

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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March 21, 2025

Start: 10:51 a.m.

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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Oswald Feliz, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher

Selvena N. Brooks-Powers

Shekar Krishnan

Sandra Ung

Susan Zhuang

A P P E A R A N C E S

Dynishal Gross, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services

Michael Forte, Executive Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services

Linda Baran, President and Chief Executive Officer of Staten Island Chamber of Commerce

Randy Peers, President and Chief Executive Officer of Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

Dirk McCall de Palomá, Executive Director of New York City BID Association

Chris Walters, Senior Policy Associate at Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development

Yanki Tshering, Executive Director of Accompany Capital

Leah Archibald, Executive Director of Evergreen

Christian Hidalgo, Workers Justice Project

Sharon Brown, Rose of Sharon Ministries

Mohamed Attia, Managing Director of Street Vendor Project

Darry Saldana, Small Business Resource Specialist from Bronx Chamber of Commerce

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

Alex Grzebyk, Deputy Director of the Community and Economic Development Program at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

Jessie Lee, Managing Director of Renaissance Economic Development

Brady Meixell, Government Relations and Business Services Manager of Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation

Anh-Thu Nguyen, Director of Strategic Partnerships at Democracy at Work Institute

Juan Cuautle, Director of the Cooperative Development Program at Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Melat Seyoum, Director of Political Affairs and Strategic Partnerships at New York City Network of Worker Owned Cooperatives

Catherine Murcek, Worker Owner at Samankaya Yoga Back Care and Scoliosis Collective

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Barry Pinckney, Senior Project Manager of Working World New York City

Dalaeja Forman, Worker Owner from Breadfruit Cooperative

1 COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mic check, mic check,  
3 this is a mic check, this is a mic check on Small  
4 Businesses, in the Committee Room. Today's date is  
5 March 21, 2025, recorded by Walter Lewis.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and  
7 welcome to the New York City Preliminary Budget  
8 Hearing on Small Business.

9 Please silent all electronic devices at  
10 this time.

11 Also, please do not approach the dais.

12 If you have any questions, please raise  
13 your hand, and one of us, the Sergeant-at-Arms, will  
14 kindly assist you.

15 Thank you very much for your kind  
16 cooperation.

17 Chair, we're ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: [GAVEL] Thank you.

19 Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's Small  
20 Business Committee Budget Hearing. Bienvenidos. My  
21 name is Oswald Feliz, and I am Chair of the Council's  
22 Committee on Small Business.

23 Today, we'll be hearing from the  
24 Department of Small Business Services on the Fiscal  
25 2026 Preliminary Budget. Small businesses are the

backbone of our economy. They give our neighborhoods their unique identity. It is crucial that we as a City support our diverse universe of small businesses. I'm excited to hear from the agency on how this Preliminary Plan responds to the needs of our small business community and how the resources will be utilized.

For a little context, SBS' Fiscal 2026 Budget, as presented in the Preliminary Plan, totals approximately 182 million dollars, with 37 million of that, or 34 percent of it, to support 356 budgeted full-time employees. Of the total budget for the agency, 72 million, or 66 percent of it, supports the Department's operations. This Fiscal 2026 Budget of approximately 182 million is approximately 33 percent less than last year's adopted budget of 272.5 million dollars. We must ensure that this budget tackles the issues facing our small businesses and commercial corridors, including the issue of storefront vacancies. We must also ensure it provides tools to ensure commercial corridors are attractive and vibrant, ensure that these are places that anyone would want to visit to eat, to shop, and spend time. We must also ensure that this budget tackles issues

facing the agency, SBS, including the high workforce vacancy rate, which is currently approximately 18.7 percent. It will be important for the Committee to understand what steps the agency is taking to reduce these vacancies so that it can appropriately carry out its very important mission.

As Chair of the Committee on Small Business, I will push for accountability and accuracy to ensure that the budget reflects the needs and the interests of the City. This hearing is a vital part of this process, and I expect that SBS will be responsive to the questions and concerns of Council Members. I look forward to an active engagement with the Administration over the next few months to ensure that the Fiscal 2026 Adopted Budget meets the goals that the Council has set out.

I would like to thank you, Commissioner Gross and Deputy Commissioner Forte, for testifying today. I would also like to thank SBS' staff, who have consistently been responsive to our many, many, many requests, at all hours by the way. We would not be able to analyze the City's budget at such a detailed level without your cooperation so thank you.

2 I would also like to thank both my Staff  
3 and the Staff of the Finance and Legislative  
4 Divisions for their help in preparing for this  
5 hearing. Thank you.

6 I will pass it to Committee Counsel to  
7 administer the oath.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, everyone. We will  
9 now hear testimony from the Administration. Today we  
10 are joined by Commissioner Dynishal Gross and Michael  
11 Forte.

12 Before we begin, I will administer the  
13 affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right hand.

14 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
15 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
16 Committee, and to respond honestly to Council Member  
17 questions?

18 COMMISSIONER GROSS: We do.

19 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE: We  
20 do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may  
22 begin when ready.

23 COMMISSIONER GROSS: Can you hear me?  
24 How's that? Wonderful. Good morning, Chair Feliz and  
25 Council Member Zhuang and Members of the New York

City Council Committee on Small Business. My name is Dynishal Gross, and I have the privilege of serving as Commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services, or SBS. I'm joined today by Executive Deputy Commissioner Michael Forte to discuss SBS' Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget and how it supports SBS' mission of unlocking economic opportunity and creating economic security for all New Yorkers.

New York City is currently home to more than 183,000 small businesses, the highest number ever recorded. One in five small businesses operating today opened during the Adams Administration, and storefront vacancies citywide have declined for five consecutive quarters. At the same time, we've experienced unprecedented job growth, not only recovering all 946,000 private sector jobs lost during the pandemic, but also breaking the City's all-time jobs record ten times, with the number of jobs exceeding 4.8 million. These milestones were made possible through the Administration's bold economic agenda, the strong partnership of the City Council, the tireless work of our sister agencies,



and of SBSers over the past three years to drive our recovery.

Today, small businesses face other challenges, including an ever-changing regulatory landscape, shifting consumer behaviors, and economic pressures from trade tensions and other factors. Through our FY26 Preliminary Budget, SBS is well-positioned to continue delivering high-impact programs that help New York's small businesses adapt to changing conditions and advance New York City's economic momentum. SBS' FY26 Preliminary Budget stands at 182.1 million dollars. Approximately 40 percent, or 73.2 million dollars, represents pass-through funding for other City entities, including the New York City Economic Development Corporation at 38.7 million, NYC Tourism and Conventions at 18.6 million, and the Trust for Governors Island at 15.8 million dollars. As a conduit for these entities, SBS does not manage or spend any of these funds. The remaining 108.9 million dollars includes SBS' core programming, primarily delivered by our four programmatic divisions, the Division of Business Services, the Division of Economic and Financial

Opportunity, the Neighborhood Development Division, and the Division of Citywide Workforce Opportunity.

Our Division of Business Services helps small businesses open, operate, and grow through a range of programs and tools, including neighborhood-based business solution centers, our SBS hotline, 888-SBS-4NYC, and the MyCity business site. We provide financing assistance, legal support, business courses, mentorship, emergency preparedness, and more, ensuring that New Yorkers have the support they need at every stage of their business journeys.

Addressing one of the biggest challenges for small businesses, SBS has helped entrepreneurs secure over 294 million dollars in financing in the current Administration, including the 85-million-dollar New York City Small Business Opportunity Fund. Working alongside the New York City Economic Development Corporation, we also launched the first-ever CannabisNYC Loan Fund last October to connect licensed cannabis entrepreneurs with the resources needed to turn their regulatory approvals into thriving businesses. The story of Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar exemplifies the impact of SBS Business Services. Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar in the Bronx

turned to SBS' New York City Business Express Service Team, or NYC BEST, as they worked to open their first location. Over the years, the owners have returned to SBS for assistance with permits, legal matters, and compliance questions, relying on expertise from our pro bono legal services and the NYC BEST team. Thanks to our support, Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar successfully expanded and opened its second location near Penn Station this past January. Similarly, when Jackson Heights entrepreneur Poonam Bhalla, owner of Red Chilli, called SBS' hotline for help rescheduling an FDNY fire safety inspection, our team went beyond the original request to provide additional support. We walked her through key City regulations for food service establishments and worked with National Grid to ensure her utilities were turned on. As a result, Red Chilli officially opened for business on November 15, 2024.

Every day, SBS works to help small businesses understand regulations and avoid unnecessary fines and fees. Last month, City Hall announced small business savings of over 50 million dollars through the dedicated work of the New York City Business Express Service Team and the City

Council's partnership in enacting more than 100 regulatory reforms stemming from the Small Business Forward Initiative through Local Law 151 of 2023.

