time.
5 A lot of the providers that we fund to do the
6 transitional planning and the in-community re-entry
7 services overlap with the DOC contracted service
8 providers who provide in-custody programming so we're
9 constantly in communication about sort of the in-
10 custody and moving to re-entry kind of referral
11 process.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That excludes the
13 medical needs or those requiring medical attention?

14 DIRECTOR CASSEL: That's really between
15 DOC and Correction Health.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: By City
17 Charter, there is a very bright line between DOC
18 programs and services and Correction Health programs
19 and services, really in order to protect the privacy
20 and the care of folks who are in custody. Those
21 things do not overlap.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I understand that,
23 but I guess if you could provide some clarity on the
24 housing piece of it. Given that there is a re-entry
25 hotel program that's transitioning and then these

1
2 therapeutic housing units, would that not all fall
3 into one conversation?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: That's a
5 great point and thank you for that. Yes, MOCJ, our
6 contracted housing providers, our folks on the ground
7 in those housing sites coordinate very closely with
8 Correction Health Services and DOC at the time of
9 release and beyond to make sure that the care that
10 was started in custody isn't incongruous with what's
11 happening in the community, so yes, of course, that
12 happens on a daily basis.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, so then
14 specifically about, for example, the Bellevue units
15 going live, when will they be ready to accept
16 patients you wouldn't have the information?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE:
18 Unfortunately not that, that's not something we have
19 access to.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay. We will
21 follow up with DOC for the responses to these
22 questions because I think they're really critical to
23 the questions that Council Member Narcisse asked
24 about earlier and ensuring that the units at Bellevue
25 and then the Woodhall units are prepared and on time

1
2 to open up in 2023, but thank you so much. That
3 provides some clarity.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Perfect timing. Thank
5 you. I just want to mention for the record and thank
6 MOCJ and also DFTA for being here, and I will ask
7 that you join the table because we're going to ask
8 this for you in just a second, but for the record we
9 did ask DHS, Correction Health Services, NYCHA,
10 Libraries, DOC, and State DOCS to all be present for
11 this hearing. If you don't mind. You want to do the
12 oath?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Should we
14 sit down to make room or would you like us all...

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Oh, no, you should
16 stay. Thank you.

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Okay.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Please
19 raise your right hand.

20 Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole
21 truth, and nothing but the truth and to respond
22 honestly to Council Member questions?

23 : Yes, I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Proceed.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.
3 Okay, sorry. Thank you for bearing with me. I would
4 love for you all to describe the coordination process
5 between city agencies, Mayoral Offices, and
6 contracted providers to serve the formerly
7 incarcerated adult population and specifically, does
8 NYC Aging proactively reach out to older adults
9 released from incarceration to connect them with case
10 management services?

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: Good
12 morning. Thank you so much for hosting this hearing
13 today and bringing attention to this important issue
14 and, of course, to highlight the particular needs and
15 services for older adults. We work very closely and
16 deliberately to constantly promote the many services
17 that we have through New York City Department for the
18 Aging which I could talk at length about, and you see
19 it hopefully on the trains the efforts we've made
20 around the Join Us campaign to continue to reinforce
21 and to bring older adults back to our older adult
22 centers and to become aware of Aging Connect and our
23 service system. When an older adult comes into our
24 service system, we're working with them as an
25 individual to respond to the particular needs that

1 they have identify and would like support around. Of
2 course, through the CARE taskforce, we work very
3 closely with our partners here at MOCJ as well as re-
4 entry groups such as Osborne who I see are here today
5 (INAUDIBLE) to work as a system to support and
6 respond to the needs of older adults coming back to
7 the community.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. That
10 sounds like folks who come to older adult centers and
11 some way find themselves engaging with NYC Aging
12 might have access to some resources, but I'm
13 wondering if NYC Aging proactively does any outreach
14 to older adults released from incarceration to then
15 connect them with case management services. Is there
16 like a direct line between folks who are coming out
17 and NYC Aging?

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: There's
19 not a formal linkage kind of the way you're
20 describing, Chair. What there is is this ongoing
21 relationship that we have with our partners, re-entry
22 and our city partners. Of course within the construct
23 of the CARE taskforce, we're always looking at ways
24 to improve and respond to the needs of older adults
25

1 including the re-entry population, but it's through
2 these relationships.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You mentioned the
5 campaign that you have in the subway and stuff like
6 that. Is there anything that you do to promote case
7 management services to incarcerated older adults who
8 are currently incarcerated, so information at Rikers
9 for example?

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: We're not
11 working directly with populations that are in Rikers
12 so what we do is through our city partners provide
13 the information about the myriad of services and
14 resources that New York City Aging provides based on
15 the individual needs of the person so that they have
16 the information and can work to refer and triage as
17 indicated.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. How quickly can
19 recently released older adults access case management
20 services in order to obtain public benefits
21 assistance?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME:
23 Immediately. As soon as someone comes into our
24 system, if you're talking specifically about case
25 management, we have a lot of different services. I

1
2 think you know, Chairwoman, that case management is
3 very specific in terms of the clients we serve and
4 the functional limitations and the work we do to
5 support aging in place so if an older adult is
6 formerly incarcerated and they call a case management
7 agency, an intake will be conducted immediately.
8 During the intake process, immediate needs will be
9 identified which could be things like food or home
10 care or benefits and entitlements, and that will be
11 addressed either directly or through triage referral
12 partnership during the intake and subsequent
13 conversations.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Are formerly
15 incarcerated older adults able to fully participate
16 in older adult center programming?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME:
18 Absolutely.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. That's good to
20 hear. Do any older adult centers offer specific
21 programming or resources for those recently released
22 older adults or how do OACs otherwise connect with
23 this population which sounds like only when they come
24 into an OAC?

25

1
2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: Yes, only
3 when they come into the older adult center. We're
4 working with older adults as individuals. When an
5 older adult walks in, you never know what their
6 history is, what their story is, what their needs
7 are, so our staff through our provider network and
8 the hundreds of older adult centers we have out there
9 are trained and supported and responsive to the re-
10 entry population. We do have a small amount of
11 providers, for example, I know the Jewish Association
12 for Services for the Aging, JASA, has some specific
13 targeted programming, not directly funded through the
14 city but that does focus on formerly incarcerated
15 population, but generally speaking we respond to the
16 need of the individual which would absolutely include
17 re-entry needs.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great. Do you have
19 any direct working relationship with MOCJ or the
20 Department of Correction as it relates to the
21 incarcerated older adult population?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: Through
23 the CARE taskforce, I would say some of us know each
24 other pretty well in terms of thinking through as a
25

1
2 City how to be most responsive to the needs of this
3 population.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. This would be
5 specific to your agencies, but it's a general
6 question. Are there any city-sponsored services that
7 you're aware of that deny individuals based on
8 criminal history?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: No.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: No? Okay. NYC Aging's
11 Grandparent Resource Centers provide services for
12 older adults with primary caregiver responsibilities
13 such as workshops on legal issues and benefits,
14 referrals and information, and peer-support groups.
15 Do these centers provide any specific information or
16 resources for grandparents caring for children whose
17 parents are incarcerated?

18 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: Yes.

19 Thank you and thank you for bringing attention to the
20 group in general. We've seen a rise in kinship care
21 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. People are
22 coming into kinship care arrangements for a variety
23 of reasons, certainly incarceration being a
24 significant one so, again, we have skilled social
25 workers and case workers that have a pretty deep

1
2 understanding of the needs of that population and
3 would respond to the older adults or to the youth,
4 it's really a whole-family approach if you will, in
5 order to be responsive to their needs. The
6 Grandparent Resource Center, they also do a lot of
7 educational work, whether it's with the older adult
8 or with the youth so this is something that they
9 would absolutely be responsive to, and I think you're
10 probably aware so many of our Grandparent Resource
11 Center services are targeted to high-crime NYCHA
12 communities so this is something we're very
13 intentional and have been there for a long time
14 through some of the work that originated through the
15 MAP programs to be responsive to the needs of this
16 population including the re-entry population.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Then for
18 MOCJ, does MOCJ currently receive funding for
19 specialized re-entry services focused on older adults
20 who are 50+.

21 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Our re-entry resources
22 are really for everyone, and, like we were saying
23 before, it's very individualized so whatever the
24 individual needs, the providers are set up to address
25 those needs.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So no specific
3 funding for the older adult population?

4 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Right, not specifically.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Back to Aging,
6 has NYC Aging ever monitored conditions in which
7 older adults are forced to live in state prisons to
8 better understand their needs upon re-entry. For
9 example, I understand there's a unit for people with
10 cognitive impairments and other major illnesses at
11 Fishkill so are you taking a look at those specific
12 conditions and then using that information to
13 determine the type of services you might need to
14 provide?

15 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: That's a
16 great question. Our service system is really focused
17 on community care and responding to the needs of
18 older adults in the community so that really goes
19 beyond the purview of what we do.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I guess also a
21 general question for both agencies. Is there anything
22 specifically that you are aware of, whether programs
23 or services, to provide specific resources and
24 information for formerly incarcerated older women,
25 whether they're like seeing employment, housing,

1
2 anything like that? I know your services serve
3 everybody, but is there anything specific for older
4 women?

5 DIRECTOR CASSEL: For women generally, one
6 of our contracted re-entry service providers is the
7 Women's Prison Association. Many of our other
8 providers also serve women but WPA specifically only
9 serves women and TGNC individuals.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: This is not
11 a MOCJ-funded program and I know Osborne is in the
12 room today, but just want to mention the amazing work
13 that Osborne's Elder Re-entry Initiative does that
14 works with women as well as men in custody and in the
15 community so that would be the best example I can
16 think of.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Just
18 going back to the CARE taskforce, that hasn't met in
19 over a year so can either MOCJ or DFTA give us an
20 update on the status of the taskforce?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALABRESE: Thank you.
22 Yes. We met as a taskforce for the better part of two
23 years through the height of the pandemic. We did a
24 lot of work together that has informed the
25 programming in both of our re-entry housing

1 initiatives as well as our community re-entry
2 services, but we haven't convened because I think we
3 sort of came to a natural close, having put together
4 work that again informed some of our key programs. I
5 don't know what you would say.

7 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER HERASME: I

8 personally valued and the agency certain values the
9 collaboration and partnership and thinking that has
10 culminated through the partnership of people here as
11 well as people from Osborne and Correction and all of
12 our city partners. We look forward to continuing that
13 work and thinking to be most responsive to the needs
14 of the older population, which are complex and show
15 up in a lot of ways that came up here in some of the
16 Q and A, financial stability, access to benefits and
17 entitlements, health, mental health, housing.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Is there going to be
19 a report that's issued from the taskforce?

20 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Let me just say
21 we are interested in continuing the work of the
22 taskforce. As the witnesses have indicated, that work
23 continues apart from the meetings of the taskforce,
24 but we are certainly open to and happy to talk to the
25 Council about steps towards restarting the taskforce

1
2 and continuing that work via the taskforce as well as
3 through the agencies that have been participating and
4 are coordinating together now.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that would be
6 great. Thank you.

7 Can you describe all financial support
8 options that are available to formerly incarcerated
9 individuals?

10 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Is that a question
11 around our re-entry services and how they're
12 connecting folks?

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah.

14 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Like we had mentioned
15 before, folks are connected with benefits,
16 entitlements, and so it's an individualized case
17 process.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. We are
19 going to start with our public testimony. Thank you
20 all so much for being here. Thank you for your time.

21 I'm really sorry. I do have one other
22 question I forgot about from Council Member Lee who
23 had to leave. It's a set of questions actually so
24 forgive me. I do apologize.

1
2 Under MOCJ's Atlas Program, the Office of
3 Neighborhood Safety works to support individuals
4 released on their own recognizance that could benefit
5 from additional voluntary neighborhood-based support.
6 Can you please describe this program and explain how
7 it supports individuals released on their own
8 recognizance?

9 GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: That basically
10 describes the program, but we can get back to you
11 with more specific information. The Office of
12 Neighborhood Safety is not here today, and we would
13 have to look to them to provide the details.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Does MOCJ's
15 Atlas program work with older adults at all, and, if
16 so, how many older adults are participants?

17 DIRECTOR CASSEL: Currently, Atlas is just
18 young people and they're in the process of expanding
19 to adults so that hasn't happened yet. They're
20 standing it up right now.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know the
22 timing for that?

23 DIRECTOR CASSEL: I don't. We'd have to
24 get back to you.

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2

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. How much
funding does the program provide?

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GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Again, we will
speak with the Office of Neighborhood Safety and get
back to you, but we don't have that information at
the moment.

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CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Is there a wait
list or higher demand than capacity for the program?

9

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DIRECTOR CASSEL: I think they're fully
serving young people right now, and I know they don't
have a wait list for young people, and they're
standing up the adult portion of the program now.

11

12

13

14

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Does the program link
individuals with more permanent supports like
housing, jobs, etc.? What's the age range currently?
Is there like an age cutoff?

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GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: We'll have to
make sure that we have this right so tentatively we'd
say 18 to 25.

19

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21

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

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GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: We'll have to get
back to you...

24

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CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Does it link them
with more permanent supports like housing and jobs?

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GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Yes, it does.

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CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Are there individual peer mentors in this program who provide one-on-one support for the population served?

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GENERAL COUNSEL GOLDIN: Yes.

7

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CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Are there other similar programs to Atlas that provide wraparound support for individuals who are incarcerated for longer periods and are leaving jail?

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DIRECTOR CASSEL: Yeah, so that's really the services of our Community Justice Re-entry Network.

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CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and then the last one. Veteran Treatment Courts, aka VTCs, provide a method of support for justice-involved veterans by connecting them to appropriate services like mental health and substance use disorder support in a court setting. Are you aware of any similar government programs that support justice-involved individuals including older adults in a court setting?

23

DIRECTOR CASSEL: There are a variety of treatment courts and specialty courts so for substance use, ATI, kind of court parts as well so I don't know if that's answering the question but there

1
2 are those other kind of specialty court parts for
3 other populations too.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you.
5 Sorry for the false alarm there.

6 All right, we'll move on to public
7 testimony.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. At
9 this time, we will be moving to public testimony. We
10 will be hearing from folks who are in the room first
11 and then we will be moving to virtual panelists.

12 As a reminder, if you are in Chambers and
13 you have not filled out an appearance card and you
14 would like to testify, please do that now.

15 Just a reminder for those who want to
16 submit written testimony, you can do so up to 72
17 hours after the hearing.

18 The first panel that we're going to be
19 going to, Frederick Robinson (phonetic), Jose Vega
20 (phonetic), and Willa Lopez (phonetic). Please make
21 your way.

22 You can proceed when you're ready.
23 Frederick Robinson.

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FREDERICK ROBINSON: Thank you very much.

