

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE, JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE FINANCE ON JOINTLY, WITH
THE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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Friday, May 16, 2025
Start: 10:06 a.m.
Recess: 3:11 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Deputy Speaker, Diana I.
Ayala, Chair Committee on General
Welfare

Hon. Justin L. Brannan, Chair
Committee on Finance

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés
Chris Banks,
Gale A. Brewer
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Tiffany Cabán
David M. Carr
Amanda Farias
Kamillah Hanks
Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis

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COUNCIL MEMBERS (CONTINUED) :

Francisco P. Moya
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Lincoln Restler
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Yusef Salaam
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams
Julie Won

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Molly Wasow Park,
Commissioner, New York City Department of Social
Services

Joslyn Carter,
Administrator of the Department of Homeless
Services

Richard Johns,
Chief Program, Performance, and Financial
Management Officer, New York City Department of
Social Services

Jill Berry,
First Deputy Commissioner of the New York City
Department of Social Services

Scott French,
Administrator of the New York City Human
Resources Administration

Calvin Michael,
Representing Safety Net Activists and the Safety
Net Project at Urban Justice Center

Diana Ramos,
Representing Safety Net Activists and the Safety
Net Project at Urban Justice Center

Harold Alexis,
Member of Neighbors Together and VOCAL-NY
Homeless Union

Alison Wilkey,
Director of Governmental Affairs & Strategic
Campaigns, Coalition for the Homeless

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Chris Mann, Assistant Vice President of Policy
and Advocacy at Women in Need (WIN)

Kristen Miller,
Executive Director of Homeless Services United

Sara Pennerberg,
Political Coordinator at 32BJ SEIU

Tammy Murray,
Security Officer and Army Veteran, Member of 32BJ
SEIU

Emely Páez,
Senior Director, Government and Community
Partnerships at Hispanic Federation

Joe Rosenberg,
Director of the Catholic Community Relations
Council, Representing the Archdiocese of New York
and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens

Molly Eckerle,
Food Policy Associate at the Metropolitan Council
on Jewish Poverty

Kim Moscaritolo,
Director of Communications & Advocacy at Hunger
Free America, Inc.

Carolina Cortes-Rivera,
Digital Food Choice Program Manager at West Side
Campaign Against Hunger

Catherine Trapani,
Assistant Vice President of Public Policy for
Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY)

Agnes Kim,
Family Homelessness Coalition

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

Mark Papish,
Supervisor of Government and Community Affairs at
the Center for Family Representation (CFR)

Abdullah Younus,
Vice President of Advocacy and Government
Relations at United Way of New York City

Constance Lesold,
Representing — Self

Gabriela Sandoval Requena,
Vice-President of External Affairs at New Destiny

Stephanie Woodbine,
Resource Coordinator at New Destiny Housing and
Member of New Destiny Housing's Survivor Voice
Project

Shervon Small,
Executive Director of Legal Services NYC (LSNYC)

Leslie Thrope,
Executive Director of Housing Conservation
Coordinators (HCC) (Working Poor Coalition)

Raquel Namuche
Tenant Advocate and Community Outreach Specialist
Mobilization for Justice

Brian Fritsch,
Associate Director of the Permanent Citizens
Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)

Abby Biberman,
Associate Director of the Public Benefits Unit at
the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

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

Patricia Wong,
Manager of Pro Bono Programs
at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Navdeep Bains,
Associate Director of Advocacy & Policy at the
Asian American Federation (AAF)

Tania Mattos,
Executive Director at UnLocal, Inc.

Emily Brett,
Director of the Greenpoint Hunger Program

Richard William Flores,
Representing — Self

Sierra Kraft,
Executive Director of ICARE Coalition

Carlyn Cowen,
Chief Policy and Public Affairs Officer of the
Chinese American Planning Council

Christopher Leon Johnson,
Representing — Self

Garland Roberts,
Representing — Self

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3 SERGEANT KING: This is a microphone check
4 for the Committee on General Welfare, jointly with
5 the Committee on Finance. Today's date is May 16,
6 2025. Recorded by Tavell King in the Chambers.

7 (PAUSE)

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, good
9 morning, welcome to the New York City Council hearing
10 —Executive Budget Hearing for the Committee on
11 Finance jointly with the Committee on General
12 Welfare. At this time, please silence all electronics
13 and do not approach the dais. I repeat, please do not
14 approach the dais.

15 Thank you for your cooperation. Chairs,
16 you may begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
18 Sergeant.[GAVEL]

19 Alright. Good morning. Welcome to day
20 five of FY26 Executive Budget hearings. I'm Council
21 Member Justin Brannan. I chair the Committee on
22 Finance. And this morning, I'm pleased to be joined
23 by my good friend and co-chair, Deputy Speaker Ayala,
24 who chairs the Committee on General Welfare.

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3 We've been joined this morning by Council
4 Members Salaam, Carr, and Cabán on Zoom.

5 Welcome, Commissioner Park and your team.
6 Thank you for joining us today to answer our
7 questions.

8 Just as a reminder, this is a government
9 proceeding, and decorum shall be observed at all
10 times. As such, members of the public must remain
11 silent at all times.

12 We will be taking public testimony on DHS
13 and HRA's FY26 Executive Budget later today, after
14 DHS and HRA testify.

15 If you wish to speak on these budget
16 items, please make sure you fill out a witness slip
17 with the Sergeant at Arms in the back.

18 In February, the House of Representatives
19 passed sweeping cuts to Medicaid and Supplemental
20 Nutrition Assistance Programs, or SNAP, which
21 entailed over \$1 trillion. It's important to note
22 that almost 1.9 billion, or about 14.4% of HRA's
23 existing total budget, is federal funding in support
24 of safety net programs such as SNAP, cash assistance,
25 and Medicaid.

3 In March, my colleagues and I questioned
4 the Administration on how they plan to address the
5 serious threat posed by the Trump administration
6 regarding illegally seized and unprecedented federal
7 funding cuts to DSS programming. The financial
8 instability remains a risk to crucial programs for
9 some of our most vulnerable New Yorkers, including
10 housing, food assistance, and health care. It remains
11 imperative that the City's plan is ironclad to ensure
12 vital and critical services are afforded to the New
13 Yorkers who rely on them.

14 On May 1, the Administration released
15 their executive plan for FY26 to FY29 with a proposed
16 FY26 budget of \$115.1 billion.

17 HRA's proposed FY26 budget of \$11.74
18 billion represents 10.2% of the Administration's
19 proposed FY26 in the Executive Plan. This is an
20 increase of \$271.1 million or 2.4% from the \$11.47
21 billion, which was originally budgeted in the
22 Preliminary Plan back in January.

23 This increase results from several
24 actions, mostly additional funding to support the
25 Department's rental assistance programs, increased
costs of cash assistance, emergency food sources,

baseline funding for pregnant people applying for shelter with rental assistance, and anti-harassment funding for residents. All very, very crucial, critical, important programs. As of March 2025, HRA had just over 1,300 vacancies relative to their FY26 budgeted headcount.

DHS proposed a FY26 budget of \$3.4 billion, which represents 3% of the Administration's budget in the FY26 Executive Plan. It represents a decrease of \$130.9 million or 3.7% from the \$3.580 billion budgeted in the Preliminary Plan back in January. As of March 2025, DHS had 76 vacancies relative to their FY25 budgeted headcount.

Today, my co-chair and our colleagues will be seeking answers to many questions. My questioning will mostly dive into the onslaught of federal funding cuts, the increase in assistance demonstrated by everyday New Yorkers, the community food connection, and city vendor contracting.

While the administration baselined the prevailing wage for shelter security, there was no commitment to increasing the sought after non-asylum seeker shelter. We did not see an increase in our human service provider contract rates to ensure that

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3 those doing the very important work are adequately
4 paid.

5 I'm now gonna turn it over to my co-chair
6 for this hearing, Deputy Speaker Ayala, for her
7 opening statement.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think he forgot to
9 say his favorite co-chair, but that's okay.

10 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm just saying.

12 Good morning, everyone. I am Deputy
13 Speaker Diana Ayala, Chair of the General Welfare
14 Committee. Thank you for joining me for the Fiscal
15 Year 2026 Executive Budget hearing for the General
16 Welfare Committee held jointly with the Finance
17 Committee.

18 The City's Proposed Fiscal Year 2026
19 Executive Budget totals \$115.1 billion, of which
20 \$15.2 billion, or 13.2%, funds the Department of
21 Social Services, encompassing the Human Services
22 Administration and the Department of Homeless
23 Services.

24 DSS serves the most vulnerable
25 populations in the city, sheltering the homeless and
improving the economic well-being of those facing

poverty. These services are more vital now than ever,
given the record-high shelter census and the economic
challenges faced by low-income New York City
residents.

The Council's budget response made it
clear that protecting housing opportunities,
bolstering the social safety net, and serving the
most vulnerable residents are some of the Council's
top priorities.

I was glad to see that the Administration
added funding in Fiscal Year 2026 to current spending
levels for HASA housing, the Community Food
Connection, and Fair Fares. Additionally, I was
pleased that the Administration added funding for
human service provider COLAs and baselined the
prevailing wage for security at homeless shelters.

However, I am also disappointed to see
that the Executive Plan did not add funding for
crucial Council priorities that were laid out in the
budget response, including to increase the baseline
cash assistance, CityFHEPS, and non-asylum shelters
to align with recent actual spending, to expand Fair
Fares to individuals making up to 200% of the federal
poverty level, to expand and baseline funding for the

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3 Community Food Connection, to increase staffing and
4 upgrade systems to improve client services and
5 benefit administration, or to adequately fund the
6 Right to Counsel program so that all eligible
7 individuals can receive legal assistance.

8 I continue to be concerned that the City
9 is not investing enough in long-term solutions to
10 address poverty and prevent homelessness.

11 The City's shelter census, which
12 continues to rise, is both an expensive burden on the
13 City and a difficult experience for families and
14 individuals. The City should prioritize programs to
15 assist clients in finding and maintaining permanent
16 housing in their communities.

17 The budget for the CityFHEPS program
18 dropped from \$1.27 billion this fiscal year to less
19 than half of that in Fiscal Year 2026—and in the
20 outer years.

21 At a time of record high demand, and with
22 federal funding at risk for programs such as Section
23 8, we cannot abandon thousands of families who rely
24 on CityFHEPS to maintain housing and avoid entering
25 shelters.

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3 I would like to thank the General Welfare
4 Committee for their work in putting this hearing
5 together today: Phariha Rahman, Financial Analyst;
6 Elisabeth Childers-Garcia, Financial Analyst; Julia
7 K. Haramis, Unit Head; Penina Rosenberg, Policy
8 Analyst; Sahar Moazami, Senior Counsel; and I would
9 also like to thank my Chief of Staff, Elsie
10 Encarnacion, and Stephanie Herrera, my Deputy Chief
11 of Staff.

12 And now, Commissioner Park, our counsel,
13 will swear you in.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I also want just to
15 take a quick second to thank the entire Council
16 Finance Division for all of their work during this
17 first week of three weeks of hearings, especially,
18 again, Julia K. Haramis, Phariha Rahman, Elisabeth
19 Childers-Garcia, and my Committee Counsel, Brian
20 Sarfo, who will now swear you in, and we can begin,
21 thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, do you
23 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
24 nothing but the truth before this committee and to
25 respond honestly to council member questions,
Commissioner Park?

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3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I do.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Commissioner
5 Berry?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I do.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Officer Johns?

8 CHIEF OFFICER JOHNS: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Admin Carter?

10 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Admin French?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

14 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you. Good
15 morning, I want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the
16 Members of the General Welfare Committee, as well as
17 Chair Brannan and the Members of the Finance
18 Committee, for holding today's hearing and for the
19 opportunity to testify about the Department of Social
20 Services, DSS's Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget.

21 My name is Molly Wasow Park, and I am the
22 Commissioner of the New York City Department of
23 Social Services. I am wearing a navy-blue suit, and I
24 have short brown, curly hair. DSS is made up of both
25 the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the
Department of Homeless Services (DHS), so

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3 accordingly, I am also joined by my colleagues, DHS
4 Administrator Joslyn Carter, and HRA Administrator
5 Scott French, as well as DSS First Deputy
6 Commissioner Jill Berry, and DSS Chief Program,
7 Performance, and Financial Management Officer,
8 Richard Johns. Collectively, we represent the
9 approximately 14,000 hardworking staff who dedicate
10 their lives to supporting New Yorkers living at or
11 below the poverty line.

12 This next slide outlines the agenda for
13 the presentation.

14 Today, we will provide an overview of the
15 FY26 Executive Budgets for both agencies and
16 highlight the programs and services supported by
17 these resources. Next slide.

18 This slide presents three concentric
19 circles in green, dark blue, and light blue
20 representing the three agencies. DSS is the largest
21 municipal social services agency in the country,
22 comprised of the Human Resources Administration, HRA,
23 and the Department of Homeless Services, DHS.

24 Under the consolidated management
25 structure and the shared mission of DSS, HRA, and
DHS, provide a seamless and integrated continuum of

client services to millions of New Yorkers every day.

Across the agencies, our primary goal is to create a path to sustainability for low-income New Yorkers through three pillars. One, streamlining access to social services. Two, addressing homelessness and housing instability. And three, creating economic stability. We will refer back to these three pillars throughout our presentation. Next slide.

This slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, "Agency Budgets".

I'm now going to pivot to giving an overview of the DSS, HRA, and DHS FY26 Executive Budgets.

This slide shows a pie chart highlighting the different portions of the DSS/HRA budget.

DSS/HRA is dedicated to fighting poverty and income inequality, providing essential benefits including cash assistance, nutrition and food programs, public health insurance, employment and transportation services, and access to housing, homelessness prevention, and emergency assistance.

DSS/HRA helps more than three million New Yorkers annually through the Administration of more than 15

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3 major public benefit programs with a budgeted
4 headcount of approximately 12,000.

5 The FY25 budget for DSS/HRA is \$13.4
6 billion, including \$10.5 billion in City funds. The
7 majority, over 80%, of the HRA City tax levy budget
8 is earmarked for benefits that the City administers
9 on behalf of New York State. Almost 97% of the
10 DSS/HRA City-funded budget provides direct benefits
11 and support to New Yorkers.

12 The blue portion of this pie graph is
13 Medicaid. That includes home care, managed care,
14 mental health, substance use services, and hospital
15 care, which New York State administers. The City pays
16 a portion of the Medicaid costs out of the city tax
17 levy. That is 60% of the DSS/HRA city-funded budget
18 shown here.

19 HRA sends these funds directly to New
20 York State, and the state uses them along with state
21 and federal funds it controls to pay medical
22 providers and managed care plans.

23 Uh, 16% of the DSS/HRA budget goes to
24 public assistance. That is the red portion of the pie
25 graph. You should note that cash assistance benefit
levels and eligibility rules are set by state law and

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3 regulation, although they are administered at the
4 city level.

5 Homeless prevention and rental assistance
6 is the green portion of the pie chart. Three percent
7 of the budget is used for administration, which is
8 purple, 2% for legal services in orange, 2% for HASA,
9 and 1% each for employment services, Community Food
10 Connection, and domestic violence services.

11 HRA also administers SNAP for 1.8 million
12 clients. These benefits, which are federally funded
13 at about \$5 billion a year, don't flow through our
14 budget, so they're not shown here, but they represent
15 another critical benefit that HRA is mandated to
16 provide.

17 Lastly, I'd like to note that the DSS
18 budget included the administration section covers
19 shared services for both HRA and DHS—next slide.

20 This next slide shows a pie chart
21 highlighting the different portions of the DHS
22 budget.

23 DHS is committed to providing safe,
24 temporary shelter, connecting New Yorkers
25 experiencing homelessness to permanent housing, and
addressing unsheltered homelessness. DHS has an FY25

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3 budget of \$4.4 billion, of which \$2.4 billion is
4 allocated from the City tax levy.

5 The Agency has a headcount of 1,995 and,
6 with its not-for-profit partners, is the largest
7 municipal organization dedicated to addressing
8 homelessness in the United States. Almost 97% of the
9 DHS budget supports shelter for families and
10 individuals and services for the unsheltered,
11 including outreach and low-barrier beds.

12 The DHS budget is broken out as follows
13 in FY25: \$1.35 billion for family shelter, that's the
14 purple section; \$1.34 billion for adult shelter in
15 green; \$384 million for street outreach in red, and
16 the remaining 3%, which is in the blue section, is
17 administrative services. Next slide.

18 This next slide shows a chart
19 highlighting key programs and services across the two
20 agencies that were increased in the FY26 financial
21 plan. In the FY26 financial plan, DSS is continuing
22 to make significant investments in our critical
23 programs totaling \$323.5 million in new needs. This
24 includes HIV/AIDS services, HASA, affordable housing
25 services or AHS, domestic violence services, Fair
Fares, New York City benefits, senior affordable

rental apartments, the SARA program, street outreach and end-of-line services, Community Food Connection, and Wi-Fi access at DHS shelters. Next slide.

This slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, "Federal Budget Impact on DSS".

As I have already highlighted in my testimony, DSS, HRA, and DHS budgets are significantly reliant on federal dollars, but more importantly, the three million people we serve receive significant benefits directly from the federal government. We are seeing increasing demand for these services at the same time that they are under threat.

The current congressional reconciliation proposal contemplates cuts that they deem necessary to reach their goal of extending \$2 trillion in tax cuts for the most affluent Americans. Key to reaching that \$2 trillion goal are targeted cuts to the Agriculture, Energy and Commerce Committees, which oversee SNAP and Medicaid, respectively.

Earlier this week, the House Agriculture Committee released its markup bill, which proposes

cutting \$300 billion in SNAP funding over ten years;
1.8 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP to feed their
families. That includes approximately a third of whom
are older adults and a third who are children.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee
markup was also released, which targets \$715 billion
in Medicaid cuts through a variety of amendments to
eligibility, and there are 4 million New York City
residents who rely on Medicaid for health care. In
both programs, Congress envisions work requirements
and shifting costs to the states, among other
changes.

In addition to the reconciliation plan,
the White House released its "skinny" budget proposal
at the beginning of the month. Although the \$163
billion in proposed cuts is silent on SNAP, Medicaid,
and TANF, it would be equally devastating to low-
income New Yorkers. For example, the skinny budget
proposes \$28 billion cuts to housing and community
development programs, impacting public housing and
Section 8 rental subsidies specifically. Tens of
thousands of New York households rely on affordable
housing subsidies to survive in our high-cost city.

The skinny budget also proposes eliminating the Community Development Block Grant, which supports housing maintenance and planning, and a 12% reduction to the continuum of care and housing opportunities for people with AIDS. It proposes eliminating the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which is a \$4 billion cut nationally that thousands of New Yorkers rely on for heating and cooling in their homes.

All of these cuts impact vital programs that the city and state do not have the budget capacity to replace. We encourage all impacted New Yorkers to make their voices heard, because if any of these cuts come to fruition, it would be catastrophic for New Yorkers, not only for low-income households but for the overall economy of the city and the region. Next slide.

This slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, "Streamlining Access to Social Services". I'm now going to highlight some of the results of our efforts to streamline access to social services and benefits work. Next slide.

This slide shows a linear graph highlighting SNAP recipients in blue and applications in green. As you can see, the SNAP caseload continues to remain high, with almost 1.8 million recipients and over 30,000 applications each month as of April 2025. Because of our investment in Access HRA and the ability of clients to apply, recertify, and interview online and on the phone, we can manage the high caseload and ensure clients have access to these important benefits. Next slide.

This slide shows a linear graph highlighting cash assistance recipients in blue and applications in green.

Turning to cash assistance in the Executive Budget, the FY25 budget for cash assistance is \$2.65 billion to support a caseload of 596,000 recipients through June 2025. That includes \$78 million added in the Executive Budget for FY25 and \$92 million that was added in the November plan for FY25. I should note that this graph shows both one-time and recurring recipients. In April, there were over 588,000 ongoing recipients and 7,400 time recipients.

3 Although the one-time recipients receive
4 rent and utility arrears along with other benefits,
5 it is important to note that many of our clients
6 receiving ongoing assistance also periodically
7 receive emergency payments for rent arrears so they
8 can remain stably housed.

9 In FY24, HRA issued emergency rent
10 payments to over 56,000 households. Next slide.

11 Along with SNAP and cash assistance, DSS/
12 HRA continues to support New Yorkers with other key
13 benefits, including, certainly not limited to,
14 Medicaid, Fair Fares, and HEAP.

15 I cannot stress enough that the automatic
16 Medicaid extensions have ended. Clients must
17 recertify in order to keep their health insurance.
18 This is a federal mandate and not something that we
19 have any flexibility on.

20 We are working to ensure that everyone
21 who remains eligible for Medicaid receives ongoing
22 benefits, and we have a robust outreach campaign to
23 remind Medicaid clients of changes to renewal rules
24 and the urgency of submitting renewal applications to
25 avoid any interruptions to coverage. Please continue
to remind all your eligible constituents to renew.

On another note, in collaboration with the Council, we have expanded Fair Fairs eligibility to 145% of the federal poverty level and encourage eligible New Yorkers to submit for benefits as soon as possible.

And although, as I noted, the federal skinny budget contemplates eliminating HEAP, DSS continues to collaborate with the state to provide heating and cooling benefits to New Yorkers. Next slide.

This slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, "Addressing Homelessness and Housing Instability".

Keeping New Yorkers in their homes, moving families and individuals out of shelter, and helping these households remain stably housed are all primary goals for the agency, and I now want to talk about our progress in these areas. Next slide.

This slide shows a pie chart highlighting the breakdown of the DHS client population. As of May 2, the overall DHS census was 85,615 people, an increase of 42,000 people since the beginning of 2022, before the surge in the special population

asylum seekers to New York City. Of the 85,000, approximately 59,000 people, almost 70%, are families made up of children, 31,741 people in that sort of fuchsia section there, and their adult parents and caregivers, 27,453 people in light blue. In other words, children make up 37%, or more than a third, of all people in the shelter system. The remaining population is made up of single adult men, just over 16,000, in dark blue, single adult women, about 5,700, in orange, and adult families, about 4,600, in green. And more than 75% of the new arrival population, the asylum seekers, are currently housed in the DHS shelter system. Next slide.

In New York City, 97% of people experiencing homelessness are sheltered. Still, the 3% of people experiencing homelessness who are on the streets or subways is an area of particular focus for the agency. Since the start of this administration, DSS/DHS has aggressively expanded low-barrier bed capacity. These are shelter models that are targeted to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, also known as safe havens and stabilization beds.

At this year's State of the City announcement, Mayor Adams announced 900 new low-

barrier beds, representing an investment of another \$106 million in efforts to address street homelessness in New York City. These beds will start to come online as early as this summer, and the remaining beds will be identified in the DHS development pipeline and brought online in subsequent years. DHS's safe haven and stabilization bed total will be 4,900 once all is said and done.

Because of this investment in street homeless solutions, DHS has placed more than 3,000 New Yorkers residing in low-barrier programs into permanent housing during the Adams administration thus far. And since the launch of the subway safety plan in February 2022, more than 8,500 New Yorkers have been connected to shelter. DSS/HRA continues to invest in outreach staffing to support referrals to the low-barrier shelter.

Lastly, under the ADAMS administration, DHS also opened three new drop-in centers to offer clients additional access to services. Next slide.

DSS remains committed to connecting New Yorkers to permanent housing and keeping them stably housed. This slide outlines the strides we have made over the past year by strengthening our rental

assistance programs, providing homelessness
prevention services, and leveraging social service
dollars to actually create more affordable housing.

As a result of this work, DSS has seen record-
breaking increases in the number of permanent housing
placements. In calendar year 2024, more than 10,200
households moved out of shelter into permanent
housing placements using CityFHEPS. That's a 56%
increase compared to calendar year 2023.

The number of CityFHEPS vouchers is only
a subset of the nearly 15,000 households comprised of
more than 31,000 New Yorkers who were able to obtain
permanent housing or stay in their homes using
CityFHEPS vouchers, reflecting a 43% increase year
over year.

Through our home-based homelessness
prevention services in calendar year 2024, more than
19,000 households or about 40,000 New Yorkers
remained in their homes, and more than 11,000
households or about 33,000 New Yorkers received
aftercare services from home-based to help them stay
stably housed in the affordable housing services
program, AHS, which is set to create at least a
thousand affordable housing units for CityFHEPS

voucher holders exiting. This program remains a significant priority for the Agency.

Through AHS, we use social service dollars to help not-for-profit human service providers either finance the purchase of or long-term lease of buildings for use as affordable housing. In other words, we are actually able to use social service dollars to add to the affordable housing stock. We are proud of the progress we've made so far. DSS has already opened more than 450 apartments across six high-quality affordable housing sites in the Bronx and Brooklyn in partnership with not-for-profit providers, and over 500 units are in the pipeline. Next slide.

I would like to take a moment to highlight some key details of the recent proposed rule change impacting the CityFHEPS program. I understand the concerns that this proposed rule change has raised, and I want to take a moment to really address this head-on.

Since its inception in 2018, CityFHEPS has grown to become the second largest rental subsidy program in the nation, behind only NYCHA's Section 8 program. As a result, the budget for the program has

ballooned from \$250 million in 2021 to \$1.2 billion this year. So, in other words, that is a fivefold increase in spending in the space of four years.

With the threat of federal cuts to other housing subsidy programs, DSS, in coordination with OMB, has strategically pursued a variety of measures to manage the cost of the CityFHEPS program, including this proposed rule change.

So what the rule change does is for those renewing at year six, so people who have received-- after the five-year standard term of the voucher, and who have employment income, DSS is proposing to change the baseline household contribution from 30% of the household's monthly income to 40% of the household's monthly income. This is one of only several changes that DSS is making to the program to address the significant growth in costs and ensure the program is sustainable going forward.

Some other examples, along with HPD, we have scaled back the augmented CityFHEPS program, where the voucher can be used in higher rent units, and we are implementing rent reasonableness to make sure landlords are not overcharging us for units.

Just speaking personally, CityFHEPS is an absolutely critical program. Investing in the program and growing it has been a hallmark of my tenure as commissioner. But I also think it is really important that we are thinking about responsible financial management so that CityFHEPS can continue to serve as a lifeline going forward. I believe one of the most important things I can do as commissioner is to ensure CityFHEPS remains a strong program. This means making some changes to bend the cost curve. Next slide.

Pivoting to another aspect of the rule change that was recently released, and as we discussed at our Preliminary Budget Hearing and the Mayor's State of the City, DSS is pursuing a pilot program to work to reduce the number of babies born in shelters. Our CRIB program, CRIB stands for Creating Real Impact at Birth Pilot Program, is included in the rule change for CityFHEPS that was recently released. The necessary rule change was published at the end of April, and we are on track to launch CRIB over the summer. Next slide.

This slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next

1 COMMITTEE ON FINANCE, JOINTLY WITH THE
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3 portion of our presentation, "Creating Economic
4 Stability".

5 Moving to the third pillar of our
6 programs, we create economic stability. We recognize
7 that more and more New Yorkers rely on our city's
8 resources to make ends meet. In addition to public
9 benefits, rental assistance, and other essential
10 resources we offer to help people get back on their
11 feet, I will provide an overview of our career
12 services and other supports that enable New Yorkers
13 to secure a steady income and live sustainable lives.
14 Next slide.

15 In calendar year 2024, HRA helped 15,577
16 clients secure employment, which I am thrilled to say
17 is an 89% increase over the calendar year 2023 number
18 of 8,252 job placements.

19 In FY24, HireNYC broke its record with
20 human service providers hiring 8,197 public
21 assistance clients. And in FY25 6,418 clients have
22 been hired so far, putting us on track to exceed last
23 year's number, which was itself record-breaking.

24 The Pathways to Industrial and
25 Construction Careers program (PINCC) advances
training and education and job placements in

1 industrial and construction jobs. We've enrolled
2 1,126 individuals thus far, with 653 completions of
3 training programs. We've referred just over 1,000
4 individuals to jobs, 513 have received job offers,
5 and 383 job placements with more than eight unions
6 and public and private employers, and those numbers
7 continue to go up every day. This is an initiative
8 we're very excited about. Next slide.

10 Going forward, we will continue to invest
11 in our career services programming. The Pathways for
12 Access to Careers and Employment, or PACE contracts
13 begin in October 2025 using the centralized, quote,
14 "no wrong door" program model with locations
15 throughout the boroughs. This program will streamline
16 and minimize travel burdens for clients, maximize
17 access to all employment and support services, and
18 foster stronger client and staff relationships,
19 establish an in demand occupation and sector-focused
20 approach that connects clients to skilled professions
21 that offer family sustaining wages, utilize labor
22 market data to assist clients in gaining marketable
23 skills for success and advancement in their careers,
24 and streamline processes for vendors by offering a
25 hybrid approach to engaging clients. Next slide.

3 I will close by underscoring our ongoing
4 commitment to break down government silos and improve
5 access to services. The challenges DSS, HRA, and DHS
6 work to confront bridge across agencies and further
7 bridge across jurisdictional boundaries. Overcoming
8 these challenges goes to the heart of creating the
9 kind of caring, compassionate communities that we
10 seek to live in.

11 We appreciate the opportunity to testify
12 today, and we welcome any questions that you may
13 have. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
15 Commissioner. We have also been joined by Council
16 Members Restler, Louis, Ung, Avilés, Stevens, and
17 Banks.

18 I want to dive right in, because we have
19 a lot of questions today.

20 Since both the executive and legislative
21 branches of the federal government came under
22 Republican control in January, we've seen a massive
23 effort to defund social services, which poses a major
24 threat to both DHS and HRA. Most of HRA's federal
25 funding goes to safety net support, including cash
assistance, domestic violence shelters, SNAP

administration, child support, employment programs,
energy assistance, and Medicaid.

So, talk a little bit about the grave
concerns DSS has regarding funding for specific DHS
and HRA programs, given the federal climate and the
lack of a plan from the Administration.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I am incredibly
concerned about what we are seeing at the federal
level, and I think that plays out on two levels. One
is cuts to the benefits themselves that flow directly
to clients, and two, on the impact of the agencies.

So the social service programs that we
are monitoring most closely at the city level are
SNAP and Medicaid.—Sorry, I should say that at the
DSS level, there are SNAP and Medicaid. Those are
certainly not the only initiatives and programs that
I'm concerned about. There are very substantial cuts
to federal housing programs that, while not directly
tied to the DSS budget, absolutely serve the clients
that we also serve, and that we are certainly looking
at a prospect of significant upticks in homelessness,
for example, if some of this comes to pass. I think,
as I mentioned in my testimony, we're seeing these
two primary strategies from the federal level. One is

increased work requirements, and the other is pushing costs down to the state.

As we talked about in our testimony, DSS really does believe in workforce development and helping low-income households access economic opportunity. But to do that responsibly and to do it in a way that actually is successful in helping people grow economically takes a lot of thought and a lot of resources, and really involves putting significant supports around low-income people.

I ask you all to put yourselves in the shoes of a single parent without a high school diploma with an eight-year-old who, under the congressional plan, would now have to work for SNAP benefits. What job is out there? How does that person actually successfully get to employment? As I mentioned in the testimony, we have very robust and successful career support programs that are based around the work requirements that already exist for cash assistance. By way of context, we spend about \$51 million a year on our career services programs for cash assistance.

The House has proposed \$100 million nationally to implement work requirements for

Medicaid. So, in order to actually have a serious conversation about what low-income households need to grow economically, we are in the wrong order of magnitude when we're talking about work requirements.

So, setting aside the moral aspects of looking for people to work for basic supports like food and healthcare, we don't have the infrastructure, and Congress is not contemplating the infrastructure to make this a realistic option. So this is something that we're incredibly concerned about.

And then, as costs are pushed down to the state, we would expect that to get pushed down to the local level as well. We don't have any of the details, obviously. So it's premature for me to talk about numbers, but I think we can expect that to happen.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Have you received any notification from the state or federal to prepare for cuts or eliminations?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We absolutely are taking those steps, and we are approaching this in a twofold way. One is engaging with all the stakeholders that we possibly can to educate and

engage about how critical these benefits are. So that means elected officials at all levels of government. It means our not-for-profit providers. We met with our Impacted Advocates Group, with essentially anybody who will listen to me about philanthropy. We are making sure we're getting materials out about what the impact is, talking not only about the impact on low-income households but income to the economy as a whole. Every dollar of SNAP spent in New York City is \$1.54 worth of economic activity. Nobody saves their SNAP benefits. This is money that goes to support our communities. So, above and beyond what it means to be for low-income households, these cuts also have the potential to be devastating for our economy.

So we are absolutely engaged in that kind of outreach and education. The other thing that we are doing internally is contingency planning. What could we do differently, and what would we do less of if faced with these cuts? I'm not going to go into specifics here, both because we're still in the planning process, but more importantly, because I don't want to give a roadmap for how cuts could be taken. But what I will say is there are very few good

options given the magnitude that we're talking about.

There are some very grim choices in front of us.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I want to talk
a bit about under budgeting.

In the past several years, DSS has under
budgeted major entitlement programs funded through
DHS and HRA. So there's often been a considerable
misalignment between adopted budgets and actual year
end expenditures. Programs like cash assistance,
CityFHEPS, the non-asylum seeker shelter cost, and
HASA housing have been historically under budgeted at
adoption, with increments of funding added throughout
the fiscal year

So, in the current fiscal year, the
budgeted amounts for all these programs have seen
dramatic increases between the adopted and the
following executive plans.

Can you explain how DSS projects the
level of need for these programs and how are actual
expenditures for the prior fiscal year factored into
this analysis and budgeting practices?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
Council Member.

3 So let me start by saying that the FY26
4 budget was very helpful in addressing some of the
5 ongoing challenges and some of those initiatives that
6 you mentioned. So in Exec, we addressed the HASA
7 budget. We addressed Community Food Connection,
8 filled in a number of the things that have
9 traditionally been adoption adds, and so I'm very
10 pleased that the Administration was able to do that
11 at Exec. Overall, it was a very good budget for us.

12 There are, as you noted, significant
13 issues to resolve with both shelter, SNAP, uh, sorry,
14 cash assistance, and rental assistance. Those are
15 large programs that are challenging to project
16 because utilization can vary, costs of services can
17 vary, and we work very closely with OMB to adjust
18 funding on an as needed basis.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So will DSS be
20 increasing the baseline budget for FY26?

21 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We are certainly
22 working closely with our partners at OMB to manage
23 the budget for those three critical programs.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Has underbudgeting
25 ever impacted the agency's ability to administer
these vital support programs?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: There are, very
4 occasionally, some short term glitches in cash flow,
5 but these are very short lived, and we work closely
6 with OMB to manage that.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And is there
8 discussion around reforming DSS to reform their
9 projection techniques to more accurately reflect?

10 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We work very
11 closely with OMB to make sure that the budget is as
12 needed.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. I want to ask
14 some questions about Local Law 125. Local Law 125,
15 those of you who don't know, the Safety in Our
16 Shelters Act required the provision of prevailing
17 wage and supplemental benefits to security officers
18 and fire guards at City contracted shelters beginning
19 back in May of 2022.

20 Do all current DHS contracts with shelter
21 providers or security subcontractors reflect the
22 local law prevailing wage requirement?

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Let me start by
24 saying I'm thrilled that this year the prevailing
25 wage increment was baselined in the budget, so that
will be very helpful for us going forward.

I believe the contract language for every single contract does have that prevailing wage requirement in it at this point, but we will double check and confirm that.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, how long did it take DHS to amend all of its shelter contracts to account for the requirements of Local Law 125?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I don't know off the top of my head, but we can circle back.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: There's a concern around, given the time it took to implement 125, by way of these contract changes, security officers and fire guards covered by the prevailing wage requirement were owed retroactive wages and benefits.

Has DHS provided any guidance since implementation?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We engage very closely with our providers to make sure that they have all of the information that we have. As you note, we did have to make adjustments on a year-by-year basis. We did have to amend all the contracts. That's something we worked very closely with our providers. And the fact that we now have the funding

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3 baseline, I think, will make this more streamlined
4 going forward.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, because we've
6 heard from stakeholders who have communicated to us
7 that they've been unable to obtain clarity from DHS
8 as to the total amount of back pay that was owed and
9 may still be owed to these workers.

10 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Okay. We'd be
11 more than happy to follow up offline to get the names
12 of those stakeholders, and we will follow up.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Can you tell
14 us the amount of retroactive wages and supplemental
15 benefits that are still owed to these workers?

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I don't have
17 that with me, but we can follow up.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. I'd appreciate
19 that information ASAP.

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Of course.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And then, going
22 forward, what steps will the agency take to ensure
23 that these workers receive their retroactive wages?

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So every
25 contract goes through a closeout process that happens
at the end of the fiscal year. We're obviously

approaching the end of the fiscal year, so that is a natural moment that we can use to make sure that we have done that reconciliation.

Administrator Carter, anything you'd like to add?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Sure, Commissioner. One of the things that we've been doing with every provider is looking at it individually to see where they are in their process. So we would look at what has been happening, and if we need to really implement and put whatever is needed in the budget, we will be doing that at closeout.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Do you have an idea of how many workers are in this bucket?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: We'll have to come back to you with that.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright. We've got a lot of homework to do.

I want to ask two more things, then I'm gonna turn it over to the Deputy Speaker.

The Executive Plan includes an additional \$27.4 million in HEAP, the federal home energy assistance program, but it's FY25 only. So how is that amount determined, the \$27.4 million?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm sorry,
4 you're speaking about HEAP?

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah. The Executive
6 Plan includes \$\$27.4 million for Heap, but it's for
7 FY25 only.

8 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So with all of
9 our grant funds, we typically mod them in as the year
10 goes by so that we are adjusting to know what we are
11 getting from the state and how we are claiming.

12 Chief Johns, anything you want to add
13 there?

14 CHIEF OFFICER JOHNS: Yeah, the only thing
15 I would add is that the funding was added when the
16 state reopened the application process.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I wanna ask about
18 that, too. So it was reported, I guess, in the press
19 that back in January, I think, the City received
20 notice from the state that the HEAP program was
21 closing applications two months ahead of schedule.
22 After that initial panic, Governor Hochul's office
23 announced that the state would reallocate \$35 million
24 from an unspecified source to allow these programs to
25 remain open. Do we know why this premature closure
happened?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So, HEAP funds
4 are federally funded. There's a fixed dollar amount,
5 and the way that the program has traditionally been
6 run by the state is they take applications, and at
7 the point at which they run out of money, they will
8 close the door.

9 Applications statewide this is not a New
10 York City specific issue; applications statewide were
11 running higher than anticipated, which is why they
12 shut the program door very suddenly. Given that it
13 was in the peak of winter and that there were very
14 serious ramifications, we're pleased that the state
15 was able to find additional financing. But I think it
16 really reflects the critical nature of the program
17 and the concern that we have with the president's
18 proposal to eliminate it.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: But, from what you
20 know, when they announced in January that they were
21 suddenly shutting this down two weeks early or two
22 months early, was it because they got a call from
23 Washington saying the money's not coming, or was it
24 something else?

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Because they had
run out of the current year allocations.

Justin CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I see. Okay.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So they added
state funding.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Got it. Okay. Last
one for me. I just want to talk about the Subway
Safety Plan. On February 18, 2022, the Mayor released
the Subway Safety Plan outlining the City's strategy
to address street homelessness and public safety on
public transit. It was first announced and funded in
the FY23 Executive plan with \$171.3 million, which
was baselined. It's a considerable amount of
additional funding that's also been added to DHS's
budget since the announcement back in 2022.

So, how is DHS measuring or quantifying
the success or the progress of the Subway Safety
Plan?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So there are
three primary metrics that we look at to track how
we're doing on unsheltered homelessness engagement.
One is the number of touch points that we have with
clients, and by "we", I'm including both DHS
providers and our contracted outreach providers. Two
is the number of placements that we make into
transitional housing. That might be shelter. It could

be the low-barrier beds, like safe havens. And three is permanent housing placements. I will say that the permanent housing side of things is relatively new to the focus of this world. We used to declare victory when we got somebody off the streets and into shelter, but shelter isn't the goal for anybody; we want to get them to permanent housing, so that has become an important part of our metric.

Given the nature of unsheltered homelessness, which is really, uh, we at DHS have a mandate and a mission to engage with those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Still, we have a very limited ability to prevent it. We have to be looking at the volume of services that we are providing and the number of people that we are getting off the streets, but also recognizing that this is a multi-level problem.

So, just to make this really concrete, last year, for example, we placed about 1,200 people living in low-barrier beds, safe havens, and stabilization beds into permanent housing. Almost exactly the same number of people were discharged from upstate psychiatric hospitals to DHS. So, as much as I would like to say the metric should be

1 exactly the number of people who are experiencing
2 unsheltered homelessness, I think in terms of what we
3 can actually control, it is the level of our
4 engagement in the number of people for whom we are
5 solving the issue. We need to continue to work with
6 other agencies and levels of government to ensure we
7 address the upstream issue.
8

9 Administrator Carter, anything you'd like
10 to add?

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Commissioner, I
12 think you really have touched on it. I mean, I think
13 one of the things that we've been looking at is how
14 do we prevent feeder systems into the, into you know,
15 unsheltered homelessness. So, we've been trying to
16 work comprehensively and collaboratively with those
17 specific agencies. And we're doing some work around
18 that, as well as doing meetings with other city
19 partners and state partners, really looking at, are
20 we doing weekly meetings, are we out doing
21 engagements, you know, what is the work that needs to
22 be done above and below ground with those who are
23 unsheltered. So, we're doing that work.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And as you know, I
25 represent two end-of-line stations, Stillwell Avenue

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3 and 96th Street, and Bay Ridge and Coney Island. What
4 is the budget for outreach at end-of-line stations
5 for FY25 and 26?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So I don't know
7 that we have a budget specifically for the end-of-
8 line. The total budget for all of our street budget
9 programs for FY25 is \$380 million; of that \$73
10 million is for the outreach contracts, and then
11 there's another \$20 or so million for DHS staff. The
12 remainder of it is largely for real estate for the
13 safe haven stabilization beds and drop-in centers.
14 But then...

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What does that total
16 that tally to?

17 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: 380 million is
18 the FY25 budget.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Through the Subway
20 Safety Plan, how many people did we get off the
21 subway into housing or shelter last year?

22 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Hold on, Council
23 Member, let me pull that.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.
25

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Okay. For FY24,
4 the referrals to services were 13,578. In terms of
5 shelter placements, it was 3,614.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: The 13,578, what do
7 we call that? Those are folks that we touched, folks
8 we referred? What?

9 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Referrals, yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, and what was
11 the placement number again?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Uh, 3,614.

13 And I want to maybe take a step back here
14 and really put unsheltered homelessness in New York
15 City in context. I touched on this in my testimony,
16 but 97% of people experiencing homelessness in New
17 York City are sheltered. There are too many people on
18 the streets and the subways; it is something that we
19 are thinking about constantly. But because of the
20 nature of the right to shelter, because of the fact
21 that we do have a very robust shelter system, the
22 people who are on the streets and subways, they've
23 been failed by everybody, right? And not just
24 government, but really sort of every level of
25 society. So building a connection, getting them to
come inside, is something that sometimes takes a very

1 long time. So that's why the number of referrals, the
2 number of engagements, is so much higher than the
3 number of people who came inside. But we do not take
4 a one-and-done approach to outreach. We're going to
5 keep working with people and figuring out what it is
6 that will connect.
7

8 One of the things that is important, and
9 why we're so excited about the State of the City
10 commitment to increase the number of low-barrier
11 beds, is that we know that this is a model that's
12 been really successful with the population. The
13 amount of time that people will stay inside as
14 opposed to cycling back to the streets and subways is
15 longer, and success rates for placement in permanent
16 housing are very strong. So we think increasing the
17 shelter model, and making sure that those buildings
18 are sited near areas where there are higher
19 concentrations of people experiencing unsheltered
20 homelessness, is going to be really critical to
21 continuing to make a dent in this issue.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you,
23 Commissioner. I am going to turn it now to Council
24 Member Cabán, who is on Zoom, since we have a quorum.
25

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Can you hear me?

4 Thank you so much, Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you to the
7 Administration for being here. Just bear with me, I
8 am having some tech issues, just give me a moment.

9 Okay, great, I want to ask a little bit
10 about involuntary commitment. So the enacted state
11 budget includes resolutions which weaken the legal
12 standard for involuntary commitment, and it's a
13 policy that the Mayor has long been a proponent of.
14 Lawmakers and civil rights advocates they've rallied
15 against this policy saying that it's too broad and it
16 effectively criminalizes homelessness and mental
17 health issues. Certainly agree with that, but
18 probably even more important than that, if that isn't
19 concerning enough, is that the medical community at
20 large says that this is not best medical practice.

21 So I just have a few questions on this
22 front. I want to know what role DHS currently plays
23 in involuntary commitment, and how that might change
24 with this new policy.
25

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Sure. I'm going
4 to start, and then I'm gonna ask Administrator Carter
5 to chime in.

6 Involuntary removal is never our starting
7 place. We absolutely believe in the value of
8 outreach, the value of building trust, and getting an
9 individual to a place where they are ready to come
10 indoors. That is the mission of DHS, and that is what
11 we work on with our contracted outreach teams every
12 day.

13 That being said, there are emergencies
14 where that's not going to work. For example, during
15 cold weather, code blue nights, I get reports every
16 morning on the number of engagements. And there are
17 very cold nights where we do involuntary removals
18 because that is literally lifesaving for people who
19 are on the street.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I'm sorry because I
21 just have limited time. I just want to interject
22 here. I'm specifically interested in understanding
23 how your role or your policies and directives might
24 or are changing in light of the state's new legal
25 standard for involuntary commitment, which we know
lowers the floor.

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So we work very
4 closely with nurses. We have been growing the number
5 of nurses that we have who are going out on outreach,
6 and we really depend on clinical expertise to make a
7 decision on when somebody does need to be taken to
8 the hospital.

9 But Administrator Carter, do you want to
10 chime in?

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you,
12 Commissioner.

13 It is important to know that decisions
14 about involuntary removals are made by the licensed
15 clinician, and for us, those are our nurses who are
16 with the teams that are out. So, the decision is not
17 taken lightly. Our licensed nurse is with the team
18 that is making that decision, and they are making
19 that assessment.

20 So, for DHS outreach, for provider
21 outreach, it is with the authority of the clinician
22 who is making that determination. It is not done
23 lightly, and it involves looking at what's happening
24 around the circumstances of that particular
25 situation. (TIMER)

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I guess my question
4 again goes back to that legal standard that was
5 enacted in the state budget, which again lowers the
6 floor. When they're going out, are those clinicians
7 saying, "Hey, this meets the standard that the state
8 has now set?" Because then that opens up a larger
9 number of scenarios, situations where somebody could
10 be involuntarily committed. Is that clinician going
11 by the legal standard that's been set? Is that what
12 they're told to do, or is it something else?

13 And then I want to add on to that. I'm
14 gonna go ahead and ask all my questions, just because
15 I want to be really mindful of my time.

16 I want to know how the expansion of
17 involuntary commitment affects the Subway Safety
18 Plan, and if you guys could just report to us how
19 many involuntary commitments there were in Fiscal
20 Year 2024, and how many in Fiscal Year 2025 have
21 there been so far?

22 Because this is my concern, right? With
23 the floor being lowered on involuntary commitments,
24 and the gaps in our continuum of care, what we're
25 seeing is that we can manufacture more involuntary,
uh, unnecessary involuntary commitments when we

aren't investing enough in creating the conditions where people are experiencing acute crisis less often. Right?

So I'll give you an example: Just in my district two days ago, a woman was living in her car, and was known to the neighbors, had some mental health issues, but had not been a danger to herself and others. She actually is helpful to the neighbors. She sometimes is able to get some support. And there was a multi-agency response, because somebody wanted her car towed for being there over seven days, without moving. And instead of her being able to access the continuum of care, police officers show up, DHS shows up, a bunch of other people show up, and that's supposed to be the answer. And, of course, that agitates her, and then she gets involuntarily committed. Her car gets towed. She's been taken to a hospital. She doesn't know where her car is, doesn't have any money, and now has no place to live. We left her worse off than she was.

But, you know, I want to know how the standards and the gaps in the City's continuum of care will contribute to what we're seeing with involuntary commitments?

So specifically, can you explain how it's going to affect the Subway Plan? Can you give me those numbers on how many involuntary commitments there were in 2024 and how many in this fiscal year so far? And, then finally, like, how are you gonna prevent the overuse of involuntary commitment? Because the reality is, is that if that gap remains, there will be an overuse. Because you're just asking and waiting for people to be in acute crisis when we could be helping people maintain their health.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So, Council Member, it is not our goal or desire or intent to manufacture anything. We approach all of our outreach with the intent of trying to serve very vulnerable people and get them indoors wherever possible.

Given that the language was just released, we have not yet started developing training protocols for that, but we will certainly circle back with the Council as we do that.

In FY24, DHS and our providers did 248 involuntary removals. I don't have the number year to date for FY25, but we can certainly circle back on this.

3 As I mentioned at the beginning, it's a
4 tool that we think should be used very sparingly, but
5 there are instances where somebody is really at risk.
6 We will continue to approach this from a clinical
7 perspective by trying to serve people to the best of
8 our ability.

9 With respect to the individual that you
10 mentioned, we're happy to follow up offline and
11 figure out the next steps for that individual.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah. I mean,
13 again, the reality is that thus far this
14 administration has failed to adequately fund and
15 staff up a mental health care continuum, which
16 creates more instances of acute crisis that rise to
17 the level of people being vulnerable to involuntary
18 commitment. That's my point.

19 Chair, do I have any time? I can't see
20 the clock. I want to be respectful of the time.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: No, you're about an
22 hour over.

23 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay, (LAUGHS)
25 thank you. I'll pass it back then.

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3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council
4 Member.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I am going to
7 hand it over now to Deputy Speaker Ayala for her
8 questions

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: In our Fiscal 2026
10 budget response, the Council called on the
11 Administration to align the baseline budget for non-
12 asylum seekers' shelter costs with the Fiscal Year
13 2025 funding level. At the time, we estimated that
14 that would require an additional \$537.1 million.

15 The Executive Plan includes an additional
16 \$99.8 million in City funding for Fiscal Year 2025
17 for those costs. But no additional funding was added
18 for Fiscal Year 2026 or the out years.

19 Why was additional funding needed in
20 Fiscal Year 2025, and how was that funding amount
21 determined?

22 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Projecting
23 shelter costs can be very challenging, given the
24 changes in utilization, different trends that we see,
25 and the extent to which we're using hotels versus
contracted shelters. We do work very closely with OMB

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3 to essentially make real-time changes to the budget
4 as needed. So, there were some additional funds
5 needed for FY25, which, as you noted, were added
6 during the Executive Plan, and we will continue to
7 adjust the budget for FY26, working closely with OMB.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know which
9 population this funding supports?

10 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: No, this was
11 general across-the-board needs.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Why was the
13 funding added for Fiscal 2025 only in the Executive
14 Plan? Do you anticipate additional funding will be
15 provided for 2026?

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We will work
17 closely with OMB to align the budget as needs appear.
18 As I say, there's some substantial variation in the
19 shelter spending, depending on census and depending--
20 a particular driver of costs is our hotel
21 utilization. We have been able to close some hotels
22 recently, so that may help us to some degree with
23 managing the budget, but we are in daily contact with
24 OMB, and we'll adjust it as needed.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: As of the Executive
Plan, the budget for non-asylum seekers shelter costs

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3 is approximately \$2 billion in Fiscal Year 2026 and
4 the out years, which is over half a billion less than
5 the \$2.62 billion budgeted in Fiscal Year 2025.

6 Does DHS realistically expect that non-
7 asylum seekers' shelter costs will be over half a
8 billion less next fiscal year? If not, what is the
9 projected cost, and when will additional funding be
10 added to the budget?

11 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
12 Council Member.

13 As I noted, it's something that we look
14 at by week, day by day with OMB, and to the extent
15 that we need to add funds, that is something that we
16 do. We and OMB recognize that shelter is a mandated
17 expense, and we will adjust as we need to going
18 forward.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: While the sheltering
20 of asylum seekers has dominated the public
21 conversation over the past couple of years, the City
22 has seen a steady increase in non-asylum seeker
23 shelter census. How much has this non-asylum seeker
24 DHS shelter census increased since the start of FY25,
25 and how does this vary across populations?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Unless any of my
4 colleagues have that exact number, we may need to get
5 back to you. But I can certainly put some context on
6 the non-asylum shelter census.

7 So at its peak in, I think it was 2019,
8 we were at about 61,000 individuals, and we were able
9 to manage that down somewhat so that we-- before the
10 pandemic started, we were maybe 59, something like
11 that. Much to my surprise, the shelter census
12 plummeted during the pandemic largely because
13 families with children intake fell very sharply. I
14 will freely admit that was exactly the opposite of
15 what I thought was going to happen. I expected that
16 when people were in a moment of stress, in doubled-up
17 situations at home for 24 hours, they would come into
18 the shelter system more. But I think the combination
19 of people banding together during an emergency, and
20 even more importantly, the federal income support
21 that made it financially viable for people to stay in
22 their homes, really dropped intake.

23 So at the start of the Administration,
24 the census was about 45,000 people, as I say, really
25 driven by that drop in intake during the pandemic.