SBS' Division of Economic and Financial Opportunity supports the growth of small businesses by providing certification support, technical assistance, legal services, and connections to City agencies for minority and women-owned business enterprises, local business enterprises, and emerging business enterprises. The impact of our programming is clear. In Fiscal Year 2024 alone, the City awarded 6.4 billion dollars in contracts to certified firms, and nearly three-quarters of these businesses had previously used SBS services to successfully navigate the procurement process. We continue working to open doors to growth through government contracting by hosting impactful events across the city. This past November, our 16th annual Citywide Procurement Fair set a record with over 1,250 attendees networking and learning about procurement opportunities. One of those businesses is Vivid Marketing Group, a Southeast Queens-based company specializing in health and wellness education, training, and employee health screenings. Vivid has leveraged multiple rounds of

one-on-one technical assistance and other SBS resources, which helped them secure three prime vendor contracts worth nearly 640,000 dollars since January of 2022. Another success story is Dirty Gloves Drain Services, founded by Nadine Clarke. Nadine won her first modest 6,000-dollar City contract in 2015, but knew she could do more. Over the past decade, she and her team have engaged with SBS' government contracting support, participating in our Selling to Government webinar series, fast-track growth venture training, and bonding service counseling. With SBS' support, Dirty Gloves has since secured eight prime contracts totaling over 3 million dollars. These success stories highlight the impact of our dedicated DEFO team, which expands access to City procurement and creates opportunities for businesses to scale and thrive.

New York City's greatest asset is its people, and at SBS, we power the backbone of the City's public workforce system, open to all adults looking for job and/or career support. Through our Division of Citywide Workforce Opportunity and our 18 Workforce One Career Centers, we connect job seekers with employment opportunities, career counseling, and

no-cost training, while also helping local businesses with free hiring services. Since the start of the Adams Administration, our network has placed over 71,000 New Yorkers into jobs or workforce trainings, including more than 1,900 people with disabilities and 3,200 veterans and military spouses. In Fiscal Year 2025, we further integrated the Administration's JobsNYC initiative into our workforce services to deliver a seamless, whole-of-government approach in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates. The results of JobsNYC speak for themselves. Through more than 30 JobsNYC hiring halls across all five boroughs, we have facilitated nearly 3,400 on-site interviews, leading to over 1,400 conditional job offers. This Preliminary Budget continues investments in JobsNYC, bringing resources, employers, and life-changing job opportunities to New Yorkers across the five boroughs.

Beyond individual job placements, our occupational training services serve as a critical bridge, equipping job seekers with the education and experience needed to secure employment in select industries. When launching new trainings, we study industry demand and seek employer partnerships to

ensure program graduates have pathways to job opportunities. Our NCLEX-RN program for foreign-trained nurses, launched as part of Mayor Adams' Blueprint for Economic Recovery, is designed to expand opportunities for New Yorkers entering the medical field. In New York City, registered nurses earn an average salary of more than 100,000 dollars annually, making this program both a powerful economic mobility tool and a response to an urgent need in healthcare employment, a local growth sector.

To showcase the impact of our work, I want to tell you the story of Maria, a primarily Spanish-speaking New Yorker experiencing homelessness, who was referred to SBS by the Department of Homeless Services. Our Workforce One Career Center staff provided Maria with resume assistance, interview preparation, and job placement support. Thanks to our team's efforts, Maria secured a crew member position at Chipotle. My team is preparing for our next JobsNYC hiring hall at the Staten Island YMCA's Gerard Carter Center on March 27, 2025. This event will connect even more New Yorkers to life-changing workforce opportunities that

are available to residents every day through our Workforce One Career Centers.

SBS' Neighborhood Development Division, or NDD, supports New York City's 76 Business Improvement Districts, which collectively deliver more than 190 million dollars in services annually to over 24,000 storefronts across nearly 300 miles of commercial corridors in all five boroughs. I was proud to stand alongside you, Chair Feliz, and Bronx Chamber of Commerce President Lisa Sorin, and leaders from the Fordham Road BID and several other Bronx-based BIDs, to celebrate the baselining of more than 5.3 million dollars for Neighborhood Development grants, bringing the Administration's total investment to over 40 million dollars. These grants have funded innovative lighting projects, murals, and neighborhood wayfinding initiatives, and other activities to support commercial corridors post-pandemic. They've also supported merchant organizing efforts, BID formation, and community events designed to boost business attraction and consumer spending through street fairs, restaurant weeks, and cultural celebrations. In Council Member Ung's District, the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub BID used its FY24 Small



BID Grant to install security cameras, host self-defense classes for merchants, and enhance its social media presence.

Additionally, our grants support community-based non-profit organizations in producing commercial district needs assessments, research projects that help community stakeholders assess economic activity, identify opportunities for growth, and determine areas for improvement. For example, in Council Member Paladino's District, the Queens Chamber of Commerce is leveraging a three-year Avenue NYC grant to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment in College Point, a project that builds on an SBS merchant organizing grant they received in FY24.

Under this Administration, SBS has advanced the formation of three new Business Improvement Districts, including the Castle Hill BID in the Bronx, the West Village BID in Manhattan, and the Cypress Hills-Fulton BID in Brooklyn. In addition, we have facilitated the expansion of several existing BIDs. For example, through our BID formation grants, we supported Long Island City Partnership in more than doubling its catchment area from 73 blocks to 156 blocks and increasing access to

supplemental sanitation, district marketing, and business resources. This year, we also anticipate the formation of a new BID along Harlem's East 125th Street Business Corridor with an upcoming City Council Finance Committee hearing scheduled for March 26, 2025. I urge City Council Members to support community members' BID formation efforts as BIDs strengthen local commercial corridors, establish sustainable funding for neighborhood enhancements, and create lasting economic opportunities for businesses and communities alike.

This May, we will celebrate the second annual New York City Small Business Month, where our agency will collaborate with Chambers of Commerce to host small business events in all five boroughs, celebrate a citywide NYC BID day uplifting the contributions of the City's 76 Business Improvement Districts, and end the month with the second annual New York City Small Business Month Expo. This Expo will bring together city, state, and federal resources under one roof to meet the needs of entrepreneurs across all stages, industries, and backgrounds. This year's event will take place in Midtown Manhattan on Thursday, May 29, at Center 415,

which is located at 415 5th Avenue. Last year, more than 3,000 New Yorkers participated at the event, with more than 150 types of services and over 40 City agencies. We'd be grateful for help from your offices promoting this event with constituents in the coming months.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and speak about this critical work. We're excited to continue delivering big for small businesses in FY26, and we welcome any questions you may have for me or my team.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony, and thank you for all the work that you do to support our small businesses.

So, let's get to the questions. The first line of questions is about the SBS workforce, hiring, vacancies, headcount. So, the Preliminary Plan includes an increase in budget headcount of two positions over the 2025 adopted plan, bringing the total budget headcount to 356. What will be the role of these two new staff members?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. The new lines we have been allocated will allow us to staff positions that support small

business education and government navigation. There will be a focus on nightlife businesses due to a result of the citywide rezoning known as City of Yes for Economic Opportunity so that we can support businesses in taking advantage of the increased ability to locate in commercial space and for nightlife businesses to operate activities on commercial districts citywide.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. SBS currently has 67 vacancies more or less, or about 18.7 percent vacancy rate. How are these vacancies, I know it's a big issue with many different agencies, but how are these vacancies affecting SBS' ability to operate and to carry out its important mission?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: I appreciate your concern about our workforce, Chair Feliz, and I'd like to make just a distinction in the vacancies that are for SBS' programming and vacancies that are covered within our budget but are for some of the pass-through entities that are funded through our budget code. So SBS for its own positions currently has only an 11 percent vacancy rate. Overall, our agency headcount has grown 17 percent since the start of the Adams Administration when our total allocated

lines were at 304. So, this year we've had 10 separations, and some of those were due to retirement, others due to talented SBSers going on to other wonderful opportunities. To backfill those 10 separations, we have thus far received three hiring allotments in 2025. In 2024, we received eight allotments, and were able to advance hires using those allotments, and we are working hard to have a robust recruitment pipeline for existing vacancies. Our strategies for filling those vacancies include internships, robust participation and fellowship programs, and focusing, of course, on employee retention through investments in training and employee wellness and SBS culture for our existing staff. But we are not currently at nearly 19 percent. For SBS' own work, we are at 11 percent vacancy rate.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. I would like to acknowledge Council Member Susan Zhuang, who is with us, Council Member Eric Bottcher, who just joined us, and Council Members Brooks-Powers and Ung, who have joined us via Zoom.

And again, I know the issue of vacancies, that's an issue affecting every City agency due to many reasons, but what's the strategy for reducing

the vacancies? I know you mentioned there's an 11 percent vacancy rate at the immediate control of SBS. What's the strategy for reducing those vacancies, and what are factors that could potentially affect hiring and also retention?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, we are working to advance hiring. We deliver hiring halls, and we participate in those hiring events to try and connect New Yorkers to opportunities in public service employment at our agency. In addition, we host interns and fellows. We have a wonderful track record with the Urban Fellows Program. We're currently hosting two Urban Fellows, and I believe nine existing SBS staff, including leaders in our agency, were former Urban Fellows, so that's been a strong strategy for recruitment to SBS. And more importantly, we try to manage the use of our allotments so that we're able to continue to meet our core needs. So, our existing vacancies are distributed across our program divisions and our administrative teams, and we manage how we use the allotments to ensure that those teams can meet their work for New Yorkers.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And do you believe that the headcount included in the Preliminary Plan is sufficient to meet the needs of the agency in Fiscal 2026? Yes, no, why not, or why yes?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, we're pleased with the growth that we've seen in our agency's headcount under this Administration and the new lines that we received in November Plan and new lines planned for FY26, and we do believe we're well positioned for FY26 when we'll want to respond and adapt to changing small business needs and deliver on our core work. So, although things can change, we've been resilient even through tough budget times and continue to deliver big for small businesses, and we'll stay in conversation with City Hall and OMB if there are any new risks.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. I was going to save this question for the end, but I guess I'll ask it now. So of course, this current budget includes many different items for different programs and operations. Let's talk about, I guess, the general SBS wish list. If there was an additional, let's say, 100 million dollars that came from the state or federal government, in addition to what's already

included, what would be additional programs that you would fund if we had this additional pot of money? Let's say 200 million dollars for SBS. Actually, 100 million, just so we don't double up the entire... I just want to think about the wish list of SBS.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, we work hard to operate within the budget constraints that we have and to adapt our programming when necessary, and so we're in conversations with OMB and City Hall about needs for FY26. As those discussions progress, perhaps further executive budget conversations, we may have wishes to describe, but mostly we are working to plan, as we've done in the past, to efficiently use the resources that we have relied on, and we're pleased with the new programs that have been funded in January Plan, which include funding to continue the JobsNYC initiative, not just for this year, but baselined for the future years. Additional funding for the NCLEX program, again, not just for this year, but for the outyears as well. Funding to restart the successful construction industry pre-apprenticeship programs, which has been effective in many years, prior years, connecting 1,000 participants to jobs with a 90 percent completion



rate and 75 percent of trainees connecting to roles in 20 unions and trades. So those are some of the restorations that we have advocated for successfully that will affect our work this year and going forward, and we'll continue to plan for adaptations in the work as the conversations with OMB and City Hall continue.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for the information.