I am honored to be here. Let me give a little pedigree before I begin my comments.

My name is Frederick Drew Robinson. I am 66 years old. I spent 20 years in the New York State prison system. Before I was arrested, I received a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania in political science. I completed my master's degree at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey in the New Brunswick Campus.

I have to say and I need some time to settle myself that a lot of things that a lot of things that I have heard so far in this hearing frustrated me, bewildered me, and this is, of course, no slight to the esteemed ladies and gentlemen who testified before me, but I'm sure everyone in this room knows that there is a marked difference between theory and practice, and the military would say that sometimes the situation on the ground doesn't mirror the operational plan. Let me say this too, I am a former member of the Transitional Housing units that you previously spoke of. My responsibilities were as case manager and because of situations that I won't discuss here I decided to retire in December of last

1
2 year. In my retirement, I now consult with several
3 groups, the Religious Society of Friends which is
4 commonly known as the Quakers, have established a
5 Prisons Committee which I am a member of, and I'm
6 also a Quaker in my faith and so I am part of the
7 Religious Society of Friends and we will support and
8 have supported persons who are coming home from
9 prison. I also consult with the Legal Aid Society,
10 and we just started a new unit of attorneys that are
11 going to be going into facilities to do parole
12 preparation and advocate for their release.

13 It's commonly said when you enter the
14 prison system that the wisest prisoner prepares for
15 their release the day they enter the system. I think
16 it's really important to know that our part in it
17 with all of the support and whatnot that is available
18 to us, it is incumbent upon us to have such a plan.
19 You certainly have enough time to formulate one and
20 so I became part of what was called the Think Tank.
21 We grew out of a group of gentlemen who actually were
22 involved in the Attica Riots and since they do have
23 things in the system like the ILC, which stands for
24 the Inmate Liaison Committee, so that prisoners'
25 grievances and issues can be heard. With that being

1
2 said, many times we wanted answers to the very
3 questions, Chairwoman, that you asked and we couldn't
4 get them and I find it conspicuous that the persons
5 that should be answering your questions are not here,
6 and so we established a yearly symposium bringing all
7 of the caretakers in this process because it is a
8 collaborative process. It's the city administrators,
9 it's parole, the Department of Correction which at my
10 time when I entered the system were two separate
11 entities but now it has merged, it's law enforcement,
12 it's church groups, and we would bring all of these
13 parties to the facility for a daylong symposium,
14 including academics, professors from John Jay,
15 professors from Columbia Law School, and we would
16 have a discussion about these very issues,
17 understanding that a lot of the expertise in the room
18 were wearing green. I don't have the particular
19 academic or professional training as some of the
20 esteemed ladies and gentlemen who testified before
21 me, but I gained my education about these issues from
22 serving 20 years inside. Now, it's an education I
23 wouldn't advocate anyone, anyone get, but I tell you
24 my 20 years inside, I learned a lot more than you
25 could ever learn in a classroom. That being said, I

1 think that one of the things that we always advocated
2 was for greater coordination between outside groups
3 and those of us who were incarcerated. It is really,
4 well I won't say too late, but you are up against the
5 eight ball if you wait to connect with these services
6 when you get out. The most successful programs I've
7 seen are ones in which agencies came into the
8 facility and began their training then, began their
9 intake and assessment then so that persons who are
10 released know exactly where to go because when you
11 step out at Port Authority or Penn Station or however
12 it is you arrive back to the City, you are in a state
13 of flummox, you experience anxiety, and if you don't
14 have that support at that moment then your odds
15 decrease. We talk about 30, 60, 90. Thirty days out,
16 you're really at risk. Sixty days, 90, and the longer
17 that you stay confused or disconnected to supportive
18 services, the greater the risk of your returning to
19 prison. It is a direct correlation.

21 I experienced it. I was released a year
22 and a half ago, exactly 15 months really, September
23 7, 2021. I walked out of Penn Station, and I had an
24 anxiety attack. Everything after 20 years was
25 different, moving faster than the speed of light, and

1
2 I liken it to returning to earth after spending time
3 on the surface of the moon. I had to sit down on the
4 main branch of the post office steps just to gather
5 myself, but I had a plan. I actually had it written
6 down. I actually had formulated my plan, what we call
7 a release plan, I submitted that to the board. I
8 believe that it was very instrumental in the board
9 deciding to let me go, the fact that I had a plan,
10 and that included contact names, numbers, what have
11 you, any training or whatnot I did in order to make
12 myself more likely to remain at liberty, and so after
13 I got myself together and my head stopped spinning, I
14 pulled out my plan and I started following it step by
15 step.

16 I've heard a lot of things, and I know I
17 have limited time. I cannot really address them
18 really in this space and time, but I will say this,
19 there's a saying we always used to say, if you fail
20 to plan, you plan to fail. It's just that simple.

21 I do want to touch upon two things in
22 particular, and I'm glad that my esteemed Colleague,
23 I say that everybody who serves time in prison,
24 whether you be male or female, it's like a sorority
25 and a fraternity you wouldn't advise your friends to

1
2 pledge to so I'm sure that these persons who are
3 sitting here with me can readily understand what I'm
4 talking about. Particularly in my own personal
5 experience, I was lucky. Three weeks after I was
6 released, I became employed by Exodus Transitional
7 Community and enjoyed that term of employment as I
8 said up to December 31st of last year, but with all
9 of the things that I had to really confront and there
10 are so many obstacles we don't have time to enumerate
11 them all, the biggest one was housing, and I will
12 tell you a personal anecdote that just will highlight
13 it exactly. When I was arrested, I was living in
14 Harlem in a one-bedroom apartment and I was paying
15 850 dollars a month. Currently, that same apartment
16 is 2,950, and one of my biggest fears when I was
17 returning home was how am I going to afford these
18 rents, how am I going to afford to live. I started
19 feeling like a tourist in my hometown because I can't
20 afford to live here, and I'm sure many people,
21 particularly of our age, who get out, if you don't
22 have family support say oh, man, this is going to be
23 hard, where am I going to live, and you have to have,
24 and I will say this briefly and I will end, you have
25 to have permanent housing because that is the basis

1
2 of which you have a base of operations if you have
3 permanent housing. You all know that the federal
4 definition I believe still is that anyone who does
5 not have, who is not permanently domiciled, is
6 considered homeless so if you're sleeping on your
7 brother's couch, you're sleeping on your mom's couch,
8 you're still homeless, and that is not conducive
9 towards you being able to provide all of the other
10 things that you need to do.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely.

12 FREDERICK ROBINSON: So now you get
13 frustrated. We all know what happens. You revert back
14 to the very behaviors that caused you to go to prison
15 in the first place and so with that particularly, and
16 I will defer to this gentleman because I think he's
17 going to talk about it, this probably even increases
18 for persons with disabilities. I know of a gentleman
19 right now who made the board eight months ago, and he
20 is still in DOCS custody because he cannot find ADA-
21 approved housing, and for liability reasons, and I
22 totally understand this, the Department will not
23 release you unless you have adequate ADA housing
24 because if something happens to you then they're
25 liable.

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CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

FREDERICK ROBINSON: So you're stuck,
you're stuck.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for your
testimony. We do have to move on.

FREDERICK ROBINSON: You're very welcome.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: We do appreciate it.

FREDERICK ROBINSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for being
here and thank you for your time.

FREDERICK ROBINSON: Thank you very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jose Vega. Turn your
microphone on, please.

JOSE VEGA: First, I would like to thank
everyone present at this event, especially the New
York City Council Members on re-entry. This is a
special memorial occasion for me. My name is Jose
Vega. I am 51 years of age. I was formerly
incarcerated. I was released from prison in June of
2018 after nearly 25 years of incarceration. I am a
level T3 paraplegic which means that I am completely
paralyzed from my chest down with numerous medical
issues. Being wheelchair-bound for nearly 25 years in
prison was hell. I had to learn to litigate for the

1 disabled wheelchair people to be afforded the rights
2 and accommodations under the Americans with
3 Disabilities Act. I thought that once I was released
4 from prison, I would be leaving the hell, pain, and
5 suffering behind me. I was wrong. After I was
6 released, everywhere I sought housing assistance I
7 was turned down. There was no suitable housing
8 available for formerly incarcerated people with
9 disabilities like me. I was told over and over to go
10 to a shelter, but shelters in New York City are not
11 ADA accessible for people with disabilities like me,
12 but I did not leave prison hell to go to another
13 hell. The public shelter system is a living nightmare
14 for those walking. It is unmanageable for a person
15 that is wheelchair-bound with disabilities like
16 myself. My mom and dad opened the door to their one-
17 bedroom senior citizen apartment. The apartment was
18 not wheelchair accessible. I could not enter the
19 bathroom toilet area or the kitchen and, perhaps
20 worse, my mom and dad lived in constant fear of
21 losing their apartment if the landlord discovered
22 that I was living with them. They willingly gave up
23 their tranquility and privacy for me. I couldn't ask
24 for better parents. They took care of me for nearly
25

1
2 25 years of incarceration. I did not want to be a
3 burden on them so for four years I kept reaching out
4 to all re-entry service providers I knew or heard of,
5 filling out hundreds of housing applications. I never
6 gave up, and when I was serving a life prison
7 sentence with a disability or placed in solitary
8 confinement and deprived of my wheelchair and medical
9 supplies as form of punishment for fighting my
10 rights, I wasn't going to give up now. I am not here
11 solely because of my resolve. I am here because Miss
12 Christina Green and Mr. Joseph Soto (phonetic) heard
13 my story and decided to find a way to help. A simple
14 act of kindness blossomed into a place that I could
15 call home. I can maneuver around the entire
16 apartment, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and the
17 hallway, gym facilities, lounge, and patio area. For
18 the first time in close to 30 years, I can say that I
19 have a home and it's all because of the Osborne
20 Association, Miss Green, Mr. Soto, and CC Management.
21 Thanks for creating such a wonderful and beautiful
22 community environment and thanks for everyone
23 involved for bringing a vision of Marcus Garvey
24 Housing Development into reality and for giving
25 returning citizens who are wheelchair-bound, disabled

1
2 a safe place we could call home. As happy as I am
3 today, my journey does not end until ADA-appropriate
4 housing is available for all disabled wheelchair-
5 bound returning citizens. Towards this goal, I am
6 honored to be a part of Osborne and RAPP to help in
7 any way possible. They reached out to me and helped
8 me when no other organization would. A special thanks
9 and endless to mom, who has been my greatest
10 inspiration throughout my life, especially the most
11 difficult times in my life, and my dad who was always
12 my hero. I miss my dad. He passed on during the
13 epidemic, my younger brother also who's always been
14 there for me. I also would like to thank my friend
15 and mentor, Mr. Jose Saldana, who is here today,
16 Director of RAPP, and his wife for allowing me to
17 sleep over the many times when I had nowhere to stay
18 because I couldn't by the security guard at my mom's
19 senior citizen apartment. I love you. Let's not
20 forget (INAUDIBLE) President of Inclusion, a woman
21 who is also wheelchair-bound for always being willing
22 to extend a helping hand to a fellow traveler. Men
23 and women who are elderly or disabled coming home
24 from prison need to be assisted, helped, and guided
25 on finding work, housing, appropriate medical care,

1
2 and basic daily needs on how to survive in the new
3 way of life after serving many years in prison and,
4 for many like me, decades.

5 To all those with disabilities who are
6 suffering the hardship I endured, don't lose faith or
7 give up hope. Remember, the worst day free is better
8 than the best day in prison.

9 I also enclosed a copy of my complaint
10 that I filed when I was in prison, what we go through
11 living with a disability and the issues we go through
12 coming home from prison. My counselor told me, Jose,
13 I won't be able to find you housing. It might take up
14 to two years for me being released from prison after
15 I was paroled. He told me let's release you to your
16 parents' house and you deal with the issue when you
17 come out because, if not, it might take you another
18 two years to be released because we can't find you
19 housing assistance for people with disabilities, and
20 I'm not the only going through it. Like he said, his
21 friend has been waiting eight months to get released
22 because they can't find housing for people with
23 disabilities, and this is an issue that people with
24 disabilities are going through now and we need help
25 with that. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for
3 sharing your testimony, and that's exactly why we're
4 here today at this hearing, to make sure that we can
5 hear from folks like you and get ideas and figure out
6 how to make it better for everybody re-entering into
7 society but particularly those who are most
8 marginalized, most vulnerable like people living with
9 disabilities such as yours so thank you.

10 JOSE VEGA: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Willa Lopez.

12 WILLA LOPEZ: It's a privilege being here
13 with y'all. My English is not too perfect, but I try,
14 okay.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's okay.

16 WILLA LOPEZ: It's a privilege being here
17 with y'all to hear our story. I did 27 years and 6
18 months incarcerated. I was 29 years old. When I came
19 home, I was 55. April 19, I came home last year. It's
20 going to be a year now that I'm home, and being
21 incarcerated and having children while being
22 incarcerated it was very hard for me. I even lost my
23 family members. I lost my mother, three brothers from
24 cancer, I'm a cancer survivor too. Osborne
25 Association, they used to work with the women because

1
2 in prison, there's not a lot of resources for women,
3 and we have to do the best that we could do to get
4 together and help each other and help each out, and
5 if you don't have a family member it's very hard
6 because anything you get paid, it's like some jobs,
7 10 cents an hour, 15 cents an hour, so to get hygiene
8 and to get our stuff, it was very hard, especially
9 with mental illness and when you're sick, they don't
10 really want to take care of you in the prison system.
11 I want to say too that when I went to prison, I
12 finished school when I was only in ninth grade, and
13 my reading level was a 2.1 when I went to prison.
14 Now, I haven't gone back to school, but I'm going to
15 go back to school. I was a 7.9 in my reading. It's
16 very painful. They gave me 15 years to life sentence,
17 and I did 27 years with 6 months. I was very
18 battered. My kids too, they were both abused by my
19 spouse, and if I had the mentality that I have now I
20 know I wouldn't have gone to prison. I want to thank
21 Exodus, they put me in one of the hotels when I came
22 home. Before I came home, in November I received a
23 letter from Christina Green, the Osborne Association,
24 because I was already 55, and I came home on April
25 21. My case manager, Miss Elizabeth Colon (phonetic),

1 she called and she said Miss Lopez is home so they
2 sent an application, now they send it through fax,
3 and I signed the application and they say they're
4 going to bump up my application and I had my hearing
5 in July and I moved in November 1, 2022, to my own
6 apartment.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Congratulations.