3 We have climbed up since then. We are
4 still at about 3,000 people below where we were at
5 the start of the pandemic, so at about 56,000, give
6 or take, non-asylum seekers in the DHS system. So,
7 yes, it is up, but I think it is some of the
8 increases sort of a resumption to where we were
9 before, as opposed to an increase.

10 We have been very aggressively trying to
11 connect people to subsidized exits. In Calendar Year
12 2024, we moved about 16,500 households from shelter
13 into subsidized exits. That was a 38% increase from
14 where we were the previous year. So we are really,
15 really focused on helping people connect back to
16 permanent housing. But what I think we're also seeing
17 is that there is a high need in the community. So
18 intake remains strong across all populations. And,
19 because of that, although we have really had these
20 terrific exit numbers, what we've done is slow the
21 rate of growth as opposed to actually reducing the
22 shelter census as much as I would like. But we're not
23 done yet. We're going to keep trying.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you keep track of
25 how many people are coming into the system because
they've been evicted?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah, we do look
4 at reasons for homelessness. The data is better on
5 the families with children side than they are for
6 single adults. People coming in as a result of a
7 formal eviction is relatively low. It's about 10%.
8 That's actually a pre-asylum number, because the
9 asylum numbers sort of inflate the denominator. So
right now, it's only about 4%.

10 The two primary drivers for shelter entry
11 on the families with children's side are domestic
12 violence and what we call discord. And what that
13 typically looks like is relatively young people who
14 have been living with family, and a baby or a second
15 baby just adds one too many people to the household,
16 and that puts a lot of strain on them, and they enter
17 the shelter system.

18 But in many of those cases, the head of
19 household who is coming to the shelter system has
20 never had a lease of their own.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, in the first two
22 months of 2025, the non-asylum seeker population in
23 DHS shelters decreased by almost 2,000 to nearly or
24 nearly 3.5%. What do you attribute the rapid decline
25

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3 over such a short period of time, and did these
4 individuals exit to permanent housing?

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So I'm not 100%
6 sure exactly what data you're looking at. I'd be
7 happy to sit down offline and go through it, but I
8 think there are a couple of things: One is, as I
9 mentioned, we have been very, very focused on exits,
10 and the first part of this calendar year, we've had
11 terrific exit numbers. We've continued to focus on
12 helping people move out, and we're seeing the results
13 of our work as a full agency group. The other thing I
14 would say is that there's some seasonal pattern,
15 particularly in families with children intakes. It
16 tends to be low in the winter and picks up in the
17 summer, so that may be a piece of what you're seeing
18 as well.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But of the folks that
20 are leaving, do you know what percentage are leaving
21 for permanent housing?

22 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Specifically for
23 the non-asylum population, you're asking?

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes. Most
overwhelmingly, people leave, particularly those with

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3 families with children, for permanent housing, and
4 most of these are subsidized exits.

5 On the adult system, it's a slightly more
6 complicated dynamic. That's a population that tends
7 to enter and exit with a little bit more frequency.

8 Administrator Carter, anything you'd like
9 to add?

10 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thanks,
11 Commissioner.

12 Families of children typically move to
13 permanency with subsidies, like you said. I think the
14 fluidity of a single adult system is because they do
15 a lot more couch surfing, and they come back to us
16 when things kind of go a little bit more downhill.
17 So, they are kind of fluid as they come to us, but
18 families do move to permanency using our subsidies.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and just to
20 clarify, the data is coming from the open data
21 between January 1st and February 28th?

22 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Okay, we will
23 certainly take a look at that and make sure that--
24 I'm confident in the answers that I just gave you,
25 but if there are any nuances that we need to add to
that, we'll circle back.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Great, thank you so
4 much, Commissioner.

5 In March of this year, DHS announced a
6 new pilot program, Enhanced Client Placement Support,
7 which would allow DHS to evict shelter residents who
8 are out of compliance with certain rules. DHS has
9 said that this program is designed to build a culture
10 of accountability. However, many advocates have
11 expressed alarm that the policy would lead to
12 increased street homelessness. What is the budget for
13 this program, and where are the funds allocated in
14 HRA's budget, and in which fiscal years?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm going to
16 start. And then I'm going to pass it over to
17 Administrator Carter.

18 This will be run out of our Shelter
19 Operations team, with support from the DSS Office of
20 Legal Affairs. I have headcount numbers. I don't have
21 exact dollars. We can certainly circle back with
22 that.

23 I would like Administrator Carter to
24 really talk about the program and how we see it
25 working, because we absolutely do not intend this to
increase unsheltered homelessness. We think this is

something where we're anticipating very high levels of engagement and control. If we saw anything like that, it would be a real issue for us, and we would course-correct it.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thanks, Commissioner.

One of the things we were really intentional about was looking at this as client support, not sanctions. So if we are in the pilot seeing lots of discontinuities, then we're doing something wrong, right?

So, the idea behind this is that when we really thought about it, I was here in DHS, where we had sanctions and client responsibility. It was really about, you know, clients. We have now revamped it to ensure accountability for us, DHS, providers, and clients. So, it's a three-prong program, and it's not that, "You're not doing something right, clients", right?

We want to hold our providers accountable. We want to hold DHS and the clients accountable, but we also want to ensure that our providers support the clients in exiting shelter to permanency. So that's the goal. The goal is not to

put people on the street, right? If I'm seeing that, then we are failing, right?

So, right now we're in a training stage. We're not implementing until July, because we want to make sure that we've trained ourselves up. We have hired staff, and now we have a team at DHS that includes a variety of staff and our legal partners at DSS. They are really looking at what work needs to be done to support providers, so they know what they have to do. We have stages of housing that they should be going through, and they should document each stage as it happens. We are doing lots of work on the ground in our provider spaces that we are seeing, well, how do you really do independent living plans? Are you really doing the work? You mentioned that clients aren't searching, but have we informed them? Have we shown them? That's the work that we are doing. So, you know, discontinuity is the last thing I want to see happen.

The other piece to it that we want to do is to keep our facilities safe. So, there's a gross misconduct piece of it, right? We want to reduce gross misconduct, and we want to not reduce discontinuity. That's the absolute goal.

3 So, if we've done the training and worked
4 with providers, but they haven't moved towards
5 discontinuing clients, then they won't be able to
6 discontinue clients because we haven't done the work,
7 right?

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm.

9 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, that's the
10 first thing to remember. We're holding everyone
11 accountable in this program.

12 So, if they're not doing it, I'm looking
13 at the team, saying, "You're not doing the work,
14 too", right? So, it's a whole comprehensive program.
15 If we have not done the work, that's one piece. But
16 if we have done the work, and there's a hole, then we
17 have to plug that hole. We will support providers. We
18 have an Office of Accountability that will guide
19 providers towards a specific track, helping them
20 focus on what they need to do.

21 If we do get to a discontinuance, there's
22 a first level. There are conferences that will
23 happen. We'll escalate that. We'll look at whether
24 the apartment is really suitable, and what that means
25 is whether they can afford the rent. Is there a
safety issue? Is it an apartment that they can

1 actually move into, because it's not, you know, can
2 you use that apartment? Is it safe, right? So it's
3 not just, "You're going to do this," so we have a
4 whole process.
5

6 We are evaluating throughout the entire
7 year whether we have to tweak anything. Our
8 expectation, and we've talked a lot about it in this
9 program, about the idea of what happened years ago,
10 that's not what we want to replicate. So, the idea is
11 not to sanction, but move to permanency. That's the
12 idea of this program.

13 So, for me, ECPS is not about putting
14 people on the street. If that's happening, we have
15 failed. So, the goal is to move people to permanency.
16 That's the goal of the program.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, so what is the
18 actual budget?

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm gonna need
20 to circle back with you on that. I know we have
21 headcount numbers.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Could you also
23 add where the funds are allocated in the budget and
24 for which fiscal years?

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And include the budget
4 for implementation as well as the analysis of the
5 program, which, you know, Ms. Carter just kind of
6 went through.

7 At the Preliminary Budget Hearing, you
8 testified that in order for a shelter resident to be
9 evicted, there will need to be several instances of
10 gross misconduct.

11 Can you further explain what constitutes
12 gross misconduct and what steps DHS takes to address
13 more minor misconduct before pursuing eviction? I
14 think we've heard a little bit about it, but I would
15 love to hear your definition of gross misconduct and
16 the number of instances you're aware of.

17 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, gross
18 misconduct is a different, you know, levels of gross
19 misconduct are something egregious, right? That's
20 where we say gross misconduct. It is not, you know, a
21 typical fight. It is something we consider on a case-
22 by-case basis, but every day, we have situations that
23 arise that we discuss in conferences. Everything is
24 not, "We're gonna discontinue." The idea is, "Let's
25 do case conferences; let's course correct. Let's make

sure that we can help make a difference and keep our clients in our shelter system."

But it's supporting our clients and providers in understanding how we de-escalate situations before they reach a point where we consider discontinuation.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But it is your policy - Do you have an example of what you would constitute gross misconduct?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Off the top of my head, what would I think about? It is something that's a violent act. It is something that puts the health and safety of other clients at risk. It is something where we see firearms. That's the type of gross misconduct, that's what I'm thinking about.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: And if I could chime in. We track the number of serious incidents in our shelter system, and the number of serious violent incidents in the shelter system is going down, but we also know that this is a concern for clients, right? People want and deserve to feel safe in a place where they are receiving emergency shelter.

We are looking at a broad spectrum of ways that we can improve and strengthen the safety of

the shelter system. This is a part of that. It is training for security guards, both DHS peace officers and contracted security guards. And it is investing in the kind of trauma-informed care and de-escalation that Administrator Carter mentioned. Right?

So, across the board, the question is how to ensure that someone facing a moment of trauma and needing emergency shelter has a safe place to stay. At the end of the day, holding people who are not engaging with us accountable for their actions makes things safer for everybody.

But as Administrator Carter noted, there will be multiple instances and points of engagement so that nobody is going to be sanctioned on day one.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And would that look different in a regular shelter with the general population than it would in a shelter that houses individuals with similar serious mental health issues?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We are not piloting this in mental health shelters.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Okay, I appreciate that. Okay.

3 So we've heard reports from many
4 providers that many of the 19 shelters that are
5 slated to be a part of this pilot are understaffed.
6 One of the shelters is budgeted for six case managers
7 and two housing specialists, but currently has only
8 one case manager and no housing specialist.

9 Why is the City targeting people residing
10 in shelters when there are no adequate staff to
11 assist them?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I think that
13 really speaks to the provider accountability aspect
14 of this, and frankly, the DHS accountability aspect
15 of this.

16 If there are insufficient staff to engage
17 with clients, then no client is going to experience
18 any kind of consequence here, and our focus is going
19 to be on making sure that DHS is appropriately
20 working with the shelter to make sure that they are
21 adhering to their contract terms.

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you,
23 Commissioner. I was about to say the same thing,
24 right?

25 We expect that the 19 sites that are in
this pilot will be able to actually do what we want

1
2 them to do, and if they don't have, you know, they're
3 not ready to do that starting July, then we're not
4 going to be discontinued. We want to make sure that
5 they're adequately resourced to move towards this.

6 So, there's work happening now with
7 training and assessing their resources—working with
8 the providers to see if they're ready. So, we're
9 doing some upstream work for these facilities.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, why not just
11 create, you know, some steps to ensure that the
12 providers are doing the work that they're contracted
13 to do and encourage the clients to follow the
14 treatment plans?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Frankly, that is
16 the premise of the work that we do day in, day out.
17 We have contract terms. We do contract monitoring.
18 Clients are expected to adhere to independent living
19 plans. That is the basic nature of the work that we
20 do, and we continue to do it, and we will continue to
21 do it. Understanding, though, that everybody, whether
22 it is DHS staff, DHS as an agency, providers,
23 clients, people have competing priorities, and
24 sometimes being told, "This is what we expect of
25 you," gets us a lot of the way there, but not all of

the way there. So we are looking for ways to ensure that all of us are held accountable to the standards we want.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Understood, but I think the training is really key, right? Because we want to make sure that we are hiring staff that is capable of, you know, destabilizing and bringing on, you know, controlling a situation, and that's not always the case, right? So I worry when we are relying on others to determine what gross misconduct is, right? How do they define gross misconduct, as opposed to somebody-- I mean, I'm not saying that people aren't difficult, right? I mean, it is what it is. But if I work in a daycare center, and I know that I may encounter a little biter, it doesn't mean that I'm going to bite back, right?

Oftentimes, because the staff is not adequately trained or educated in social services or mental health issues, they may not recognize what a mental breakdown looks like as opposed to somebody just being, you know, nasty.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Council Member, I agree with you, absolutely.

The training piece of it is critical. And the fact that we have invested in DHS and DSS legal resources here means that there will be eyes on this every step of the way. So if we think a provider is moving towards action that is not inconsistent with our standards, then any consequences for the client are stopped, and we go back to the Provider Accountability Act.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, we don't want this to become a punitive measure for...

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: It is not...

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: individuals who have differences in that type of setting.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Absolutely.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: The last piece I would add is that we have a structured training program for this, right? We have put together training in a structured way. We are keeping track of who's doing it. There are makeup sessions for those who have missed it. Our Health Services Offices are involved. There's a lot of work that's happening to train just to make sure that we're hitting those points that you're making.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I believe you. It's
4 just that your agency is pretty big, and it's really
5 difficult to control every aspect of human behavior,
6 and that includes you, you know, our staff as well.

7 I'll ask a couple more questions, then
8 let the Members ask theirs, and I'll come back
9 around.

10 The Executive Plan includes an additional
11 \$77.8 million in City and State funding for cash
12 assistance in FY25, only increasing the cash budget,
13 the (INAUDIBLE) budget for Fiscal Year 2025 to \$2.65
14 billion, but the budget for cash assistance in Fiscal
15 Year 2026 is \$1.65 billion, \$1 billion less than the
16 budget in the current year. How was the amount of
17 additional funding for Fiscal Year 2025 determined?
18 Is that funding added for a specific population, and
19 if so, which one?

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
21 Council Member.

22 It's not for a specific population. We're
23 monitoring utilization and spending trends with OMB
24 and adding as needed to ensure we have sufficient
25 funds to get through the fiscal year. And we will
continue to engage in that process into FY26.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is the \$77.8 million
4 increase in funding within the current fiscal year an
5 estimate of the need for the whole year, or do you
6 expect to add more funding in the adopted budget?

7 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We anticipate
8 that this will get us through the end of the fiscal
9 year, but we will certainly monitor that closely.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and how much was
11 actually spent on cash assistance in FY24?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Hold on, let us
13 pull that number.

14 Cash assistance in FY24 was just short of
15 \$ 2.4 billion. That's a gross number, both City tax
16 levy and other funding sources.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: In Fiscal Year 2026,
18 for the preliminary budget response, the Council
19 called on the Administration to address the under-
20 budgeting in the baseline for cash assistance.
21 However, it was not addressed in the Executive Plan.

22 Does HRA realistically expect the cash
23 assistance expenditures to be \$1 billion less than
24 next year in the current fiscal year?

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: There are
reasonable points of uncertainty in exactly how much

we will spend in the balance between city, state, and federal funds. We work very closely with OMB to realign as needed.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'm trying to just jump through some of these more important questions.

ACS stated that the City is facing a \$1 billion deficit in funding for child care vouchers through the end of the next federal fiscal year. As a result of the deficit last week, ACS has paused new family enrollment into the program, instead placing families on a wait list. The agency has indicated that growth in both population and state-mandated rate increases for childcare vouchers are the drivers of the funding deficit and that they anticipate a significant uptick in cash assistance clients utilizing vouchers due to the reinstatement of work requirements.

When did HRA resume the mandatory work requirements for cash assistance clients? And was this immediately applicable to all clients on cash assistance, or was there a phase-in over a period of time?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We are in the
4 very earliest days of re-rolling out the federally
5 mandated work requirements. It has really just begun,
6 so no, it was not implemented across the board. But
7 I'm going to ask Administrator French to give some
8 more details.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect.

10 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Sure. Thank you,
11 Commissioner.

12 So yes, at the very end of April, we
13 restarted the mandatory engagement work requirements
14 for cash assistance clients. So what that means right
15 now is for all new applicants, during their
16 application process and the interview, they will be
17 assessed for their employability, and if they're
18 deemed to be employable, we'll connect them to the
19 appropriate services we have, whether it's our career
20 services programs, for individuals looking for
21 workforce development, for individuals who may have a
22 medical or mental health barrier to employment, we'll
23 connect them to our We Care Program. For existing
24 clients, we've started the process of calling them
25 back in, but that will roll out through the end of
2025. So it is a phased approach that we're taking.

1 Most cases and individuals will be engaged during
2 their renewal period when they have to do an
3 interview. We will determine if they're still deemed
4 employable, and they will then be referred as
5 appropriate to the right services. So it's very much
6 a phased-in approach. As part of that, we will see an
7 uptick in the utilization of child care vouchers as
8 we are...

9
10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We will, but have we
11 started to see that?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We've just begun...

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

14 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: So we have not
15 begun. Right now, there are about 27,000 child care
16 vouchers being utilized over the next sort of year
17 and a half. So, we'll see that number steadily
18 increase until we hit a sort of plateau, probably
19 around 63,000 vouchers that will be utilized. That
20 is higher than our pre-COVID number for a couple of
21 different reasons. First, our caseload has increased
22 since 2019 and early 2020. Additionally, state
23 changes to childcare eligibility for those eligible
24 for mandatory vouchers have allowed them to retain
25 childcare for longer periods than before.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The City's family
4 homelessness vouchers—okay, so the Executive Plan
5 includes an additional \$176.6 million in City funds
6 for FY25. This new need brings the total CityFHEPS
7 Fiscal 2025 Budget to \$1.27 billion. Yet, the budget
8 in FY26 and the out years is currently approximately
9 \$540 million less.

10 Why was the additional funding needed in
11 FY25, and how was this amount determined?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
13 Council Member.

14 We've been very aggressively moving
15 families and individuals out of shelter with
16 CityFHEPS. The CityFHEPS program now serves over
17 55,000 households, making it the largest rental
18 subsidy program in the country, but for NYCHA's
19 Section 8 program. Everybody else's Section 8 program
20 is smaller than ours. The federal government has
21 really abdicated its responsibility even before the
22 current situation. The federal government has really
23 abdicated its responsibility to provide rental
24 assistance, and the City has stepped in to do that.

25 The rapid growth in the program has led
to a very rapid increase in costs. As I think I

mentioned earlier, we've seen a fivefold increase in spending in about four years. The growth in the program largely drives that, although rents have also gone up during that time period.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. How much of that fund has been spent to date in FY25 on CityFHEPS, and how much was spent in FY24?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: In FY24, we spent \$833.7 million. In FY25 through March, we spent \$907.5 million.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, \$907.5 million.

As part of the fiscal year FY26 preliminary budget response, the Council called on the Administration to add \$25 million to address CityFHEPS administrative barriers and to provide funding to address the chronic under-budgeting of the CityFHEPS baseline. However the additional funding was included in the Executive Plan for either proposal. The call to address the under-budgeting of the baseline has been raised in the past, and it continues to be a concern to the Council. Given the actual spending last year and this year, are we well above the budget in fiscal year FY26 and beyond, or

is HRA advocating for an increase to the baseline budget?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So certainly our FY25 spending is greater than the FY26 baseline. We're working very closely with OMB, and we'll realign as needed.

With respect to operations, I believe we have taken significant steps internally to ensure CityFHEPS operates as efficiently as possible. And the numbers really bear us out. I talked about the really significant increase in growth in the program, the increase in the number of people exiting shelter with CityFHEPS, and I think that is very much due to the fact that we have really, as an agency, come together to focus on CityFHEPS operations. We have a four-prong work plan that we meet on regularly, for exiting households out of the shelter. We focus on getting vouchers into people's hands, ensuring that anyone potentially eligible for a voucher has access to one. We think about housing supply. It's not traditionally the role of the social service agency to think about housing supply, but in a city with a 1.4% vacancy rate, if we don't, people aren't moving, so we do that. The third work stream ensures that our

providers have all the necessary tools to operate as efficiently as possible. That has been training and creating new materials. We now have our Concierge Team, which sends DHS staff to struggling shelters for four-week stints, embedding them to help improve move-out numbers. We also ensure that our processes are as streamlined internally as possible. For instance, one of the things we do before someone moves out with CityFHEPS is check all the administrative records, right? Does the building have violations? Is it owned by the person who claims to own it? Things like that. And our staff used to do all of that manually. Literally, they'd go on the HPD website and then the DOB website, and it took a long time. We've now automated parts of that process, reducing it from a week to 24 hours. So, there are dozens and dozens of projects leading up to that. Still, I think the bottom line is, as I mentioned earlier, a 38% increase in the number of households exiting shelter to subsidize placement, because we have been looking across the agency at everything that we need to do.

3 I appreciate the Council's advocacy for
4 agency resources, and I believe we are making
5 significant progress in this area.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that.

7 I'm going to allow my colleagues to ask
8 questions. Please take into consideration that they
9 have other places to be, and then I will come back
10 around.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Deputy
12 Speaker. We have questions from Council Member
13 Restler, followed by Council Member Salaam.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you both,
15 Chairs Brannan and Ayala. You both do a phenomenal
16 job. And thank you, Commissioner Park, for being with
17 us today. And, Team, it's always good to see you. I
18 appreciated your testimony today.

19 Is it fair to say that the Committee
20 markups on the budget reconciliation process in the
21 House, that the cuts to food stamps and the cuts to
22 Medicaid would be devastating for New Yorkers?

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Catastrophic?

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. We have not
4 heard that from the Mayor, or frankly, from anybody
5 on the other side of City Hall, so I just appreciate
6 you speaking up and speaking out for low-income New
7 Yorkers, people who would suffer profoundly if these
8 cuts come to fruition. There was a news alert while
9 you were testifying that they are delaying the Budget
10 Committee vote. And that is only because the far
11 right within the House is pushing for deeper cuts
12 that would be even worse for the people that we all
13 care about.

14 I would like to understand how the
15 proposal, currently working its way through the
16 House, would impact New York. So, \$300 billion in
17 proposed cuts to food stamps, to SNAP, and part of
18 the way that they are looking to have the states pay
19 more, is based on the error rate of food stamp
20 processing. And my understanding is that in New York,
21 we are at an approximate 12% error rate? Is that
22 roughly accurate for the state?

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah, that is
24 the right ballpark.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And slightly
higher for the City?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And we represent
5 about two-thirds of the food stamp cases statewide?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And so, for an
8 error rate that's north of 10%, what they're planning
9 is that we would be on the hook for 25% of the food
10 stamp payments that the federal government currently
11 covers. Is that accurate?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes. With the
13 caveat, obviously, that this is very much a moving
14 target.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: It's fluid.

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We're...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yeah, understood.

18 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We're reading
19 all the same things you're reading.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yeah, I just want
21 to make sure that we all understand what the impacts
22 are.

23 So you testified, and we all know it's
24 about \$5 billion in food stamp funding that we're
25 talking about overall. So if we were on the hook as a
state for 25% of it, we're talking about a \$1.25

(sic) or so roughly ballpark fluid process. Nothing's been made, nothing's even been voted out of the House, let alone the Senate, but we're talking about a billion-dollar-plus cost shift onto New York City or loss of food stamps.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah. But I'd also like to take a minute to talk about the error rate process. It is not possible to get more wonky than this, but I think it is incredibly important for people to...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I agree.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: understand how these error rates are calculated.

On a monthly basis, they pull a sample of seven, literally seven. We talked about the size of our SNAP program. They pull this tiny sample of cases. (TIMER)

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm already out of time.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: And my colleagues will correct me if I get any of this wrong, because it is very complicated, but it is a case that is active. That doesn't mean a case that was processed in that month. So when you have an

1 issue, for example, there was a tech glitch, and a
2 notice didn't go out eight months ago. And that
3 happens sometimes, it's on our end, sometimes it's on
4 the State's end. Things happen. A notice didn't go
5 out. The fact that notices didn't go out for a month
6 affects an entire year's worth of those samples on
7 the error rates. They also count client error rates
8 and agency error rates exactly the same way.
9

10 Administrator French or Jill, anything
11 you wanna add on?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, that is
13 correct. It is a very small sample that isn't
14 representative of the actual real-time current state
15 of what's actually happening in the program.

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So one of the
17 things that I think is incredibly important is if and
18 when we are talking about these unbelievably high
19 stakes decisions based on this very poor quality data
20 point, like that is very disturbing to me.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I agree with
22 that. I think that the other reality that we will be
23 facing, if this is enacted, is that there's gonna be
24 enormous pressure on you to crack down on every
25 single food stamp recipient that may have gotten

\$3.00 extra or \$5.00 extra, unintentionally or whatever the case may be, to drop that error rate because there's a billion+ dollars at risk in funding. So we're gonna see aggressive fraud prevention tactics that make it harder for people to get the benefits that they need. And I think a return to the kind of Bloomberg/Giuliani era approach on this, because you won't have a choice to try and protect City funding.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: What I will say about the error rate is our focus isn't on the individual clients, right, and being punitive to the clients. What we're doing internally, because we do want our error rate to be lower, because we wanna get it right first time... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yeah, but I do think that's the history of the agency, I don't think that's the current policies. I'm not criticizing you all. I do think that ten years ago, during the Bloomberg and Giuliano eras, that was how things were approached. And I think you're gonna see a return to that approach based on the way this funding is structured.

3 I'm out of time, but I'm deeply concerned
4 about legal immigrants accessing food stamps, as is
5 proposed in the House bill, that legal immigrants,
6 folks who are documented immigrants, would not have
7 access to food stamps, as in their proposals.

8 I'd love for you to provide estimates on
9 the number of people that could be potentially
10 impacted by that here in New York City, considering
11 40% of our population is foreign-born.

12 I am deeply concerned about how this
13 impacts specific geographies. Have you done any
14 modeling for Congressman Malliotakis' district for
15 how many food stamp recipients are at risk of losing
16 their food stamps, and how many Medicaid recipients
17 could be at risk of losing their Medicaid for her
18 district in particular?

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
20 Council Member.

21 With respect to the immigration question,
22 we don't have that answer with us. We can take a look
23 at what we can provide. I will note that SNAP has
24 very stringent rules already that you have to be in
25 the country legally for five years before you're able
to access SNAP. So limited, certainly, and recent

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3 immigrant utilization there. OTDA (Office of
4 Temporary and Disability Assistance) has put out
5 excellent one-pagers on SNAP utilization by
6 congressional district. Happy to share those with
7 you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay, and
9 Medicaid impacts?