I would like to acknowledge Council Member Krishnan, who has joined us.

So, I'm going to skip to the questions that I was planning on asking later. I want to thank all the BIDs who have joined us. I see BIDs from Brooklyn, Queens, and throughout the City. I just want to thank you all for joining us and thank you for all the work that you do for our commercial corridors and small businesses.

So, a few questions about BIDs. Actually, a few questions about the new containerization rules. I know this is a question that all of our BIDs are looking forward to getting answers from. A few questions about the new containerization rules. As we know, there's new rules that the Department of

Sanitation has implemented requiring that, rather than putting out trash bags, requiring that they be placed in a bin. Great purpose for the rule. I'm sure that all of us agree that the war on rats needs to be escalated until that problem is fully eradicated. That's an initiative that I'm sure everybody supports, but we've heard many serious concerns from different BIDs, including concerns about cost. Many of them have stated that implementation of the rule could potentially take up their entire budget and more, given the high costs of these new containers. So, I guess the first question is a very general one. Talk to us about the feedback that you've received from the different small business owners and BIDs based on this rule. And I know this is more of a Department of Sanitation rule, but of course, Small Business Services plays a role as well.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: It is a Department of Sanitation rule, but an administrative-wide goal to reduce bags on the street, to help manage the trash population. SBS, as the Mayor's representative on all of the BID boards, has heard a great deal from the BIDs, who've done a fabulous job alongside the BID Association of speaking out about the impact of this

change on their budgets and operations, and the feedback that BIDs have shared directly with SBS was also shared with DSNY for inclusion in the record of comments for the rule, and that record shows robust participation by our Business Improvement Districts. So we're well aware of both the Administration's desire to advance this goal and the challenges perceived by our wonderful Business Improvement Districts.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What role, if any, do you think SBS should play in the proper and effective implementation of these sanitation rules?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So SBS, as I said before, we have an NYC BEST team that works with small businesses and community organizations citywide to increase understanding of compliance with City regulations, and NDD and our NYC BEST team work closely together. Any businesses or the BIDs themselves that have questions about compliance regulations from containerization to other issues will also have the support of that team.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Does the Preliminary Plan include any funding to support BIDs and small

businesses with compliance with these new laws and rules?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So the additional, the 5.3 million dollars in baseline funding for NDD grants was scoped to baseline the investments that we have piloted in NDD since the blueprint was released. So those include the small BIDs grants to increase the capacity of BIDs with smaller assessments and doing all of the wonderful work of BIDs from increased security to district marketing, events, public space management, and supplemental sanitation. In addition, BID formation and merchant organizing costs are planned uses of that 5.3 million dollars. That budget was not scoped to include containerization costs.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Does SBS feel that compliance costs may be a barrier to entry for new potential BIDs and also merchant associations?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: I don't believe that our merchant associations specifically included. I think it's any group, any community group that may be conducting cleaning that would result in bags on the corridor. So, obviously there will be costs to compliance for Business Improvement Districts and

other groups covered by DSNY's rule. I'm heartened that the formal rules record does reflect that DSNY, one, has worked one-on-one with BIDs to understand their operational concerns and is committed to doing that going forward, and in addition, expressed in the final rule that BIDs that have operational challenges to implementation won't experience enforcement from DSNY through issuing violations.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. A few questions about new needs, but I'll pause for now. I know some of my Colleagues have questions. We'll start with Council Member Brooks-Powers, who has joined us via Zoom. Actually, Council Member Bottcher first.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Hi, Commissioner. How are you?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Well, Council Member. How are you?

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: I want to follow up on Chair Feliz's questions about the Department of Sanitation's proposed rule that will prohibit BIDs and other entities from placing bagged trash on the sidewalk that they take out of the corner baskets. And one of the big problems, in my view, with this rule is that it's trying to solve a problem that

doesn't necessarily exist. In Council District 3, we have quite a few Business Improvement Districts. The Hudson Square BID, the West Village BID, the Village Alliance, the Meatpacking BID, the Flatiron BID, the Union Square Partnership, the Times Square Alliance, the Garment Structure BID, the 34th Street, the Hudson Square BID. Those entities, every day, they have workers who are, throughout the day, bagging the corner baskets that are overflowing throughout the day, and they place the bag next to the trash bag, next to the can, in their nice, branded Business Improvement District trash bags. Throughout the day, the Department of Sanitation comes by and picks up the trash. It's usually like twice a day in high-traffic corridors. Those trash bags that are placed next to the waste baskets, they're not there for long periods of time, and they're not on the list of things that we have problems with. They're not really a huge problem. The bigger problem is the overflowing waste baskets. When they're full and people are making trash sculptures on the top, because it's just overflowing. Having those BIDs being able to bag them and put them on the sidewalk, that's a good thing, not a bad thing. And what this rule is doing is

saying they can't do that anymore. They've got to put them in containers. And while I am a huge supporter of getting trash bags off the sidewalk, and everyone knows that's one of my main issues, operationally what this will mean is they're either going to have to stop bagging the corner baskets, carry the trash bags somewhere else, or have fixed containers that sit there just for this purpose. I would personally rather have a trash bag there for a few hours (TIMER CHIME) rather than have a fixed container next to the corner basket that will further clutter the corner. Within a few hours it will be covered in stickers and graffiti, and it will look terrible. And like the BIDs have been saying, just maintaining that system is not economically feasible. And that's just BIDs. What about ACE? We fund formerly homeless New Yorkers to empty the corner baskets throughout the day. They won't have anywhere to put the bags. Our community cleanup groups, we have cleanup groups, volunteers from the neighborhood who empty the corner baskets. They won't have anywhere to put the trash bags. So, while this is well-intentioned, I've suggested that this be a pilot. Let's see if it works before we roll it out as a citywide rule so I would still like to

see the Administration change course and make this a pilot, listening to the Business Improvement Districts, listening to the community cleanup groups. Can we make this a pilot? Would you have those conversations with your colleagues in the Administration?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Council Member Bottcher, and I really appreciate your deep understanding, your relationships with the BIDs in your districts, and your deep understanding of their operations. You are sharing details of why implementation is operationally complex, and you're absolutely correct in understanding that, you know, different BIDs have different resources for their supplemental sanitations. They go about it in varying ways, and the street conditions, both sidewalk width, space for containers, and other issues vary around the city, and even across the BIDs within your District. I'm absolutely happy to bring back your reflections from this hearing to my partners within the administration. And I do appreciate that DSNY, is engaging with the BIDs individually and reflecting that they understand that the operational complexity should justify not enforcing, penalizing BIDs in this



period of transition, but I'm happy to lift up your idea about a pilot.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much, Council Member Bottcher.

Another question on that topic. As we know, our BIDs do really important work in our communities. They work around the clock to make sure that our commercial corridors are clean and attractive and vibrant places where people want to come to shop, to eat, and much more. A few questions about that. And again, I know that this is a problem, or a topic, mostly under the jurisdiction of the Sanitation Department. But if the challenge was fully under your jurisdiction and agency, based on all the feedback that you've heard from the different BIDs, what do you think a proper resolution would be, and what steps would you take to fully resolve the real concerns that have been mentioned by the different BIDs, small business owners, and different organizations?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: I think the final rule that was published describes, in categories, the types of challenges that BIDs raised during the comment period, as well as the other types of

entities, including community cleanup groups and supplemental sanitation providers, and a set of categories that included cost of containers and a timeline to implement. And I think BID by BID individualized attention to those operational challenges is what is needed, and DSNY has already expressed a commitment to that so I think we are on our way to crafting a set of solutions that continue to reflect the full appreciation the City has for BIDs as partners with City government, providing supplemental sanitation services citywide, and balancing that with the goal of improved cleanliness on corridors, which, of course, the BIDs themselves are deeply committed to.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah, and I've spoken with BIDs, again, to do really important work, making sure that our commercial corridors are clean, something that we all want. I've spoken with BIDs who have simply said, hey, we don't have the funds to be able to purchase these bins, especially the smaller BIDs who have a budget of, let's say, 100,000 dollars. Some of them have said complying with the rule might cost more than their entire budget, more than 100,000 dollars. Many of them have stated, you