9 WILLA LOPEZ: Thank you so much. My kids,
10 all of them, they were very small. I have one son.
11 He's incarcerated since 2010. He just was 21 years
12 old, and he has like 20 years to 30. He's in PA
13 Correctional Facility. I was living a double life in
14 prison. My son incarcerated, me incarcerated because
15 I couldn't be there for him. We used to write each
16 other. Now we communicate and we talk on the phone.
17 My kids, they've been (INAUDIBLE) to with their
18 foster parents that they have so the system, they
19 take away your kids and then they put them in other
20 hands and they be abused in other ways. I just want
21 to be (INAUDIBLE) what we went through in prison,
22 what we go through in prison. There's no programs in
23 prison. Everything is stripped away from us, and it's
24 like they have the control over us, even if you do
25 everything good for them, they want to double punish

1
2 you even more. You're already paying one sentence and
3 then you have to pay a double sentence. I want the
4 system to change more because I just was 29 years
5 old. I came home at 55. I turned 56 April 28 and now
6 I'm going to be 57, and I hope that you will be able
7 to help us. Now, especially for the youth now, it's
8 getting lost. 15, 16, 17 year olds, they're going to
9 have to now do 25, 30, 40 years in prison.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah. Thank you so
11 much for sharing. That's exactly, again, why we have
12 this hearing and why we want to make sure that the
13 services for re-entry, that we're holding the
14 agencies responsible for those services accountable
15 and that they can provide the best services possible,
16 knowing that what happens in prison is out of our
17 control, out of my control, but we want to make sure
18 that what we can control or help at least influence
19 can be made to the best that it can be. By the way,
20 your English is perfect.

21 WILLA LOPEZ: Yeah? I'm getting better.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I don't know why you
23 were concerned.

1
2 WILLA LOPEZ: It's a privilege to come
3 here, and I want to contribute to society because all
4 of the years, everything was taken away from me.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

6 WILLA LOPEZ: So I have my plan for me to
7 come home, I want to contribute to society.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: We're lucky to have
9 all of you as active contributors to society. Thank
10 you all, again.

11 I think Council Member Restler, who we've
12 been joined by, may have a couple of questions for
13 you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so
15 much. Let me just firstly thank you, Chair Hudson,
16 for your leadership on this issue. It couldn't be
17 more important and really deeply appreciate you
18 holding this hearing today and your leadership.

19 Miss Lopez, tu hablas ingles mucho mejor
20 que mi español.

21 WILLA LOPEZ: Gracias. Thank you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You spoke
23 beautifully and so movingly. I wanted to ask about
24 your experience in the Exodus hotel. Where were you
25 staying?

1
2 WILLA LOPEZ: When I came home, they put
3 me in 31st Street, the Wolcott.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: What kind of
5 services and supports did you get at that hotel?

6 WILLA LOPEZ: Okay. They have case
7 managers. They had a doctor there. Everything. I
8 cannot complain. I cannot complain. They treated me
9 so beautiful. They welcomed me home after doing so
10 many years, and then the case manager says because I
11 would go to the store, come back and just stay
12 inside, he said no, Miss Lopez, you're free. Just
13 don't go to Puerto Rico, and they really, really
14 helped me a lot because I have a (INAUDIBLE) for the
15 Legal Aid Society for the domestic violence
16 (INAUDIBLE) My case is going through court because of
17 that, and they really, really have helped me so much.
18 They helped me with my mental health, they helped me
19 to get back on my feet, with my (INAUDIBLE), with
20 clothing that I needed, and they still today, I'm
21 still with the program, and I want to thank Julio
22 Medina because he opened it when he came home, he had
23 did a lot of years, he was in prison, and he opened a
24 little re-entry and he expanded, and I had met him

1
2 the first time personally and thank you because he
3 even opened it for women too.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Right. I really
5 appreciate you highlighting this experience. I was
6 fortunate to have one of these re-entry hotels in my
7 District, and on a couple of occasions I just popped
8 in to see how things were going, uninvited, and I
9 will tell you the conversations that I had with the
10 clients of Exodus who were staying at the Tillary
11 Hotel at the time were just incredibly inspiring, and
12 we have seen a major decline in the state prison
13 population, but as many people are coming home,
14 especially older adults, they have nowhere to go, and
15 the shelter system is not equipped to meet their
16 needs, and what we've seen in these re-entry hotels
17 is specialized services to support re-entry, stable
18 housing, connections to jobs. I was talking to
19 individuals who were not only working full-time and
20 doing great work with BlocPower and other
21 organizations but were also doing advocacy work on
22 behalf of formerly incarcerated individuals in their
23 spare time, and while I was disappointed to see the
24 Adams' administration change management from Exodus
25 to Housing Works because I think Exodus had been

1
2 doing a very good job, I'm even more disappointed by
3 the decline in the number of hotels that are
4 operating. This was a new initiative that came about
5 during the pandemic and what was I think six or seven
6 hotels is now down to half of that, and we do not
7 have the capacity that we need, the beds that we need
8 in these hotels to provide specialized care to people
9 exiting incarceration and so I just want to say I
10 really appreciate you sharing your story and
11 highlighting how important it is for us to have
12 specialized capacity to provide stable housing with
13 services as people are exiting incarceration. You're
14 a great example of that. In just a years' time, you
15 already have a beautiful new apartment and are doing
16 so well so it's great to hear your story and thank
17 you for sharing and thank you, Chair Hudson, for
18 giving me the chance to speak.

19 WILLA LOPEZ: I want to say one thing,
20 too. The Osborne Association, Christina Green, the CC
21 Management, the case managers there that we have
22 there too is a lot of support for us. It isn't like
23 we're just there in our apartment. They really give
24 us a lot of support, and it's something that
25 everybody needs when they come home from prison.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Absolutely. It's
3 one of the things we're so fortunate in New York City
4 is the quality of the community-based organizations
5 that provide re-entry services like Osborne, like
6 Fortune, like Exodus, and Housing Works and so many
7 others, we have a phenomenal landscape of really good
8 providers that can help people get through hard times
9 and I want to thank each and every one of the people
10 who are involved in those organizations..

11 WILLA LOPEZ: I want to (INAUDIBLE) when I
12 first got there, Miss Elizabeth Colon, that's my case
13 manager, Mr. Gary Brown, he's like a supervisor,
14 everybody there just like picked me up because let me
15 tell you, I didn't know how to use a cell phone,
16 nothing, I came to a new world, 27 years this month
17 in prison, and they used to write everything down for
18 me. I said please write on piece of paper how to take
19 the train, do this, sometimes (INAUDIBLE) I used to
20 cry. I said, God, please, help me, I have to go to my
21 (INAUDIBLE) I don't want to be late, I have to do my
22 programs, I don't want to be late. It's like very
23 hard and still adjusting to society.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.
25

1
2 WILLA LOPEZ: I'm still adjusting to
3 society, but it was very, very...

4 JOSE VEGA: Can I say one more thing
5 before...

6 WILLA LOPEZ: Very hard.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sure.

8 JOSE VEGA: These organizations need to
9 get together and really help people coming home with
10 disabilities because it's difficult. None of these
11 hotels are equipped to deal with people with
12 disabilities like me, and this is something that
13 focus needs to become on because there's a lot of
14 people suffering. I just had a friend of mine that he
15 was forced to stay in a shelter because he's disabled
16 and he lost both of his legs because they had him
17 sleeping on a bed that wasn't ADA-accessible to meet
18 his needs, and that's something that we need to focus
19 on with all these organizations because Osborne
20 reached out to me and they made an apartment ADA-
21 accessible for me because Miss Green (INAUDIBLE)
22 heard my story, and a lot of these buildings are
23 being built and stuff and they're not being made,
24 nobody's thinking about people with disabilities, and
25 this is something that needs to be done because

1 there's a lot of people suffering with disabilities
2 in these shelters, especially the elderly.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely.

5 JOSE VEGA: That's something that needs to
6 be done. Thank you. I appreciate it.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Thank you
8 all again.

9 FREDERICK ROBINSON: Could I just address
10 the gentleman's question?

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, if you can
12 quickly because we have a whole lot of other folks
13 who are lined up to speak as well.

14 FREDERICK ROBINSON: Okay, I understand. I
15 understand. Listen, part of the most important part,
16 and I've heard this term used a lot in this room
17 today, is case management. Now, the best case
18 managers in the hotels, I worked at the Wyndham
19 Gardens in Fresh Meadows Queens, is one that,
20 everybody's situation is different so you have to be
21 a good listener, but the important thing is to assess
22 right then and right there, we had people come in the
23 vans from Rikers Island and walk in our door, assess
24 immediately what their needs are and then the best
25 case managers, if you don't have the answers or you

1
2 don't particularly know where to go to get them, you
3 start to do your research so we put people in touch
4 with, the most important thing, of course, was you
5 got to get your vital documents, you come with no
6 documents whatsoever, the New York State prison ID is
7 only good for not even 90 days, 45 days, something
8 like that, so you've got to get a (INAUDIBLE) New
9 York State driver's license or a driver's license ID,
10 you have to get your Social Security card. Many
11 people don't have their birth certificate, and you
12 can't go through the process of navigating all the
13 other bureaucratic stuff if you don't have this
14 documentation so the very first thing we do is make
15 sure that everybody gets their vital documents then
16 you can get plugged into whatever other services you
17 may need.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Thank you
19 all again so much. Thank you for being here.

20 WILLA LOPEZ: You're welcome. Thank you
21 for hearing our story (INAUDIBLE)

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Before we get ready
23 for our next panel, we're going to hear from Senator
24 Hoylman on Zoom.

25

1
2 SENATOR HOYLMAN-SIGAL: Thank you, Chair.
3 Very good to see you. State Senator Brad Hoylman-
4 Sigal here. Just wanted to recognize my amazing
5 Colleague, Senator Julia Salazar, for all of her
6 efforts in connection with the issue that I'm
7 testifying about regarding Elder Parole and the fact
8 of our aging New Yorkers currently incarcerated and
9 the need to take action in connection with that. I
10 just wanted to thank the Committee on Aging and the
11 Committee on Criminal Justice and your resolution
12 which is so important, Resolution 241 calling upon us
13 in the New York State Legislature to pass and the
14 Governor to sign Fair and Timely Parole and Elder
15 Parole.

16 I represent the 47th District in
17 Manhattan which runs from Christopher Street in the
18 Village six miles up to West 103rd, and I am Senate
19 sponsor of Elder Parole legislation, S2423. Our Elder
20 Parole bill, which I carry with Assembly Member
21 Davila, would help remedy punitively long and
22 ineffective sentences by guaranteeing a parole
23 hearing, not parole but a hearing, for those age 55
24 and older who have served at least 15 years, and
25 you'll hear from Senator Salazar, if you haven't

1 heard already, that her bill would provide a more
2 meaningful parole review process for incarcerated
3 people who are already parole-eligible.
4

5 We sponsor these bills because long
6 prison sentences without a meaningful chance for
7 parole don't keep anyone safe or deter crime. They
8 just keep people languishing in jail cells for
9 decades after they've been rehabilitated.

10 There are roughly 9,000 to 10,000 New
11 Yorkers serving life sentences, surpassing states
12 like Texas and Georgia. 3,500 New Yorkers in state
13 prisons have already served 20 years. Roughly 1 in 4
14 of those are now 50 or older, and the average age of
15 death in New York state prisons is 58 years old so as
16 have been said by advocates since we've began this
17 campaign while we don't have the death penalty here
18 in New York, we have a new death sentence which is
19 death-by-incarceration.

20 The need for Elder Parole is higher than
21 ever. Over the last two decades, the number of
22 incarcerated older New Yorkers has more than doubled
23 to over 10,000, even as the overall prison population
24 has fallen by 30 percent so you have the doubling of
25 the older population while at the same time the

1 overall prison population has fallen precipitously.
2 Last year, the State Comptroller released a report
3 that found that between 2011 and 2018 alone, 675
4 older New Yorkers died in a New York prison. The
5 Comptroller stated that "policymakers should examine
6 opportunities to reduce the population of
7 incarcerated individuals 50 and over where public
8 safety would not be compromised," and that's exactly
9 what we're trying to do here today. The solution lies
10 in promoting hope, healing, and accountability to
11 stop cycles of violence and support victims and
12 survivors. The solution, we believe, lies in Parole
13 Justice.
14

15 Studies have shown that the odds of an
16 older individual committing a crime after release
17 from prison are incredibly low, 5 percent or lower,
18 the lowest recidivism rate of any age cohort.
19 Additionally, Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole
20 will save the State an estimated 522 million dollars
21 a year. Let me say that again, it'll save the State
22 522 million dollars a year, and let's put this in
23 perspective by uplifting what United Neighborhood
24 Houses noted in their written testimony at our State
25 Legislative Parole Hearing at the end of last year,

1
2 522 million dollars is greater than the entire budget
3 of the New York City Department for the Aging, which,
4 as we know, supports hundreds of thousands of older
5 adults through contracted services such as over 300
6 senior centers, home delivered meals, and case
7 management. Now, that's a staggering statistic and
8 just think what we could do to serve older New
9 Yorkers instead of keeping them locked up. But is
10 also about more than just the State's bottom line. We
11 have a crisis of death in our state prisons. Columbia
12 University, their Center for Justice published a
13 study two years ago that found a 777 percent increase
14 since the 1980s in deaths behind bars of people who
15 have served 15 or more years, 777 percent increase,
16 and that 56 percent of those deaths behind bars...

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

18 SENATOR HOYLMAN-SIGAL: In the last
19 decades were among those age 55 or older.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to speak
21 today. I urge the Committee to pass this Resolution.
22 Again, Chair Hudson, thank you for your dedication to
23 this issue today and wider on parole justice. Thank
24 you so much.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
3 Senator.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We're going
5 to be moving on to our next in-person panel, Samuel
6 Hamilton, Parrish (phonetic) Steward, Roslyn Smith,
7 and Jose Saldana, please.

8 We can just go from right to left here so
9 if you'd like to start.

10 ROSLYN SMITH: Good morning. You can hear
11 me? All right. First of all, I want to thank you,
12 Council Members. My name is Roslyn Smith. I'm the
13 Beyond Incarceration Program Manager at V-Day. I'm
14 also a Brooklyn community leader at RAPP, Release
15 Aging People in Prison, and I'm on the advisory board
16 of Osborne.