10 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I believe we
11 have a similar documentation on Medicaid as well.
12 Happy to share all of that with the Committee. As I
13 mentioned in my testimony, we've been busy working
14 with stakeholders to ensure they have the necessary
15 materials to discuss the impact of these benefit
16 programs by district and different parts of the
17 state.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm a board
20 member of the New York Public Welfare Association,
21 making sure that we're partnering with my Upstate
22 counterparts, knowing that they have different access
23 and...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm out of time,
25 I'm in trouble. So, just briefly, a lightning round:
I'm grateful for your advocacy. I think you're

speaking up in a bold and clear way, and it's really important, and I want to thank you for it.

Administrator French, could we seek, like, monthly updates from you on the child care voucher utilization so we understand what we're planning and preparing for? Is that a reasonable expectation?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I can follow up on what a right time frame would be, but we are tracking it, so we'll follow up with what...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay.

We will, and then lastly, I know my colleagues have raised this, but we painstakingly negotiated \$215 million in additional FEPS funding in City of Yes. It's not in the budget. Do you support it being included in the adopted budget?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So the CityFEPS budget has grown very substantially. We've added hundreds of millions this year.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yes.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm going to need to circle back with OMB colleagues and others on exactly how things are being added and counted towards different commitments. But what I will say is

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3 we are passionately committed to the CityFHEPS
4 program and support all resources.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'd love to work
6 with you to get OMB to do the right thing. Thank you
7 very much, Chairs.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Before we
9 move to our set of questions, I want to acknowledge
10 that we have been joined by Council Members Williams
11 and Moya on Zoom. I also want to welcome to the
12 People's House, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School.
13 Thank you for joining us today.

14 We are now going to turn to...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Mr. Chairman, I'm
16 sorry...

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Oh, go ahead.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: I just wanted to
19 take this opportunity to thank you and to thank
20 Deputy Speaker Ayala, quickly, for just an
21 interruption because I'm here with my niece, who is
22 part of the school that's here today at Our Lady of
23 Mercy. And we also have Mr. Duffy, and I think that
24 this is such a great opportunity for them to see
25 government at work and see how hard all of the

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3 council members and colleagues have been working
4 here.

5 So thank you, Annabel, and thank you to
6 all the kids who are here today. Thank you, Chair,
7 and thank you to Deputy Speaker Ayalla for allowing
8 the interruption.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thanks for visiting
10 us today, guys.

11 Okay, we are now going to turn to
12 Council Member Salaam, followed by Council Member
13 Avilés.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, Chair,
15 and good morning.

16 So the Executive Plan added 35 outreach
17 positions and \$9 million for subway outreach. How
18 many of these outreach workers are stationed in
19 Harlem subway hubs such as 125 Street? You know,
20 Harlem has been a high-contact area for unsheltered
21 individuals. How is DHS ensuring adequate coverage
22 uptown?

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
24 Council Member. I'm going to start, and I'll pass to
25 Administrator Carter.

We work both with our contracted outreach providers and the DHS staff. Generally, individuals, whether they're contracted or DHS staff, aren't assigned to one given station. We have the largest outreach program in the country, but in total, it is about 400 people. So, given the size and scope of New York City, we do move people around through the system. But we look at data based on what we hear from our outreach teams, what we see on 311, reports we get from other sources, and we make sure that we are directing resources to places that we know have a higher concentration, and certainly parts of East Harlem fall in that category.

But, Administrator Carter, would you like to add on?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you, Commissioner.

Council Member, to your question about being assigned, what we do with our outreach teams is that they are rotating throughout the city and throughout the boroughs. In terms of the subways, our outreach teams are assigned based on data and 311 calls.

And so, we are looking at the big picture of the entire city. We do have our Manhattan outreach teams that are in Manhattan throughout, and so if there is a influx of where their outreach teams and members are needed, then we will be able to look at the data and have them go there.

Also, 311 is one of the biggest drivers of where we're going, and so we're looking at that data to drive our teams around. So that's how we get that.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Yeah, I'd definitely like some follow-up on specifically Harlem, seeing that that hub is such a, you know, highly challenging area.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Mm-hmm.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: I want to move to peace officers and misconduct. In April 2024, New York Focus released a report about DHS peace officers who provide shelter security. The article focused on peace officer misconduct and detailed DHS's failure to discipline peace officers, taking six months or more to suspend officers found guilty of misconduct. But the suspended officers are often able to return a month later.

The article also mentioned that peace officers have been trained with the NYPD since 2017. Can you tell me more about the training the peace officers received? Do you think that the NYPD (TIMER) training is appropriate for this role?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you.

DHS actually has our own training academy that is licensed by New York State, and so there is, for us, it's our comprehensive training academy where we train DHS police officers, and then we have our deputy commissioner that is able to, with her staff, look at what's happening in terms of disciplinary for police officers.

There is absolutely oversight of what's happening with police officers. They are standards of expectations of behaviors. They do de-escalation training. They do conflict resolution. And so, they go through that, you know, looking at what's happening there in terms of disciplinary.

We are licensed by the state. Then they have eight hours of training that's happening within our police officers' training process. And so, we are comprehensively trained. It is on-site at our academy where we do the training.

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: If I could just
4 add on to that?

5 The DHS peace officers were under the
6 auspices of the NYPD from 2017 until 2020. In 2020,
7 the NYPD's involvement with the DHS security officers
8 ended, and we have since managed that entirely on our
9 own. Administrator Carter noted that we have our own
10 training academy with a focus on trauma-informed
11 care.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Gotcha. Just a
13 follow-up in terms of when there are instances of
14 misconduct, how are residents who are sheltering able
15 to report those instances of misconduct?

16 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you.

17 So, every provider and every resident
18 that we shelter has the opportunity to make reports
19 to either the shelter director or straight to my
20 team. When that happens, we follow up with the
21 directors and visit the sites to see what's going on.
22 So, there's an opportunity for them to investigate
23 whatever the reports are.

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We also have the
25 Ombudsman's Office, where people can report if

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3 they're not comfortable reporting directly to shelter
4 staff.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: And just a final
6 follow-up, how many reports of misconduct did DHS
7 receive in Fiscal Year 2024, and how many have you
8 received so far in Fiscal Year 2025? How many of
9 these instances have been committed by repeat
10 offenders and such?

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: We'll get back to
12 you with those numbers.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Alright, thank
14 you. Thank you, Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council
16 Member. Now we have questions from Council Member
17 Avilés, followed by Council Member Stevens.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: (BACKGROUND NOISE)
19 Excuse me, just making sure everybody's awake in the
20 chamber. Thank you, Chairs.

21 I'd like a quick follow-up on Council
22 Member Salaam's questioning. If you could also
23 include how many of those have resulted in
24 disciplinary action, that would be a very helpful
25 data point for that group of questioning.

I'd like to take a quick switch to DSS's protocol around immigration agents who are permitted into DSS facilities.

As you are aware, in February 2025, there was a memo issued to DSS employees and contracted providers that gave broad discretion and on compliance with federal immigration agents, saying, "If at any time you reasonably feel threatened or fear for your safety or the safety of others around you, you should give the officer the information they have asked for or let them enter the site." Another version of that memo was distributed shortly after, without the statement.

Is DSS's position that employees and contracted providers should, under some circumstances, comply with immigration agents even if they don't have a warrant?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Our position, which is the City's position, and we have trained extensively with our shelter providers, is that non-local law enforcement are allowed on-site only with a signed judicial warrant. We have had a relatively small number of instances of non-local law enforcement coming to DHS shelters. I am very

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3 grateful to the frontline staff who managed those
4 very challenging situations very, very well. They
5 were in direct contact with the DSS legal team, and
6 the policy of access with a warrant only has been,
7 thus far, implemented very carefully.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you,
9 Commissioner.

10 So I was just going to ask if you would
11 just, for the record, I know we've had a lot of
12 conversations about this, just briefly walk through
13 the protocol when immigration agents show up at a DSS
14 site.

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Sure. If non-
16 local law enforcement, and I'm using that term
17 broadly, because we've seen...

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yes.

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: a fairly broad
20 set of law enforcement entities. We ask for
21 identification. We will then ask for-- and we are
22 typically talking about provider staff.
23 Overwhelmingly, our shelters are operated by
24 providers. Staff are instructed to (TIMER) notify DHS
25 and DSS legal immediately that there is non-local law
enforcement on-site. We ask to see a warrant, and law

enforcement's not allowed on-site without a warrant.

If they are refusing even to provide identification, at that point, the direction is that they should deny access even to entering the building. We stop the interaction there, and if necessary, the direction is to call 911.

We do not allow anybody on-site into any of our shelters without appropriate identification. In all instances, we want people to be in communication with DSS and DHS staff and DSS legal. Again, the frontline staff who have had to confront this very challenging situation have handled things in an exemplary fashion. Certainly, if we do receive a signed judicial warrant, then law enforcement is allowed on-site.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you.

You mentioned there have been a few cases. Do you know how many specifically there have been of ICE attempting to enter DSS sites since the change in the federal administration this year?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I want to say it's about six incidents. Six incidents.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Can you tell us, and you can get back to us, which boroughs those

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3 occurred in, and in how many instances they were
4 permitted to enter the location?

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'll need to get
6 back to you on the borough. I can tell you there's
7 been one arrest.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it. Thank you
9 so much. And I think I'm out of time. Can I have one
10 more?

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: (INAUDIBLE)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay. Forgive me,
13 you may have discussed this earlier. We're going to
14 revisit the \$215 million around CityFHEPS.

15 I heard you say that there was much more
16 added to the program. I was curious specifically
17 about where we could see the \$215 million that was
18 negotiated and added in, such as in the line item
19 accounting of the program.

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So in FY25,
21 we've had hundreds of millions of dollars added to
22 the CityFHEPS budget. It's more or less doubled. I
23 need to consult with my OMB colleagues on how they
24 are accounting for that in alignment with the City of
25 Yes commitment.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, just to note,
4 I think my colleagues may have said that, it pains us
5 that we have added resources to become a slush fund
6 for other things potentially. So that's why we are so
7 dogged in making sure that we see the addition of the
8 resources, because this would not be the only
9 instance where the Administration has wanted to put
10 the resources that we fought very hard to give
11 agencies for very specific work to other purposes.

12 So I appreciate you, and thank you.

13 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Always happy to
14 do the follow-up. Just to clarify, certainly no slush
15 fund. The dollars I was talking about were
16 specifically for CityFHEPS spending.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we have
18 questions from Council Member Louis.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair.
20 Good to see you, Commissioner, and your team.

21 I have a quick question about burial
22 assistance. HRA currently has a \$3,400 cap on funeral
23 and burial reimbursements, which is outdated and
24 insufficient, as we've discussed with the agency in
25 the past.

Has there been any movement in the FY26 Executive Plan to raise the ceiling to match today's costs, and if not, how does the Administration justify this stagnation, given that most funeral services in New York City exceed \$5,000? Will HRA consider covering the cost differential for families in its greatest need? And, of course, the state has a component to this, but it would be beneficial to understand the Administration's approach to addressing this issue for low-income families.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you, Council Member. I hear the concern. I will be honest that this is not something that we have been working on thus far. We can certainly discuss it during the adoption process.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Okay, it would be good to hear about it before OMB gets here so we could understand what the Administration is thinking about and how much you're thinking to add in for the differential component.

And just wanted to give you a heads up, we never got a follow-up from DSS or DHS regarding the child that died due to fentanyl at the Women in Need (WIN) shelter, so it would be good to have a

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3 conversation with someone else on your team at a
4 higher level.

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Apologies for
6 any lack of follow-through. We're happy to follow-up
7 offline. Certainly, that's not something that we
8 should put on the record.

9 And just to be clear on the burial costs,
10 it has not been something that we have been modeling
11 thus far. If you have a particular proposal you'd
12 like us to take a look at, we're happy to do that.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Okay, thank you.
14 Thank you, Chairs.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I have a question
16 from Council Member Banks, Chair of our Public
17 Housing Committee. He had to leave.

18 In Council Member Banks' district, it
19 appears DHS is planning to convert two formerly
20 designated migrant shelters into a 112-bed shelter
21 for single men. This is at 272 and 268 Williams
22 Avenue. The question is, how is the Agency conducting
23 community outreach regarding these changes?
24 Specifically, what efforts are being made to inform
25 residents, gather their feedback, and understand the

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3 community's perspective on how these transitions may
4 impact the neighborhood?

5 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you. And
6 we can certainly follow-up offline on specific
7 addresses, but generally with respect to shelter
8 citing, our commitment is to make sure that we have
9 sufficient shelter to meet our legal and moral
10 mandate to provide shelter to all in need, and we are
11 very aggressively looking to get out of paying hotel
12 rates, paying a night by night rate. We're in more
13 than 16,000 hotel rooms. It is a significant expense
14 for the City, so we are looking into it. Although we
15 want to decrease the size of the shelter census, it
16 is also a priority for us to reduce the number of
17 hotels and replace them with contracted shelters.
18 Occasionally, we do look at converting hotels. Still,
19 generally speaking, our policy is that we are looking
20 at the need for shelter space, looking at what
21 already exists in the community, and accepting
22 proposals through our open-ended RFP. As we go
23 through the process, there's a limited amount of
24 engagement that we can do before procurement happens,
25 but after procurement happens, we always engage with
the community. We do a formal notification. We'll

have a community board meeting if they would like.

Every site has a community advisory board, but our goal is to make sure that we have safe, secure spaces that are cost-efficient for the city and located across the city, consistent with need.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member Banks is also concerned about another shelter in his district that's set to open, where it's transitioning from a supportive housing facility to a full-on shelter. Isn't that going backwards?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm gonna need to do the address. It is absolutely our policy not to take housing out of the housing stock, and particularly supportive housing. So...

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright, I'll make sure his team follows up with you to...

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We'll follow up on the address there.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

I am going to turn it back to Council Member Avilés.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you. I'm gonna change my voice.

3 These are some additional questions
4 regarding cash assistance and SNAP processing.

5 So the preliminary Mayor's Management
6 Report shows a timeliness rate of 53.4% for cash
7 assistance applications for the first four months of
8 fiscal 2025. What is the current timeliness rate?

9 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm very pleased
10 to say that our timeliness rate is much better. So
11 for March numbers, cash assistance is at 72% and SNAP
12 is 93%. We have been very focused on this, and you're
13 seeing the results.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Amazing. Okay, you
15 answered my next question.

16 What are the timeliness rates for
17 processing recertifications for SNAP and cash
18 assistance?

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Those are
20 aggregate numbers. Administrative French, anything
21 you want to add?

22 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: (INAUDIBLE)

23 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah. Those are
24 aggregates for new applications and recertifications.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: The 72 and the...

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Correct.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: 93% are aggregate?

4 Could you provide us with a breakdown of
5 those?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm not sure if
7 we can break up the data that way, but we will take a
8 look and circle back.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay, thank you.

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, I
11 just, can I, if I can just jump in here, the
12 timeliness numbers that we provide are only on
13 applications. We don't calculate or report on
14 timeliness for recerts.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: For recerts, okay.

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you.

18 So what are the specific steps the Agency
19 is taking to bring itself into compliance with state
20 and federal laws regarding the timeliness of the
21 process?

22 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So when I
23 stepped into this seat a couple of years ago, we had
24 backlogs of tens of thousands of cash assistance and
25 SNAP, both applications and recertifications, and I'm
very pleased to say that is not the case right now.

That was the result of a very deliberate effort, again, of cross-agency teamwork to be able to get there. We hired something like 1,000 people to do frontline processing on cash and SNAP. We invested in technology so that we are better able to process. We got some very key waivers from the state so that we were able to cut out some pieces of the process that we felt like weren't necessary.

We made a whole host of changes to handle the workload we're getting. Application numbers are very, very high, and commensurately, recertification numbers are also very high, but we are staying current because we have put all of this investment in process and people.

Administrator French, anything you want to add?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, those are really what we've done, and I can just say on a monthly basis, (TIMER) we're constantly looking at the numbers, even on a weekly basis, to ensure that we're staying on track with that. If we identify potential issue areas, we dig in quickly to ensure we can address them in real time.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Well, certainly
congratulations on being able to dig out of that.
Certainly, we want to see as much timeliness as
possible.

Given the context where we're
anticipating increased needs, particularly if
everything comes to pass, are you developing a plan
on how to meet potential spikes in need?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yeah, we sort of
trend out what we know the peak months are going to
be, you know, in the future, to plan for that way, so
that we can sort of ramp up and ramp down as
appropriate. And we would basically look if we start
to see increased need, look at those different levers
to see what we would ramp up or down quickly. And so
we work very closely with our Performance Management
team, who is really tracking these trends and able to
sort of mirror to us what we might see down the road,
so we can prepare a little bit in advance so that
we're not caught off guard.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: How does HRA plan
to change or improve the New York City benefits
program in the new fiscal year?

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So are the New
4 York City benefits contracts with community-based
5 organizations? Thank you. I just wanted to make sure
6 I was understanding.

7 We are very pleased to have secured
8 funding for FY26 for those contracts. These CBOs do
9 critical work in communicating to clients and helping
10 people understand the benefits for which they're
11 eligible. We actually had our first-ever in-person
12 convening with all the New York City Benefits
13 Contractors earlier this week. I don't know; time has
14 lost all meaning (LAUGHS), but I'm pretty sure it was
15 earlier this week. It wasn't something we'd been able
16 to do in person before because this started during
17 COVID, but it was terrific to bring everybody
18 together.

19 And as I said to all the CBOs who were in
20 the room, one of the things that we do well as
21 government is create big systems that crank thousands
22 of people through processes. What we don't do well is
23 necessarily meet people where they are and
24 communicate in their language, figurative language.
25 Obviously, we care very deeply about translation.

So I think having those CBO contracts where somebody who is a trusted messenger is in place to be able to talk about the benefits that are available to people is really important. As I say, I'm very glad we have the funding for FY26 in place.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I'll turn it back to you guys. I may need another round.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Alright, I have a question regarding the Community Food Connection program.

I was very glad to see that the Executive Plan included an additional \$36.1 million and an additional six positions to bring the CFC fiscal 2026 budget up to \$57 million. This is a critical program for families and individuals in need of it, and is often the only choice for some of our city's most vulnerable residents, which is why the Council has long supported and pushed for funding the expansion of this program. While this was a positive first step, I'm still concerned that the funding was not baselined or increased to meet the growing need.

The Council will continue to push for full funding of this need. The threat of, in

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3 actuality, federal funding cuts has already impacted
4 the provider network and will cause food pantries to
5 rely more heavily on CFC and City funding.

6 As part of the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary
7 Budget response, the Council called on the
8 Administration to add \$79.1 million to CFC's baseline
9 to both restore one-time funding in Fiscal Year 2025
10 and to expand the annual budget for the program to
11 \$100 million.

12 How was the amount of funding added in
13 the Executive Plan determined? And what are the six
14 positions for, and how many are currently filled?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,
16 Council Member.

17 I'm very pleased that we were able to add
18 funding during the Executive Budget. The amount that
19 was added brings FY26 up in line with FY25.

20 The fact that we have the money available
21 now allows us to make allocations so that the
22 pantries know what they're going to get at the start
23 of the fiscal year, which I think is going to allow
24 everybody to be more efficient. It will, at least on
25 the margins, help with addressing the need that, as
you acknowledge, is very real.

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3 I'm gonna ask First Deputy Berry to speak
4 to some of the additional details.

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah,
6 this administration has really invested unprecedented
7 amounts of funding into the CFC budget, which we are
8 very pleased about. We're very happy to have had the
9 money added in the Executive Budget this year so that
10 we can make the FY26 allocations timely for the start
11 of July.

12 We have worked closely with other
13 partners to help reallocate some of the CFC funding
14 to fill in for those pantries that lost federal
15 funding. It was not our funding that was lost, but in
16 recognition of the whole network and in support of
17 the entire network. We'll have to get back to you on
18 the additional six staff members added. This budget
19 code includes not only CFC but also the Mayor's
20 Office of Food Policy. We'll have to get back to you
21 on the details of that staff add.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are you guys
23 advocating for the funding to be baselined, or are
24 you just asking for restoration and an increase?
25

3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: You know, we
4 certainly work very closely with OMB on CFC. They
5 understand the critical nature of the program.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

7 There have been multiple federal cuts to
8 large nonprofit organizations providing food
9 assistance services in the city. These organizations
10 operate food pantries and soup kitchens, and many
11 provide for millions of hungry city residents in need
12 each year. Given that many of the providers within
13 the CFC network operate on a shoestring budget and
14 are staffed primarily with volunteers, how is HRA
15 helping to ensure the viability of these
16 organizations? How is HRA supporting its CFC
17 providers who have already lost or are at risk of
18 losing other funding due to federal cuts?

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah, this is a
20 challenging situation. We're aware that, aside from
21 the federal 2026 budget, there's been a significant
22 reduction in emergency food spending.

23 As the Governor has said, as the City
24 Budget Director has said, as I testified in the
25 Preliminary Hearing, the scope of cuts that either
have happened or are set to come are such that the

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3 city and the city and state are not going to be able
4 to backfill anything. Still, we are in constant
5 communication with CFC partners. To the extent that
6 we have resources that we can use to plug
7 emergencies, we certainly will.

8 And I think, as Jill and I both said,
9 having our allocation now means that we can think
10 about how we can get things as efficient as possible.
11 We are always thinking about additional ways that we
12 can support people and organizations doing this
13 really critical work.

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: And if I
15 could just add, one of the things we're doing
16 differently also over the last few months is not just
17 operating in a silo. We're working very closely with
18 the other agencies within the city that do receive
19 state funding food, and federal funding for emergency
20 food, and other food sources to make sure we're all
21 collaborating to make sure that we are getting food
22 really where it is most needed, that we're
23 coordinating on that and filling in gaps wherever we
24 can.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I want to
recognize and appreciate that you did follow up from

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3 the last hearing regarding adding some brick and
4 mortar locations in the Bronx.

5 Nonprofit organizations provide
6 community-based human services on behalf of the City
7 to our most vulnerable residents. This is especially
8 true for HRA and DHS.

9 DHS's contract budget totals \$33.7
10 billion, which is nearly 90% of the Agency's budget,
11 largely relating to shelter services. HRA's contract
12 budget is \$1.04 billion, which is nearly 9% of the
13 Agency's budget and includes programs such as
14 domestic violence shelters, workforce development
15 programs for cash assistance clients, and food
16 pantries.

17 Many nonprofits are struggling because
18 city contracts do not provide for the actual cost of
19 providing services, and payments are often delayed.
20 In October of 2024, MOCS launched a payment backlog
21 initiative focusing on clearing outstanding payments
22 from Fiscal Year 2023 to 2025. How is DSS working
23 with MOCS to ensure that providers are receiving
24 their outstanding payments?

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you.

3 This is absolutely a serious issue. We
4 know we can't do the work that we do without our not-
5 for-profit partners, and they can't do it if they
6 don't get paid.

7 What a not-for-profit experiences as a
8 lack of payment is frequently a symptom of a variety
9 of different challenges on the City side. So it could
10 be a delay in contract registration. It could be a
11 delay in the approval of a subcontractor. It can be
12 an invoicing issue. It can be the processing of a new
13 need and the approval through the agency and OMB. It
14 can be getting a contract mod actually processed.

15 All of these things are different, but at
16 the end of the day, they all have the same outcome in
17 that the not-for-profit isn't getting the funding
18 expected and needed.

19 So what that means is that we are working
20 across the board on all of those streams
21 simultaneously, really trying to make sure that we
22 are processing invoices, but also doing mods, but
23 also working with OMB on new needs, that full
24 spectrum. I can say we've put out hundreds of
25 millions of dollars in cash into not-for-profit hands
in just the last six weeks or so. We've been really

very, very focused on this. And MOCs have been an important partner in this. Already, they've made a change to their technology and process so that instead of invoice review being a four-step process, it's a three-step process for DHS in particular, which has made a huge difference and allowed us to move quickly. One of the things that we know is coming later on this, we hope fairly soon, right now, if we want to process a mod, so we want to move money around, add money, there can't be any active invoices. Providers have to decide whether to move invoices or a mod, and it's a very challenging dance. I believe MOCS will be implementing some technical changes to enable us to work simultaneously. That will make a huge difference.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, but it couldn't come fast enough.

Do you know the average length of contract payment delays and the number of days providers experience these delays?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah, so again, a payment delay actually can be the symptom of all of these different things, which are all tracked in

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3 different places and monitored differently. So I
4 don't have a number.

5 For invoices for DSS as a whole, it's
6 about 28 days on average from invoice receipt to
7 payment. It's a little bit shorter on the HRA side
8 and a little bit longer on the DHS side, and that's
9 something we're working very hard on.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's the average,
11 more or less?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: For invoice
13 payment, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I mean, that's
15 not necessarily what we're hearing from some of the
16 providers, and many of the providers are, you know, I
17 mean, have expressed concern that they will have to,
18 you know, shut down operations because they simply
19 can't make payroll.

20 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We know we have
21 a real issue, and it's something that we're working
22 on. When a not-for-profit is not getting paid, and
23 I'm taking that on face value, I believe that their
24 financial issues are real. In some cases, it's a
25 problem with an invoice, and there is certainly
variation around that average. However, they

sometimes struggle to invoice because we have a new need that's been stuck in the approval process for six months. So the end result is the same for them. They are not getting the money that they need. But that particular issue wouldn't be factored into the average invoice process that I gave you, because they actually can't invoice on that particular cost.

But DHS in particular has been taking doing some, I think, important engagement with not-for-profits.

Administrator Carter, you want to speak about that?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thanks, Commissioner.

Deputy Speaker, what we have been doing is meeting with each individual provider, and we have actually done 72 of those individual meetings. At the end of this month, we will have done virtually all. So, these are meetings where we have everyone in the room, right? It's our Program, folks. It's our Finance folks. It's our Budget folks. We even had MOCS in the room because we wanted to identify the specific areas where the holes were. Right? So, we don't want to work in silos anymore, right? So, in

that space, we are pulling our (INAUDIBLE where the
holes are, so that we could figure out why things
have not moved. We're also doing office hours, and
the feedback we're getting is that they've really
been helpful.

Our expectation for the next fiscal year
is that we will be in a better position than we are
this year. We know that it hasn't been going well. So
we have acknowledged that with our providers. But we
think that, you know, this is why this is happening,
but when we sit in a room with all of us in this
space, we're like, oh, this is where the hole is. And
so, we've been doing these meetings every single
week, actually every single day, with the highest
level of staff—the First Deputy Commission. Is this
person actually our DSS side lead? The lead is there,
MOCS is there (INAUDIBLE) is there. We want to make
this a place where we can resolve these issues, which
is why we've put this in place.

The work is tedious. The work is hard,
but we expect the outcome to be a place where we're
going into the next fiscal year in a better place. So
we've taken this very, very, very seriously and

intentionally to make sure we can put some parameters
in place.