know, if we're required to do something that we don't have the funds for, we're just going to stop cleaning, because we're not going to have the resources to be able to do that. So, do you think SBS should play a role in helping them resolve that economic factor, or do you think that's not under SBS?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: SBS should absolutely play a role as the entity within City government that has a close understanding and working relationship of BID's functions and budgets, and we will continue to lift up the perspective and needs of BIDs within the Administration.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Is there anything in the FY 2026 Preliminary Plan to help them with this economic issue?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: I don't believe that there's currently any allocation specifically scoped to manage increased BID costs related to a transition to containerization. However, you know, I may not have the full awareness of plans in other agencies, but not within SBS' budget.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And based on your conversations with the many BIDs, I'm sure they've

all reached out about this issue, approximately what would be the average cost for compliance of this rule, based on the feedback that you've gotten from different BIDs, and maybe the cost for the smaller BIDs, mid-sized BIDs, and the larger BIDs?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, I think the cost of implementation would vary significantly across the BIDs as their geographies and assessments are very different, and where they currently stand with respect to containerization also differs significantly so I can't give you an aggregate cost across the network, but we have sought information from the BIDs about their progress and planning toward implementation and budget impacts, and I know that the BIDs are considering that, both individually and discussing it collectively.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah. Based on the feedback, though, that you've received, what are rough numbers that BIDs have thrown around in terms of, you know, compliance with this new rule? And I know we're still analyzing how much it will cost, but based on the feedback that you've gotten from them, what are rough numbers that you've received? Even if they're not fully accurate, given the costs.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yeah. So, I think it will depend on the style of containers that can be accommodated in the district and used by the BIDs, whether those are City bins, which range from, you know, a few hundred dollars to other options for larger types of containers, or they plan to manage it by increasing supplemental, you know, cleaning of the corridor. Another option DSNY has asked BIDs to consider is actually, you know, moving the bags themselves to a nearby Sanitation depot. So, all of those costs, like, create a lot of variety across the network, as do, as I said, the stages that the BIDs are currently in in terms of containerization. Some of the larger BIDs, you know, don't just put bags on the street, sweep and put bags on the street and service the corner cans and leave bags nearby, but are already transporting so there is, you know, a lot of variation, and labor is also a variable. Some BIDs, you know, have large employees, supplemental sanitation crews, while others are contracting out for the service so I can't quite narrow that in with a total across the network, Chair Feliz, but we're happy to continue to work to understand the financial impacts on BIDs as they come to describe the

operational solutions that make sense for their programs.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And if a BID decides to have the containers in the commercial strip, do you think it'll be a stretch to say that having the containers could cost more or less 100,000 dollars? Do you think that'll be a stretch, or is that within the range that you've heard?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: I think it really varies, Council Member, based on the type of containers, the traffic on the corridor, how much those containers would need to be serviced, cleaned, how often they would need to be replaced, again, staffing costs, many variables. So, we're aware of some of the basic costs for individual types of containers, but it varies so much across BIDs, and even for geographies within BIDs, what types of solutions will be appropriate for those locations.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right. Let's take an example, though. A high-traffic area, a super-busy area, and a BID decides to get, I guess, the most expensive option, which I'm sure would be the larger bins, etc. Do you think a super-rough number of 100,000 dollars might be in the range of compliance?

2 COMMISSIONER GROSS: I think the...

3 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: I know we don't have  
4 the exact numbers, but just a super-rough number,  
5 just so we could know what range we're talking about  
6 when we're talking about this rule.

7 COMMISSIONER GROSS: I think the way to  
8 build toward that understanding would be to look at  
9 the geography, the number of containers that would be  
10 required to manage the number of bags serviced by the  
11 BIDs on an annual basis, and then use that as a  
12 multiplier to understand the cost of the containers,  
13 and then labor to service those containers and get  
14 the cans into those containers and meet up with  
15 whatever method would be used to transport those to  
16 the depots, whether that would be DSNY pickup or a  
17 BID or a new contract would be an additional cost.  
18 I'm sure every BID would appreciate an additional  
19 100,000 dollars to help manage those costs. I don't  
20 want to say that that would be sufficient for all  
21 BIDs.

22 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. One more  
23 question, and then we'll pass it on to Council Member  
24 Krishnan.

Have you had conversations with DSNY about the financial burden, and also is the Administration considering funding to help at least helping the smaller BIDs who might not have that budget of, let's say, 100,000, or that might be all they have?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So we work closely with all of our regulatory partner agencies, and we have had conversations with DSNY about this issue, and we'll continue to be in conversation about containerization and other BID issues concerning supplemental sanitation, and more importantly, other regulatory issues impacting small businesses that are within DSNY's purview.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. And I'm sure if there was a new line of funding, SBS would be open to helping fund compliance of these rules, right? If there were additional funds provided to SPS.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, Council Member, where SBS has been provided one-time funding or short-term funding to help manage a small BID challenge or a small business challenge, we've always implemented that effectively, and we have the mechanisms to do so. So, of course, we want to be



partners in this solutioning, and, yeah, we look forward to being in further conversation.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Thank you so much.

Now let's hear from Council Member Krishnan.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you, Commissioner, too, for your testimony and for the great discussion today.

I just had a couple questions. One is I wanted to reiterate the concerns about this containerization program. I think you're hearing it from a lot of us in the Council, both because of the not only the burden it's putting on BIDs, but also on organizations like ACE that we are big, and I know I'm not the only one, big funders and supporters of. They do excellent work in our District, and them being required to purchase the bins to help comply with this program puts an extraordinary strain on their resources and also on their non-profit status, too, because a lot of their money now is going to be spent on these kinds of logistical things rather than what it should be, and so it's a big issue for us, and I think, as the Chair said, too, we understand

and appreciate the intent, and I know it's not just you, and it's also DSNY and their rule, too, but I would say we'd really want to see you all talking, too, because it's definitely very concerning to us, and especially for those of us who support organizations like ACE and work with them in our District. Separate from the BID issue, too, it just really undermines a lot of the work that we're doing with the right intention, but the impact is very concerning.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Council Member Krishnan. As I said, we have 76 BIDs citywide, but there are so many commercial corridors that aren't organized or supported by Business Improvement Districts or high-functioning merchants associations, and we really appreciate the City Council's Clean Up NYC Initiative and other Member allocations that support the cleanliness of commercial strips. For small businesses to thrive on commercial corridors, they have to be well-maintained, places where New Yorkers feel safe, where they can come and shop and are comfortable consuming goods and services so those allocations are critical, and we appreciate your concern for the supplemental sanitation providers,

some of which you fund directly but others of which are contracted by our BIDs to extend the reach of their staff so absolutely happy to remain in discussion about this. I am pleased, though, to point out, and I think you'll have perhaps noted that the final DSNY rule that was published did note that clean-up crews, and I think the supplemental sanitation providers, can continue to coordinate with their local sanitation depots for pickup when they are generating bags through their work.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Yes. And thank you for mentioning that too. It's just some of these logistical pieces, the intent is good, but not if we're shifting the burden a lot to, whether it's the BIDs or organizations like ACE that do the supplemental sanitation work so I hope we can have more conversation on that and explore ways to implement this program without undermining the efforts in other ways too.

My other question was the Small Business Resource funding, you know, that was about 2 million in total (TIMER CHIME) 1.5 in a one-shot and a 500,000 initiative. Will you support restoring and baselining of the Small Business Resource Network

funding that directly supports and brings resources to small businesses across the city?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: SBS works closely with SBRN. That work is carried out by a five-borough Chamber of Commerce alliance, contracted with our Economic Development Corporation over the past couple of years, and we work closely to coordinate our services so that we're working in a complementary way and not duplicating services and we would absolutely like to see the SBRN program continue.

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Okay. Because that was a big concern for us last time too. We noticed that too. I know the five Chambers do that work together, and for that funding to be lost I think was very concerning so to have it restored and baselined so that they don't have to keep dealing with the ups and downs and uncertainty of whether it's going to be funded. It was never something that should have been cut in the first place, but we appreciate working together to make sure that funding is restored and baselined.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: I think SBRN is another way that we learned about how to provide effective outreach to connect small businesses to

City services and non-profit services during the pandemic and, like the big grants that have been baselined, we understand that stability and foresight for those non-profits creates efficiencies and better outputs through those investments so I appreciate your...

COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Absolutely.

Yeah, I mean a lot of small businesses and the Chambers depend on that to your point too and that stability of funding is critical so I appreciate your commitment on that too. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. And I think we can all agree that the work that our BIDs do, it's invaluable work. Without our BIDs, I cannot imagine what our commercial, can't even imagine what our commercial corridors will look like.

We have, you mentioned about 75 BIDs, right? 73, 75?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: 76 today.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: 76. Oh, one more. Beautiful.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: With one more up for a vote and before the City Council Finance Committee

next week. That's the East Harlem Business Improvement District.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Nice. All right. So, I just want to do some general math. So, if we have 76 BIDs, and we just give them a grant of let's say 50,000 dollars, that'll be 3.8 million out of the budget of about 182 million dollars. Obviously, that's a lot of money, but given the invaluable work that they do, we look forward to continuing the conversation about how we could make sure that this budget helps address literally the top concern of the BIDs in our city.