17 As a person impacted by the criminal
18 justice system, I'm going to speak about my
19 experience in the hopes that others will not have to
20 endure the hardships I encountered inside and when I
21 was released. Many management companies discriminated
22 against me when trying to obtain housing and jobs. I
23 knew nothing about technology and felt alienated and
24 frustrated with my progress. I served 39 years in
25 prison and was released in 2015 when I was 56 years

1
2 old. My co-defendant, Valerie Gader (phonetic), who
3 is 61, served 41 years and never got the chance at
4 freedom because she was misdiagnosed and not properly
5 treated for aggressive throat cancer that took her
6 life. Our stories are not unique. These lengthy
7 incarceration sentences and parole denials are being
8 handed down each day, and countless men and women are
9 not provided with technology, educational, or medical
10 care inside nor the necessary tools and support for
11 successful re-entry. At 56, most people are preparing
12 for their retirement. Here I was preparing for the
13 start of my life and career being denied housing
14 several times and being denied jobs. I suffer from an
15 autoimmune disease that requires me to see multiple
16 doctors to treat my lupus. I didn't even know that I
17 needed to sign up for health insurance or that I had
18 to pay. These things forced me to live with friends
19 and family members when I wanted and needed
20 independence and direction in navigating my life. All
21 of these things made me feel like a failure. I was
22 depressed. I felt isolated and useless. I was
23 computer illiterate and knew very little about
24 technology. I didn't even know how to swipe a
25 MetroCard so imagine how difficult utilizing a

1
2 cellphone, kiosk, laptop, or computer was. When I was
3 incarcerated, I worked for the DMV for five years as
4 a supervisor but couldn't get a job with the DMV when
5 I came home because they said prison work didn't
6 count as experience. I longed for independence and
7 what I thought was freedom. Still, I saw no way to
8 achieve this due to all the denials for housing and
9 jobs and the fact that I was an older individual
10 without official documents of my work history other
11 than prison jobs. Having official work documents and
12 a comprehensive discharge plan addressing my
13 employment, my mental health, my medical and housing
14 needs would have made my experience more manageable
15 and less frustrating. Re-entry should begin once a
16 person is in custody. It should be the goal to
17 reintegrate older people into society with the plan
18 for success, not obstacles to impede and discourage
19 them. Our black and brown communities are being
20 destroyed and decimated by mass incarceration, and we
21 know that keeping people in prison is not the answer
22 to public safety. The safest neighborhoods are the
23 ones that have the resources to support their
24 members. Through this understanding, women and men
25 who have served long sentences, addressed the harm

1 they have caused, and make a conscious decision to
2 make a difference by designing curriculum and
3 programs in the prisons that warehouse them and when
4 returning home, creating healing spaces, 501(c)(3)s,
5 businesses to enhance and educate their communities.
6 They are making valuable contributions to the
7 community's development and healing their needs. We
8 need to bring people home sooner and not let people
9 languish or die when they can be home with their
10 loved ones in their communities adding value and
11 their expertise. The people closest to the problems
12 are the ones with the solutions, and this is
13 exhibited in all the programs and businesses people
14 impacted by the justice system have created over the
15 years. The need for adjustment counselors for
16 returning citizens is vital. We need to think about
17 the emotional trauma we experience and invest in
18 mental health support, funding community-based
19 organizations that are led by formerly incarcerated
20 people who help the majority of people with the re-
21 entry process. We need to be provided with resources
22 that address our needs as we age and get supportive
23 help while incarcerated to address the issues that
24 have brought us there in the first place. We need to
25

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3 have wraparound services from the start. We need safe
4 housing, jobs that will pay us a living wage,
5 therapeutic programs, physical and mental health and
6 trauma centers and services to access and help us be
7 successful. The prison staff should be trained to
8 recognize these unique social, psychological, and
9 emotional needs of the elderly and have educational,
10 vocational, recreational, and rehabilitation programs
11 to accommodate them with physical designs appropriate
12 for their health needs and limited physical capacity.
13 We need to bring our elders home. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for
15 your testimony.

16 SAMUEL HAMILTON: Good afternoon. My name
17 is Samuel Hamilton, and I'm a Senior Re-entry
18 Advocate at Brooklyn Defender Services. I'm also
19 justice-impacted, having served 32 years incarcerated
20 on an 18-to-life-year sentence and also having
21 appeared before 10 parole boards before eventually
22 being released, and that kind of speaks to the two
23 bills that Senator Salazar spoke to.

24 Thank you to the Committee on Aging and
25 Criminal Justice for the opportunity to speak today
about re-entry issues for older New Yorkers. BDS Re-

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3 entry team works with clients and their families from
4 the beginning of their case until they come home. We
5 call this process Re-entry to Pre-entry. This means
6 that before a person is incarcerated our team is
7 available to provide pre-entry support, advice, and
8 mentoring. During incarceration, we work to secure
9 access to essential medical, mental health, safety,
10 education needs through individual administration
11 advocacy. We mentor people in custody on accessing
12 services and educational opportunities in preparation
13 for their release. We monitor and document conditions
14 incarcerated New Yorkers experience and advocate for
15 their rights and wellbeing. After release from
16 incarceration or completion of an alternative-to-
17 release program known as ATIs, we help people find
18 housing, gain full employment, continued education,
19 and community-based support. In light of the work our
20 re-entry team does, I would be remiss if I didn't
21 acknowledge the fact that our work is made possible
22 due to the funding from City Council so thank you.

23 When people come home from city jails or
24 upstate prison, regardless of age and more so older
25 New Yorkers, they need help to access basic
essentials such as housing, photo ID, healthcare,

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3 transportation, and employment services. In our
4 written testimony, we have a number of suggestions
5 for improving the re-entry process for older
6 returning citizens. However, for time's sake, I will
7 be focusing on one program that we know all too well
8 works, that is housing. Starting during the height of
9 the pandemic, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice,
10 MOCJ, worked with community organizations to open
11 several hotels to provide safe, private rooms for
12 people returning from New York City from jails and
13 prisons. In the first two years of operation, over
14 2,000 New Yorkers benefited from this program. One of
15 those who benefitted, then age 59, was released from
16 a New York State prison after serving 40 years to an
17 already overcrowded DHS shelter at the height of the
18 pandemic, reached out for re-entry assistance from
19 Brooklyn Defender Services. In this case, we were
20 able to mediate the positive outcome, and he received
21 a bedroom at one of the re-entry hotels, which
22 provided a safe and supportive space for him to
23 adjust and navigate the other challenges he faced
24 with his return. At the end of 2022, that hotel was
25 closed and its residents were moved to other
locations. However, with the wraparound services that

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3 occurred in the re-entry hotel and our support, the
4 aforementioned moved into his own one-bedroom
5 apartment where he remains to this day as a law-
6 abiding citizen and, if I may add, gainfully employed
7 and reintegrating into society at large.

8 Recently, several of the hotels have been
9 closed and the total occupancy has been cut almost in
10 half, and on June 30th this program is scheduled to
11 close due to a lack of funding, even though today
12 there are over 500 people in the hotels and an
13 additional 400 people on their waiting list looking
14 for a safe place as was the case with our client. In
15 the case of a 56-year-old elder scheduled to be
16 released in May, his name has been added to that
17 waiting list, a list that has paused since late last
18 year when two of the re-entry hotels was closed by
19 the Mayor's Office.

20 In closing, we at BDS realize that
21 countless aging men and women who have multiple
22 complex issues are being released from jails and
23 prison every day with limited resources to support
24 their basic human needs. Therefore, on behalf of BDS,
25 I urge the City Council to work with the Mayor's
Office to ensure continued funding for the re-entry

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3 hotels as well as support the recommendations
4 mentioned in our written testimony. Thank you, again,
5 for your support that allowed us to do such amazing
6 and important work but also for your time.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for yours.
8 Can I just ask a quick question? I just want to
9 confirm the programs that you said are set to close
10 on June 30th, that's the re-entry hotel?

11 SAMUEL HAMILTON: That's the MOCJ, the
12 hotels that they have open. It's our understanding
13 that that contract ends on June 30th so there's
14 several other hotels that are operating. Whether the
15 Mayor's Office is going to fund that, we haven't
16 heard anything to that, and it's our hope that City
17 Council could pretty much urge him to keep those
18 hotels open because of the invaluable services that
19 they provide for people returning back to society.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. We urge
21 him to do a lot of things that he doesn't do, but we
22 will for sure continue to urge him on that front.

23 SAMUEL HAMILTON: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

25 PARRISH STEWARD: My name is Parrish
Steward. I did 20 years. I was released 2018. I've

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3 been home about five and a half years. I'm going to
4 spare you the prison stories and all that because
5 they did a great job on that.

6 My issue out here since I've been here is
7 this. I went in jail at 33. I'm 58 years old I think,
8 58 or 59, one of them, but I noticed since I've been
9 out on the streets, it's not New York City. I'm not
10 from New York. I came here from a different city, but
11 it's not the city, it's the systems overlapping each
12 other and neither give a damn about other. Let me
13 give you an example. When I first came home, parole
14 said I want you to take these mandated programs.

15 Well, that's time-consuming. You want me to do this
16 for three years, go to a program for three years from
17 3 o'clock to whatever o'clock and then I have to find
18 a job, follow me, and then I have to be in the
19 shelter at 9 o'clock, and you want me to be
20 successful, but then when I ask one system can you
21 give me a break because this seems to be a priority,
22 this system says no. Okay, then the middle system
23 which is the shelter, I ain't even going to go into
24 that madness, that's a whole insanity discussion on
25 its own, so I had to schedule all of that for four
years. Now, at the end, here's my issue because I

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3 already know the systems are broke and they work
4 against you, and (INAUDIBLE) it's the people also who
5 are responsible from parole officers to case managers
6 who go and eat donuts and play on their phone and DHS
7 is hollering at them, where's this guy at, I want to
8 move him to housing but because you're on your phone
9 playing games and eating donuts and don't care, I can
10 sit in the shelter two extra years because you
11 disregarded what DHS sent you on the computer. That's
12 part of the problem too. Follow me? Anyway, I ended
13 up doing four years in the shelter which was another
14 sentencing like they told, and I worked every day,
15 parole wouldn't give me a break, you ain't getting no
16 break. I (INAUDIBLE) shelter is madness, but I always
17 went to work, and they gave me a voucher. The voucher
18 was obsolete. A 1,200-dollar voucher in New York
19 City, you can't even get a closet so I stayed in the
20 shelter another 15 months until somebody, I don't
21 know who, said great idea, give them a 1,900-dollar
22 voucher (INAUDIBLE) I went out with that for a whole
23 18 months. I never got a studio with that 1,900
24 voucher because the new game is either you're black,
25 I ain't going to give you an apartment, I'm talking
about New York City, either you're too old and don't

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3 have the right income, you ain't getting up here, and
4 you're a convict or that criminal history so that's a
5 triple threat so the odds is, you understand what I'm
6 saying? The system is (INAUDIBLE) I know how to
7 survive, but I don't want to use survival tools that
8 bring me back to the game so what do you want me to
9 do. So by the man upstairs and some legislators, I
10 don't know how it came (INAUDIBLE) they called me
11 back from work for the shelter and said listen,
12 you're eligible for housing, and low and behold it
13 was the Osborne Society and they got the staff
14 downstairs and (INAUDIBLE) and I interact with them
15 and I live decent and my mind is at peace, and the
16 only thing I'm lacking is a couple dollars now. Other
17 than that, I'm good, but what I'm saying is that if
18 the hat wouldn't have fell from heaven on my head,
19 I'd be in a shelter right now. I'm done.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How old were you when
21 you were released?

22 PARRISH STEWARD: I told you, I forget the
23 time, but I'm 58 right now and I've been out five
24 years.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You said five years?

PARRISH STEWARD: Right, yeah.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so about 53,
4 54? Okay, but over 50 is what I was trying to gather.

5 PARRISH STEWARD: Yeah. I came out over
6 50, but I'm just saying to cut to the chase, it's not
7 New York City. When you take an older person, when we
8 come home, parole, DHS, and what was the other
9 system, parole, DHS, and trying to find a job..

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right. Nobody's
11 talking to each other and they end up giving you
12 different mandates.

13 PARRISH STEWARD: They ain't giving up no
14 mercy. I'm done.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Understood. Thank you
16 so much.

17 PARRISH STEWARD: You're welcome. I need
18 to (INAUDIBLE)

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Not a problem. Thank
20 you for your time.

21 JOSE SALDANA: Chair Hudson and Council
22 Members, thank you for this opportunity to testify
23 before this Council and, Chair Hudson, thank you for
24 supporting our parole reform bills, Elder Parole and
25 Fair and Timely Parole bill, greatly appreciate it.

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3 I want to speak about a couple of things.
4 We hear about older people. I want to put a human
5 face on these older people because we're talking
6 about people who I spent a lot of time with. I was
7 released from prison five years ago after 38 years. I
8 was 66 years old when I came out. Went in at 27. So
9 one of these older folks is people who taught me. I
10 wouldn't be here today, I wouldn't be the Director of
11 the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign. I
12 wouldn't be involved in my community as a social and
13 moral obligation if I wasn't mentored by great men.
14 Roz mentioned her co-defendant, Valerie Gader, an
15 iconic woman at the Bedford Hills Correctional
16 Facility. Just about every woman I run into accredits
17 her, Val Gader, with being instrumental in them being
18 who they are today. The question is why would we
19 allow such great people, great human beings to
20 languish in prison needlessly. They obviously do not
21 pose a threat to public safety. In fact, they enhance
22 public safety. They have enhanced community safety in
23 prisons across the state. One of my first mentors
24 died at 72 years old after 46 years in prison, 14
25 parole denials, and he's also responsible for
literally hundreds if not thousands of men across New

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3 York State prison system transforming their lives.

4 Why would we allow such men to die in our prison
5 system or to release them at an age where they can't
6 continue the job that they've been doing for decades
7 across our prison system. I want to mention that

8 these older men we're talking about, the term
9 Credible Messenger, that was developed in our prison
10 system by these older men. Violence interrupters

11 developed in our prison system by these older men. In
12 fact, transitional service, which is in just about
13 every prison in our state, that concept that men and
14 women need to be transitioned back into our society,
15 into the community, that whole concept, the details,
16 the outline of it was developed by incarcerated men.

17 In fact, one of them is still languishing in prison,
18 75 years old, close to 40 years in prison. Why do we
19 allow such great men and women and nonbinary folks to
20 languish in our prison system when they could be

21 safely released and be a contributing factor in our
22 communities? We don't need college students to be
23 Credible Messengers. (INAUDIBLE) was correct and

24 perhaps the only correct thing he probably ever said
25 in my opinion, he said the best Credible Messengers
are the old-timers in our prison system. We don't

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3 need a college student. They can't reach these kids.
4 We've tried everything else. We need these men and
5 women and nonbinary people that are languishing in
6 our prison doing the job that nobody else can do,
7 nobody else, developing the program because I was a
8 part of this. I was mentored by them and then I
9 became a mentor. New York State prison system does
10 not offer a single program to help us not only take
11 responsibility for the harm but to get insight into
12 the harm, to really do that, and once you get that
13 insight then you embrace that moral obligation of
14 repairing harm. These men, women, and nonbinary folks
15 are the ones who taught us, who gave us the guidance
16 on this path that we are still in and we are still
17 committed because it's a lifetime commitment for us.
18 Why are we letting them languish in prison without
19 any hope for the most part? This is why the two bills
20 that we advocate for is the only solution. You can't
21 retrofit these prisons. You can't increase medical
22 care. It's always going to be substandard and, for an
23 elderly person, it's a crisis. Every year, every
24 decade is a crisis, a mental health and physical
25 health crisis for the elderly. Why are we doing this
to them? It's inhumane, and we are better than that

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3 so the only solution for this is to pass these bills
4 so that men and women could be reunited with their
5 families, go on with their lives, and continue to be
6 assets to our society. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to
9 this panel. Thank you. We will be moving on to our
10 next panel. We'll be hearing from Tanya Krupat,
11 Brianna Paden-Williams, Rebekah Almanzar, Christian
12 Gonzalez-Rivera.