And then we put structure in. We're also
looking at whether it's the right way we've been
doing this work, right? You know, we've also gotten
away from it's you, tag it's you, tag it's you, but
you know it's all of us to make this work better.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the number of
contract providers you have under DHS?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: For us, it is 85.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Eight-five providers?
How many folks are assigned to the Contracts
Division?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: The way we are
structured across DHS and DSS makes that a remarkably
challenging question to answer.

So, DHS program staff have responsibility
for engaging with providers and doing invoice review,
but that's not their only responsibility. Our Budget
Team and our Capacity Team, both touching the
contracting process, and the Budget Team is also
touching the invoice process. And then when you get
over to DSS, we have our ACCO's (phonetic) Office. We

have accounts payable in our Finance shop, which is obviously touching everything.

So, for any payment that goes out the door, we have a lot of people who are touching it. One of the things, as Administrator Carter noted, that we are looking at is whether or not there's a better way of organizing things.

We are working on two fronts: An emergency response to ensure dollars are released today, and a longer-term approach to prevent the situation from recurring.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, that's a lot of hands. My mother used to say, "Too many people stirring the soup; it's not a good thing." And I think that's part of the problem. There's a lot of bureaucracy within the agency, and things kind of get lost.

Only because I hear from my constituents, you know, "I've submitted documents and they've gotten lost, and then I have submitted them again and they're still saying they didn't get them." And my staff is saying, "Well, we submitted them on behalf of the constituent, and they're still saying they didn't get them." That concerns me because the

system is so large that it's difficult to keep track of these things. Streamlining them is really important. I think that a more consolidated unit that deals specifically with contracts is probably the better alternative.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Separation of duties and extra eyes and oversight have their place, so we do need to make sure that we are all keeping a certain level of accountability in there, but we agree that this is an area that is ripe for refreshing.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. And you did mention that the contract providers receive an advance?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So traditionally, a DHS provider, or all providers receive--human service providers receive a 25% advance. This year, all providers, including human service providers citywide, received a 30% advance. We then worked with some of our providers to provide additional advances on an as-needed basis.

For FY26, the City will be doing 30% advances for DHS providers with a potential for an additional 25% advance mid year to the extent that

it's needed. Other human service providers will receive a 50% advance at the start of the fiscal year.

I would also note that families with children shelter providers are paid based on what we call "care days", which essentially means they certify how many people, how many bed nights were used, and then we pay upfront, and then do the invoice reconciliation after the fact. So, families with children providers are essentially receiving a month-by-month advance process as well.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that.

I have a question regarding the CRIB (Creating Real Impact at Birth) pilot. The City has proposed a research program for the crib pilot that would randomly assign pregnant people (INAUDIBLE) intake to one of three groups: Group number one, a group that receives immediate CityFHEPS, two, a group that receives Pathways Home, and three, a control group that receives nothing.

While the rule hearing has not yet taken place, we would like to know more about the rule change for the CRIB pilot. Will HRA release a report

on the outcomes of this pilot? What measuring factors
will be used to indicate the outcomes?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you. I'm
excited about this pilot and always happy to have the
opportunity to talk about it.

So you described it very well. The rule
changes were necessary to allow all of that
typically. There are certain eligibility requirements
for CityFHEPS and for Pathway Home that we are
bypassing for this pilot. Given that we haven't
launched, we haven't exactly gotten to the point of
thinking about how we will roll out the results, but
it's certainly something that we are looking to learn
from and are happy to talk to the Council about it as
well.

The metrics we're evaluating for success
include the number of shelter nights used. I think
our hope is that those receiving the subsidy will
ideally avoid shelter altogether, but certainly exit
faster if they aren't able to avoid it altogether.
And then looking at the number of babies born into
shelter and homelessness. We have ideas for secondary
metrics, but those are the two that are most
important.

Administrator Carter, anything you want
to add?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you,
Commissioner.

I think the goal is to have babies go
into permanency, right? So, our ultimate goal is to
ensure that families are not in shelters. So, it is
one of the things that we really want to see happen
out of this one year, and we think this is what we
would love to see happen. And we'll see what the
outcomes are going to be.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, the Pathway Home
program requires that a person have a friend or a
family member with whom they can move in, and the
program will provide monthly payments for up to
twelve months.

How can people be randomly assigned to
the program for research purposes if there's a
condition that requires them to have a family or a
friend to live with?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So nobody is
going to be denied shelter, right? If you were in the
Pathway Home group and you do not have an appropriate
place to live— a family, or a friend where you can

1 use that subsidy, then of course you're eligible for
2 shelter. You'll be eligible for the housing subsidies
3 that you might become eligible for under a normal
4 course of business. So nobody is being denied access
5 to anything they would have had today before the
6 initiative launches.
7

8 The reason we are doing this is—this is
9 me, Molly, speaking, personally— my hypothesis is
10 actually that Pathway Home will be a really valuable
11 tool here. We know that, A, the City has a really low
12 vacancy rate. It's hard to go out and find an
13 apartment. Also knowing that having a baby is a
14 really tough moment, and actually being on one's own,
15 particularly if you're a young parent, your first
16 kid, that could be challenging. So, actually having a
17 situation that is financially viable to be with a
18 friend or family, that might actually be a really
19 good option for stabilizing and dealing with this
20 particular point in transition.

21 But that is my personal hypothesis. I
22 don't actually know if it's true. If what we find is
23 that most of the people who were assigned to the
24 Pathway Home group end up entering a shelter and sort
25 of behaving more or less like the control group, then

what that will say to me is that Pathway Home isn't
the tool that we should be using.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Regarding the
CityFHEPS....

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Deputy Speaker,
before we continue...

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes, go ahead.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: It's 84 providers,
not 85. I just want to correct that on the record.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: (INAUDIBLE)

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: It's 84, not 85
providers.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Regarding the
CityFHEPS increase to baseline household
contribution, another part of the rule change is to
increase the baseline household contribution in the
sixth year of participation in the CityFHEPS program
from 30% of the household's monthly income to 40% for
households that have earned income and are granted
additional renewals for good cause.

Can you detail what constitutes good
cause? How will HRA ensure that CityFHEPS voucher
holders are aware of this change?

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3 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Thank you,

4 Council Member.

5 So at this point, about 90% of CityFHEPS
6 voucher holders renew at year six. Although the
7 regulations include this good cause language, we have
8 been taking a very expansive definition of what good
9 cause means, and we currently plan to continue this
10 approach. So the majority of people, as I say, are
11 renewing at year six.

12 We will ensure that this information is
13 widely communicated. We are in contact with all
14 CityFHEPS voucher holders, as they receive a subsidy
15 from us. We will ensure that this information is
16 adequately communicated.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Currently, how many
18 CityFHEPS voucher holders are in years four and five
19 of the program, and how many are in year six and
20 beyond?

21 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We can circle
22 back with exact data. What I can say is that a fairly
23 small minority are in the out years, simply because
24 the program has grown so rapidly over the last few
25 years. Right? The program was much smaller a few
years ago, so there haven't been that many people who

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3 have aged into the later years. As a result, it is
4 weighted towards those early years.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know what the
6 projected cost savings on an annual basis from this
7 change will be?

8 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Once it's fully
9 rolled out, obviously, because it's one year at a
10 time, it will take some time, but as it is fully
11 rolled out, it's around \$11 million a year.

12 And let me just take a step back and
13 reiterate what I said in my testimony. This was not a
14 change that we undertook lightly. I am deeply
15 committed to the CityFHEPS program, and I want to
16 make sure that it continues to be a lifeline for
17 people who need it. The fivefold increase in spending
18 over the past four years is really challenging and,
19 frankly, not entirely sustainable. So we are looking
20 at a number of different ways that we can bend the
21 cost curve. This is one of them, but we're
22 implementing rent reasonableness to make sure that
23 landlords aren't overcharging for units.

24 I think an important one that we did in
25 conjunction with HPD earlier this year is making some
really significant changes to the augmented CityFHEPS

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3 program, where people were using CityFHEPS in middle-
4 income units. It was an idea that I really supported
5 at the time, but I think landlords actually took
6 advantage of it in ways that we didn't anticipate,
7 and were leasing up entire buildings with augmented
8 CityFHEPS in ways that were pushing market rents.
9 Pulling that back will be beneficial on multiple
10 levels, including changing the cost.

11 So, the goal is not to put all the burden
12 on tenants. However, I must ensure we have a
13 sustainable CityFHEPS program. And growing at the
14 rate that we are growing, it is not viable.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do we know what the
16 average income is for individuals who are eligible
17 but are working?

18 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I don't have
19 that off the top of my head. We can circle back.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I have serious
21 concerns with this program. I don't think \$11 million
22 is enough to make it, you know, it's not as cost-
23 effective as it is damaging to families. I say that
24 because, you know, my family grew up in public
25 housing, and we paid 30% of, you know, our income on
rent. Later on, I had Section 8, and I had to pay 30%

of my income on rent. And it was always the gross income, not even the net income. If you have no children or a certain number of children, it really affects your net income. For me, 30% was very difficult because it meant that 95% of my second check of the month went towards rent for the following month. And you factor in the cost of, you know, inflation, food cost, and childcare—you know, utilities are ridiculously high. I don't understand how-- and I'm trying to be fair here, because I don't believe that the City should have the sole burden of financing these types of programs. I think that we need to be creating more of what's known as Section 2 housing for older adults, where we have, you know, project-based Section 8 opportunities.

We need to invest in fixing and upgrading our public housing stock so that we can bring back online all the units that have been sitting there warehoused for years. The federal government has a responsibility to expand the Section 8 program, as it reflects the number of people in New York City who cannot afford affordable housing. They need subsidized housing, and that's a very big distinction between the two.

But in the interim, while we are responsible, and while we're trying to figure out what those alternatives are, I think that we would be imposing a bigger financial burden on families that are already struggling to make ends meet. And that I just cannot in good faith support. It really, really keeps me up at night, because I've been on the receiving end of that. People assume that just because a family receives food stamps, they're lazy. But it's not a party to have to survive off of those benefits. I'll tell you that. You know, the amount of food stamps that most families get may take them to week three if they're lucky. And that's only because most families have children, and they go to school, and they have breakfast, you know, and lunch in school. So you're able to stretch those food stamps to maybe the third week of the month. And that means by the fourth week of the month, you have to get creative. Sometimes, that means going to the food pantry, like my mother did, and getting those cans of whatever "creative meat" is in there. I have no idea what we were eating. My mother made it taste really, really good, but you know, we have to do those things in order to subsidize the needs in the household.

I would like to reiterate that \$11 million seems insufficient, and I will also ask OMB about it. I'm sure that we could find \$11 million somewhere else without having to take it off the backs of some of our neediest New Yorkers.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I appreciate the perspective. I certainly understand that it is very hard work to be low-income and that there are a lot of challenges. Again, my goal is to ensure the CityFHEPS program is strong and sustainable, allowing me to continue issuing new vouchers to those in the shelter system in need. I echo your sentiment that hopefully other levels of government will get involved. We're very happy that the Housing Access Voucher Program passed for the first time in the state. Great start, but that's a \$50 million program statewide, and we're spending \$1.2 billion on CityFHEPS.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

I wanted to ask a question about affordable housing services. The Executive Plan

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3 includes City funding of \$28.4 million in FY 25 and
4 \$33 million in FY26 for affordable housing services.

5 What programs or services will this
6 funding support?

7 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I'm so glad you
8 asked. This is one of my favorite programs.

9 So, the Affordable Housing Services
10 program is essentially a project-based CityFHEPS
11 program. And the way it works is that rather than
12 giving each tenant a voucher, the vouchers are put
13 into a contract along with some maintenance and
14 operation costs and light-touch social services. The
15 contract can either be nine years, or what we are
16 increasingly doing is long-term, 30-year contracts.
17 And the not-for-profit can then go out and lease or,
18 with the long-term contracts, acquire buildings.
19 These are permanent projects, and the housing is set
20 aside for individuals transitioning out of the DHS
21 shelter system.

22 So effectively, what we've been able to
23 do is convert social service dollars into an actual
24 housing finance tool, which is great. In a city with
25 a 1.4% vacancy rate, we absolutely have to be turning
over every rock that we can to find more affordable

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3 housing, more options for households coming out of
4 the shelter system.

5 So the funds that were added to the
6 budget are covering those contract costs. So it's a
7 mix of rent operations and light-touch social
8 services.

9 We have done, I think, about 500 of these
10 with another 400 or so in the pipeline. In many
11 cases, these are buildings that were built really as
12 market-rate housing, really pushing the market. Not-
13 for-profits had been able to buy them, leveraging the
14 contract. And something that I think is really
15 exciting about it is that they are fully leased
16 within a few weeks or a month of closing on the
17 financing, as opposed to, you know, I love my
18 colleagues at HPD, but sometimes the lease-up time on
19 those buildings can be very long.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Could you tell us
21 how those funding amounts were determined?

22 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Sure. So we have
23 a model that we negotiated with OMB. It is the
24 CityFHEPS rent for given unit sizes. Then there are
25 tiers of operations and social service costs that

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3 depend on both the size of the building and the mix
4 of the units.

5 A building with more one-bedroom units
6 will receive less financing and funding for
7 operational costs compared to a building with two-
8 and three-bedroom units and things like that.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And then what's
10 HRA's process for determining which clients with
11 FHEPS vouchers to place in the units?

12 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: It's a
13 combination of HRA and DHS. We are looking primarily
14 at those who are long-term stayers but who do not
15 need the level of services that a supportive housing
16 building would provide. There are ongoing services
17 on-site, but it does not rise to the level of social
18 service. So it's not going to be people with serious
19 clinical needs.

20 We then match individuals based on their
21 eligibility for CityFHEPS, their status as long-term
22 stayers, the correct household size for the given
23 unit, and where client preferences and other needs
24 align. So if a client says, "I absolutely, positively
25 want to be in Brooklyn," and the building is in the
Bronx, we will probably not refer them, because it's

not a great housing fit for them, and they're unlikely to stay.

So it's a little bit of a retail process, but as I say, we have been able to move very, very quickly on those, and they've been terrific. To give one example, I was at a ribbon cutting for one of these this fall. And there was a young man who spoke at the ribbon cutting. He was, I think, 21; he'd been in the shelter system for a couple of years. He didn't need supportive housing. He probably wouldn't have qualified for supportive housing. He didn't need supportive housing. But I think back to myself as a 21-year-old, I wasn't capable of living completely on my own. I called my mother for everything, but he didn't have the family resources to be able to do that. So being in a permanent housing setting where he had somebody who could call and be like, "Hey, I actually don't know how to get my cable set up," or "I don't know how to maintain my benefits. Can you help me with this?" "Can you help me through a referral to an employment program?" I think that is going to be the difference between success and failure for a young man like that.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. I want to ask
4 about the SHARE program, Special Housing Assistance
5 Resource Program. Has the program launched?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, do we know why
8 it keeps getting delayed?

9 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: It has launched.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: When did it launch?

11 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: In March, I
12 believe.

13 So when the funds were appropriated at
14 the state, they created this rental subsidy program
15 and then virtually immediately clawed back most of
16 the money for New York City. There was an extended
17 process back and forth with the state to determine
18 how much was left in that allocation from what they
19 had clawed back for how much we could use. So that
20 added some time.

21 The second source of delay was the nature
22 of the population we serve, which necessitated a
23 contracted entity. We couldn't use the normal
24 mechanisms for paying rent, so we went through a
25 procurement process. We have hired Anthos Home to be
the administrator for that, but now that we have the

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3 contract in place, we are off to the races, and we
4 have had households move out of shelter already.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Just a couple
6 more from me bouncing around here—Wi-Fi at DHS
7 shelters. How many DHS shelters currently have Wi-Fi?

8 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Virtually all of
9 the families with children shelters have been wired
10 for Wi-Fi, which started during COVID. The funding
11 that was included in the Executive Plan is for a few
12 remaining sites and to help with ongoing operating
13 costs.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, that's good to
15 hear.

16 The direct cash assistance pilot, As part
17 of our FY26 budget response, we called on the
18 Administration to allocate \$4.7 million to create a
19 direct cash assistance pilot program to support
20 justice-involved individuals, including those who
21 have recently left incarceration, who live in
22 communities with the highest rates of gun violence.
23 No funding was added in the Executive Plan for these
24 two initiatives. Does HRA foresee any funding being
25 added to support those initiatives?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We're happy to
talk to OMB about that.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

Are there any new needs that you asked
OMB for that you're still waiting to hear back?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We are in
constant engagement with OMB about our budget. We've
talked about a number of places where there are
distinctions between the FY25 spending and the FY26
budget. Those are ongoing conversations, but we
appreciate the partnership with OMB, and as I say,
we're in regular communication.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, last question
from me.

Does HRA feel that the current domestic
violence shelter system has enough capacity to fully
meet the level of demand?

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: This is
something that we look at regularly. We do routinely
have vacancies. There can sometimes be misalignment
between household size or specific geographies, but
we do routinely have vacancies in the DV system.

Administrator Franch, anything you'd like
to add?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, I think that covers the level of facilities that we have. We believe it covers the City, but there are often challenges around boroughs or family composition, and matching that with available resources. But we have a very close relationship with DHS. We've also implemented a process as well to connect people to DHS, where, in the DV system, either they may have timed out, because there are time limits to domestic violence emergency shelters, where households can stay up to 180 days, but then do need to transition. And if there's no availability that meets what they need in the tier two system for DV, we have a fast track process with DHS to place individuals directly into sites that meet the different, you know, requirements that those families may need.

COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: And just to clarify, that time limit is a state requirement.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, Alright. I'm gonna hand it back over to the Deputy Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I am going to allow Alexa Avilés to ask one more and final question.

4 behavior pays off. You see how patient I was? Thank
5 you, Chair.

6 I want to ask about legal services
7 funding. In the Executive Plan, the fiscal year 2025
8 budget for immigrant legal services is \$68.8 million,
9 of which \$25.3 million is funded through Council
10 discretionary initiatives.

11 The funding for the immigration legal
12 services has remained relatively stagnant compared to
13 prior years, despite the influx of more than 210,000
14 immigrants to New York City since 2022.

15 In the fiscal year 2026 preliminary
16 budget response, the Council called on the
17 Administration for \$109 million for the immigration
18 legal services enhancement.

19 What is the budget for immigrant legal
20 services in fiscal 2026 and in the out years?

21 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: For the out
22 years, it is about \$35 million thus far. We greatly
23 appreciate our partnership with the Council and the
24 funds allocated for immigration legal services, and
25 we look forward to continuing our collaboration with
you in the future.

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3 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, for the fiscal
4 year 2026, do you have a number on what the services
5 are? Is it the same?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: The number that
7 I just cited was the FY26 specifically for
8 immigration legal services, which is about \$35
9 million. That is in the plan thus far... (CROSS-TALK)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, no increase
11 despite an enormous increase in demand, despite a
12 violent federal government that is coming after 40%
13 of New Yorkers who are immigrants. The Administration
14 has decided it won't add one more dollar for that?

15 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: At this time,
16 the budget is flat-funded, yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Will you ask OMB
18 for an enhancement?

19 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We are happy to
20 engage with OMB on what the budget looks like.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Have you requested
22 a baseline of this budget from the City for these
23 services in particular?

24 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: We're working
25 very closely with OMB on the Office of Civil Justice

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3 Budget as a whole. We have not specifically asked for
4 an increase to the IOI baseline.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it. I am
6 deeply dismayed by this information, but thank you.
7 Thank you, Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright.
9 I have a question regarding Right to
10 Counsel. The Executive Plan includes \$15.6 million in
11 City funds for FY26 to support the right to counsel
12 program managed by HRA's Office of Civil Justice.

13 What is the funding added for, and how
14 was the amount determined? Will this funding be used
15 to expand coverage for eligible tenants?

16 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So the \$15.6
17 million is replacing federal stimulus (TIMER)
18 funding. So it doesn't actually increase the total
19 amount of funds available. There is an additional \$15
20 million that was added, which is an indirect cost
21 adjustment for those providers, and there was some
22 funding, a small amount of money added for IOI, the
23 \$4.4 million that was added for FY26. So there is a
24 small amount that was added there.
25

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3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know what the
4 total budget for Right to Counsel is in FY 2025 and
5 2026 and the out years?

6 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: So specifically
7 for what we consider our Right to Counsel program,
8 this is the Right to Counsel, and then the anti-
9 harassment tenant protection services, the total
10 budget for FY25 is \$204 million, uh, for FY26 it is
11 \$197 million. There is some Council funding that is
12 in the FY25 budget that hasn't yet been added in
13 FY26. The \$15 million for the ICR adjustment is not
14 actually included in that number, as it needs to be
15 cost-allocated across all OCJ programs.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But once those funds
17 are added...

18 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: It'll up.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It'll go up, and it
20 should be relatively the same number?

21 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: Yeah, so it'll
22 be slight, assuming the Council funds, and we thank
23 the Council for the partnership, assuming the Council
24 funds are added, FY26 should be slightly above the
25 FY25 amount. Again, we need to allocate that ICR

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3 adjustment across the different program areas that
4 are part of the larger OCJ universe.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Right.

6 As part of the fiscal year 2026
7 preliminary budget response, the Council called on
8 the administration to add \$2 million in funding to
9 the Human Resource Administration and the Mayor's
10 Office to End Gender Based Violence to establish a
11 pilot program to provide free, brief legal assistance
12 and full legal representation to domestic violence
13 survivors in divorce proceedings.

14 This request is in line with Local Law 5
15 of 2022, which requires the establishment of a
16 working group to make recommendations regarding a
17 pilot program to provide legal services for domestic
18 violence survivors and divorce proceedings, and,
19 subject to appropriations, to then establish a two-
20 year pilot program.

21 Was the funding added in the executive
22 plan for this pilot? And if not, when will the
23 funding be added to address the requirements of Local
24 Law 5?

25 COMMISSIONER WASOW PARK: I don't believe
it was added, although any of my colleagues will

correct me if I'm wrong, but we will circle back with
our colleagues at ENDGBV to follow up on that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Alright, thank
you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you all
very much.

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We are going to take
a 10-minute break, and then we will hear from the
public. Thank you.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. [GAVEL]

Welcome back, everybody. Can we have
silence in the Chambers, please?

We will now open up the hearing for
public testimony. I want to remind members of the
public that this is a formal government proceeding
and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As
such, members of the public shall remain silent
unless they are testifying.

The witness table is reserved for people
who wish to testify. No video recording or
photography is allowed from the witness table.
Further, members of the public may not present audio

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3 or video recordings as testimony, but may submit
4 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at
5 Arms for inclusion in the official hearing record.

6 If you are here today in Chambers and you
7 wish to speak, please make sure you fill out an
8 appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms—available
9 on the back table. When recognized, you will have two
10 minutes to speak on today's budget, HRA, or the DHS
11 Year 2026 Executive Budget.

12 If you have a written statement or
13 additional testimony you wish to submit for the
14 record, please provide a copy of that testimony to
15 the Sergeant at Arms.

16 You may also email written testimony, if
17 you don't have it with you today, to
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the
19 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
20 will not be accepted, only written word transcripts.

21 Okay, we are going to call the first
22 panel. We have Emely Paez, Diana Ramos, Calvin
23 Michael, and Harold Alexis. Come on up.

24 (PAUSE)

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, if you want to
begin from the left?

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CALVIN MICHAEL: (UN-MIC'D) Me?

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure, just make sure
4 your mic is on.

5 CALVIN MICHAEL: Sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Say your name, and
7 then you can begin your testimony.

8 CALVIN MICHAEL: Okay. Good well, good
9 afternoon. My name is Calvin Michael.

10 Good morning, my name is Calvin Michael.
11 I'm speaking on behalf of the Safety Net Activist in
12 conjunction with the Safety Net Project at the Urban
13 Justice Center.

14 I'd like to speak about a couple of
15 things today. First, I'd like to speak about the DHS
16 proposed shelter sanctions policy, whereby shelter
17 residents can be kicked out onto the streets for 30
18 days for things like having an issue with your public
19 assistance case not securing permanent housing after
20 getting kicked out on the street. It may even be
21 possible for the same prior shelter resident to be
22 swept up in the sweeps campaign that's going on at
23 Washington Square Park.

24 So we're strongly opposed to the
25 sanctions policy. We don't need sanctions. We need

housing. Even though it's, you know, may be necessary, it's a little bit more on, like I said, more negative side.

Basically, let me wrap it up by saying, I think that's what we think that CityFHEPS needs more staff, particularly, like, housing specialists, and the housing specialists need to have, like, be more involved with the clients. For instance, they need to be more involved as far as helping them find housing actively. Like giving them information, helping them, you know, get suggestions for the internet, things of that nature. And also, lastly, the Wi-Fi, I'm glad that they're adding Wi-Fi, because the shelter that I was in was at the Clark Thomas men's shelter, 300 men on an open floor, no Wi-Fi. And we couldn't look for - we couldn't look for work. But one of the sanctions is not looking for housing. That's one of the issues that I wanted to approach (TIMER) today. You're in a shelter among 300 men, there's no Wi-Fi, how are you going to look for work? You can't look for work. You can't look for a job. You can't look for housing. And then you get sanctioned, you know what I'm saying? That's the whole thing. I'll end right there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

3 DIANA RAMOS: My name is Diana Ramos. I am
4 a member of the Safety Net Activists, part of the
5 Safety Net Project through Urban Justice Center. I am
6 also a recipient of SNAP and CityFHEPS, and have
7 received cash assistance until February of this year,
8 when I finally got my SSI, after many years.

9 I am here to speak about my experience
10 with HRA delays, from recertification issues to phone
11 delays, to issues with CityFHEPS, and the fact that I
12 wasn't notified about the housing allowance that was
13 passed after I had already been receiving my voucher.

14 I also have some concerns I would like to
15 voice. I have been getting benefits since March of
16 2020. At first, I had no issues with HRA. Then, in
17 September of 2023, I was renewed for cash assistance,
18 but not for my SNAP benefits. I didn't get my
19 benefits until mid-month. In September 2024, I
20 received my SNAP benefits late again. I found that my
21 2024 SNAP recertification application was just
22 sitting on someone's desk waiting for approval. When
23 I tried to call HRA to address the issue the first
24 time in 2023, I waited on hold for four to five hours
25 only to be hung up on. This is not unique, but a

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typical experience for people receiving benefits.

3 There's no way for people to get their issues
4 addressed.

5 In 2024, I was fortunate enough to have
6 an advocate on my side to communicate with HRA over
7 this issue and issues I've had since then. Ninety-
8 nine percent of people don't have access to an
9 advocate or a program like mine. HRA needs additional
10 staff on phone lines and at the offices to assist
11 people.

12 The impact of benefits being delayed for
13 people such as myself is that their health conditions
14 could be impacted immensely if they don't get their
15 benefits, (TIMER) such as someone who is celiac who
16 cannot go to a food bank due to gluten allergies,
17 which could hospitalize them. For someone like me,
18 being a diabetic, there are certain foods I cannot
19 consume a lot of. My blood sugars will go too high
20 and then crash, and I will possibly hospitalize
21 myself.