A few questions about new needs at SBS. Moving on from the BIDs and the containerization rules. The Preliminary Plan includes an additional 8.6 million dollars for various programs such as BID formation, job training and partnerships, and Jobs NYC. The Plan includes a 1-million-dollar baseline for job trainings, construction, pre-apprenticeships. Talk to us about this program and can you provide details on how the funding will be used?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes. Thank you, Chair Feliz. The construction pre-apprenticeship program is a program that SBS operated successfully for, I

believe, eight years. The program provides a pathway to construction careers, union construction careers, which lead to great middle-class wages for New Yorkers who are able to access them, and the program attempts to expand access for New Yorkers from low-to-moderate-income communities and areas of the city and groups in the city that have historically not connected to union opportunities at a high rate. We're really proud of the work that we've done through this program over its existence. We've served over 1,000 participants. Those participants have completed the pre-apprenticeships at a 90 percent completion rate and over 75 percent of them have been connected to jobs in union trades so we are very excited to have this money restored in the January Plan, and we are working this Fiscal Year to reestablish these programs and have first outputs this Fiscal Year because we don't think this is work that can wait and we are also excited to carry it forward into the outyears.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Does this program assist specific communities in need of job skills and training and also how many individuals will this program assist?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, this program is not geographically targeted or confined to certain geographies. We attempt to serve high-need New Yorkers so those from low- and moderate-income communities including our NYCHA communities, and we have served about 200 New Yorkers per year through the intervention. This year we're starting with a partial year so the output for FY25 may be less than that, but we'll be back up to full scale in FY26.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Back in FY24, the job training program saw a 5.9-million-dollar PEG. How did the PEG impact the agency's ability to provide these services?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, FY24 was a challenging budget year across City agencies and, through the PEG process, we worked hard to strategically achieve those savings and ensure that we weren't jeopardizing any programming that was operating at the time or that were in recruitment at the time. So in the area of training, there are contract transitions due to procurement timelines as we're launching new programs or establishing new vendors or onboard new training providers and so our approach to those PEGs in FY24 was to reduce funding



in that Fiscal Year for trainings which were not operating at the time and now that the City tax levy budget is more stable and we've secured training for the construction pre-apprenticeships and the NCLEX, the nursing program expansion, we're excited to continue to grow our training programs.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: The Preliminary Plan also includes 2-million-dollar baseline funding to expand the reach of JobsNYC hiring halls specifically for communities in need. Is this increased for any communities in particular and also how many individuals will SBS be able to assist with this new funding?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. JobsNYC is a geographically targeted intervention, but it's a data-driven targeting. The goal is to identify neighborhoods in the city that have the highest unemployment rates and rather than simply promoting our walk-in workforce services, which are robust and effective, we take the show on the road and we design community-based interventions that help to connect residents of those communities to workforce system services and to available jobs, and so we will continue to welcome New Yorkers city-

wide to participate in these hiring halls but to hold them in the highest-need zip codes identified through our data analysis. So, the 2 million dollars will fully integrate this JobsNYC programming into our workforce system going forward. This initiative was started as a sprint by City Hall with us kind of building the initiative through trial and error and staff seconded from other agencies and provided by City Hall so this provides a stable future for the JobsNYC initiative going forward.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What are long-term metrics that SBS uses to determine success at JobsNYC?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you. So, with JobsNYC, as with our workforce programming, our ultimate metric is hires, so we're looking to see how many New Yorkers achieve jobs through interviews that we connect them to in the systems, and we are proud to share that thus far that our hiring halls have served an average of 300 to 450 job seekers at each event. We've had more than 30 of them to date, and we've had 3,400 on-site interviews at those events and over 1,400 conditional offers. So, as we get further out from those events, we'll start to get

more verified hires from employees which requires a validation process before we report on the verified hires. We will report on hires, the conditional offers, the number of employers at the events, and the number of job seekers at the events. In addition, we survey both employers and job seekers who attend these events about their satisfaction and, at a recent hiring hall, we achieved for the first time a 100 percent satisfaction rate from all of the employers who participated which include private sector employers and City agencies that are hiring, connecting those New Yorkers in those communities to civil service as well as neighborhood job opportunities.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Thank you for the information.

A few questions about BIDs and BID formation and a few other topics. I guess the first one is a very broad question. Talk to us about all the funding and processes related to BID formation. Different grants that we have available and different processes. I know it's a very lengthy process as someone who is going through a BID formation in East

Tremont. Thank you for all the help on that by the way.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Council Member. We really appreciate your support for the community effort to form a BID in East Tremont. You know from your engagement in that process that the BID formation process requires a driven group of stakeholders in the community to lead that process forward. It has to be driven by demand. Those stakeholders plan a set of outreach activities and mailings to gather, increase, and document the support of stakeholders in the community for BID formation. We want to see and the law requires that at least 51 percent of property owners in the district are in support of the formation of the BID. With our BID grants, we are looking for community groups that have begun this process and have the capacity to carry it through to conclusion. We want to see that they're working with us, that they've expressed their interest in forming a BID to SBS, that they've worked to establish a formal steering Committee, and we produce a guide and share a guide on BID formation to inform them of how to take those initial steps. Then we want to see that they meet the

eligibility requirements to apply for the BID formation grant which are set out in our rules to which we're accountable to hold these awardees. So BID formation grants can be used to support staffing, other planning projects and research, and the implementation of a BID formation or expansion proposal. So, we currently have BID formation grant applications for FY26 open. The application will close on Sunday, March 30th, so next weekend, at 11:59 p.m., and so we are tracking the number of applications in progress, and groups can also reach out to our neighborhood development team if they have questions or need support putting together an application for BID formation grant for next fiscal year.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Given what will be a new cost for having a BID, the containerization rules, given that new cost, do you think that those new rules can potentially discourage different areas from forming a BID, given that they might say this would be our budget if we form and this is going to be a new cost which is going to take up the entire budget?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: We haven't heard from the steering committees that we're working with now on BID formation efforts that the containerization kind of policy evolution is a deterrent and in fact, you know, perhaps they'll be better positioned because from the point of their outreach and their planning of their geography and assessments, they can plan for these costs. So, it will be a new cost for BIDs, but we haven't found that to undermine the desire of communities and stakeholders in the community to form new BIDs at this point.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. The Preliminary Plan includes a baselining of 5.3 million dollars for BID formation as a grant program under the Blueprint for Economic Recovery. Can you give us more information about the Blueprint for Recovery, its goals, and how SBS assesses its performance?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Happy to do so, Chair Feliz. The Blueprint for Economic Recovery was a policy document that outlined the City's post-pandemic recovery, and it provided guidance to City agencies including SBS. Some of the efforts that we've carried forward is work to support entrepreneurship and connecting New Yorkers to

quality jobs and also investments in reactivating the public realm. So, we're proud to share, and I did in my testimony that one in five small businesses operating today has opened during our Administration, and we're also experiencing unprecedented job growth with the jobs recovery approaching 950,000 private sector jobs and jobs exceeding 4.8 million. So many of the portions of the Blueprint that relate to SBS have been successfully deployed, and with the baselining of the NDD grants this year, we look forward to being able to continue those interventions forward into the outyears.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. What selection criteria does SBS have for BID formation grants? What are factors that SBS considers?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: It is a competitive process. We're looking for applications that are clear, and we consider a variety of factors. They include the strength of the proposals. We want to see that there's a pragmatic scope for the time period that it will take to get to BID formation and the budget amount for the formation period. We want to understand that they have a need for these resources based on their budget and staff capacity,

organizational capacity. We want to work with steering committees that are really driven to move this process forward and have a strong likelihood of success. It's helpful if they've already had a history of compliance and successfully managing grants, but we do as much as we can. Also, outside of the groups that we award to support groups that have fledgling desires to begin a BID formation effort by sharing our guide, connecting them with our staff, and supporting them in those early stages. Also, another important eligibility criteria is that they have to have a steering committee and need to have completed a neighborhood survey to be eligible for the grant.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for the information and also for making that a priority. I know that's been a big priority for all of us in City government. So we have 66 BIDs in the City of New York.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: 76.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right. 76, sorry. Yeah, 76 bids. How many do we have in each borough? Could you give us a breakdown and also how many are in the formation stages?



2 COMMISSIONER GROSS: Just a moment. I'll  
3 pull that up for you.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah, breakdown by  
5 borough and also how many in the formation stages.

6 COMMISSIONER GROSS: Just a minute.  
7 Council Member, I'm not seeing the borough breakdown  
8 of BIDs here, but I'll make sure we share it before  
9 the hearing has concluded. We do have BIDs across all  
10 five boroughs, and I'll give you the breakdown if  
11 you'll allow me to circle back to that.

12 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yep. And I guess while  
13 all of you get that information, how long can it take  
14 to form a BID? And also where, the ones that are in  
15 the formation process, where in the process are they?  
16 In the beginning stages? Final stages?

17 COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, it really depends  
18 on the neighborhood group, the steering committee.  
19 Some BID formation processes wax and wane over time  
20 and may extend over some years, where we have  
21 organized steering committees with resources to  
22 invest, strong consultants in some instances, they  
23 may move the process in, you know, two years or less.

24 And the current BID breakdown, Chair  
25 Felice, we currently have 12 established BIDs in the

Bronx, we have 23 established BIDs in Brooklyn, 26 in Manhattan, 11 in Queens, and four BIDs in Staten Island.