13 We can hear from Christian first and then
14 just go down the line.

15 CHRISTIAN GONZALEZ-RIVERA: Hi. My name is
16 Christian Gonzalez-Rivera, and I'm the Director of
17 Strategic Policy Initiatives at the Brookdale Center
18 for Healthy Aging at Hunter College. We're a research
19 and policy center focused on aging. Thank you, Chair
20 Hudson, for calling this hearing and introducing
21 Resolution 241. In it, you highlight facts that show
22 that elder justice means changing the unfair way that
23 the parole process handles the cases of older people
24 who have spent much of their lives in prison. You
25 point out that taxpayers are spending money on
perpetuating human suffering with no result in terms

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3 of public safety, and you detail how a systemically
4 unjust system perpetuates systemic racism. Prison is
5 no place to grow old. The poor nutrition and medical
6 care offered in prison, as you've heard from the
7 panelists, combined with the physical and emotional
8 stress of prison life results in incarcerated people
9 exhibiting sickness and disability much earlier than
10 people outside so this means that people in prison in
11 their 50s exhibit some of the same conditions that
12 people in their 70s and 80s exhibit outside. The
13 average age of death of people in the New York State
14 prison system is just 58 years. If New York State
15 prison system were its own country, that life
16 expectancy of 58 would rank it near the bottom of all
17 countries in the world. In contrast, New Yorkers
18 outside who live in community, their average life
19 expectancy is 81. This is a huge concern not only for
20 the people who are currently aging in prison but also
21 for society more broadly, and the main reason why is
22 because keeping people inside after they've already
23 served those long sentences closes that window of
24 opportunity that they have to rebuild their lives,
25 and that's the central argument here, the longer you
keep them inside, the faster that window of

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3 opportunity closes. As you know, it's already
4 difficult for people who are already older to go out
5 and get a job, get housing on fixed incomes, all of
6 those things, but it's that much harder, as you've
7 already heard, for people who are older and also just
8 coming out of prison, and that is a job that could be
9 made a lot easier if we make a concerted effort to
10 serve them in community through the huge social
11 services network that we have in this city, and we
12 have that huge infrastructure for that. People end up
13 in prison largely because society failed to take care
14 of them, particularly when they're young. Case in
15 point, one cross-sectional study found that 70
16 percent of black high school dropouts ended up in
17 prison at some point before they turned 30, 70
18 percent, so failing to give older incarcerated people
19 a real chance to demonstrate their rehabilitation is
20 just adding more insult to a life that society has
21 already failed in every possible way, so let's change
22 what we're doing. Let's change where we're spending
23 our money. Let's decide to strengthen community
24 supports to embrace people who are returning from
25 prison because a community service system that has
the strength to include people who are returning from

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3 prison is a system that is strong enough to serve
4 everyone. Just like that old metaphor about the curb
5 cuts, it's like the curb cuts are there to help you
6 if you're in a wheelchair to get up and down from the
7 curb, but they'll also help you if have a hand truck
8 and you're delivering something. It's like they'll
9 help you if you're pushing a stroller. That same
10 idea. It's like a system that is strong enough to
11 serve the many, many needs of people returning from
12 prison is a system that will serve everyone, and
13 that's something that is a central issue about why
14 this issue is not just about the people who are in
15 prison but it's about everyone and if you can serve
16 those people, you can serve everyone. Thank you for
17 the opportunity to testify.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

19 REBEKAH ALMANZAR: Good afternoon. My name
20 is Rebekah Almanzar, and I'm a Forensic Social Work
21 Supervisor at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you to the
22 Chairs for giving me this opportunity to comment on
23 this very important issue.

24 Getting our aging New Yorkers to the
25 parole board sooner with the presumption of release
allows for a more successful integration. According

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3 to DOCS statistics, only 6.6 percent of individuals
4 released on parole between the ages of 50 and 64 are
5 returned for new commitments based on a new
6 conviction, which is all the more reason the
7 presumption should be release, especially for elders
8 who may be starting to show signs of more complex
9 needs while incarcerated. Releasing them at a time
10 when they still have capacity to engage and
11 meaningfully contribute to their care is crucial to
12 long-term stability in the community. Antonio's story
13 highlights what can go terribly wrong when the
14 release comes too late. Antonio is a 77-year-old man
15 who had been incarcerated for 42 years at the time of
16 his release from prison in 2011. He was eligible to
17 see the parole board starting in 1990 after serving
18 19 years of his sentence. Antonio was incarcerated
19 for another 22 years because of repeated parole
20 denials. When he was finally released in 2011,
21 Antonio was sent to live at a shelter in the Bronx
22 with no identifying documents. A shelter case manager
23 quickly recognized that Antonio had serious memory
24 issues, was struggling to take care of his daily
25 needs, and other signs of what looked like dementia.
This incredible case manager worked tirelessly and

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3 far outside of her role to care for Antonio in an
4 environment that was not suited for his needs as well
5 as ensure that he stayed in compliance with his
6 parole mandates. What ensued after being dumped in
7 the shelter system because New York State DOCS no
8 longer wanted to pay for his increasingly expensive
9 dementia care in custody was a technical parole
10 violation after his shelter closed and he was
11 transferred to a new unfamiliar shelter without his
12 case manager. After spending months at Rikers and not
13 understanding what was happening, every nursing home
14 rejected him because of his criminal record and being
15 unable to receive a formal diagnosis for dementia by
16 Correction Health Services. The administrative law
17 judge in the parole violation case, a former parole
18 board commissioner herself, sent Antonio back to
19 prison during a tearful final hearing at Rikers
20 Island when he asked to go home. She stated that she
21 felt she had no other option and because of his
22 severe limitations in caring for himself and lack of
23 acceptance to a nursing facility, he would be safer
24 in prison than on the streets of New York, knowing
25 also that parole would not adapt his parole mandates
to his limitations. Antonio's story shows how the

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3 Elder Parole Bill and Fair and Timely Bill are both
4 critically important. Because Antonio was under 55
5 when he first went before the board, he does not fall
6 within the Elder Parole Bill, but despite his
7 interview date being scheduled for when he was 44
8 years old, Antonio was denied for 22 years beyond
9 that eligibility date and was 65 when released. The
10 earlier eligibility for parole that the Elder Parole
11 Bill would accomplish must be accompanied by the
12 presumption of older adults who pose no risk to
13 public safety being fit for release so they don't
14 suffer a series of denials that keep them
15 incarcerated indefinitely. His ability to provide
16 information, connect with medical care for proper
17 evaluations and treatment planning and reconnect with
18 family or friends who could've provided support as
19 his dementia progressed might not have been lost, but
20 it was lost. His release came so late that the only
21 place, the only memory he had was that of prison.
22 Supporting Resolution 241 is one step, but there are
23 more immediate steps that can be taken. For example,
24 advocating for organizational funding fairness to
25 ensure that we have attorneys, social workers,
paralegals, and support staff at public defenders'

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3 offices to support our elders going before the parole
4 board and their reintegration and connection to
5 community care upon release is one element.

6 Additionally, you can continue to support emergency
7 re-entry housing options for people upon release from
8 prison to increase the likelihood of a successful and
9 humane reintegration process. The MOCJ re-entry
10 hotels have been a critical resource for LAS clients
11 who otherwise would not have housing. Also,

12 increasing access to the housing and residential
13 medical resources already in existence for older New
14 Yorkers can change the landscape of re-entering as an
15 aging individual. For example, in order to be housed
16 at Valley Lodge, a transitional residence run for
17 seniors run by the Westside Federation for Senior and
18 Supportive Housing, requires an intake and stay at a
19 Department of Homeless Services shelter. Any amount
20 of time at an intake shelter can be challenging.

21 Those difficulties can be dangerous and intolerable
22 for an aging person just returning to New York City
23 after decades removed. Allowing seniors to go
24 directly to Valley Lodge and bypassing an intake
25 shelter would greatly increase their stability and
safety in returning to their community. Relatedly,

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3 requiring nursing home and assisted-living facilities
4 to accept people into their care with criminal
5 convictions can transform the lives of elders re-
6 entering New York City who require a high level of
7 medical care and need support in attending to their
8 daily needs when they no longer have any living
9 relatives to care for them. While working with infirm
10 seniors at Rikers Island held on parole violations, I
11 witnessed the passive discrimination the nursing
12 homes would engage in when the referral came through
13 to them that had Correction Health Services
14 letterhead on top. They consistently denied seniors
15 for their vacancies and left very ill New Yorkers
16 lingering at Rikers without an appropriate place to
17 go. Holding nursing homes and assisted-living
18 facilities accountable to admitting older folks based
19 on their medical need regardless of criminal
20 conviction is an immediate move that could open
21 appropriate living environments for re-entering
22 seniors.

23 As a social worker at the Legal Aid
24 Society, I've supported and will continue to support
25 older people coming home from decades incarcerated.
There are incredible resources available in New York

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3 City that can provide the services for our fellow New
4 Yorkers that they need coming home back to our
5 communities. I am asking to have more of those
6 resources, increased access to those resources, and
7 the ability to get aging New Yorkers connected to
8 them sooner so they don't miss out on the second
9 chance they have worked towards and deserve. Thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

12 TANYA KRUPAT: Good mid-day. Thank you for
13 holding this hearing today to address this urgent
14 issue. Thank you for inviting the agencies who didn't
15 come. We appreciate you inviting them even if they
16 unfortunately weren't here. My name is Tanya Krupat.
17 I'm the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at the
18 Osborne Association.

19 For 90 years, Osborne has been
20 transforming lives, communities, and the criminal
21 legal system with a particular focus on the
22 intersection of aging and incarceration for the past
23 decade. As a city and a society, we are denying the
24 humanity of older people in jails and prisons and
25 those returning to our communities at an enormous
human and fiscal cost. Speakers before me have

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3 courageously shared their experiences and
4 demonstrated why we need to bring more people home
5 and bring them home sooner. In order to ensure people
6 have a pathway out of prison before decades pass and
7 more damage is done, we ask you to vote for the
8 resolution you're sponsoring calling on the State
9 Legislature to pass the Elder Parole and Fair and
10 Timely Parole Bills. These bills promote healing and
11 safety and have the support of many crime victims and
12 survivors. We unequivocally believe in the urgency of
13 these bills.

14 Rather than keeping us safe,
15 incarceration perpetuates harm. It is also incredibly
16 expensive with little or a negative return on
17 investment. I want to highlight some of the actual
18 financial cost and make a case for decarcerating and
19 reinvesting in older people and families and in
20 communities. Today, close to one in four people in
21 New York State prisons is over 50. As of this week,
22 802 older people are incarcerated on Rikers Island.
23 The New York City Comptroller calculated that one
24 year on Rikers for one person costs 556,539 dollars,
25 an astounding and deeply concerning figure
considering what people and all of us are getting for

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3 this amount of money. With this figure, we are
4 currently spending more than 446 million dollars to
5 keep on older people on Rikers. This is close to New
6 York City's Aging entire budget, and this does not
7 include what we are spending to keep New York City
8 residents incarcerated in prisons for 30 or 40 years,
9 decades past their minimum sentence. Older people are
10 two to five times more experience to incarcerate and
11 in many cases they are returning home with trauma,
12 health, and adjustment issues that are entirely
13 preventable. To add to this, thousands of people are
14 discharged from prison directly to New York City
15 homeless shelters which can cost up to 9,000 per
16 month per person. Shelters also include rules like
17 being locked out all day which can increase the
18 likelihood of re-arrest generally or parole
19 violations. We could double New York City Aging's
20 budget by releasing older people. Simply bringing two
21 people off Rikers who are there for one year could
22 fund an entire specialized unit within New York City
23 Aging at 1 million dollars to focus on justice-
24 impacted older adults. We recommend creating such a
25 unit as well as investing in community-based
programs, accessible housing, peer support models,

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3 and more. My written testimony expands on these
4 recommendations.

5 I just wanted to make a quick note that I
6 was very disappointed to that the CARE taskforce came
7 to a natural close. We were part of the steering
8 committee of that, and that was news to me. It didn't
9 feel like a natural close so we recommend continuing
10 a citywide interagency taskforce.

11 We also need to look at the full scope of
12 ways incarceration affects older New Yorkers, and I
13 was happy to hear you ask questions about caregivers
14 earlier and I learned from your own email, Chair
15 Hudson, that it's National Caregivers Day today so
16 thank you for your emails.

17 Older New Yorkers care for and are
18 welcoming loved ones home from incarceration without
19 additional resources to do so. This includes
20 grandparents and others caring for children whose
21 parents are incarcerated. At Osborne, we've developed
22 effective responses such as our Kinship Re-entry
23 Program and a New York Initiative for Children of
24 Incarcerated Parents. These and models like them need
25 greater investment to meet the need. We look forward
to working with the Committees on Aging and Criminal

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3 Justice on next steps and urge you to ensure as you
4 did today that those who are formerly incarcerated
5 and living elder re-entry every day are included in
6 guiding this discussion. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.
8 That was also news to me about the CARE taskforce. I
9 wanted to ask you a quick question. How many people
10 are you serving that are coming from DOCS and do you
11 know the total number of people coming to New York
12 City from the State prison system by chance?

13 TANYA KRUPAT: We would love to know that,
14 and I think it's something as you asked previously
15 that the City should be tracking. We don't know, and
16 we used to be able to get more information from DOCS,
17 but in the past few years we haven't. We would have
18 to FOIA for that information.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Got it.

20 TANYA KRUPAT: We could get back to you
21 with a rough estimate based on county of conviction
22 and doing some tallying.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

24 TANYA KRUPAT: And I can also get you the
25 number that we're serving across all of our programs,
but I don't have it today.

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3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, non-profit.

4 That would be helpful just so that we can compare to
5 what they give us. Thank you.

6 BRIANNA PADEN-WILLIAMS: Hello. I am
7 Brianna Paden-Williams, the Communications and Policy
8 Associate at LiveOn New York and thank you for the
9 opportunity to testify today.