22 Thousands of people would receive
23 vouchers if Mayor Adams had implemented the CityFHEPS
24 expansion laws passed in July 2023. Instead, they are
25

being evicted and/or stuck in shelters while awaiting
a judge's decision.

While waiting, HRA should concentrate on
making the CityFHEPS process smoother and more
efficient, and prepare for the influx of
applications.

Of course, let's not forget about those
who are working and going into their sixth year of
CityFHEPS, who are about to face a rent hike from 30%
to 40%. This would devastate working families, impact
children, and possibly raise the number of homeless.
The 40% hike would not save the City any money or put
more money in city coffers; instead, it would lead to
increased spending on those evicted for being unable
to pay their 40% increase. Those people would end up
in homeless shelters or on the street, which would
perpetuate a very negative cycle. My biggest fear is
that, although the increase would only affect those
currently working, it could lead to a similar
increase for those receiving SSI, SSD, and retirement
benefits after five years on CityFHEPS. Thank you for
your time. I welcome any questions.

CALVIN MICHAEL: Can I say one last thing?
I am extremely grateful for the CityFHEPS program. It

1 saved my life. Okay? Because I would be on the street
2 right now. You know what I'm saying? It's an
3 excellent program. I am enjoying being on it. I think
4 it's attentive to certain--I have certain complaints,
5 but for the most part it's a great program. And it
6 needs to stay. It needs to stay. You know what I'm
7 saying?
8

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

10 CALVIN MICHAEL: I'm grateful.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 HAROLD ALEXIS: Hi, my name is Harold
13 Alexis. I am a native New Yorker, a member of
14 Neighbors Together and VOCAL-NY Homeless Union,
15 grassroots organizations that advocate for affordable
16 housing and fight homelessness. I want to thank the
17 Council and the Committee on General Welfare for
18 convening this budget hearing to discuss the
19 CityFHEPS programs administered by the Department of
20 Human Resources Administration. These programs are
21 essential for New Yorkers who rely on them to secure
22 affordable housing in a city that has become
23 increasingly unaffordable.

24 I want to share all my experiences with
25 CityFHEPS as an in-community voucher holder who

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3 received assistance from HRA and Homebase. I would
4 like first to address the proposed policy, Enhanced
5 Client Placement Support.

6 During my time in the shelter, I was
7 linked to an apartment. I viewed a one-bedroom unit
8 that I envisioned as my newfound beginnings, access
9 to permanent housing, and stability using my
10 CityFHEPS voucher.

11 I told my housing specialist case manager
12 that I would like to move forward and take the
13 apartment. Unbeknownst to me, the new apartment I
14 viewed was not the one I had signed up for. It was a
15 studio, whereas I had specifically mentioned to my
16 housing specialist that I preferred a one-bedroom. I
17 was baited and switched by the management of the
18 building breaking ground, with no support from my
19 caseworker at the shelter, and I was rushed to move
20 into this apartment. I felt that my preference didn't
21 matter, and my autonomy to make decisions about my
22 new home was not considered.

23 Although Enhanced Client Placement
24 Support was not being actively enforced then, my
25 experience surely exemplifies what this proposed
(TIMER) policy would look like: people feeling rushed

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3 and pressured to take housing that isn't right for
4 them, or risk being kicked out of shelter.

5 I submitted a transfer request at
6 Homebase due to medical concerns. I was later
7 approved for the transfer voucher, but when it became
8 time to update my transfer voucher, that's when
9 issues occurred. Caseworkers and supervisors weren't
10 responding to phone calls and emails.

11 In December of 2024, I was informed
12 during my visit to HRA for my annual voucher renewal
13 that my current rental assistance to my current
14 residence was stopped due to a transfer. Please note
15 that I haven't moved out yet. HomeBase continues to
16 sabotage my move-out plans, and I've lost the
17 approved transfer voucher. Additionally, I was told
18 my request wasn't good enough. CityFHEPS stopped
19 paying my rent for my current apartment and claimed I
20 had moved, which doesn't make sense since I never
21 found a new apartment or submitted a move-in package.

22 The caseworker at CityFHEPS didn't
23 present any proof, nor were there any remedies
24 provided to fix this blunder. My public assistance
25 case was closed, although I was in compliance with
recertification, and now I'm facing rental arrears.

Communicating with Homebase and HRA has been a challenge, with delays in updating my case. I've learned that I am entitled to utility allowances, but I was never notified, nor have I received any payments to pay my utilities. Now I'm home in the dark due to having no assistance to pay my electricity bill, and HRA is delaying help to turn my lights on. Incidentally, I went to HRA yesterday, and they have since fixed the problem, and my electricity is back on. So, thank goodness for that.

I want to address the proposed rule change that will cause CityFHEPS voucher holders to become rent burdened by requiring them to pay 40% of their income after five years. This will cause housing expenses to exceed tenants' budgets, and with the rise in electricity costs and other inflation, this will harm people. The thought is truly overwhelming.

To conclude, to the entire Council, please take in to consideration that both HRA and Homebase have set me up in a deplorable and despicable housing situation. And I am not at risk of eviction. Imposing rent burdens on low-income New Yorkers with CityFHEPS to underdetermine disability

and self-sufficiency, this situation needs to be handled with care and concern. It will affect many CityFHEPS voucher holders if it is not resolved in a timely manner. No one should have to be in this predicament in a program that is supposed to keep low-income New Yorkers stable in permanent housing, who are now facing housing insecurity. Housing is a fundamental human right, and I will relentlessly advocate for justice and peace. I am deeply frustrated with the current situation, and I will not back down. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very much for your testimony.

Okay, for our next panel, we have Tammy Murray and Sara Pennerberg from 32BJ. (NO RESPONSE)

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, now we have Kristin Miller, Chris Mann, Alison Wilkey, and Agnes Kim. And we have also been joined by Council Member Gale Brewer.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure, you can start, thank you.

3 ALISON WILKEY: Hi. Good afternoon,
4 Chairs. My name's Allison Wilkey, and I'm the
5 Director of Government Affairs and Strategic
6 Campaigns at the Coalition for the Homeless.

7 So, in hearing after hearing,
8 Commissioner Park comes here and talks about the
9 success of CityFHEPS and moving people out of
10 shelter, how it keeps people successfully housed. But
11 I want to talk about three ways the City is trying to
12 limit access to CityFHEPS.

13 First is the agreement that was made as
14 part of the City for All City of Yes Text Amendment
15 that would have provided \$215 million for people
16 facing eviction to receive CityFHEPS. It appears that
17 the City is reneging on that agreement, which would
18 keep, we estimate, 7,500 households housed if we had
19 that \$215 million investment, and that would be for
20 two years for those households. The Administration
21 appears to be walking away from this, and we really
22 urge the City Council to fight to make sure that that
23 money is going towards CityFHEPS for people facing
24 eviction.

25 The second way that I want to talk about
the city limiting CityFHEPS is through the increase

in the sixth year to the tenant's portion of the rent to 40%. Doing this would enshrine rent burden into City policy. Forty percent means that you are rent-burdened. And who else has done this or tried to do this? President Trump, in his first administration, tried to raise the tenant's share of rent to 35% for federally subsidized housing. The Adams administration is proposing going even further and raising it to 40%. It is a dangerous precedent to set, and I think we really need to push back hard on doing this, not only because of that precedent, but because this would harm households, and the \$11 million savings that the Commissioner is citing would disappear (TIMER) when you would see families entering shelter.

I also just want to talk about the CRIB pilot briefly. You know, the City is putting forward this as a research study, but one of the interventions would be getting CityFHEPS, which we know already works. So why wouldn't the City just actually provide CityFHEPS vouchers to all pregnant people arriving at PATH rather than creating this research study that would have a control group that receives nothing? I mean, it kind of violates the

1 ethical principles of research, which say that you
2 should offer any benefit to all participants in
3 research. Yet, this is creating a control group of
4 pregnant people who would get nothing while offering
5 the benefits to only some based on random selection.
6 You could still conduct the research by giving
7 pregnant people all access to CityFHEPS or Pathways
8 to Home, if that's a better option, and then compare
9 it to the current status quo. They don't need a
10 control group that receives nothing, as some people
11 are already getting this benefit.
12

13 And I think I heard Commissioner Park
14 talking a lot about reining in the CityFHEPS budget,
15 but the fact is, when people can't pay for their
16 housing, it cascades into other parts of the City's
17 budget. And so if we're not paying for it with
18 CityFHEPS, we're going to be paying for it in DHS's
19 budget, we're gonna be paying for it in benefits,
20 we're gonna be paying for it in a whole bunch of
21 other ways. And I'll submit full written testimony
22 later.

23 CHRIS MANN: Good afternoon, Chairs
24 Brannan and Ayala, Members of the Committees.
25

My name is Chris Mann; I'm the Assistant Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at WIN (Women In Need, Inc.), the largest provider of shelter and supportive housing for families with children in New York City. Each night, nearly 7,000 people, including 3,800 children, call WIN home.

As the federal government imposes deep cuts to housing and social welfare programs, New York City must step up to protect our most vulnerable. As WIN laid out in Project Hope, we urge the Council to take bold, proactive action in the FY26 budget to mitigate the harm of these federal rollbacks.

We urge the Council to allocate an additional \$263 million for CityFHEPS to support approximately 10,000 households at risk of losing their Section 8 vouchers, invest an additional \$10 million in direct cash transfer programs for families, youth, and individuals facing housing instability, building on last year's investment in the Bridge Project, and increase immigrant legal services funding to \$80 million, ensuring immigrant New Yorkers can access vital protections.

We also strongly oppose the Administration's proposed changes to CityFHEPS, which

require households to pay 40% of their income toward the rent after five years on the program. The policy punishes the poorest New Yorkers, undermines the program's purpose, and risks pushing families back into homelessness. All for projected savings representing just 0.01% of the City's budget, which we don't expect to materialize, given that many of those families will end up back in homelessness.

Additionally, the City must invest \$40 million to implement Local Law 35, ensuring mental health professionals are available in family shelters, fill the gap in child care funding, which is essential to helping families transition out of shelter, and resolve ongoing shelter (TIMER) provider payment issues, which continue to destabilize critical services.

New York City has a moral and fiscal responsibility to lead during these uncertain times, and we urge the Council to continue advocating for a budget that prioritizes families, protects against federal threats, and strengthens our collective mission to end homelessness. Thank you.

KRISTIN MILLER: Good afternoon, I'm
Kristen Miller, and I am Executive Director of

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3 Homeless Services United, a member organization
4 representing 55 nonprofits that deliver homeless
5 services and shelter services across the city. I'm
6 submitting written testimony that echoes much of what
7 my colleagues here have presented.

8 What I wanted to focus on is the reaction
9 to the Commissioner's comments regarding payment
10 issues. She has acknowledged that we have a problem
11 —we have an issue with nonprofits getting paid. I
12 have testified before you many times, discussing the
13 hundreds of millions of dollars collectively owed to
14 nonprofits, which date back to fiscal year 2019.

15 I think the message for us to you is for
16 you to please continue to push. We have seen some
17 improvements. But the reality is, we are barely ahead
18 of where we were a year ago.

19 We hear a lot of things happening. It's
20 like the track being laid, but the train is not
21 moving. For example, somebody might have been owed
22 \$60 million, and now they're owed \$38 million. *They*
23 *are still owed \$38 million.* They're still paying a \$1
24 million in interest this year alone.

25 This is funding that should go back into
the program. It should be going back into the mission

of helping people in New York City. I think when the budget comes, when we're looking at the budget, we are happy to see that there was some money in there for MOCs, Mayor's Office of Contract Services. They need more staff and OTPS funding to make improvements to PASSPort. That was good to see.

We are seeing a decrease in DHS staff. Commissioner Park noted that there are many cooks stirring the pot, right? We need more program staff, budget, and fiscal staff. Right? (TIMER) We are not seeing that investment, and we believe that there is no way we will ever get ahead until there are more trained people to process the paperwork so that we have the ability to invoice.

I look forward to working with you more on this. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure, just one quick question, and then I am going to hand it over to Council Member Brewer.

All told, your member organizations, how much are they currently owned by the City, approximately?

KRISTIN MILLER: I would guess over half a billion dollars, going back many, many fiscal years.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Council
4 Member Brewer?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I have a question.
6 When people have vouchers, they have trouble getting
7 an apartment. So, Laura Lazurus (phonetic) testified
8 earlier about her organization that helps people get
9 an apartment and then stay in the apartment. Is that
10 the kind of organization that would be helpful to
11 fund for people to get an apartment and then to stay
12 in the apartment? That's number one.

13 And number two is, I am trying to be nice
14 to HomeBase, I've been criticizing them for the last
15 30 years. To me, it seems like too many people are
16 going into the shelters, and this issue could be
17 stopped. We have stopped it. I know how to do it in
18 our office. I'm wondering if there are other ways,
19 beyond just relying on HomeBase, to prevent people
20 from entering the shelter system in the first place.
21 So, it's getting them out of shelter and getting them
22 not in (sic).

23 ALISON WILKEY: I think to your first
24 question, what we would really like to see is DSS
25 revamp the way that CityFHEPS is administered by
making it easier for that process to go smoothly.

That includes giving third parties, such as organizations like ours, who are trying to help people, access to their Shopping Letters and vouchers, allowing us to move those applications along. Because right now, all we can do is make phone calls, and we cannot actually get things moving. Even having a system in place, which should already be available, where people can look up the status of their own application, would be important. There are a number of reforms that could be made that would actually just make the process go more smoothly, that really should be done at DSS.

CHRIS MANN: Yeah, I mean, I would echo that. And in terms of Anthos Home, WIN works with them; they're a great organization, I think. Anything we can do to be creative, in terms of getting households placed, is great, and I think their model has a ton of potential and has worked well at WIN.

To the other part of your question...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Don't go there in the first place.

CHRIS MANN: Yeah, the Council acted, right? You passed CityFHEPS expansion, which would

have helped keep people in their homes (INAUDIBLE)...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It was your good
idea, if I remember correctly, sir. Yes.

CHRIS MANN: (LAUGHS) Yes, so, obviously,
that is stuck in litigation, but we know that if we
can meet people where they're at, in their homes, and
keep them there, that is a much better outcome than
letting them go into shelter.

KRISTIN MILLER: Just quickly, Anthos, I
think I agree with what has been said. The one unique
thing that Anthos does bring is that—they are a
member of ours—and they bring to the table that they
are also developing a relationship with landlords.
Right? So, they are at all ends of the work that
needs to be done, which I think is really important,
so that landlords have some place to go should there
be a problem. Right?

Regarding HomeBase, I think it is
important—and I am glad you brought it up—that the
demand for HomeBase has been exponentially growing
over the years, and the budgets, the contract amounts
to do this work have not. Now, there are often long

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3 waits just to get an appointment with HomeBase, which
4 was not the original model.

5 So, I think it is easy to blame the
6 HomeBase providers, but in fact, they are now
7 structurally unable to meet the demand. And I think
8 that, when we look ahead, if federal funding is being
9 cut, if programs are being reduced, the important
10 thing for us all to remember is that the people
11 aren't going anywhere. Right? So, just because the
12 resources are disappearing, we still need to serve
13 them. So, I think HomeBase is going to become more
14 and more important as we go forward.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
16 much.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
18 much for all you do.

19 Uh, 32BJ, are you ready? Alright, we've
20 got Sara Pennenberg and Tammy Murray.

21 (PAUSE)

22 SARA PENNENBERG: Good afternoon, Chair
23 Ayala and Chair Brennan, Members of this committee.
24 I'm Sara Pennenberg, and I'm the Political
25 Coordinator for Local 32BJ. 32BJ is the nation's
largest union of property service workers

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3 representing a 185,000 members, including over 90,000
4 in New York.

5 I am here today to urge the City Council
6 to fund the back pay lawfully owed to the security
7 officers who have served at DHS-contracted shelters.
8 Security officers at City shelters are frontline
9 workers in some of New York's most challenging
10 workplaces, serving the most vulnerable of our
11 neighbors. The majority of these workers are Black
12 and brown New Yorkers who deserve not only our
13 respect, but fair wages and benefits that reflect
14 their essential role in protecting our community and
15 allowing them to build stable and dignified lives in
16 the city that they help keep safe.

17 Beginning in 2020, 32BJ campaigned for
18 legislation to require prevailing wage benefits for
19 security officers at city-contracted shelters. The
20 Safety for Our Shelters Act, sponsored by Council
21 Members Ayala and Moya, passed in 2021. However,
22 contract amendment delays resulted in officers being
23 owed back pay, retroactive to the required start
24 date.

25 Despite 32BJ's sustained effort to
understand the cause and the scope of this

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3 delinquency, and engagement with agencies and other
4 stakeholders, we, still to this day, believe that
5 thousands of officers are owed tens of millions of
6 dollars in retroactive wages and benefits.

7 We are asking the Council to allocate no
8 less than \$90 million to DHS to fund the back pay
9 owed to thousands of workers. These allocations,
10 representing only a small percentage of the DHS
11 budget (TIMER) would be life-changing for many
12 officers who are owed.

13 In closing, I would like to highlight the
14 cascading impact that delayed payments by the City to
15 contracted social service providers have on working
16 people who deserve better from the city they serve
17 every day.

18 Beyond budget season, 32BJ looks forward
19 to working with the Council and stakeholders to
20 advance reforms that will lead to contracted work at
21 city facilities, including shelter security officers
22 getting the respect they are due. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

24 TAMMY MURRAY: Good afternoon, everyone.
25 My name is Tammy Murray. I'm 46 years old, born and

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3 raised in New York City, and I'm also an Army
4 veteran.

5 I work as a security officer in the
6 City's shelter system. I've been working in security
7 for almost eight years, ever since coming back from
8 the military. On a day-to-day basis, my job is to
9 keep everything running smoothly. I make sure all my
10 guards and my coworkers show up, and that they're
11 doing their job to keep everyone safe. When things do
12 happen, we're the first responders. If there's a fire
13 in the kitchen or anywhere in the building, we
14 evacuate the building on a need-to-know basis. If
15 there's a fight, we step in and try to de-escalate
16 the situation. It's not easy work, but it's
17 important. The thing about shelters is that many
18 people don't want to be there. It's true. I know that
19 because I went through the shelter system myself.
20 When I first got out of the military and came back to
21 New York, I was in the shelter system with my
22 children. So every time I go to work, I try to make
23 it as smooth an experience as possible for people
24 coming in. They're in a tough spot.

25 I moved out of the shelter system when I
got a job in security. It was huge for me, but still,

every month I was scrambling to pay my bills. So when we got the prevailing wage adjustment, it was really a big deal. It would mean my hourly salary nearly doubled, and I could pay all my bills and also help my children and grandchildren more. But then it took several months for me to see the new number hit as well as others.

As a hardworking veteran and mother, I deserve a living wage, and I deserve the pay that I worked almost three years of shifts for. Ever since I got out of the military, I've been fighting to get on my feet. Right now, I'm in between jobs. (TIMER) The shelter I worked at, which was a migrant shelter, had closed, and I've been waiting to be assigned to a new site. That could probably take up to a few months. I don't know. I'm a little behind on my rent and phone bill, but with this money, I could finally catch up. I could pay my bills and make it through this job transition. Most importantly, I could send something to my kids and grandkids. I'm about to be a grandmother of four. So I urge the City Council to find the back pay rightfully owed to security officers like me, as well as others. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much,
thank you

For our next panel, we have Emely Páez,
Molly Eckerle, Abdullah Younus, and Joe Rosenberg.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, you can begin.

EMELY PÁEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon,
Chair Ayala, Chair Brannan, and Council Members
Avilés, Banks, Cabán, Ossé, Restler, Riley, Stevens,
and Ung, for taking the time for this hearing and
this testimony presented by the Hispanic Federation,
a nonpartisan organization seeking to empower and
advance Hispanic communities through programs and
legislative advocacy.

Our network of 780 member and partner
organizations, over 200 of which are here in New York
City, are front-line service providers for our
neighborhoods and communities. Despite being
significantly undercapitalized and under resourced,
local community-based organizations remain the heart
and soul of ever-changing and ever-growing Latino
families. They are deeply embedded in our
neighborhoods, providing our most vulnerable
residents with food, shelter, and clothing, helping

at-risk youth succeed academically, helping low-income families to obtain health insurance, and helping workers gain the skills they need to be more successfully mobile and socially mobile.

Additionally, CBOs uplift communities that would otherwise be voiceless to advance equity and opportunities to improve everyone's quality of life.

Today, we are taking the time to advocate for the expansion of key funds for the incoming year to support our ever-growing Latino families, to ensure that the City prioritizes the allocation of resources that can improve the well-being of our vulnerable communities.

Hispanic Federation is requesting that the City Council provide baseline funding of a \$100 million to Community Fund Connection, CFC, to allow emergency food providers to battle food insecurities for all New Yorkers. Additionally, as the Council did in 2020, in response to a severe hunger crisis, we request the allocation of \$20 million in discretionary funds for emergency funding for food pantries in the fiscal year 2026 for the New York City budget for the Hispanic Federation, as well as

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3 our community partners, Met Council, and Catholic
4 Charities.

5 For over 15 (TIMER) years, a cornerstone
6 of the Hispanic Federation's Lucha Contra el Hambre
7 hunger relief effort has been boosting nutritional
8 food support to needy families across New York City,
9 fulfilling the need for food items and food pantries,
10 to improve the health and nutritional status of New
11 Yorkers.

12 Through our network of nonprofit
13 community-based organizations and other partner
14 agencies across New York City and its surrounding
15 areas, Hispanic Federation worked to provide fresh
16 fruit, produce, and meat that meet the needs of
17 culturally responsive and diverse communities across
18 the region.

19 To date in fiscal year 2025, Lucha Contra
20 el Hambre has provided nearly 350 meals, Thanksgiving
21 turkeys, and Christmas (INAUDIBLE), impacting 15,000
22 families living in New York's most vulnerable
23 communities. On the ground, service providers trusted
24 among vulnerable Latino communities throughout the
25 city can (INAUDIBLE) reach those needs.

We are grateful for the City Council's
commitment to addressing food insecurities that are
felt throughout New York due to economic
deficiencies.

Additionally, we are thankful for the
support that has been provided to our neighbors. One
of our underlying basic needs for the overall health
and safety of all populations is food security, and
it continues to impact Latino and Black New Yorkers
most deeply.

According to the 2024 Food By Numbers
Report by the Mayor's Office for Food and Policy,
over 40% of adults in New York City lived in
households at risk for food insecurity in 2023,
compared to 39% in 2022, continuing a rising trend
since the pandemic.

The report also highlights that the
impact of higher food prices is another reason why
HF's hunger relief program focuses on providing fresh
fruits and vegetables to pantries and communities
where these are harder to access.

In the face of deepened cuts and once
stable federal funding, the need for New York City to
step up to meet the needs of our vulnerable neighbors

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3 is critically more important now than ever. We have
4 heard from organizations that have had cuts in the
5 amount of food offered, as well as a reduction in the
6 number of families that they can serve due to budget
7 cuts.

8 Although we appreciate the maintenance of
9 CFC's funding at \$36.1 million in the Executive
10 Budget, we anticipate a significantly larger need due
11 to uncertain economic times and federal funding cuts
12 that directly impact communities of color.

13 Hispanic Federation applauds the City
14 Council and calls for \$100 million in baseline
15 funding, and we will continue to advocate for funding
16 among the final budget.

17 We thank you for your time, and we look
18 forward to working with you all to help serve New
19 Yorkers by providing culturally responsive hunger
20 relief assistance programs. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

22 Joe?

23 JOE ROSENBERG: Good afternoon, Chairs
24 Ayala, Brannan, and Brewer. I'm Joe Rosenberg,
25 Director of the Catholic Community Relations Council
representing the Archdiocese of New York and the

Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens. Catholic Charities of both dioceses have been providing shelter, food, and other essential services to New Yorkers for more than a century. Combined, we operate over 80 food pantries throughout the five boroughs and serve more than 18 million meals annually.

We have faced many challenges assisting New Yorkers over the last one hundred years, but we are currently confronting a hunger and food insufficiency crisis. This is due to the rising poverty rate of New Yorkers, the dramatic increase in rents and prices of food, and, even more significantly, the unprecedented federal attacks on programs that protect our clients. Two of these are SNAP and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

SNAP provides essential funding to address food and security for vulnerable Americans. The proposed congressional reduction of \$230 billion from the program is particularly troubling and will have significant consequences by increasing the number of Americans who face hunger daily.

A similar situation exists with the Emergency Food and Shelter program, a crucial federal resource for our food programs. This was placed on

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3 hold by the federal government in March, and as a
4 result, both Catholic charities have sustained a loss
5 of over \$800,000 each.

6 We have seen the number of people at
7 pantries increase significantly. We're not just
8 feeding working families, seniors, and children;
9 newer clients include college students, recent
10 college grads who are either unemployed or
11 underemployed, youth aging out of foster care, and
12 migrants, many with infants.

13 State Comptroller DiNapoli's report last
14 month on the cost of living reveals that one in nine
15 households in New York is affected by food
16 insecurity. That adds up to over 1.3 million New York
17 City residents going hungry. The plight of children
18 is particularly heartbreaking, with more than one in
19 four in our city living in poverty.

20 Due to all these obstacles, and with more
21 New Yorkers going hungry every year, we urgently
22 request \$20 million in emergency funding for food
23 pantries to be included in the FY26 New York City
24 budget for both Catholic Charities, as well as our
25 partners, Met Council and the Hispanic Federation.

3 We also rely on the Community Food
4 Connection (TIMER), and we strongly support your
5 effort to baseline it at \$100 million annually. The
6 Mayor's budget has it at \$36.1 million, which is not
7 enough.

8 Our city faces daunting challenges, but
9 one of the most important priorities is that we
10 cannot have our fellow New Yorkers go hungry. We
11 thank you for your long-standing support of our
12 mission in assisting our city's residents.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

14 MOLLY ECKERLE: Good afternoon, Chair
15 Ayala, Chair Brannan, and fellow Members of the
16 Committee. My name is Molly Eckerle, and I am a Food
17 Policy Associate at the Metropolitan Council on
18 Jewish Poverty. Thank you for holding for holding
19 this hearing today.

20 Met Council operates the largest Kosher
21 and Halal food pantry network in the country, serving
22 more than 200,000 New Yorkers annually, regardless of
23 religious observance.

24 I want to start today by applauding the
25 City Council for calling for \$100 million in baseline
funding for Community Food Connection in response to

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3 the preliminary budget. While the Executive Budget
4 did not include this amount, and we are grateful that
5 the funding for CFC has been maintained, in this
6 uncertain moment when federal anti-hunger programs
7 are under attack, it is essential that the City step
8 in to fill the gap that federal cuts will leave
9 behind.