And the next BID to go through the BID formation effort, to go through the legislative process, as I mentioned a couple of times, is East Harlem, which is supported by Uptown Grand Central through the formation process.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Now moving on to Local Law 156. Local Law 156 requires that SBS report to the Council on training and education provided by SBS. Does SBS have a goal for how many trainings and educational sessions are generally held every year?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes, Chair Feliz. So, I'm sure you're familiar with our MMR and PMMR chapter. SBS' goals are sometimes expressed as a numerical target and other times as a directional target so in the area of business courses, we attempt to serve more businesses every year with the resources that we have. In Local Law 156, we describe our services to small businesses in this area between FY20 and FY24.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. Over the past two years, every borough other than Brooklyn saw an increase in the number of business training and education sessions held. What led to these increases in training sessions?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: We're really proud of the work that our staff and vendors do to connect small businesses to SBS services. In the last couple of years, we have invested in the creation of an agency-wide outreach team. That outreach team on the ground has partnered with more than 600 community-based organizations including industry associations, from various immigrant communities, community-based development organizations. We've worked with Member offices as well to increase awareness of SBS services. I think that increased outreach led into increased awareness has led to an increase in the services that we have provided. And also we attempt to develop and continually adapt the business education offerings to be responsive to changing business conditions and what business owners respond to in the content and express a need for. So, we have reached, let's see, we doubled our mobile unit events in the last Fiscal Year to holding over 100 of them

and reaching over 18,000 New Yorkers. I believe since the agency-wide outreach team was created, we've reached more than 33,000 New Yorkers through that effort and, therefore, that has translated to conversion in our business training services.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. Who facilitates these sessions? Does SBS follow up with the participants after the trainings and also how is language access supported in these sessions?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes. Thank you, Chair Feliz. We register small businesses for all of our courses and manage their contact information through a strong CRM. That management allows us to send a follow-up survey to every consumer of our services once they have completed the course that asks about their satisfaction with the course, also how they learned about us, so we know how to promote our work effectively and also if they would recommend SBS to their peers or other small businesses so we do survey them consistently. We also are dedicated to providing broad language access to our services. We have a language access coordinator in our executive team that works across the agency to ensure that we've got translators and interpreters for our service

delivery. That's from our Jobs NYC hiring hall to our webinars. In addition, we work hard to hire staff with linguistic diversity, and we provide some courses directly in non-English languages. Fifteen of our courses are translated into at least one other language and they're available in Spanish. Fifteen are available in Spanish and Chinese, eight in Russian, five in Korean, Haitian Creole, French, Bengali, and Arabic. And as a last effort, we have Language Line as a support for all of our vendors and staff if needed.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Got it. Okay. Moving on to federal and COVID funding. As we know, in January, the Trump Administration paused federal loan and grant spending then they rescinded the order two days later. But an executive order issued by the Administration to review the funding remains in effect. The Preliminary Plan includes 43.6 million dollars in federal funding for SBS in FY 2026 with 32.8 million dollars for the City's workforce development efforts. How would decreases in federal funding affect the services that you provide?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. So, at this point, we have not seen or heard

of any federal plans that would jeopardize the sources of federal funding that SBS relies on, and those include funding for our workforce services. And workforce and small business services have generally enjoyed broad bipartisan support and so, of course, we're monitoring policy announcements out of Washington, D.C., but at this point, we have no cause for deep concern that the sources of funding that we rely on will be impacted by those shifts. However, you know, we want to be sure that we're paying attention to the larger impact on the small business ecosystem as that could affect the capacity of our partners or demand for SBS services so that we can adapt as needed.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. As we know, almost every day we continue to hear threats coming from Washington, threats related to budget cuts to different city and state agencies. I think the last one I heard was a threat to the MTA. Does SBS have a contingency plan in place of the federal funds are cut?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. So as I said, you know, we're monitoring these conversations closely, and I know that OMB is

monitoring that on a citywide basis as well and you know we have, you know, healthy discussions with OMB, but at this time we have no reason to expect that the sources of federal funding that we rely on are in jeopardy.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Has all of the COVID funding from the federal government expired? If yes, how has the expiration of federal COVID funds affected SPS' programming?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. We are not currently using any federal funds, COVID funds. We did receive some enhancements that we used for workforce programming and business programming, but those allocations have not been carried forward in our budget. They have expired.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. So, two more lines of questions and then we definitely want to make sure we get an opportunity to hear from the BIDs, so two more lines of questions and then we'll conclude.

So, the next line of questions is about storefront vacancies, a topic that's been a big priority not only for the Committee but also I'm sure as we all know for all of you as well as at SBS. As

we know, vacant storefronts create many issues in the community. When you have a vacant storefront, it leads to graffiti in the area. Makes the area unattractive. It leads to garbage dumping. It decreases foot traffic and creates many more issues. My understanding is that SBS has been using data from LiveXYZ to track storefront occupancy rates to fulfill reporting for several laws. What are current storefront vacancy rates? Do you have a breakdown by borough? And, if yes, which borough is seeing the most rapid growth in storefront vacancies? And do we know why? Four questions in one.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. We have worked closely with the support of a great local business, you named them, LiveXYZ, to track changes in vacancy rates on commercial corridors citywide, and have seen five straight quarters of decreased storefront vacancy when we look at the citywide level. The current rate is 11.4 percent, which means that citywide we're more than 99 percent back from the pre-pandemic levels of vacancy. That's decline in vacancy rates citywide for five consecutive quarters, which is certainly related to



the strong small business creation that we have seen in the city under this Administration.

In terms of the distribution of vacancy, we're seeing the strongest growth in the outer boroughs. The Bronx and Staten Island have both surpassed their pre-pandemic levels, so fully recovered, with higher vacancy rates in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens.

So, in terms of a citywide breakdown, the citywide level is 11.04 percent. In the Bronx, you win at 8.2 percent, Chair Feliz, vacancy, followed by Queens, which is at an 8.7 percent vacancy rate. Staten Island actually should be between there. They're at an 8.6 percent vacancy rate. Vacancy rates across the borough of Brooklyn currently are slightly above the citywide rate at 11.9, and Manhattan, with some persistent pockets of vacancy, is at 14.2 percent vacancy boroughwide.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Sorry, 14.2, you said?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes, 14.2 percent, and Chair Feliz, in your particular District, the vacancy rate is 9.66 percent. That is the LiveXYZ calculation as of the end of February, which means

that you are 8 percentage points below the vacancy rate in the first quarter of FY20.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Oh, very nice. So, we're back to pre-pandemic levels of vacancy rates. Very good.

Can you give us a breakdown of citywide vacancy rates for the last, I guess whatever information you have in front of you, it could be the last three to four, five years, citywide vacancy rates?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, Chair, if it's all right with you, so we have seen improvements in vacancy rate every quarter for the last five quarters, but I'd be happy to follow up with more details on those vacancy changes broken down on a borough basis once we conclude the hearing.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. What steps is SBS taking to decrease the number of storefront vacancies? What are different tools that all of you have available to help areas being affected by this? And also, what are factors that you think or have heard are contributing to the high vacancy rates in Manhattan and also Brooklyn?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair  
Feliz. SBS provides numerous services that help new  
business creation, including the operation or  
establishment of businesses in commercial space.  
Those include our Commercial Lease Assistance  
Program, which provides legal representation to small  
business tenants to negotiate initial lease, a lease  
amendment, or deal with issues of landlord behavior  
that can be, you know, described as harassing.  
Overall, we have served 1,600 businesses through CLA  
in this Administration. We serve about 700 businesses  
a year through that intervention. In addition, SBS  
connects businesses to incentives programs. We have  
an incentives estimator on our MyCity business site,  
and 4,800 companies have used it since we launched  
it. And connecting businesses to incentives to reduce  
the cost of operation in commercial space is an  
important support to help reduce vacancy as well. In  
addition, we focus on capital access. We've connected  
businesses to 294 million dollars during this  
Administration in affordable loans, and those have  
included focus on new businesses being established in  
commercial space in the Opportunity Fund. Also, all  
of the work of our New York City Business Express

Services Team to help businesses understand the regulatory rules of operation in New York City and to accelerate the time period from the time they sign a lease into the time they can open their doors. We want businesses to be able to begin providing goods and services and providing jobs and not, you know, have carrying costs during a pre-operational period that can jeopardize their start. We estimate that we've saved businesses 50 million dollars through NYC BEST and reg reform interventions during this Administration. And, of course, the BIDs themselves and the community-based development organizations that contribute to the health of our commercial strips. They also help to reduce vacancy by understanding the community demands for businesses in the district, promoting the district, and helping those corridors to thrive.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right, and the numbers related to vacancy rates, those numbers are based on the LiveXYZ program slash software, correct? Or are there other ways that you've calculated those numbers?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, our insights into vacancy for the last five quarters is based on