10 LiveOn New York's members include more
11 than 110 non-profit organizations that provide core
12 services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our
13 community as we all age. As we've heard today, in New
14 York the number of people in prisons have been
15 declining. However, the proportion of older adults in
16 prisons continue to rise as we've heard with one in
17 every four incarcerated people in prison 50 or older.
18 It's evident that people in prison age at an
19 accelerated rate because of harmful and unhealthy
20 prison conditions including stress, separation from
21 loved ones, poor nutrition, as well as other factors,
22 and, unfortunately, when formerly incarcerated older
23 adults are released from prison and re-enter into the
24 community, they're often faced with unique challenges
25 with being released in their later life. Here in New
York City, New York has a moral and fiscal crisis of

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3 aging and dying in prison due to decades of extremely
4 harsh sentencing and a racially biased parole system
5 that does not have adequately created space for
6 redemption, personal transformation, healing, and
7 safety, and so it's time for the City to address
8 elder parole as an aging issue with an older adult
9 population re-entering into community and really just
10 looking to move forward in their lives, and so we're
11 here in addition to supporting your resolution, have
12 the following recommendations. We encourage the City
13 to look to broaden and fund collaboration with
14 community organizations including the Osborne
15 Association that really have the expertise and
16 programming to provide resources and tools to
17 individuals, families, and communities impacted by
18 the criminal justice system. We also encourage the
19 City to remove barriers to access affordable housing
20 for formerly incarcerated older adults, and we know
21 here in New York City the housing crisis in the city
22 is really acute for older adults as many rely on
23 fixed income and have difficulty with affording the
24 rent with increased rent prices. Particularly for
25 older adults that are released from prison, finding
affordable and accessible housing is really an added

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3 challenge with many landlords as we've heard today
4 discriminating against older adults. We also ask the
5 City to work with HPD to make older adult housing a
6 key priority, and, as you know, there's a waiting
7 list of over 200,000 older adults including older
8 adults released from prison, and so we ask the City
9 and recommend that the City really increase the
10 capacity of older adult housing. That would relieve
11 one of the largest hurdles for older adults returning
12 into the community after incarceration. We also
13 encourage the City to create space through support
14 for community building and cure violence programs for
15 formerly incarcerated older adults to contribute to
16 their communities. We know upon release formerly
17 incarcerated older adults often make important
18 contributions to their communities and that include
19 interrupting gun violence, mentoring young people,
20 and really ultimately just promoting community
21 safety. In addition to that, we also encourage the
22 City to expand mental health and social services for
23 older adults as well. With that being said, we also
24 strongly support your Resolution 241-A which calls
25 for the passage of the Fair and Timely Parole Act as
well as the Elder Parole Act, and we just show our

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3 appreciation for Council Member Hudson for
4 introducing this Resolution and, even though Chair
5 Rivera isn't here today, her support as well for
6 holding this hearing as well as the additional
7 Council Members for their support. It's really time
8 that the City reformed its parole system to provide
9 hope for families across the state by passing the
10 Elder Parole Act. If passed, this bill would make it
11 eligible for individualized parole consideration for
12 people in prison age 55 and older who have served at
13 least 15 years, and we know it is not a blanket
14 release policy but rather it gives older people who
15 have transformed themselves an opportunity to
16 demonstrate their moral character before the Board of
17 Parole. Secondly, we really encourage the City to
18 support the passage of the Fair and Timely Parole Act
19 to ensure that individuals have a fair and meaningful
20 opportunity to demonstrate their rehabilitation and
21 to be released, and this bill would really provide
22 more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated
23 people who are already parole eligible by altering
24 the standard of parole to center release
25 determinations not on the original crime but on the
person's rehabilitation while incarcerated and their

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3 current risk of violating the law, and more
4 information can be found in our written testimony,
5 but thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for
7 your testimony.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to
9 this panel. We appreciate it. We're moving on to our
10 last in-person panel. We're going to have Arielle
11 Basch, Tara Klein, and I apologize if I mispronounce
12 this name, Raji Edayathumangalam. Thank you.

13 TARA KLEIN: Thank you for the opportunity
14 to testify today, Council Member Hudson and the
15 Council. My name is Tara Klein. I'm the Deputy
16 Director of Policy and Advocacy for United
17 Neighborhood Houses. UNH is a policy and social
18 change organization that represents 46 neighborhood
19 settlement houses in New York State including 40 in
20 New York City. We're really honored to be here today
21 to testify in support of your resolution, Council
22 Member Hudson, calling on the State to pass the
23 Parole Justice package of legislation.

24 UNH and our settlement house members
25 strongly support both of these parole justice bills
which serve as compassionate measures that would

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3 support some of New York's most vulnerable residents.

4 The bills would give incarcerated people the

5 opportunity to receive a fair parole hearing and

6 potentially return home to their communities where

7 UNH's settlement house members offer supportive

8 programs and services that foster community

9 connection. Everyone has worth and dignity and no one

10 should be defined by the worst thing that they have

11 ever done. These bills would give people the

12 opportunity to return home and build stronger

13 communities. We know that New York spends an average

14 of 60,000 dollars each year to incarcerate just one

15 person. That number jumps up to between 100,000 and

16 240,000 dollars annually per older adult in prison.

17 We heard numbers about New York City jails from the

18 Comptroller earlier. They're astronomical numbers. We

19 know that this money could be reinvested in

20 community-based services that provide resources and

21 strengthen overall community health and safety. We

22 heard earlier that these bills together would save

23 the State about 522 million dollars per year which,

24 of course, is greater than the entire budget of New

25 York City Aging. On the Elder Parole Bill, we've

heard that the share of older adults in state prisons

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3 is rising steeply even as the overall prison
4 population has been decreasing, and older people in
5 New York prisons comprise 56 percent of all deaths
6 behind bars. In the 1980s, this was at just 8 percent
7 so this is really a growing challenge. Older adults in
8 prison face unique challenges that can be met by
9 shifting them back into their communities. They face
10 a low public safety risk. Older adults have been
11 shown to have the lowest recidivism rates of any age
12 cohort in the country. They face medical costs on the
13 outside. Older adults in prison have very high
14 medical needs which add high costs to prison
15 healthcare delivery, which is fully provided by the
16 State via DOCS. This could be shifted onto insurance
17 companies and Medicaid and save the State a lot of
18 money, and they live longer lives on the outside.
19 Older adults in prison tend to experience accelerated
20 aging due to the struggles of prison life and the
21 poor conditions. We also know that the prison
22 healthcare system has faced a lot of criticism for
23 the low quality of care, especially throughout the
24 pandemic and so we really need people to get out and
25 access those services on the outside so this bill is
really commonsense.

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3 On the Fair and Timely Parole Bill, we
4 heard earlier from Senator Salazar and her comments
5 that often parole commissioners are looking at the
6 underlying case only, and freedom tends to be based
7 on events that may have happened decades in the past
8 and on facts that can never change. By failing to
9 consider what a person has accomplished while in
10 prison and how they may have changed, this practice
11 fails to adhere to the guiding principle of
12 maintaining public safety. This leads to a lack of
13 meaningful opportunities for parole release and is a
14 major contributing factor to mass incarceration in
15 New York State. We also know that racism, white
16 supremacy, and other systems of oppression permeate
17 the parole process. Black people are
18 disproportionately impacted. Not only are they more
19 likely to be incarcerated, we know that they are less
20 likely to be granted parole release than their white
21 counterparts. Both of these bills together are
22 urgently, urgently needed.

23 Formerly incarcerated individuals often
24 need high levels of institutional supports in order
25 to succeed after they leave prison especially for
older adults who have been incarcerated for long

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3 periods of time and may lack familial support on the
4 outside. Though these cases are not tracked and they
5 are not contracted to do so, settlement houses are
6 already serving previously incarcerated individuals
7 with some of these supportive programs and services
8 and helping with re-introduction into the community
9 and ensuring that people feel connected. Settlement
10 houses believe that a community thrives when all
11 residents are lifted up and supported and that
12 individuals who are incarcerated deserve a fair
13 chance to return home to their communities, and
14 that's why we strongly support the Resolution 241-A
15 in support of these bills. I just want to say at the
16 same time if this legislation does move forward we
17 hope that the City and State will invest more
18 resources into these community-based programs and
19 providers who are already facing a severe budget
20 crunch as you know so we hope that can move forward
21 as well and be considered. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

23 ARIELLE BASCH: Hi. Thank you so much for
24 the opportunity to be here today. I'm Arielle Basch.
25 I'm the Senior Director of Health Services at JASA.

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3 We're one of the largest providers of aging services
4 in New York City.

5 JASA serves over 40,000 older adults with
6 affordable housing, homecare, and other essential
7 services primarily contracted through New York City.
8 We're values driven, honoring older New Yorkers as
9 vital members of society and providing services that
10 support aging with purpose. As such, I want to speak
11 both about why City Council should pass the
12 resolution calling on the State to pass the two
13 parole bills under discussion and how aging services
14 like JASA can provide supports to returning elders in
15 a way that enables them to strengthen the communities
16 they left behind.

17 First the bills. Prisons have few
18 accommodations to meet the needs of the aging and can
19 cause accelerated aging as many people have touched
20 on. The result is that people die behind bars
21 notwithstanding the amazing strides they've made. The
22 parole bills do not automatically set people free as
23 we know. Rather, they provide opportunity for people
24 to demonstrate their rehabilitation and readiness to
25 return to the community. Research shows that paroled
older adults are unlikely to return to prison for new

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3 crimes. Passing these bills is certainly an issue of
4 justice, but also the cost of incarcerating older
5 adults completely outstrips the cost of care in the
6 community. While New York does not document the cost
7 of incarcerating older people in its State prisons,
8 data from other states indicate the annual cost of
9 incarceration are up to four times higher for those
10 over 55, costing up to 240,000 dollars per year
11 compared to 60,000 for younger people. Passing these
12 parole bills would free up needed funding for all
13 community-dwelling older adults.

14 I'd like to share two of JASA's clients'
15 stories to understand why this is important. Miss C
16 is a born and bred New Yorker who was incarcerated
17 for 14 years where she developed multiple health
18 condition. After release, she joined JASA's chronic
19 pain self-management program, an evidence based
20 health education program where she learned about
21 tools to manage her pain. After completing the
22 program, Miss C volunteered to be trained as a leader
23 to deliver the program to her peers so that they too
24 can manage their health conditions. Mr. R is 70 years
25 old and was released after 48-1/2 years of
incarceration. Mr. R has a history of falls,

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3 hypertension, tuberculosis, and degenerative disk
4 disease. He uses a wheelchair. He was hospitalized
5 and set to be discharged to a shelter which would've
6 been dangerous given his health and social risks.
7 JASA advocated for his discharge to be delayed to
8 provide time to find a safe living alternative. We
9 identified a niece who agreed to have him discharged
10 to her home under the Osborne Kinship Program as we
11 seek more permanent housing for him. JASA also
12 provided Mr. R with education on medication
13 adherence, healthy eating, and falls prevention, and
14 helped Mr. R to enroll in Medicare, get a physician
15 house-call and ultrasound at home, connect to
16 medically tailored meals, homecare, and a blood
17 pressure monitor. Community services are far better
18 equipped to support clients like Miss C and Mr. R.
19 Let's work together to end a system that's unjust to
20 older people and focus on moving additional resources
21 to support them in the community. Older adults who
22 return home can meaningfully contribute to New York
23 City. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for your
25 testimony.

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3 RAJI EDAYATHUMANGALAM: Good afternoon. My
4 name is Raji Edayathumangalam. I'm a Forensic Social
5 Worker at New York County Defender Services. Thank
6 you to New York City Committee on Aging and Committee
7 on Criminal Justice and in particular Chair Hudson
8 for holding this hearing today and for this
9 opportunity to present testimony today on the crucial
10 re-entry issues for older New Yorkers.

11 Today, I testify as have others to how
12 deeply broken the parole systems are as well as the
13 inadequate re-entry for our justice-involved elders
14 and what their vital and urgent needs are, even more
15 so after COVID has wiped out a staggering number of
16 older adults who have always served as a living
17 witness to a nation's history and to our sense of
18 continuity day by day as human beings. If we're truly
19 invested in improving community safety, it comes with
20 the moral imperative to do the right thing by
21 reuniting families and reallocating crucial resources
22 toward urgent community needs and goals. I strongly
23 support City Council and urge City Council to pass
24 Resolution 241.

25 My testimony comes from a place of
extensive experience and advocacy in the areas of

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3 older adults and re-entry issues that are specific to
4 them. First, I worked with older adults at a senior
5 center funded by DFTA in a NYCHA housing development
6 in Brownsville in Brooklyn. The community was made of
7 almost entirely African American, Afro-Caribbean, and
8 Latin Caribbean elders. I learned firsthand from many
9 of them how generations were scarred by legal
10 involvement and the legal systems. At Brownsville, I
11 met the oldest human being that I know. She was 103
12 years old when I met her, and I know she would have
13 so much to say about our topic today.

14 Second, I'm a licensed clinical social
15 worker and a practicing psychotherapist. I work with
16 older adults in the community clinic in East Harlem,
17 again another neighborhood with a concentration of
18 older adults impacted by the legal systems.

19 Finally, in my role as a forensic social
20 worker, I've learned in-depth about the vast
21 challenges experienced by older adults trapped in
22 cycles of disenfranchisement, legal involvement, and
23 cycles of no real resources or help.

24 Like Council Member Mealy asked, I'm
25 going to present a client example. Our existing
parole system bars elders from humane and timely

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3 release and then it trips them up constantly every
4 step of the way when they ultimately return to the
5 community. Take for instance the story of an elder
6 client whom I will refer to as Mr. Jones to protect
7 his confidentiality. My Colleague and wonderful
8 attorney, Catherine Perrone, and I currently work
9 with him. Please bear in mind that Mr. Jones is 82
10 years old. There's two parts to his story. One,
11 before the emergency re-entry hotels and one after so
12 that you can hear the distinction. Mr. Jones was
13 released on lifetime parole in 2019 at the age of 79
14 after serving over four decades in State prison. When
15 he was released, COVID was lurking just around the
16 corner. He also has, as others have shared, returned
17 to a New York that was entirely a new universe than
18 he remembered, a dysphoric universe with cellphones
19 and MetroCards instead of phone booths and subway
20 tokens. His family in New York had dwindled away over
21 the years and, while incarcerated, he also developed
22 Alzheimer's disease and a host of other health
23 condition often accelerated in prison. Mr. Jones was
24 never permitted to have his case go before the parole
25 board, and in 2019 he was finally released to parole
with no re-entry plan to meaningfully integrate into

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3 his community at the age of 79, and he was left to
4 the elements with little to no family or financial
5 support in New York. No, he was not connected to
6 programs such as Osborne Association. Eventually, his
7 family from out of state tried to come and help him
8 settle into an apartment, but that was full of
9 challenges too, and he was arrested on a parole
10 warrant in early 2022. He was remanded on that
11 warrant and incarcerated at Rikers for failure to
12 maintain appointments with parole. Picture the
13 tragedy and absurdity of expecting an elder with
14 dementia with no appropriate supports whatsoever and
15 an elder who never heard of a cellphone or a computer
16 in his growing years to track his parole
17 appointments. While remanded at Rikers for failure to
18 keep his parole appointments, Mr. Jones waited for
19 his parole hearing date that never came. They changed
20 his parole hearing date several times. One day, he
21 fainted and was brought to Bellevue Hospital for
22 emergency care where he was diagnosed with having
23 contracted sepsis. Mr. Jones, an elder with the
24 highest risk to die from complications of COVID, was
25 allowed to languish in Rikers by a failed parole
system and he could've died. A writ was filed and

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3 ultimately denied despite his old age, despite his
4 risk for COVID complications, and in spite of his
5 near-death experience while on the island.