10 So, today, I join our fellow emergency
11 food providers in urgently requesting that the City
12 invest \$100 million in CFC and create a special \$20
13 million fund for emergency food.

14 There are an estimated 1.3 million food
15 insecure New Yorkers, and according to a recent New
16 York Health Foundation Report, food insufficiency is
17 currently estimated to be higher than it was in 2020.

18 Additionally, 63% of households with
19 children are unable to consistently meet their basic
20 needs, such as food, housing, or healthcare. CFC is a
21 uniquely valuable program for Kosher and Halal
22 providers, as it empowers pantries to choose the
23 foods that meet their communities' needs by offering
24 a robust selection, including many Kosher and Halal
25 options that are not available through other funding
sources.

There is an urgent need for more funding for frontline emergency food providers. By baselining funding for CFC at \$100 million, the City Council will enable these providers, who are facing dramatic federal cuts and pauses, to battle food insecurity for all New Yorkers.

Additionally, in 2020, at the height of the need and uncertainty, New York City created a special fund for emergency food. These dollars allowed Met Council and our partners, Hispanic Federation, and Catholic Charities to deploy resources to areas with limited pantry and social service infrastructure and meet the needs of communities with religiously informed or culturally nuanced diets.

With this proven experience and in the face of a hunger crisis that is becoming worse than we saw five years ago, we urge the City Council (TIMER) to commit \$20 million to continue and expand on the important work that we have done.

Thank you for your time today, and we hope to continue to work with these committees and the City Council to better meet the needs of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity.

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3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
4 much.

5 Our next panel will be Kim Moscaritolo,
6 Carolina Cortes-Rivera, and Emily Brett.

7 KIM MOSCARITOLO: Hello. Thank you so much
8 for having this hearing, Chair Ayala and Chair
9 Brannan, as well as Council Member Brewer, and all
10 the Members of the committees.

11 My name is Kim Moscaritolo, and I'm the
12 State Policy Director for Hunger Free America. I've
13 testified in front of the General Welfare Committee
14 several times in the past few months, talking about
15 the massive hunger crisis in New York City. I want to
16 thank all of my fellow advocates who were here
17 advocating for the baseline funding for CFC, which,
18 of course, we agree with. And they've given you all
19 the statistics on hunger in New York City, so I don't
20 need to repeat all of that.

21 I will say that this week, the House
22 Agriculture Committee passed a portion of the broader
23 budget package that would slash US domestic food
24 assistance by \$300 billion. The cuts to SNAP alone
25 would reduce benefits for all 41 million participants
in the program. So I think it's more important than

ever that the City Council step up in terms of
funding programs that will help people who are hungry
and help people who are facing poverty.

Nearly one out of every five children in
New York City experiences food insecurity. And at the
same time, there are hundreds of thousands of city
residents eligible for federally funded benefits who
do not receive them.

So, in terms of what we believe the city
can do to most effectively fight this, first and
foremost, increasing funding to nonprofit groups that
increase access to government food benefits through
the NYC benefits program and direct City Council
funding, accelerate the City's promised work to
create a MyCity portal that would allow people to
apply for benefits, multiple benefits at the same
time. We want to make sure that all classes in New
York City public schools provide either an in-
classroom school breakfast or a grab-and-go
breakfast. We want to make sure that you work with
nonprofit groups to launch a comprehensive outreach
and enrollment campaign to ensure robust
participation in the new summer EBT program.

We hope that you will take all or some of these actions rapidly. We still believe that the best way to combat hunger (TIMER) is to connect people with the federal benefits they are eligible for. We also think this will help, as we are facing budget cuts everywhere. Making sure that people are connected to those federal benefits, that's hopefully less funding that the City Council will have to provide directly to them.

So we thank you for your time, and we hope you'll commit to some of these programs.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Kim.

CAROLINA CORTES-RIVERA: Hi, thank you to General Welfare Committee Chair Diana Ayala for holding today's budget hearing and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Carolina Cortes-Rivera, and I'm here today as a Washington Heights constituent and as an anti-hunger advocate. I serve as the Digital Food Choice Program Manager at the West Side Campaign Against Hunger, known as WSCAH, which for 46 years has worked to increase access to healthy foods, fresh produce, and connect New Yorkers in need with benefits enrollment.

In 2024, I helped over 2,000 customers receive groceries delivered directly to their homes, a distribution channel we're using to expand our vision of food access and choice.

Last year, WSCAH provided 5 million pounds of food to over a 110,000 New Yorkers, of which more than 50% was fresh produce.

Our digital choice platform gives customers the option to select their grocery box type online, and soon will let customers choose a pickup location closer to home.

Folks shouldn't have to endure long commutes to obtain their groceries, so we're working to address the accessibility gap by giving back a critical resource to our customers, time, especially given that many of them work long hours or have families to care for.

Choice is more than just choosing food items; it's also about where and when customers access their groceries free of stigma. Our home delivery program reaches patients experiencing food insecurity, specifically pregnant people, families with young children, and older adults, many of whom live with chronic mobility issues.

3 Reliable access to healthy foods has
4 clinical and preventative health benefits. Every New
5 Yorker deserves that.

6 None of this work is possible without the
7 City's financial support. Programs like Community
8 Food Connections are critical in achieving food
9 security in our city and help frontline providers
10 like WSCAH keep our pantries stocked with market-
11 quality fresh produce for our communities. But we're
12 struggling in a time where both housing and food
13 security are reaching another record high. We've had
14 to, for the first time, turn away new customers at
15 our in-person pantry on West 86th Street on the Upper
16 West Side.

17 The need in our city is indisputable, and
18 access to nutritious food is fundamental to a
19 dignified life. Yet we're facing unjustifiable budget
20 cuts to the very programs that help us innovatively
21 increase food access and promote food as medicine.

22 So, although last week the Mayor (TIMER)
23 proposed \$31 million again for CFC funding in the
24 year ahead, we know this is not nearly enough. We ask
25 that the FY26 New York City budget increase baseline
funding to a total of a \$100 million for Community

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3 Food Connections, formerly known as EFAP (Emergency
4 Food Assistance Program).

5 CFC funding helps emergency food
6 providers like WSCAH purchase fresh, quality food for
7 our communities. Despite us implementing cost-saving
8 solutions through coalition-building initiatives like
9 the Round Table, we still need the City's support to
10 ensure our communities are healthy and nourished.

11 Last year, the Round Table served 69
12 million meals across 882 distribution points and
13 saved over \$200,000 in bulk purchasing through
14 collective action. Imagine the reach and impact we
15 could have with the City's increased financial
16 support.

17 Thank you for your time and leadership,
18 and I'm hopeful that you can bolster the Community
19 Food Connections program to the needed levels. We're
20 grateful for your continued support and leadership.
21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

23 Okay, for our next panel, we have
24 Abdullah Younus, Catherine Trapani, Agnes Kim, Mark
25 Pap, and Constance Lesold.

(PAUSE)

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You can start.

3 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Thank you, Chair. I
4 appreciate it.

5 I'm Catherine Trapani, and I'm with
6 Volunteers of America Greater New York, and we are
7 one of the largest supportive housing and homeless
8 services providers in New York City.

9 I'm here today with gratitude to your
10 work and Deputy Speaker Ayala, Gale Brewer, and all
11 their other members of the Council to talk through
12 what has to happen with the homeless services safety
13 net so that we can weather the storm for the next
14 year.

15 I spoke with you at a rally recently
16 about the late payment crisis. I am depressed to say
17 that VOA is still owed \$32 million, and of the 51
18 returnable grant fund loans that we've put in, four
19 have been approved so far. So it's not the solution
20 that the City touted at the last hearing on this
21 matter. A budget priority would be to ensure the
22 returnable grant fund functions as described and can
23 really ensure cash flow.

24 I also just want to take a minute to talk
25 about the need to support students in temporary

housing across New York City. The homeless crisis continues to be in a bad place, and a lot of children are going to start school next year without the supplies they need to start the day. And that's because the Department of Education has yet to commit to funding Operation Backpack, which gives students in temporary housing access to the supplies they need before the first day of school so they can walk in the door and be fully prepared to succeed. So our ask would be a \$500,000 contribution from the DOE to Operation Backpack. I am grateful for the Council for including the \$250,000 in your budget response, but if we can nudge that number a little bit higher in the final, I think that would go a long way.

Finally, I want to talk about the need to invest in proven housing solutions. We're grateful for the investment in the HRA indirect funding, which is going to shore up the infrastructure for supportive housing. I'm grateful for the shift from the scattered to the congregate model to ensure that we have enough housing to meet the need. But finally, I do just want to say that the CityFHEPS budget continues to concern me. There is this sort of Trojan horse of a rule change coming through, where there's

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3 going to be a rent hike for long-term CityFHEPS
4 participants that will impact roughly 25% of the
5 population. (TIMER) So we hope that the Council
6 pushes back against that and really ensures that
7 CityFHEPS is fully funded for all voucher holders,
8 both for today and for tomorrow.

9 My written remarks certainly contain a
10 lot more detail, but I just want to thank you for
11 your ongoing advocacy and support of the sector.

12 (PAUSE)

13 AGNES KIM: Hello, my name is Agnes Kim,
14 and I'm testifying today on behalf of the Family
15 Homelessness Coalition, or FHC. FHC is made up of
16 organizations representing service and housing
17 providers, children's advocacy organizations, and
18 people with lived experience with family
19 homelessness. We're united by the goal of preventing
20 family homelessness, improving the well-being of
21 children and families in shelter, and supporting the
22 long-term stability of families with children who
23 leave shelter. Thank you to the chairs and members of
24 the committees for the opportunity to testify.

25 While we were pleased to see \$176.6
million in the Executive Budget dedicated to

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3 CityFHEPS, we are greatly concerned about the
4 proposed HRA rule to increase some recipients'
5 portion of rent from 30% to 40%.

6 While rents in New York City continue to
7 increase sharply, incomes have not. The cost of rent
8 has been rising faster than income, further widening
9 the gap in recent years. While we understand the need
10 to control costs in an uncertain federal and
11 budgetary environment, this change is not the way to
12 do so.

13 This is a critical moment for the City to
14 commit sufficient resources to support families in
15 need. Given the federal landscape, the City should do
16 all in its power to mitigate the impacts of looming
17 federal cuts to housing programs, social services,
18 Medicaid, and other social safety net programs.

19 FHC continues to strongly urge the
20 following priorities in the upcoming budget:

21 • Finding a housing stability solution for
22 the emergency housing voucher recipients, FHC is
23 deeply troubled by the planned end of the EHV
24 vouchers, which house around 16,000 families. There's
25 a looming crisis of homelessness if a solution is not
found for these families. While federal advocacy

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3 efforts continue, we urge all stakeholders to come
4 together with the plan.

5 • Additionally, increasing the budget for
6 HomeBase by \$37.9 million to a total of \$100 million
7 for eviction and aftercare services, and improving
8 housing stability for low-income households.

9 • We also support \$4 million in additional
10 funding for the City Commission on Human Rights to
11 enforce source of income discrimination, amongst
12 other priorities, which we've outlined in the
13 submitted written testimony as well.

14 On behalf of FHC, thank you again.

15 MARK PAPISH: Thank you, Deputy Speaker
16 Ayala and Chair Brannan, for the opportunity to speak
17 today, as well as Council Member Brewer.

18 My name is Mark Papish, and I'm the
19 Supervisor of Government and Community Affairs at the
20 Center for Family Representation, also known as CFR.

21 CFR is the assigned county-wide indigent
22 defense provider providing interdisciplinary legal
23 services to families facing ACS and investigations
24 and prosecutions in Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island,
25 and parts of the Bronx. In the last fiscal year
alone, we served thousands of clients, many of whom

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3 could have been your constituents, particularly
4 yours, Deputy Speaker Ayala. Over 90% of our clients
5 are Black, brown, or people of color. All of our
6 clients are victims of poverty, as we would say.

7 We also provide youth representation in
8 parts of Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. But I'm
9 actually not here today to speak about our family
10 defense model, but rather our complementary services,
11 which are in desperate need of support from legal
12 services for the working poor and legal services for
13 low-income New Yorkers.

14 As many of you know, coordination of
15 services is a critical aspect of any functioning
16 social safety net. In particular, when those
17 coordinates cause coordination between various legal
18 service and social service organizations. At CFR, we
19 are thrilled to have the Home for Good unit. What
20 this means is that when clients come to us facing ACS
21 investigations, they're coming to us with a number of
22 other issues, including landlord-tenant issues,
23 immigration issues, and issues navigating the social
24 safety net.

25 What Home for Good allows us to do is
just be a one-stop shop for all those issues. You

come in with an ACS issue, but you also have a non-payment case; we'll take care of it. And we're incredibly proud of this.

My apologies for being a little nervous. It's very wet outside, and it kinda ruined my notes.

But all that to say, getting to the ask, we're asking for \$425,000 for our Home for Good program, which offers holistic support for parents and youth, in addition to \$150,000 in (INAUDIBLE) services to continue our deep support for victims of (TIMER) DV. Thank you for your time, and hope to be better next time.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

ABDULLAH YOUNUS: Good afternoon, Chairs Brannan, Ayala, and Council Member Brewer. My name is Abdullah Younus, and I'm Vice President of Advocacy and Government Relations at United Way of New York City. I'm here today to express strong support for expanded funding for the Community Food Connections program that you've heard a lot about today.

In this year's budget, we want to call for the FY26 budget to implement the City Council's own vision and recommendation of \$100 million in

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3 baseline funding for this program, which was not
4 addressed in the Mayor's Executive Budget.

5 Community Food Connections is a proactive
6 approach to building resilient food infrastructure.
7 It emphasizes dignity, neighborhood trust, and access
8 to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. It
9 acknowledges that our emergency food systems were
10 never actually intended to be permanent fixtures.
11 However, for many New Yorkers, they've become exactly
12 that.

13 At United Way, we collaborate with over
14 400 community-based organizations across all five
15 boroughs and serve tens of thousands of New Yorkers
16 weekly.

17 In the wake of COVID, food insecurity
18 remains alarmingly high. Visits to food pantries are
19 up 85% since 2019 and have not gone down. Worse,
20 we've already begun to see pauses in federal programs
21 such as the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, which
22 currently owes \$1.25 million to 97 local CBOs.

23 CFC offers a solution. It provides
24 predictable funding, enabling local organizations to
25 plan effectively. It shifts our approach from
reactive to systemic, fostering a food system that is

equitable and sustainable. We know this model works because we've seen its impact firsthand. With sustained and enhanced support, CFC can serve as a blueprint for effective public/private collaboration when it comes to food access.

New Yorkers are counting on us. No one should have to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table. We urge the New York City Council to prioritize fully funding this program with \$100 million in demonstrating leadership and compassion that this moment demands. Thank you for your commitment to building a more just and food secure city.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank you all very much.

Constance?

CONSTANCE LESOLD: My name is Constance Lesold, and I just want to make a few comments on the importance in a democratic society of voting.

It seems to me that with all you've talked about today, which is so overwhelming, the difficulties, particularly in the shelter systems, but in all of them, it is very important that you have money in the budget to encourage voting. Maybe

you do, I'm sorry if I am wrong in suspecting that you don't have money in the budget specifically for the shelters, jails, mental hospitals, whatever.

I do know that out at Creedmoor, only one person voted in the last election in the part of Creedmoor that is there because there's not enough housing. Those people are free to come and go as they please. Only one person voted.

It is very, very important that you get the League of Women Voters and any other groups that you can to get into the shelters and other such places and get permission to get in and register voters. This is not an appeal to register them for any particular party or whatever. But we can't have a democratic society if people are not voting. And they're not. It's part of why we're in the problem we're in right now.

I am also very concerned about any mandatory work programs. (TIMER) We've tried those over and over. They don't work. Things aren't getting better. We have more and more people homeless, and the cost of living goes up and up and up. It is not fair when we give these big tax breaks to developers, while asking people who are in great need and under

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3 great stress to participate in mandatory work
4 programs So even if the federal government demands
5 them, I hope you will resist cooperating with these
6 kinds of programs that have not worked in the past
7 and won't work now. Involuntary commitment comes in
8 the category of those kinds of programs that don't
9 really work.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.
11 Thank you all.

12 Okay, our next panel will be Stephanie
13 Mansfeld, Gabriela Sandavol Requena, and Stephanie
14 Woodbine.

15 Hi, you can begin.

16 GABRIELA SANDOVAL REQUENA: Thank you so
17 much. Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair
18 Brennan, and Council Central Staff. Thank you for
19 holding this hearing and for the opportunity to
20 testify on behalf of New Destiny Housing. My name is
21 Gabriela Sandoval Requena, and I am the Vice
22 President of External Affairs for New Destiny
23 Housing.

24 New Destiny is the only organization in
25 New York that's 100% focused on permanent housing
solutions for domestic violence survivors. We do this

work because domestic violence is the number one
cause of family homelessness in New York City. Access
to a safe and affordable home often determines
survivors' ability to leave their abuser for good and
stay alive. As the federal government continues to
threaten vital housing programs for survivors, this
year more than ever, we need our City leaders to step
up and protect New Yorkers impacted by domestic
violence and homelessness.

We are submitting to extended written
testimony, so I'm just going to focus on our three
priorities here.

- We ask the City Council to urge members
of Congress to fund the Federal Emergency Housing
Voucher Program. The federal government notified
agencies in March that funding for the program is
ending this year. Nearly 8,000 households in our city
depend on this vital resource, including almost 1,700
domestic violence survivors. New Destiny helped house
more than half of these survivors. Since we maintain
close contact through our aftercare services with
them, we know how vulnerable many of them are to
return to homelessness or their abuser if they were
to lose the vouchers.

• We ask the Council to ensure that HRA, HPD, and NYCHA are planning for contingencies to support any loss of EHV's, including increased funding for CityFHEPS, and oppose the proposed income changes to the program.

• The 2026 budget must include \$6 million for ENDGBV's Flexible Funding Program for domestic violence survivors. We thank the Council for passing legislation that created this program back in 2022. The Flexible Funding Program was finally implemented last year as part (TIMER)-- of just a few more moments-- As part of the existing HOME+ initiative, however, the \$1.2 million allocated in the budget has proven to be insufficient. We understand that by now, the funding has actually run out.

Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

STEPHANIE WOODBINE: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Deputy Speaker Ayala and Chair Brannan, for the opportunity to comment on the Executive Budget.

My name is Stephanie Woodbine. I am a domestic violence survivor and a member of New Destiny Housing's survivor voice project. I'm also a

Resource Coordinator at New Destiny, serving around 40 domestic violence survivors as their case manager while they rebuild their lives after fleeing abuse and being rehomed.

I'm asking the City to fund the Flexible Funding Program to \$6 million. Now more than ever, flex grants are important because they save lives. My clients benefit from these grants to get necessary essential items. Imagine leaving everything and grabbing your baby in the middle of the night, and then imagine if you manage to keep your memories, losing them in a storage auction after five days' notice. That is the reality of survivorship, and it's these situations that make flex grants necessary.

The program was funded at a third of what we need. This impacted its rollout negatively in that there wasn't enough to pay dedicated staff, which accounted for high turnover. This meant most survivors who needed grants were left in the cold with little to no information on what was to come next, with an average of 28 days for processing applications at the one agency, Womankind, which rolled out the program in October of 2024.

3 We also need an expansion of housing
4 resources for survivors. They have nowhere to go when
5 they flee abuse. And the few programs like ours that
6 help are threatened by federal cuts. My clients are
7 afraid.

8 The new rule proposed by the Adams
9 administration to increase rent from 30% of income to
10 40% is reminiscent of systemic oppression. An
11 increase in income towards rent will destabilize low-
12 income families who are rebuilding their lives. It's
13 almost a punishment to these New Yorkers, most of
14 whom don't have other benefits to balance out an
15 increase in their rents. (TIMER) Food pantries are
16 not enough, and they are overburdened as is.
17 Something has to give. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

19 STEPHANIE MANSFELD: Hi. Good afternoon,
20 it's been a long day. It's raining now. We started on
21 a pretty sunny and gloomy day. I appreciate your
22 time.

23 My name is Stephanie Mansfeld, Stephanie
24 M., and I'm a single mom of three. I just want to
25 take two seconds to acknowledge all that we
accomplished here today.

There were the Catholic kids who came in and saw us. There were the union members who came and showed their unity. There were many, many, many moments of frustration and just overall clarity and just frustration on my end.

I'm a single mom from Brooklyn. I have three children. I am disabled. I'm so off script, what I wanted to say to you guys is irrelevant to what I heard today.

I am a EHV voucher holder. There's something that the DSS Commissioner said today. She said that homelessness and people on the street have been failed. And what I wanted to respond back is to say that the lack of proper and adequate support is what failed those homeless people, unhoused people.

I was housed and unsupported as a survivor. I was unseen and unheard in my survival-ness. My children— I have a son who is neurodivergent. I have another son who has ADHD hyperactivity, undiagnosed for a very long time, because of the lack of support (TIMER), and being a mother who is also suffering and has a disability, an unseen disability.

It is hard to reach my full potential in life without the proper support. So, as we are sitting here and we're trying to count the pennies and see how we can distribute money to really impact homelessness, I am a mom of three trying to curate and trying to make sure that my kids can be that astronaut, can be that writer, can be that soccer player. I have to make sure that this cycle ends with me, that being a voucher holder ends with me, that they can be the best that they can be. I don't have that village; I'm relying on these services, so I'm here to advocate for that. I am symptomatic, I am sick, I'm disabled, and I'm advocating for that here today. So hearing these things and sitting here and just being like okay, I'm cool, this is great, this is why I'm here. I should have been here last month, I should have been here, in so many hearings before, but just having the pleasure of being able to be here; I was in the hospital in March. I'm over my time, I'm sorry. I was in the hospital in March, and I was hospitalized for a very long time, and I still had to make sure that my kids were okay.

My ask from you guys is to push for the FHEPS to make sure that the funding in FHEPS is met,

to make sure that HRA, DSS, and those things that are meant for not only survivors but also for the homeless, that we have access to that care. There is a lack of continuity, so a lot of things that I was hearing today are like this discontinuity of care.

It's like DSS was saying that they have police officers. This morning, I'm in my safe space. I'm in my safe home, and I see a homeless person, and I see how they have a mental health illness, but there's a DSS officer who can address that mental health illness specifically for that person, right? But does the local precinct know that? Does HRA know that? How do we hold these systems accountable? How do we get them to communicate with one another and work in a way that the layman, like myself, who's just trying to survive, can access these things and thrive?

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Okay, next we have Patricia Wong, Leslie Thrope, Shervon Small, Brian Fritsch, Abby Biberman, and Raquel Namuche.

Okay, do you want to start from my right, your left?

3 SHERVON SMALL: Good afternoon, Chairs

4 Ayala and Brennan, Council Member Brewer, and council
5 staff. My name is Shervon Small, and I serve as the
6 Executive Director of Legal Services NYC. Thank you
7 for the opportunity to speak today about the crucial
8 role legal services play in reducing poverty,
9 preventing homelessness, and keeping New York
10 families safe and stable.

11 At Legal Services NYC, the largest
12 provider of civil legal services in the country, we
13 serve more than 100,000 New Yorkers. But we are not
14 only a legal services provider, we are an anti-
15 homelessness prevention organization, an anti-poverty
16 organization. Our work helps people stay in their
17 homes, access health care and food, maintain
18 financial security, fight back against discrimination
19 and exploitation, and secure the necessities of life.
20 And we do all of this while saving the city hundreds
21 of millions of dollars.

22 Last year alone, our eviction prevention
23 program and benefits saved the City over \$300 million
24 in averted shelter costs, representing a nearly 10 to
25 one return on investment.

Meanwhile, the nonprofit sector that delivers these services is being pushed to the brink. Contracting and reimbursement delays have led providers, including LSNYC, to wait six to ten months or more for payments. We've had to draw down credit lines just to meet payroll. No nonprofit, no matter how mission-oriented, can survive this way. No nonprofit can survive with the City owing them tens of millions of dollars day in, day out, year in, year out. And if one of us falters, even if one of us in this group falters, one of us in the city falters, it has a ripple effect that impacts the entire system.

We're also staring down a federal financial cliff with core programs at risk. If the City experiences federal funding cuts, it may be tempted to scale back or eliminate crucial programs like eviction prevention, tenant harassment protection, immigrant legal services, and public benefits advocacy. But let's be clear, cutting these services won't save money. It will cost the City more. Our programs (TIMER) are not just social supports; they are cost-saving interventions that prevent homelessness, reduce reliance on emergency services, and keep families stable and out of crisis.

3 More New Yorkers rely on us every single
4 year, and we keep people out of shelters, out of
5 hospitals, and other costly systems of last resort.
6 The data is clear: investing in civil legal services
7 upfront avoids significantly greater costs down the
8 road.

9 When families are evicted, they end up in
10 shelters. When immigrants can't work legally, they
11 rely more on public benefits. Again, investing in
12 civil legal services is a great bet, and the City
13 cannot go wrong with increasing the funding and
14 paying us on time and relying on the services that we
15 continue to provide day in and day out for the City
16 of New York. Thank you.

17 LESLIE THROPE: Thank you, Chairs Brannan
18 and Ayala, and to the Members of the New York City
19 Council and their staff, for your long-standing
20 support of the legal services for the Working Poor
21 Coalition.

22 My name is Leslie Thrope, and I serve as
23 the Executive Director of Housing Conservation
24 Coordinators, one of five member organizations of
25 this Working Poor Coalition. Alongside HCC, the
Coalition includes CAMBA, Mobilization for Justice,

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3 Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and
4 TakeRoot Justice.

5 For over 20 years, with the steadfast
6 support of City Council, this coalition has worked to
7 address the civil legal needs of working poor and
8 other low-income New Yorkers, individuals whose
9 income slightly exceeds the threshold for traditional
10 free legal services.

11 The Working Poor Initiative is vital to
12 preserving the economic stability and independence of
13 these New Yorkers. It allocated \$455,000 to each
14 coalition partner in FY25, and this year, we are
15 requesting an increase to \$600,000 per year for the
16 organizations. That's a full restitution of last
17 year's funding and an enhancement to meet the growing
18 demand and increasing challenges that we face.

19 This increased investment will allow
20 coalition members to increase and expand our services
21 to our communities, including immigration services,
22 workers' rights services, access to public benefits,
23 and economic justice. These services are more
24 critical than ever as federal policy changes and
25 budget cuts continue to erode the social safety net
for working New Yorkers.

Every day, our organizations work with clients who face civil legal crises that threaten their livelihoods in their homes. These include wage theft and unpaid labor, identity theft of frozen bank accounts, denial of public benefits, and consumer and foreclosure issues that jeopardize their housing stability. Without legal assistance, these issues often push working (TIMER) individuals and families into poverty.