LiveXYZ's work and that team actually, you know, their local business, and it's foot leather, they do quarterly reviews, walks of every corridor in New York City, every street in New York City, actually, to review which commercial spaces currently, the ground-floor commercial spaces, are occupied or vacant. And then the insights from that, you know, manual work are reflected in a technology tool, so a database that describes vacancy with a dashboard that can be accessed by I believe more than 80 City agencies, and agencies are using this vacancy data in many ways, but it also allows SBS to meet our obligation of reporting on changes in vacancy to the City Council.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And how accurate would you say the software is in terms of the data being provided by it? Obviously, any challenges with, I guess, accurate reporting? Or can, if you were to rate it from a 1 to 10, how accurate would you say, based on all the feedback you've heard or have seen?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, some of our Business Improvement Districts also, you know, track foot traffic in their district using technology tools and BIDs as part of their annual reporting to SBS,

share vacancies in their districts to us, and our  
BIDs also have access to the LiveXYZ database. And as  
organizations within the Administration and our BIDs  
have used LiveXYZ more, I think they only have  
expressed increased confidence in the accuracy of the  
insights that we receive from the tool. I'm very  
pleased with the service of LiveXYZ to date, and, you  
know, I also appreciate that they're a small  
business, a New York City based business, providing  
local employment, and they've been very open to  
requests for adaptation and improvement in their  
outputs. And I hope that, you know, all of our  
constituents, including Members of this Committee,  
will share if they have feedback about the insights  
that we're gaining from that work.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. And earlier you  
mentioned that the citywide vacancy rate right now is  
11.04, and we're back to pre-pandemic levels. What  
were those pre-pandemic levels? What was the average  
vacancy rate?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, pre-pandemic  
storefront vacancy citywide was approaching 11  
percent, and that is based on a LiveXYZ data  
collection from the first quarter of FY20.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. So it was about 10-ish percent, more or less, in that ballpark.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: More than 10.5, approaching.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: More than 10.5.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. My understanding is that LiveXYZ, which was initially funded by SBS, is moving to OTI. The SBS program was funded through FY 2025, but they're seeking to extend it through 2028. OTI submitted a capital needs request for the Preliminary Plan, but it was not approved. If OTI doesn't extend this contract, how will SBS continue to provide reporting on storefront vacancies without LiveXYZ?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, LiveXYZ is really a unique resource, and it's allowed us to have expanded insights into storefront occupancy throughout the city and also track change in vacancy rates, and those insights are critical, but if we didn't have them, we would have to rely on a database of information that DOF collects. This is self-reported vacancy reports from the owners of tax lots in the city. There's no obligation for property

owners to share this data, so it's not as complete as the survey that LiveXYZ provides, but, you know, if we lost that resource, we would rely on the DOF reporting and potentially insights from partners that could help us have some understanding of vacancy within, say, our Business Improvement Districts.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. A few more questions, and then we'll conclude so that we could hear testimony from the BIDs who have joined us.

So, the contract budget. So, the Preliminary Plan includes 111 contracts for FY 2026, which is only one less contract than the number for contracts last year. So, FY 2026, one less contract, but the FY 2026 budget for contracts is 75.6 million dollars less compared to 2025. So, one less contract, but we have 75.6 million dollars less, and if those numbers are a little off, just let me know. Can you let us know what contract services were reduced and why, and what the largest reduction in the cost of contracts comes from a reduction in general services. So, what type of services have been reduced and why?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes, Chair Feliz. Let me try to focus in on that. I think you're referring to the table in the Committee report from OMB



describing a breakdown in contract funding, and the difference in contract funding across these two Fiscal Years can be primarily attributed to the fact that City Council discretionary funds are not yet in the budget. That's one important factor, and second is, again, a pass-through explanation. There's a reduction reflected in the FY 2026 preliminary budget of 25 million dollars for EDC. Again, our total contract budget for in FY 2026 is 136 million dollars, and that does include the large contracts for EDC, NYC Tourism and Conventions, and the Trust for Governors Island. So, those are the primary reasons for that decrease.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. So, it's fair to say that the number is going to go back up once the full budget is adopted, based on discretionary funding and other factors.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, you know, our hope is that the Council will continue to support the initiatives that, whose contracts SBS manage, and that will be replaced. I can't speak to whether or not the EDC funding will be replaced in the adopted budget. However, there's not expected to be any impact on our services based on this decrease.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. Moving on to the New York City Small Business Opportunity Fund. As we know, the Opportunity Fund is designed to help small business owners offering public/private loans directed at small business owners. How many businesses have been served by the Small Business Opportunity Fund? Can you explain how the fund works? Have there been any discussions about expanding the program, and also what criteria are used in providing these funds?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. We launched the Opportunity Fund, I believe, in early 2023, and the program operated throughout that year and closed in January of 2024. In that period, we distribute a total of 85 million dollars in loans and served 1,000 small businesses through the program. Since that program has closed, Mayor Adams has committed an additional 10 million dollars in City tax levy dollars to support SBS' development of a new loan fund. We're calling that the New York Future Fund. We announced that at last year's Small Business Expo, and that program will incorporate all of the learnings from the Opportunity Fund and build on them. The goal is to bring a revenue-based

financing model to CDFIs in New York City, which is new technology and really is innovation for our CDFI partners, and so we're looking forward to launching that in 2025. So not a continuation of the Opportunity Fund, but a new fund informed by all of the learnings from the Opportunity Fund. And in terms of eligibility, applicants can demonstrate their ability to repay these loans in a number of ways. We worked hard to eliminate minimum credit scores in the Opportunity Fund, and eliminated application fees to reduce small business barriers to participation in the fund, and we are working to develop an impact report about the Opportunity Fund, which will be available late in this Fiscal Year, and we'll be happy to share that with the Committee.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Sounds good. So, a final question for SBS. I'll end with the same question that I asked at the beginning. Of course, SBS, like every agency, has many different priorities, and of course funds are not unlimited. So curious, if SBS had an additional 20 to 50 million dollars, what would be additional programs?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: How much did you say?

2 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Let's say 20 to 50. I  
3 thought it was 100 million. Let's say 20. Let's keep  
4 it at 20.

5 COMMISSIONER GROSS: I thought it was 100  
6 million when you first said it. You went down.

7 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Let's say 50 million  
8 dollars. What would be programs that you would,  
9 additional programs that you would fund? Why? And  
10 also, of course, we love our BIDs. We all know the  
11 great work that they all do. Would helping fund those  
12 new containerization rules be one of those programs,  
13 if you had those additional funds? Just want to get,  
14 just want to directly ask you about your wish list.

15 COMMISSIONER GROSS: So, Council Member,  
16 I'm only describing my wish list retrospectively  
17 through the successes that we've had so far, but I  
18 think it's exemplary of the strategy that we would  
19 take if we had additional resources. We have very  
20 effective systems for serving small businesses and  
21 job seekers, and we want to drive New Yorkers toward  
22 those resources and then do as much as we can with  
23 those systems so those include our workforce training  
24 programs, our Workforce One Centers, our Business  
25 Solution Centers, and our partnership with community-

based organizations that are part of the small business ecosystem in the city. You know, thus far, we have invested in restarting effective programs to create higher wages for New Yorkers through construction jobs. You know, we can further, you know, think about what fields have expanded demand and opportunity for New Yorkers. We have invested in a successful nursing program that takes New Yorkers who may be working as home health aides and transitions them to jobs earning six figures. Those are the types of investments we want to consider and expand on. That's been our track record of success, and we would build on those strategies for success if we had new resources. Working to understand opportunity in the economy, needs of small businesses, needs of job seekers, and using our strong systems to meet those needs.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Actually one more final question. This one is briefly about the Cannabis NYC program. So, Cannabis NYC helps with loans. It is supposed to work with industry stakeholders to create jobs and economic opportunities while also addressing the harms of cannabis prohibition. A few questions about it. How

much funding has been provided to date? How many applications have been received? What's the average amount of funding that is loaned per the application? And also, what criteria is used in making decision-making on the funding?

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Thank you, Chair Feliz. So, the Cannabis NYC loan fund is our most recently created financing assistance program. We opened applications in October, and they were open for about a month. They closed in early November. Of course, I want to lift up the partnership with the Economic Development Corporation, which is our partner in delivering this program within City government. We had 60 applications for the first tranche of loans in the program. In order to be eligible for these loans, it's a closed universe of potential applicants. You have to have received a license to operate a cannabis business in New York City. And in this instance, it was focused on conditional adult use applicants, so you know, social equity participants in this program so it was a smaller universe of potential applicants. And we have begun to notify applicants to this first tranche of how they have fared in the program. We don't yet have

1 enough data to provide an average of the loans being  
2 awarded through the program, but the potential loans  
3 were up to 100,000 dollars. And so we closed Phase  
4 One, but some of the businesses that applied during  
5 Phase One are supplementing their applications and  
6 still being considered so we look forward to being  
7 able to report out on impact of this first phase very  
8 shortly.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. So, we're  
11 concluding the first phase. So, Phase Two of the  
12 Cannabis NYC Loan Fund is set to begin this spring.  
13 How will Phase Two differ from Phase One?

14 COMMISSIONER GROSS: Phase two will have  
15 an expanded set of potential licensees who will be  
16 included. We expect that we'll be able to connect  
17 businesses to up to 6 million dollars in City  
18 capital, and we're also hoping to have private  
19 investment. At that point, we're driving toward a 20-  
20 million-dollar fundraising goal. We're still going to  
21 prioritize card licensees, but also potentially lend  
22 to more mature operating businesses, whereas the  
23 first tranche was focused on card licensees who  
24 hadn't yet been able to open a retail location.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Thank you for the information. I think that's it with the questions. That's it for now. Thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you for all the information and for all the work that you do to support our small businesses and our BIDs and our commercial corridors. Looking forward to continuing our partnership and continuing to work on the different issues that affect our small business corridors. I especially look forward to continuing the conversation about containerization rules. I know this is mostly under DSNY, but of course there's a role that we could all play with the Small Business Committee and Small Business Services to make sure that we help with those different concerns that small businesses have provided. We all love our BIDs, and you know this is the number one issue that continues to come up, so I look forward to continuing conversations about that.