6 Ultimately, Mr. Jones was released to parole again in
7 early 2022, and he was able to return to the

8 community. However, he had no place to live and no
9 supports he knew of in the city. Thanks to the option

10 of MOCJ emergency re-entry hotels with its low

11 barrier to access with the need for housing being the

12 criteria for housing, Mr. Jones was able to get a

13 hotel room in one of the emergency hotels. There, he

14 was able to begin to stabilize after decades of

15 incarceration and instability. He was able to get a

16 private room with some peace and quite so that he

17 could sleep at night amidst his dementia and health

18 issues. He was able to use a private bathroom without

19 fear of being assaulted. He was able to get a hot

20 meal three times a day. He was able to have clean

21 laundry. He was able to get a medical treatment plan.

22 He was able to get his first ever cellphone, and he

23 was also able to learn how to use his cellphone.

24 Without this emergency hotel model, an elder like Mr.

25 Jones would have yet again been cast away by our

society and he would have been without a home upon

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3 his return to the community from Rikers. WITHOUT his
4 emergency re-entry hotel room, Mr. Jones could've
5 been immediately violated on his parole as he would
6 not have had a reportable address.

7 To finish up, I conclusion, older adults
8 are national treasures and even more so during this
9 devastating COVID-19 pandemic when mortality among
10 people 65 and older in the United States through the
11 end of last year was at 75 percent of the total
12 COVID-19 mortality. In this regard, we at New York
13 County Defender Services strongly support and urge
14 the City Council to pass the Resolution 241. For
15 elders returning home from jails and prisons, a group
16 of people who pose little to no risk of re-arrest
17 upon release or safety risk upon release, we as that
18 the City and the State ensure that they have a robust
19 re-entry plan. We ask that the City and the State
20 expand access to senior living programs such as those
21 at Ulster Correctional Facility. Unfortunately, such
22 programs are only available toward the end of
23 incarceration and not throughout, and that is
24 something that needs to change. We ask that the City
25 and State protect and expand on the low-barrier
emergency re-entry hotel model which has been a

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3 lifesaver for so many New Yorkers as many have
4 testified today and including Council Member Restler
5 who spoke about it. We ask that all older adults have
6 supportive housing and access to re-entry initiatives
7 for elders, even as they prepare for their return
8 home, such as the programs that Osborne Association
9 spoke to. We urge that elders have coordinated
10 programming of services and not programming in silos
11 in the community specific to their needs that include
12 on-site healthcare, technology assistance, education,
13 employment, pro-social services and wraparound
14 services. I want to highlight the testimonial earlier
15 of asking about disability assistance for elders. We
16 also strongly support and urge the City Council to
17 pass Resolution 156-2022 in support of Traffic Not
18 Jail in order to provide timely and necessary medical
19 care and related services for elders.

20 In closing, we believe that thriving
21 families and communities with fair access to
22 resources and our collective care for all, especially
23 our elderly, are our only path to community safety.
24 Thank you all and good afternoon.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

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3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this
4 panel. At this time, if there's anyone in the room
5 who would like to testify but has not done so yet,
6 please indicate.

7 Seeing none, we're going to move on to
8 virtual testimony. Our first panel virtually will be
9 Christina Green, Ingrid Gordon-Patterson, Laura Roan,
10 and Julia Solomons. We'll start with Christina Green.
11 Please wait for the Sergeant-at-Arms to call time
12 before you begin your testimony.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

14 CHRISTINA GREEN: Thank you very much.
15 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you
16 today. My name is Christina Green. I'm the Director
17 of Marcus Garvey Supportive Housing, the first
18 residential program of the Osborne Association. For
19 nine decades, Osborne has been committed to
20 transforming lives, communities, and the criminal
21 legal system including focusing on the needs of older
22 people in prison and jail and offering re-entry
23 service that programs and services inside jails and
24 prisons and in the community. My program offers 52
25 units of permanent supportive housing to older adults
26 who have served at least seven years in prison. Not

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3 only do we provide housing, we also provide supports
4 to give people the tools in order to be successful
5 including programs. We collaborate with organizations
6 like John Jay for technology support, JASA who you
7 just heard speak, (INAUDIBLE) Institute for family
8 health and many others. Also offering social
9 supports. The topic of this hearing and the residents
10 of Marcus Garvey that testified today and many others
11 are very near and dear to my heart. I also am an
12 elder re-entry and, if it wasn't for organizations,
13 the Osborne Association, I wouldn't be where I am
14 today because I also an elder re-entry myself. The
15 need for re-entry housing cannot be overstated. We
16 refer to be released as coming home, but far too
17 often this terms makes a scary, unstable, and
18 confusing re-entry experience. In preparation for
19 this hearing, we convened a discussion among
20 residents and staff at Marcus Garvey. Importantly,
21 the staff who work at Marcus Garvey including myself
22 are formerly incarcerated and the supportive
23 community that exists there can be felt in the air
24 when you walk through the door. Many who are part of
25 this discussion had served decades inside, and all of
them came home over the age of 50. Together, these 16

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3 people represented 322 years of incarceration. What I
4 heard among many challenges was loss, trauma,
5 frustration, and pain, cumulative exposure to
6 inhumane conditions, randomly applied rules, racism,
7 violence, abuse, and substandard even unethical
8 medical care, but I also heard incredible
9 persistence, courage, and self-advocacy. They also
10 discussed very concrete areas in need of improvement
11 which are outlined in my written testimony and our
12 additional recommendations that grow out of Osborne's
13 extensive experience providing release and parole
14 preparation and re-entry case management for older
15 adults.

16 I wanted to quickly mention two concrete
17 recommendations for the older people detained on
18 Rikers. Older people on Rikers need access to
19 consistent medical care, but instead there are
20 countless missed medical appointments and lapses in
21 access to medication often due to lack of officer
22 escorts. This can have dire and even deadly
23 consequences. There should be an assigned unit of
24 officers with a captain or deputy warden that can
25 ensure people have access to medical care with their
medication. Dedicated housing should be established

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3 on Rikers Island so adults are housed together. With
4 the current population of around 800, it may be
5 possible to have this group in a single facility with
6 an enhanced medical presence to meet their needs. We
7 hope you will support investing in communities and
8 expanding re-entry housing. Marcus Garvey's 52 units
9 were filled in no time, and we already have a very
10 lengthy waiting list. While we work to expand
11 available housing, I urge the Council to also pass
12 the Fair Chance for Housing Bill so that those with
13 prior convictions are not discriminated against.

14 In closing, I urge the Council to pass
15 Resolution 241 calling on the State Legislature to
16 pass the Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole
17 Bills. Far from keeping us safe, lengthy
18 incarceration is weakening families, communities and
19 causing unnecessary harm.

20 Thank you, Chair Hudson, for championing
21 the needs of all older New York City including those
22 who are formerly incarcerated.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we'll be hearing
25 from Ingrid Gordon-Patterson. Please wait for the

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3 Sergeant-at-Arms to call time before you begin your
4 testimony.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time will begin.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ingrid, are you on?
7 Ingrid Gordon-Patterson.

8 INGRID GORDON-PATTERSON: I'm here.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You can proceed with
10 your testimony.

11 INGRID GORDON-PATTERSON: Okay. Good
12 afternoon, everyone, and once again thank you very
13 much for giving me this opportunity. My name is
14 Ingrid Gordon Patterson. I am a Case Manager with the
15 Osborne Association at Marcus Garvey in Brooklyn.

16 I come before you all today with a burden
17 from past and mixed emotions in my heart. I spent
18 years giving to others and was imprisoned physically
19 and mentally. I was broken, distraught, disappointed,
20 and demoralized by the justice system I believed in.
21 Today, I'm thankful for the time I spent in prison.
22 My life was spared a fate worse than death. When I
23 was comatose by COVID, helped and cared for by the
24 men and women of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
25 and as much as I also witnessed the disparities in
healthcare and mental healthcare services. During

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3 those seven years, I realized that the people I spent
4 (INAUDIBLE) even my family, did not care about me or
5 my children. I went to work release and was
6 discharged feeling even more dejected because of the
7 conditions of the facility and the complete lack of
8 support. My re-entry to society was totally left up
9 to me. I had to find my resources, not even a
10 pamphlet of the location of a job center was given.
11 What needs to change is discharge planning. It should
12 start the day one enters into the penitentiary
13 system, whether it's short- or long-term. Short-term
14 challenges will always be there. However, it is of my
15 presumption that anyone who spends three or more
16 years incarcerated often will face the (INAUDIBLE)
17 task of the obstacles to navigate an unfamiliar
18 system for identification, social services, health
19 benefits, housing, and transportation all needs to be
20 addressed. I believe with all the legalities and
21 (INAUDIBLE) clearances involved in an individual's
22 release, why is it not possible to have a valid state
23 ID upon discharge, which should include a pre-
24 application one to six months prior to release
25 (INAUDIBLE) social services with acclimatization for
the released individual that is (INAUDIBLE) upon them

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3 to complete this action within 48 hours. For me, I
4 was given 48 hours, not enough to go to parole and
5 essential services and home all in the same day.

6 (INAUDIBLE) there's in the system you cannot

7 (INAUDIBLE). Re-entry is not an individual issue. It
8 is a collective process of collaboration with various
9 disciplines focused on quality of life and mental

10 health. There is a need for more program

11 opportunities for women, particularly over 50. Work

12 opportunities that highlight the achievement of the

13 individual through education and self-rehabilitation.

14 For individuals with professional licensing, there

15 should be some kind of program geared towards

16 reinstating license, even with (INAUDIBLE) and plans

17 for progression. Re-entry is not food stamps. It is

18 not about not wanting to work (INAUDIBLE) years

19 paying for a crime in a system built on routines and

20 with no corrective or rehabilitation in place. It

21 would benefit everyone to look at what that

22 individual has done to show growth and

23 rehabilitation. Much like the presentencing report

24 that was created for the purpose of looking at the

25 person before the crime, which has unfortunately lost

its true purpose, there should now be a post-sentence

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3 report to highlight the accomplishments during
4 incarceration which would help potential employers to
5 see that one is not their crime. In a society
6 supposedly geared towards second chances, the stigma
7 of incarceration needs to be addressed by recognizing
8 the importance of re-entry and the continual need for
9 opportunities for viable employment. Let's move
10 forward and allow re-entry to be seen as a valid tool
11 that will eventually show that it is vital to
12 (INAUDIBLE) can be seen as a tool of diversion for
13 incarcerated individuals, knowing that the foundation
14 to build their lives with re-entry that stems from
15 their progress, initiative to change, and not having
16 to worry about the ever-present wall that creates the
17 barriers. Re-entry should not be about social class
18 or financial status. Re-entry is an inevitable
19 consequence of incarceration (INAUDIBLE) still
20 remains. It is to provide services to meet accepted
21 standards. If the services don't, the people they're
22 supposed to (INAUDIBLE)

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

23 INGRID GORDON-PATTERSON: Quality of life.

24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you very much.

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3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we're moving on
4 to Laura Roan. Please wait for the Sergeant-at-Arms
5 to call time before you begin your testimony.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Laura.

8 LAURA ROAN: Okay. Thank you. Can you hear
9 me okay?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

11 LAURA ROAN: Thank you. Good afternoon.
12 I'm Laura Roan, and I'm here speaking to you from two
13 perspectives. The first is in my professional
14 capacity as a Service Provider at the Osborne
15 Association, someone who's worked with hundreds of
16 older adults coming home from prison. I've been side-
17 by-side with re-entering elders as they went through
18 the tunnel to re-entry, picking them up from prison
19 and providing case management. Prison is an inhumane
20 place for most older adults. Imagine you're a typical
21 incarcerated 60-year-old. That means your body is
22 more like that of a 75-year-old. You've got arthritis
23 in your knees, which makes walking and stairs
24 painful. You've got poor eyesight and hearing. Your
25 cell is on the third floor, but meals, medication,
programs, showers, they're on the first floor.

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3 Officers' orders can be impossible to hear over the
4 din of the 499 other men who are literally locked in
5 the cell block with you. Sometimes the officers are
6 physically rough with you because you don't hear
7 their orders. Sleep can be important between the
8 music and yelling and the pain that you feel. Prison
9 staff won't give out anything beyond Tylenol for the
10 arthritis. Though you'd like to go to programs,
11 meals, and showers, sometimes you just can't face the
12 walking and the stairs, especially the shower with no
13 grab bars and slippery floors. With 70 men showering
14 at once, the sound is deafening. You can't wear your
15 glasses. It's foggy, and the one officer that's in
16 there can't see or hear anything so if you fell or if
17 someone hurt you, no one would notice so you decide
18 most days to skip it, and when you skip that shower a
19 few times in a row other incarcerated people bully
20 you and staff might not want to work with you or
21 assume you have mental health or cognitive issues.
22 Some people hear these kinds of scenarios and say but
23 couldn't you just request a move to the first floor.
24 Maybe. Sometimes that would work then eventually you
25 get moved to a new prison and have to keep requesting
it over and over, and sometimes it just doesn't work.

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3 Sometimes the programs are on the third floor or the
4 cafeteria is or the whole prison is built on a hill.
5 My point is that you don't make accommodations for
6 these folks because it's not accommodation that they
7 need. It's to go home. We must stop solving all of
8 our problems with incarceration. The U.S. is the most
9 incarcerated nation in the world, ahead of Russia,
10 South Africa, El Salvador, Rwanda. Americans aren't
11 awful people that need to be locked up. It somehow
12 became trendy to lock everyone up in the '80s like it
13 was cool to wear those fingerless lace gloves.
14 Somehow we came to our senses on the fashion side but
15 not on the justice side. We also incarcerate longer,
16 and it's those additional years that mean people are
17 released sicker, more isolated, and further behind on
18 things like technology. Each additional year behind
19 bars cost them dearly and has zero public benefit,
20 maybe actually we just call that public harm.