In conclusion, the Council's investment in the legal services for the working poor remains the only funding stream specifically dedicated to addressing the civil legal needs of working people in New York City. We urge you to not only continue this flexible essential funding but to increase it. We thank you for your time and your continued support.

RAQUEL NAMUCHE: Good afternoon, Chairs Ayala and Brannan, and Members of the committees, of which I don't know where they are, but thanks to them as well.

My name is Raquel Namuche, and I'm a Tenant Advocate and Community Outreach Specialist at Mobilization for Justice. I'm also a proud member of

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3 MFJ's staff f MFJ's staff union, ALAA - UAW LOCAL
4 2325.

5 Mobilization for Justice has been
6 providing free legal services for over 60 years to
7 low-income individuals, and we pair that work with
8 community advocacy, education, and impact litigation
9 that brings relief to many people who need it the
10 most.

11 I'm here today to talk to you about the
12 need to fully fund and enhance legal services for the
13 Working Poor, the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative,
14 and all the other vital legal service programs so
15 many New Yorkers depend on.

16 Every year, MFJ's dedicated staff of
17 paralegals, organizers, social workers, and attorneys
18 handle approximately 14,000 cases from across New
19 York City in the broad areas of housing, disability
20 and aging rights, economic justice, and children's
21 rights. And we're providing these legal services to
22 working-class communities in the context, as you all
23 know, of a federal administration that is openly
24 hostile to the ideals of public service and the
25 public good.

The other difficulty comes in the severe delays, as others have already mentioned, that the nonprofit community faces in contract payments and hiring obstacles amidst the challenges of pay parity for public service work.

And though it's been a tough year, we know it has been even a tougher for our clients. So our goal is to be the strongest advocates and allies we can possibly be, but doing so, of course, requires resources.

Last month, I assisted a family living in an illegal basement apartment to obtain emergency housing relocation services. This was really tough. The family had a one-year-old baby. And for two weeks, the baby couldn't have access to her bottles, (TIMER) her baby seat, her food, and other necessary items.

So it's for these clients that I strongly urge the Council to fund and enhance the following initiatives fully: Legal services for the working poor, family advocacy and guardianship support, the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative, legal services for low-income immigrants, low-wage worker support, and the new Protect NYC Families Initiative.

3 For MFJ, some of our most critical
4 programs, such as our Immigrant Practice and our
5 Kinship Caregiver Law Project, Council actually fully
6 funds these programs, or this is where we get the
7 main support from, financial support from. So without
8 this support, we can't continue the robust services
9 that we offer.

10 For kinship Care in particular, this is
11 actually the most crucial, as we are the only New
12 York City provider of free legal services for
13 grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other kin caring for
14 their children who reside outside of the foster care
15 system.

16 As New Yorkers, we know that immigrants
17 are the ones who make our neighborhoods the vibrant
18 communities that we all love, and so now is the time
19 to demonstrate that we will stand with our neighbors.
20 Again, I respectfully ask that you favorably consider
21 our funding request, and I thank you for your time.
22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

24 BRIAN FRITSCH: Good afternoon, Chair
25 Brannan and Deputy Speaker Ayala. I am Brian Fritsch,

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3 Associate Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory
4 Committee to the MTA, or PCAC.

5 We are incredibly disappointed that Mayor
6 Adams once again refused to expand the Fair Fares
7 program to 200% of the federal poverty level in his
8 Executive Budget. The Mayor spoke at length in his
9 address about making New York City more affordable
10 for working-class people. Still, at \$22,000 for an
11 individual, or just over \$45,000 for a family of
12 four, nearly all working people make too much to
13 qualify for the program. Raising Fair Fares to 200%
14 would expand eligibility to over 415,000 residents,
15 including 160,000 regular commuters and minimum wage
16 New Yorkers who are incredibly likely to be transit
17 dependent. It is critical to do this now before MTA
18 fare increases, which are scheduled to take place
19 later this summer, making the subways and buses more
20 expensive for everyone.

21 On top of this, New York City is the
22 least generous major US city that offers a public
23 transit discount for low-income residents, despite
24 having one of the highest costs of living and the
25 highest poverty rates. Nearly all other US cities use
200% as their income limit, and most also offer

discounts on their commuter rail systems, which New York City does not do. It's time to change that, too, so that people who live in subway deserts, but are close to the Long Island Railroad or Metro North, within the city, can use their Fair Fares benefits on whichever system is most convenient for them.

Yet, what is perhaps the most frustrating about the program is that, due to its dismally low enrollment rate, it is feasible for the City to raise the eligibility threshold while maintaining the current funding level and still end the year with money in the bank.

It is time to stop kicking the can down the road on this program and expand Fair Fares to 200%. I don't think anyone wants to go through another year where it takes HRA six months to implement another 20% change. Working people deserve a half-price ride; they won't qualify unless we raise the income level.

Thank you to the Council (TIMER), and especially Speaker Adam, for your steadfast commitment to this program. Let's expand Fair Fares now.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

3 ABBY BIBERMAN: Deputy Speaker Ayala,
4 Chair Brannan, and staff, thank you for the
5 opportunity to testify about the FY26 Budget. My name
6 is Abby Biberman, and I am the Associate Director of
7 the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal
8 Assistance Group (NYLAG).

9 In a political climate where access to
10 SNAP and Medicaid benefits is on the chopping block,
11 where the intention is to create more barriers and/or
12 eliminate access to these benefits, the City must
13 provide the highest level of care to New Yorkers in
14 need.

15 Our clients still encounter problems
16 completing their applications and recertifications
17 because of systems at HRA that are not functioning
18 well or are not accessible, and these barriers are
19 leading to improper denials.

20 Although we are pleased with the recent
21 improvement in timeliness, we are still concerned
22 that many of our clients are still waiting too long
23 for cash assistance that they need for their
24 families. And these delays also put our clients up
25 against housing court deadlines and dangerously close
to eviction. Failure to maintain these systems for

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3 recertifying and applying for benefits causes

4 administrative churn, and it leads clients to lose
5 their assistance benefits and to have to submit
6 multiple applications before they are accepted.

7 In addition, NYLAG opposes the City's
8 harmful changes to the CityFHEPS program that will
9 result in a higher rent obligation for recipients in
10 conflict with the principle that no family should
11 have to pay more than 30% of their income toward
12 rent. This will impact low-wage working families who
13 are on CityFHEPS, who already struggle to pay the 30%
14 required under the current program. Increasing their
15 obligation to 40% will result in more eviction cases.

16 NYLAG also has extensive initiatives
17 requests for the following, including legal services
18 for low-income New Yorkers, Immigrant Opportunities
19 Initiative, Immigrant Health Initiative, low-wage
20 worker support (TIMER), legal services for veterans,
21 legal services for low-income immigrants, and estate
22 planning and resolution. These are all fleshed out in
23 my written testimony.

24 Thank you very much. We look forward to
25 our continued work together.

3 PATRICIA WONG: Good afternoon, Chair
4 Brennan, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and Members of
5 Council. My name is Patricia Wong. I'm here on behalf
6 of New York Lawyers for Public Interest, also known
7 as NYLPI. I would like to thank you all for this
8 opportunity to testify.

9 NYLPI is a community-driven legal
10 organization working in the areas of civil rights and
11 health, disability, immigrant, and environmental
12 justice. I'm here to raise before the Council urgent
13 issues affecting our client communities.

14 To begin, NYLPI's Health Justice Practice
15 works to bring an equity and immigrant justice focus
16 to health and advocacy. We continue to find that due
17 to HRA understaffing, our clients experience
18 unnecessary delays and systemic barriers to enrolling
19 in urgently needed health insurance. Bureaucratic
20 inefficiencies and understaffing have routinely
21 caused delays lasting weeks or months and led to
22 wrongful denials for otherwise eligible individuals.
23 These issues leave vulnerable people without
24 essential resources and benefits and result in severe
25 consequences. We ask the Council to ensure that HRA

is adequately staffed and funded to meet the needs of
New Yorkers.

I'm also here to raise before the Council
a critical need for resources to help nonprofits in
the city, especially for those organizations
responding to the politicized threats and to prepare
to face scrutiny under this current federal
administration.

In New York City, many nonprofits operate
with limited resources and are unprepared for legal
challenges that could disrupt their work. NYLPI is
building upon our existing work focused on
strengthening and protecting the City's nonprofit
sector with the launch of the Nonprofit Resiliency
Network. This network specifically focuses on rapid
response and risk mitigation for nonprofits facing
politicized legal threats.

NYLPI is supporting organizations that
are currently the direct targets of federal agencies.
We are standing up against those attempting to
conduct raids, chill advocacy, and claw back funding
for vital services. Central to this effort is our
work providing informational resources, hosting

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3 events and workshops, facilitating limited scope
4 consultations, and legal representation.

5 We respectfully request the Council's
6 support with a grant of \$200,000 for (TIMER) FY26.
7 This will allow NYLPI to support 600 to 800
8 organizations across the city.

9 Lastly, NYLPI is privileged to be a part
10 of the City Council's Immigrant Health Initiative,
11 and we thank you for that support. This initiative
12 has supported NYLPI's programs aimed at improving the
13 health and well-being of immigrant New Yorkers. We
14 are respectfully asking the Council to restore and
15 enhance the funding for the Immigrant Health
16 Initiative, and we seek an allocation of \$650,000 for
17 the FY26.

18 Thank you again for your time, and we'll
19 submit a more detailed testimony following the
20 hearing. Thank you

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, thank you
22 to this panel

23 The next panel will be Navdeep Bains,
24 Tania Mattos, and Richard William Flores.

25 (PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, you may begin.

3 NAVDEEP BAINS: Okay, thank you, Deputy
4 Speaker Ayala, and the Committee on General Welfare,
5 and Chair Brannan and the Committee on Finance for
6 holding this hearing and for allowing us to testify.

7 I'm Navdeep Bains, and I'm the Associate
8 Director of Advocacy and Policy at the Asian American
9 Federation, where we proudly represent the collective
10 voice of more than 70 member non-profits that serve
11 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

12 Food insecurity in New York's Asian
13 community has reached a breaking point. A combination
14 of federal funding cuts, escalating anti-immigrant
15 policies, community fears of jeopardizing their
16 immigration status because of public charge concerns,
17 and, of course, wild shifts in the economy from the
18 price of food to looming tariffs has created an
19 untenable situation.

20 Despite the model minority stereotypes
21 surrounding Asian Americans, the most vulnerable in
22 our community face significant hardship. One in three
23 Asian residents lives in low-income households, and
24 we are twice as likely to experience poverty compared
25 to white New Yorkers. Furthermore, 42% of Asian older

adults are low-income, making them among the city's
poorest seniors.

Many of our member organizations rely on
a combination of federal, state, and city resources
to feed our vulnerable community members. In these
spaces where demand is increasing, organizations are
having to stretch their limited resources to keep
people fed.

In recent years, our member organizations
have also seen a disturbing increase in EBT food
benefits theft, and this issue is regularly brought
to our member organizations, non-profits working on
the ground, to provide support, as many people in our
community have limited English proficiency and
limited digital literacy.

In an environment where our communities
are surrounded by misinformation, fear, and
isolation, AF believes it is more critical than ever
that the City reinforce its support for addressing
food insecurity by supporting the CBOs that provide
these services.

We have several recommendations:

- Continue elevating the need for an
urgent rollout of CHIP-enabled EBT benefits cards

because no New Yorker should go hungry (TIMER) due to preventable theft.

- The City should continue funding a network of linguistically and culturally competent food service programs that provide alternative food benefits to immigrants.

- The City must also remain vigilant and committed to keeping our community's data safe, ensure that non local law enforcement are not permitted into sensitive locations, because we know that going in person to get services like food pantry or even just getting any government services is something our community is increasingly afraid of, of giving information over and of going in person.

- We must continue to have a direct line of communication between HRA and our local CBOs because our local CBOs are regularly troubleshooting benefits issues on the ground with in-language support and providing culturally competent care.

The challenges before us are complex, and we recognize there's no easy answer. Your leadership in addressing food insecurity at this vital time is incredibly important. Thank you so much for your work and leadership.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry, I just want
4 to call up one more person, Emely Paez?

5 You may begin.

6 TANIA MATTOS: Good afternoon, Chair, and
7 Members of the Committee. My name is Tanya Matos; I'm
8 the Executive Director of UnLocal.

9 UnLocal is a nonprofit providing free
10 immigration legal services to New Yorkers. I'm here
11 today to ask you for your support in preserving
12 funding for immigration legal services, including
13 critical initiatives like the Pro Se Plus Project,
14 the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, and also
15 Unlocal's work with the New York State Dream Act.

16 The Pro Se Plus Project is a
17 collaborative between UnLocal, NYLAG, Central
18 American Legal Assistance Group, Catholic Migration
19 Service, Masa, African Communities Together, and
20 Venezuelan Immigrant Aid.

21 This program is a lifeline for people who
22 must represent themselves in immigration court alone,
23 often because there aren't enough immigration
24 attorneys to meet the overwhelming need.

25 The Pro Se Plus Project was created to
give these individuals the tools, guidance, legal

1 screenings, and help to complete filings, and improve
2 their chances of staying safely in the country with
3 support in their court immigration hearings. It's an
4 efficient, effective way to provide meaningful
5 support to more New Yorkers. Just last year alone,
6 our organization served thousands of clients and
7 their families, many of whom would have otherwise
8 faced deportation or family separation without this
9 vital help.
10

11 Cuts to these programs would mean more
12 people go fully unrepresented without any guidance,
13 and where outcomes are drastically worse as we're
14 seeing day by day.

15 So I thank you for your continued support
16 for the immigrant community, and really invite you to
17 invest in and defend the Pro Se Plus Project that we
18 have going on here. Thank you so much, and again,
19 thank you again for your commitment to the immigrant
20 community.

21 EMILY BRETT: Hi, my name is Emily Brett.
22 Thank you to the City Council for your time today and
23 your persistence over five hours of testimony.

24 I'm the Director of the Greenpoint Hunger
25 Program under Executive Director Ann Kansfield, and

I'm here today to ask for the restoration of CFC's full \$100 million for the next fiscal year. I know many of you already hold this opinion as well, but I'm here to preach to the choir on the record and encourage your continued aggressive advocacy. Our lines are not as long as they were in 2024; they are longer, and it does not make sense to duplicate a budget when we are no longer facing duplicate circumstances.

Our pantry has faced a 125% increase in clients, and those numbers continue to rise. Guests expressed to me that their need is growing and that they're anxious for what's to come. We cannot continue to rely on the same amount of funding when we do not have the same number of guests. Yesterday at my pantry, we saw over a 100 guests, several of them families with young children.

Hunger is not just about nutrition; it's about mental health, it's about dignity, it's about the knowledge that someone in your community, whether it's a parent or a teacher or a member of your City Council, cares about you and wants you to be here.

And to that end, I would express to this Council that a denial of CFC's full \$100 million

funding is a choice to allow hunger into our city, a choice that doesn't just make New York a worse, less livable city, but makes it more dangerous.

A fed child is a child who can focus, who can learn, who can go to school, and who can play. A hungry child or a hungry person is in danger not just physically but mentally. They're at risk for depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicidality, and violence. Hunger is not just a physical sensation; it is a destabilizing threat that can undo communities, families, and individuals.

To briefly zoom out on the large scheme of this best budget, the choice to give CFC its \$100 million share while giving the choice not to give CFC its \$100 million share while giving the NYPD over \$3 billion isn't just an act of absurdity; it's an act of hypocrisy. (TIMER) Guns and tasers on the subway do not make our kids safer. Food on the table makes our kids safer.

Please expand this budget to give pantries what they need to do our essential work. If you want to keep New York safe, please keep New Yorkers fed. Thank you for your time.

3 RICHARD WILLIAM FLORES: Thanks for giving
4 me the opportunity to speak, Ms. Ayala and Mr.
5 Brannan.

6 There's one crucial thing that hasn't
7 been said or addressed at this General Welfare Budget
8 Meeting for 2025, and that is, despite what Ms. Parks
9 said, there's widespread racism and discrimination in
10 the DHS and DSS agencies. It's been targeted at
11 heterosexual and cisgender persons.

12 I have only been to one housing interview
13 in over three years as a resident at the BRC
14 facility, and this is after meetings with case
15 managers, with outreach management, and with meeting
16 the Ombudsman at DHS repeatedly for over three years.

17 Ms. Parks said publicly that a shelter
18 facility may remove a person from the facility after
19 that person has seen reasonable housing
20 opportunities. As I said, I've only seen one
21 interview in over three years at one resident outside
22 of that facility by the case manager, one. And also
23 that they would be put out of the shelter or facility
24 if they were unwilling to pay 30% of their income,
25 whether that's from SSD, SSI, or Social Security.
Now, if you examine this one example, and there are

many other examples and many other scenarios that are not being addressed at the budget proposal hearing. If you just look at that one example, you'll find that there are gaps and problems in the system (TIMER) that are not being addressed.

And finally, while the emphasis on this General Welfare Meeting is on how the City and the state are addressing the budget for DHS and DSS for the fiscal year of 2025, please let me state here that the reality of how the budget is being used is in total contradiction to what is being experienced by individuals who are formerly homeless, whether they are suffering from mental illnesses, are suffering from drug or alcohol addiction, were formerly incarcerated, or even worse if they're targeted for their gender, for their race, for their age, for their nationality, or their religion.

The DHS, DSS, and HRA must put more emphasis on future planning for how future budgets will be used for the most vulnerable persons in society. And currently, as a facility resident, I know personally and I also know collectively that the fiscal budget is being wasted, I believe by mismanagement, fraud, and corruption. Thank you.

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3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
4 much.

5 Okay, now we are heading to Zoom for the
6 next panel. We will start with Sierra Kraft.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

8 SIERRA KRAFT Hi, Good afternoon, Chair
9 Brannan, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and Members of the
10 Committees on Finance and General Welfare. Thank you
11 for inviting testimony.

12 My name is Sierra Kraft, and I'm the
13 Executive Director of the iCare Coalition, a citywide
14 network of legal service providers that for over a
15 decade have ensured unaccompanied immigrant children
16 in New York City have access to free high-quality
17 legal representation.

18 This year, we're in a moment of urgent
19 crisis. On March 21st, the federal government
20 abruptly terminated the unaccompanied children
21 program contract, wiping out nearly \$14 million in
22 funding for legal service providers, and 1,300
23 children lost their attorney overnight. These are
24 kids, some as young as toddlers, who have fled
25 violence, trafficking, and family separation only to

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3 face a complex immigration system without legal
4 representation.

5 Access to legal representation is a key
6 form of homelessness prevention, ensuring that
7 immigrant children can secure lawful status and
8 remain safely with family or sponsors rather than
9 falling into systems of instability. Without an
10 attorney, a child's chance of staying safely in the
11 US drops to less than 15%. And with an ICARE
12 attorney, that chance rises to over 90%.

13 This federal funding collapse is having a
14 devastating ripple effect and is destabilizing the
15 legal ecosystem that we've built over the last
16 decade. Several of our legal service providers have
17 had to do layoffs, freeze their intakes, and lose
18 expert attorneys. These attorneys and organizations
19 have built trusted, culturally responsive
20 relationships with families and communities we serve,
21 particularly in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx,
22 where most unaccompanied children live in New York
23 City. Meanwhile, children are still being scheduled
24 for hearings. Their cases are moving forward
25 expeditiously, without understanding their rights, no
voice in court, and no protection.

The City Council's longstanding support
through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families
Initiative has been essential, but funding has
remained stagnant for more than six years. And while
UMFI has helped providers shift some of the cases and
respond quickly, it's (TIMER) just not enough to meet
the growing need or offset the damage.. (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired...

SIERRA KRAFT: that these federal cuts...

(CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you.

SIERRA KRAFT: This is why we're
requesting \$6.3 million in discretionary funding to
help stabilize UMFI and \$5.4 million in emergency
funding to help shield us from this federal
termination of the UCP contract. Happy to answer any
questions, and thank you for your time and continued
commitment to the immigrant youth in our city.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Seirra.

Now we have Carlyn Cowen.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CARLYN COWEN: Good afternoon, Chair
Brannan, Chair Ayala, and Members of the Council.
Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify

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3 today and for your tireless work on these important
4 issues.

5 I'm the Chief Policy and Public Affairs
6 Officer at CPC, the Chinese American Planning
7 Council. I want to uplift the messaging that many of
8 my colleagues have already offered, from the deep
9 need for funding for SNAP to Fair Fares to housing
10 support, and others. And while that's all outlined in
11 my full testimony today, I simply want to share with
12 you a story about one of our community members.

13 This particular community member, whom we
14 have been working to support out of a domestic
15 violence situation, got her placed in a domestic
16 violence shelter. And through the process of the
17 move, she came to us because she had been unable to
18 feed her young children. But, she was scared of going
19 on SNAP benefits because even though she was
20 eligible, she was worried about how it might impact
21 her immigration status. We were able to, of course,
22 immediately get her food to meet the short-term needs
23 and then work with her to get her enrolled in
24 benefits. But this is just one example of what we've
25 been seeing in our community members.

At the same time, there are increased fears about being on public benefits like SNAP, Medicaid, and others; we're also seeing a hugely increased need for them. And we're also seeing under-enrollment in our communities. Only 28% of eligible Asian households are enrolled in SNAP, which is a lifesaving resource.

All of that is to say it is more important than ever that the City fund these very important programs because they are so closely related. They're all necessary to support the community member I told you about and our other community members as well.

And I would be remiss if I didn't use my last few seconds to mention that making sure that the human services workers who provide these important (TIMER) services are fully paid through JustPay for Human Services and that we ensure that the contracts are delivered on time and fully meet costs.

Thank you again for your time and your advocacy.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Carlyn.

Okay, now we have Pernell Brice.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

PERNELL BRICE: (NO RESPONSE)

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, Pernell
dropped off.

Now we have Christopher Leon Johnson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello.
Hello. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello. Yeah.
Yeah. Hello, Chairs of John, uh, Chairs Brannan,
Chairs Bank--Chair Banks and Brannan and Ayala.

My name is Christopher Leon Johnson--and
Gale Brewer. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson, and
I'm supporting 32BJ on the record. I was a former
shop steward with 32BJ for the MTA Eastside Access. I
used to work for Help USA in 2016 as a supervisor for
Help USA at the Howard Avenue shelter location.

So I'm here to support their initiative
to be reimbursed \$90 million into DHS so these guards
can get paid back. Not only that, I am calling on
you, the Finance Chair, Justin Brannan. I know you're
running for comptroller, you need to put an
initiative into it with the help of 32BJ to help out
guards with legal help when they get accused by a

shelter resident of any violation. Because what goes on in these shelters with these guards, and I used to be a guard with 32BJ, as a shop steward, and I know the stuff that I've been in the offices, is that when a guard gets accused of anything by a shelter resident, DHS and HRA have to log in those complaints. And what happens with those guards is that they get removed from the job site. Sometimes they might get fired for a false allegation. So I'm calling you, Mr. Brannan, because you got endorsed by the 32BJ for comptroller, to put at least a \$100 million into legal help for these guards. So when they ever get accused a of a violation from a shelter client, they are able to really defend themselves with a real legal representation other than union representation, because the union representation is really weak Union representation is really weak. They need real lawyers.

When it comes to the other unions like the PBA and SBA, when they get accused of a crime by a civilian, especially a corrupt civilian, like a criminal civilian, they got powerful attorneys to protect the PBA officers.

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3 So I'm calling on you as the Finance
4 Chair and our so-called (INAUDIBLE) for the next
5 comptroller to really, really put a real financial
6 (TIMER) (INAUDIBLE) to really help out these guards.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, Christopher.
8 Time has expired.

9 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: (INAUDIBLE)
10 32BJ Wait, wait. I know. Wait. (INAUDIBLE) 32BJ, when
11 they get in trouble when they get in trouble... when
12 they get in trouble with... when they get in trouble
13 with these... with these shelter clients, because a
14 lot of these shelter clients, a lot of them are
15 really corrupt. They're really dirty. They're really
16 evil people, and they are really they really
17 mischievous. They try to find a way to get out of the
18 shelter, they know the legal... the legal get around
19 by, let's accuse a guard of, like, sexual assault or
20 accuse a guard of looking at them funny because I
21 replaced a guard, as a supervisor who got accused of
22 looking at a girl funny. But...

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you very
24 much.
25

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3 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: (INAUDIBLE)

4 That shouldn't be happening, but thank you so much.

5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
7 Christopher.

8 Christopher Leon Johnson: Thank you.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we have
11 reached the end of the hearing. If there is anyone
12 here who wishes to testify-- come on up, sir, you'll
13 be the last one. Sorry, uh, Garland Roberts.

14 GARLAND ROBERTS: I only have three
15 minutes, right?

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You have two
17 minutes. You made it just in time.

18 GARLAND ROBERTS: Former Assistant
19 Secretary of Defense George Edward Walker Bush,
20 Senior. Also, I am...

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Take... you could
22 take a sec. Catch your breath and go ahead.

23 GARLAND ROBERTS: I'm mad as Hades. You're
24 getting a budget when you're being drained by people
25 who are stealing from the situation. I went to
Commissioner Park and others on the situations

1 because I helped found restoration with Robert
2 Kennedy, and I'm involved with trying to deal with
3 different tenants. And I find that on the succession
4 rights and everything else, when they go to get the
5 HUD monies to pay these types of things, instead of
6 charging the rents, because when you have a Section 8
7 apartment and you're on a succession or rent control,
8 you cannot charge market value. They're charging
9 market value. The people have complained, and the
10 agencies, Parks, and other people are not dealing on
11 it. I have a person right now, the Department of
12 Justice, the Department of Investigation, and also
13 DHCR, who is trying to get through the system.

14 We need a system like the IRS has, a
15 whistleblower system, or else we have to go to DOGE
16 and Donald Trump, and all these crazies. They're
17 bugging us to give them information, but we can do it
18 for ourselves. We need a whistleblower system that
19 has rewards on conviction, and in this way, we can
20 have an independent group of people that can try to
21 help and protect ourselves.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.
23 Thank you.
24
25

3 GARLAND ROBERTS: I've been undercover for
4 the FBI. I've been undercover for Tiragiano,
5 secretly, in clearing up the bidding process and
6 other things. But this new administration, you can't
7 get anything done.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

9 GARLAND ROBERT: (INAUDIBLE) on the take.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, if we have
11 inadvertently missed anyone who has registered to
12 testify today, either here in person or Zoom, and you
13 have yet to be called, please let us know now. Use
14 the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and you will be called
15 in the order that your hand has been raised.

16 Seeing no one, day five of Executive
17 Budget Hearings for FY26 has been adjourned. Thank
18 you. [GAVEL]
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date August 15, 2025