21 I said at the beginning I'm here to speak
22 to you from two perspectives. I'm also hear speaking
23 to you as a survivor of violence. Despite the fact
24 that the person who hurt me could've spent a lifetime
25 behind bars, I don't want that for him. I want a
system that recognizes rehabilitation, remorse, and

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3 responsibility so I urge you to speak up for those
4 older adults who are locked away and can't speak for
5 themselves. They're right this minute meeting
6 classes, building furniture, cleaning floors, being
7 victimized, and dying without anyone noticing in
8 prisons hundreds of miles away.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to speak
10 with you today.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for
12 your testimony.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll be
14 moving on to Julia Solomons. Please wait for the
15 Sergeant-at-Arms to call time before you begin your
16 testimony.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

18 JULIA SOLOMONS: Thank you so much. Good
19 afternoon, Chair Hudson and Committee Members. My
20 name is Julia Solomons. I'm a Senior Policy Social
21 Worker at the Bronx Defenders. Thank you all for the
22 opportunity to speak today and for highlighting this
23 important and unfortunately often under-resourced
24 issue.

25 First, the Bronx Defenders is in full
support of Resolution 241 regarding the passage of

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3 Fair and Timely Parole and Elder Parole Acts. The
4 passage and implementation of these bills is long
5 overdue because our State Legislature has been afraid
6 to act. In addition to passing this resolution, we
7 propose additional actions for the City to take to
8 reduce the number of pretrial older adults
9 languishing in jails and the re-entry support that we
10 need the City to fund that would improve their
11 chances of release.

12 We've heard many people today share their
13 heartbreaking stories about their struggles to access
14 housing upon release. In our experience, supporting
15 clients re-entering is the same. Being a justice-
16 involved older person means significant barriers to
17 accessing housing. Chronic health issues,
18 discrimination based on one's criminal history,
19 extreme limitations due to sex offender status if
20 that applies to you, and the list goes on and on.
21 Luckily, the City already created a solution to this
22 problem, and we've spoken at length about it today.
23 The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, MOCJ, created
24 the Emergency Re-entry Hotel Program at the beginning
25 of the pandemic. It has been discussed at length
today so I won't repeat what everyone has already

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3 said about how incredible this program is, but I do
4 want to emphasize that this was unlike any re-entry
5 resource that had ever existed in New York City. For
6 the first time, advocates had an immediate, barrier-
7 free housing option to offer people in jail and
8 prison who otherwise had no place to go. The
9 admission process was fast and easy, and when I say
10 fast and easy, I mean we would send an email, we
11 would give some basic information about our client,
12 and they would receive confirmation of a room, and
13 transportation was provided by DOC directly from jail
14 to the hotels. This barrier-free aspect of this
15 resource, I can't stress enough how critical that is.
16 The hotels received some of our most vulnerable
17 clients that were otherwise barred from traditional
18 housing options so we were glad to hear MOCJ say on
19 the record today that the eligibility criteria for
20 the hotels will remain the same when they become
21 transitional housing this summer, but I do want to
22 note that as a social worker who often refers people
23 to different housing options, traditionally
24 transitional housing has more barriers to entry
25 because it's intended to be longer term. There's
usually an application process, some kind of an

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3 interview, it just traditionally takes more time, and
4 that was not the case with these hotels. It was
5 immediate and emergency, and I just want to stress
6 that. Additionally, I want to emphasize that this
7 resource was decarceratory. We used these hotel rooms
8 to successfully convince district attorneys and
9 judges to release our clients regularly at the early
10 start of the pandemic when there were room available,
11 those rooms directly contributed to our clients being
12 released. As of now, however, the hotels have been at
13 capacity and unable to accept new residents for at
14 least a year so that has not been the case for the
15 past several months, nearly a year, that we have not
16 been able to use the hotel rooms in order to get our
17 clients released. Others have mentioned that MOCJ
18 closed three of the hotels late last year, and that
19 also resulted in the residents that are currently
20 there moving into double occupancy, most of the
21 residents moving into double occupancy rooms as
22 opposed to single occupancy that folks referenced. I
23 want to clarify that our information is that the wait
24 list for the hotel program remains close to 400
25 people as of the beginning of this month, and I want
to note that that number does not reflect all of the

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3 people that are waiting in jail and prison that could
4 benefit from this resource because advocates have not
5 continued to add people to the wait list in order to
6 prevent people from having false hope that they might
7 get in when we know that they haven't been accepting
8 new residents.

9 I just want to stress that the 950
10 transitional housing beds that MOCJ spoke about
11 earlier is not enough. 150 SARA-compliant beds that
12 are currently completely full is not enough. We need
13 both. We need both the emergency re-entry hotels to
14 continue functioning the way that they did at the
15 beginning of the pandemic where there were rooms
16 available that we could refer people directly coming
17 out of jail and prison and we need transitional
18 housing that people can stay for longer periods of
19 time, receive ongoing support, and work towards
20 permanent housing, and we also need investment in
21 permanent, long-term housing so that people can move
22 through what we call a housing continuum. That's what
23 this is. It's emergency and transitional and
24 permanent. We need all of it.

25 I just want to say that we are here to
ask the Council to permanently fund the MOCJ

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3 emergency re-entry hotels, emergency housing that
4 provides barrier-free holistic social and support
5 services including humane medical care and offers
6 residents access to vocational and educational
7 opportunities as well as pathways to permanent
8 housing. We're happy to discuss this further with
9 anyone that would like to. Thank you so much for your
10 time.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
13 your testimony. We're going to be moving on to our
14 final virtual panel. We have Derick Bowers, Imani,
15 Andre Ward, and Assembly Member Harvey Epstein. We're
16 going to start with Derick Bowers.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

18 DERICK BOWERS: Thank you. My name is
19 Derick Bowers, and I'm the Regional Director of
20 Social Enterprise in New York City for the Center for
21 Employment Opportunities, also known as CEO. Thank
22 you to Chair Hudson and Chair Rivera as well as the
23 Members of the Committees for allowing this hearing
24 to happen on these important issues.

25 I appreciate the opportunity to submit
testimony about our program model and work across New

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3 York and how innovative initiatives on aging and
4 criminal justice intersect with our work in the re-
5 entry space. CEO's mission is to provide immediate,
6 effective, and comprehensive employment services to
7 individuals recently returning home from
8 incarceration, and, as the largest provider of re-
9 employment services in New York, we serve individuals
10 on parole and probation supervision with an
11 intentional focus on serving individuals facing the
12 most significant barriers to remaining free from
13 incarceration and the criminal legal system while
14 also returning \$3.30 for every dollar of public
15 investment. In addition to passing Resolution 241, we
16 would like to see a target investment in re-entry
17 program services for older New Yorkers, specifically
18 around funding for direct cash assistance. CEO has
19 piloted and evaluated employment impacts of providing
20 financial assistance upon re-entry through our
21 Returning Citizens Stimulus Program. The RCS Program
22 helped individuals meet employment milestones, find,
23 secure, and maintain employment, and increase their
24 financial stability. CEO and our local partners
25 distributed 4.1 million dollars in re-entry cash
assistance to over 1,600 formerly incarcerated

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3 individuals here in New York City as they engage in
4 vocational training during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5 Early evidence suggests that financial assistance
6 upon release from incarceration does improve

7 recidivism outcomes and may help stabilize formerly
8 incarcerated individuals and can transition back into

9 their communities. CEO encourages this Council and
10 administration to support funding for direct cash

11 assistance for re-entry program participants which
12 would specifically assist aging formerly incarcerated

13 New Yorkers coming home. Finding meaningful work
14 after incarceration proves to be arduous, especially

15 for older adults, many of whom may have difficulty
16 engaging in physical activities or may not have the

17 technological skills necessary for non-physical jobs.

18 These individuals report challenges during the re-
19 entry process to include securing safe and stable

20 housing and obtaining employment, places that we

21 believe cash assistance will be pivotal during their
22 journey reintegrating back into their communities. I

23 would now like to share a story from one of our
24 participants, Ronald. Ronald worked on CEO's

25 transitional work crew, sanitizing New York City

Housing Authority properties to keep residents safe

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3 during the height of the pandemic. Alongside his CEO
4 wages, his RCS payments allow him to keep up with
5 expenses, food for the house, clothing for his son,
6 and the family's bills. It also helped him to save
7 for a rainy day. With the support of CEO, he was able
8 to land a full-time job and, for Ronald, the
9 Returning Citizens Stimulus payments gave him a
10 financial cushion to deal with any possible
11 emergencies. For people coming home, Ronald told us,
12 the program gives independence, and so we believe
13 that these are sound investments that the City can
14 and should adopt through the budget. At CEO, we don't
15 just put individuals to work. We help keep them out
16 of prisons and jails.

17 Thank you for your consideration of these
18 recommendations.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you for your
20 testimony.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll be
22 moving on to Imani. Please wait for the Sergeant-at-
23 Arms to call time before you begin your testimony.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

25 IMANI: Thank you so much. Hello,
everyone. I wanted to say that for the disabled

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3 people that are coming out of incarceration, they do
4 need a place that's accessible and adaptable, also
5 (INAUDIBLE) as well. It's not easy period for us to
6 maneuver and so that's why (INAUDIBLE) and
7 everything, I believe that group funding is not
8 helping enough, the groups are not helping us
9 disabled people enough as to stuff that we need and
10 require so that's what I have to say about that.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for
12 your testimony.

13 IMANI: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

15 We'll be moving on to Andre Ward. Please wait for the
16 Sergeant-at-Arms to call time before you begin your
17 testimony.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

19 ANDRE WARD: Thank you to Chair Hudson and
20 Chair Rivera for convening this very important
21 hearing. As the Associate Vice President of David
22 Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at the Fortune
23 Society and as someone who served 16 years in State
24 prisons, I submit this testimony in support of both
25 bills and respectfully urge the Council to pass
Resolution 0241-2022 in support of two critical

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3 pieces of State legislation, the Elder Parole Act and
4 Fair and Timely Parole Acts. While we're discussing
5 State legislation today, it's important to note that
6 the first person to die on Rikers Island this year
7 was 65-year-old Marvin Pines, and Mr. Pines who
8 suffered from seizures was held (INAUDIBLE) infirmary
9 command, which is a unit for people with acute
10 medical conditions and disabilities. He had accepted
11 responsibility by pleading guilty in a non-violent
12 case that was directly tied to his addiction. His
13 death while in custody at Rikers is really a sobering
14 reminder of the dangers that incarceration poses for
15 our seniors. The Fortune Society has been around for
16 over 55 years as a organization offering support and
17 re-entry services to people that are formerly
18 incarcerated and we promote alternatives to
19 incarceration to strengthen the fabric of our
20 communities, and we do this solely by believing in
21 the power of people's capacity to change and build
22 their lives through service programs shaped by the
23 experiences of our participants. Many of the people
24 we served were incarcerated for decades and released
25 as senior citizens, and Fortune was a part of the
CARE taskforce which served as the interagency

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3 taskforce focusing on elder re-entry in the country
4 that was established by the City Council and the
5 taskforce developed detailed recommendations that may
6 require an interagency body to ensure progress is
7 made. One thing we know for certain is that the
8 numbers of aging people in New York State prisons
9 have climbed steadily over decades even as the
10 overall prison population has fallen due to harsh
11 sentencing law and the prison processes that focus
12 entirely on people's past actions as opposed to their
13 current state of rehabilitation and remorse yet, in
14 prison, often completely transforming themselves,
15 accepting responsibility for their past actions,
16 taking advantage of opportunities for growth provided
17 within the prison setting, and even creating new ones
18 and mentoring their young peers to do the same. We
19 see such transformed individuals among our Fortune
20 participants every day. We also have seen firsthand
21 the challenges that our elder participants face when
22 they become home, usually because they no longer have
23 family to turn after such long periods of
24 incarceration, physical health issues that might be
25 less severe if treated properly sooner, unaddressed
trauma greatly exacerbated by incarceration, lack of

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3 financial resources and homelessness, and while
4 people over the age of 55 make up less than 20
5 percent of all fortune participants they are nearly
6 half of the participants we serve in our (INAUDIBLE)
7 They also comprise over 30 percent of the people we
8 serve through our care management division helping
9 people with chronic health needs navigate the medical
10 and mental care systems.

11 While Fortune's housing supply is
12 limited, we prioritize providing supportive housing
13 to this elder population of people who have served
14 significant prison sentences because their needs are
15 so dire. The alternative for them is all too often
16 the streets or shelter, which we have heard
17 throughout testimony can quickly prove fatal given
18 their age and their medical conditions. We opened
19 what is called the Mandela Community to provide
20 supportive housing to people age 62 and over who have
21 been held in State prisons as well as our City jails
22 and who would otherwise be homeless. Supporting bills
23 like Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole Acts
24 would be humane and would also make commonsense.
25 These bills would codify what has long been
recognized by numerous studies that older people who

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3 have served significant periods of time for violent
4 offences that occurred far in the past are not a
5 significant risk to public safety. In addition,
6 neither of these bills would remove the discretion of
7 the parole board to deny people their access of
8 parole in specific cases. Nobody is guaranteed a
9 release under these bills. They are not radical. The
10 board will still have authority to conduct
11 individualized review of each older person's case
12 before it. Moreover, passing both parole justice
13 measures is estimated, as was mentioned earlier, to
14 save the State 522 million dollars a year, some of
15 which could and should be reallocated to re-entry
16 services, which would ensure people are better
17 supported upon their return to New York City.

18 For all these reasons, we urge you to
19 take action and pass the Resolution in support of
20 these two important bills. Thank you for your
21 consideration for my testimony on behalf of the
22 Fortune Society.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

25 We are now going to move on to Assembly Member Harvey
Epstein.

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3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Going once for
5 Assembly Member Epstein, going twice.

6 Okay, at this time, if there is anyone
7 who is logged in that would like to testify
8 virtually, please indicate so using the Zoom raise
9 hand function.

10 Seeing no hands, turning it back to the
11 Chair for closing remarks.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. I
13 just want to thank everyone who has come out to
14 testify today. I think every testimony and personal
15 and lived experience that's been shared is exactly
16 why we held this hearing, myself and Chair Rivera who
17 is on parental leave, really wanted to make sure that
18 there was an opportunity for us to hear from directly
19 impacted folks and to hold our agencies accountable.
20 It's really disappointing, of course, when they don't
21 show up, but we will continue to call them to the
22 table and to have these oversight hearings to ensure
23 that we're creating programs and services and
24 resources that actually help folks rather than hinder
25 and hurt them. Thank you again to everyone who came
out in person and virtually.

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4 This hearing is adjourned. [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 February 28, 2023