COMMISSIONER GROSS: Nobody loves them more than SBS. I really appreciate this opportunity to discuss our work, and I appreciate being in partnership and in conversation with you, even when I'm on the hot seat. It makes such a huge difference that the Members of this Committee and you as a



leader of this Committee are so deeply in contact with small businesses and aware of their challenges. It really is tremendous, and I just want to thank the members of our Small Business Advisory Commission who keep SBS informed of small business, street vendor, merchant association, BID concerns citywide. I know many of them are here today, so thank you to Linda, to Randy, to the BID Association, which is represented here, and to Mohamed Attia, who brings street vendor community insights to our SBAC's work.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much.

All right. I now open the hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this is a government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

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

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on today's topic, Small Business Preliminary Budget.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony and wish to submit it to the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov), [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72 hours of the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

For in-person panelists, please come up to the table once your name has been called.

Now I'll call the first panel. I'll call four at a time, starting with Linda Baran from the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for joining us from Staten Island. Now also Randy Peers, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, Dirk McCall from the New York City BID Association, and Chris Walters from ANHD. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for all the work that you do in the different boroughs that make up the City of New York, and I guess we can

start with Linda Baran from the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for joining us.

LINDA BARAN: Thank you, Chair Feliz and Members of the Committee on Small Business and Members of New York City Council for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Linda Baran. I serve as the President and CEO of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce. Since 1895, the Chamber has been dedicated to supporting and advocating for small businesses in our community. As the largest business organization in the borough, we serve approximately 700 businesses that are members, that represent about 20,000 employees, with 90 percent of our members operating businesses with 10 or fewer employees. And while we are a membership organization, our organization represents the interest and serves more than 14,000 businesses of all sizes and sectors borough-wide. Small businesses are the backbone of our borough's economy, and the Chamber is committed to providing them with tools, resources, and advocacy they need to succeed. We achieve this through our on-ground merchant assistance, economic development programs, and policy advocacy to ensure small businesses have a voice in City government. Today, I want to highlight

several of our key initiatives that continue to make a meaningful impact on Staten Island's small business community and emphasize the need for City funding to sustain and expand our work. One of our flagship programs is our Young Entrepreneurs Academy. It's the only program citywide that the Chambers are doing, which is a transformative 16-week after-school program that empowers high school students to become real entrepreneurs by developing business ideas, conducting market research, and pitching to investors. Since launching in 2013, 228 students have graduated from the program, equipping them with skills and experience that will benefit them throughout their careers. Investing in our future business leaders is an investment in our borough's long-term economic vitality. Last year, the Chamber launched the Leading Ladies Collective, the first of its kind on Staten Island, designed to support and empower female business owners. The inaugural cohort brought together 13 business owners for an eight-month program focused on financial literacy, legal support, marketing, networking, and M/WBE certification. This initiative is a critical step toward strengthening women entrepreneurs in Staten

Island, ensuring that they have access to the resources and mentorship necessary for success. With City Council support, our Chamber (TIMER CHIME) on the Go program provides direct proactive assistance. I'm not going to go into detail because my time, I know, is up, but we do the Chamber on the Go. We've been doing that for about eight years now on Staten Island, and we are part of the Small Business Resource Network, which was mentioned before. On Staten Island, we've reached over 5,400 businesses since the inception of that program, 1,200 of them women and minority-owned businesses. I'd like to ask that that funding be restored. As mentioned before, that is actually part of the New York City Economic Development pot of money, and it passes through SBDC. We think it's crucial, the five borough Chambers on the ground, it provides us the opportunity to have extensive staff being out visiting with businesses that they, you know, that are in our borough, so we have that local connection. And lastly, one of the things that the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce has asked the Speaker's support on is to launch a new program to connect new and immigrant ethnic businesses to community services. We requested

100,000 dollars from the Speaker for that. Just really, the Chambers of Commerce do a lot of great work in all five boroughs, and we are always looking for funding to support the actual work that we do, and it's really important this day and age with the business and climate that exists. And lastly, we are in the process of hopefully getting our BID, the Bay Street Corridor BID. We've been working on that for a number of years now, trying to get that to the finish line.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Very nice, thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony and for all the work you do on Staten Island. And I have questions for everyone, but I guess we'll hear from everyone and then I'll ask everyone questions.

Next, Randy Peers from the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce.

RANDY PEERS: Thank you, Chair Feliz, appreciate the time. I'm gonna pick up on Linda's testimony so we could add more context and pick up on some of the things that you brought up in your commentary. Small Business Resource Network is partially funded through the Administration, and then it's under the City Council Initiative Five Borough

Chamber Alliance. So, it's a 2 million overall ask to fund the program, and that encompasses all five borough Chambers. And essentially, it provides outreach and assessment services, working one-on-one directly with small businesses where they're at, right, so the service delivery model is the difference here. We actually go out in every neighborhood, we speak 14 different languages, we work with businesses at their doorstep, we triage, we set up a service delivery plan, and then we connect these businesses to whatever they need, either from government or even from the private sector. We've served over 16,000 businesses over the years that we've been operating this program, and we'd love to see this get baselined. I mean, every year we're coming and asking for this support. The Commissioner herself mentioned how important the program was as a complementary program to support SBS services. We're, of course, a little concerned with a lot of transition that's been going on, so we hope to see an enhancement on the City Council side to make us whole in that 2-million-dollar initiative, and it really does pay dividends when it comes to small business support. So just to add that context there. Chamber

on the Go, look, it came out of the City Council. It's been a successful program. It's not just Chambers that operates Chamber on the Go. Merchant Associations operate it and other, you know, Yemeni Business Association, for example, so we support Chamber on the Go. It enables us to, in Brooklyn at least, to have a van that can show up at events where we know we're going to be supporting small businesses. So, I will just close by saying, look, the (TIMER CHIME) five Chambers came together in a very positive way during COVID. You know, not a lot of good things happened in the business community during COVID, but our joint programming has really made an impact, and we hope that the City recognizes that impact because we approach these types of services, you know, from an on-the-ground level so thank you for your support.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much. And next, Dirk McCall from the New York City BID Association.

DIRK MCCALL DE PALOMÁ: Chair Feliz and Members of the New York City Council Committee on Small Businesses, my name is Dirk McCall de Palomá, and I'm testifying today on behalf of the New York



City BID Association. I'm also the Executive Director of the Sunnyside Shines BID in Queens.

The New York City BID Association represents all of the City's 76 Business Improvement Districts, which are as diverse as the City itself. We're very proud to serve nearly 300 miles of commercial corridors, including around 100,000 businesses, and to invest more than a combined 194 million back into our communities. We are very grateful for the partnership of Mayor Adams, SBS Commissioner Dynishal Gross, and the City Council over the past year. As demand for BID services and the cost of providing those services continue to increase, support for BIDs is more important now than ever. We are, therefore, very heartened that Fiscal Year '26 Preliminary Budget included the baselining of the funding for the small BID operational support, as well as the formation and expansion of BIDs. These funding streams have become critical for smaller BIDs, and baselining this funding will allow BIDs to do even bigger and better things over a longer-term horizon with more strategic planning. There are still some major improvements needed to the contracting process for this funding, though, and we look forward

to working with SBS on that. The big problems include late registration of contracts. We're in March, and contracts for Fiscal Year '25, some of them still have not been registered. There are also concerns about the ability to subcontract and provide the most additional services possible to communities with these awards. We know that SBS is doing their best to move these contracts forward, and we hope the agency will receive all the resources necessary to support small businesses and BIDs alike in Fiscal Year '26. BIDs are seeing major headwinds on the horizon. We are deeply concerned about the looming containerization mandate from the Department of Sanitation of New York, which is a draconian rule which is forcing all BIDs to purchase and site containers and to haul the public's trash. This is a major departure from current operations, and especially smaller BIDs may struggle to comply. While the goal of containerization is laudable, and I think we all agree, the worst-case scenario here is that BIDs might (TIMER CHIME) cease supplemental sanitation services altogether, which would lead to overflowing corner baskets, and nobody wants that. Many BIDs are also struggling to address quality-of-

life issues outside of our authority, especially street homelessness. We've been up in Albany testifying on this, but we really need help on it. I thank you very much for this opportunity to comment.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much. And next is Chris Walters from ANHD.

CHRIS WALTERS: Great. Thank you, Chair Feliz and Members of the Committee. My name is Chris Walters, and I'm a Senior Policy Associate at the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, or ANHD. ANHD is one of the City's lead policy, advocacy, technical assistance, and capacity building organizations. We maintain a membership of 80-plus neighborhood-based and citywide non-profit organizations that have affordable housing and/or equitable economic development as a central component of their mission. Our work directly supports the needs of our members who fight to bring equity into low-wealth communities in New York City, including through coalitions like the Industrial Jobs Coalition. Much of that work centers on two components, supporting commercial tenants and merchant organizing efforts, and supporting NYC's industrial sector and industrial business service

providers. So, our asks for this Committee and the Council around the budget, we urge you to expand the Commercial Lease Assistance Program. The CLA Program is the only available resource for free legal assistance for small business owners and other commercial tenants, and must continue to be funded at a baseline minimum of 5 million and be made a permanent SBS program. We ask, too, that you fund community-based organizations engaging in merchant organizing and outreach efforts, and three, increase funding to SBS' Neighborhood Development Division to support public realm work.

Turning to the industrial sector and our work there, we ask that you, one, increase all funds for NYC industrial programs by 2 percent, provide a 50 percent increase in industrial business service provider funding, index that funding to inflation, and shift the funding from a one-year to a three-year contract, and fund a new 650,000-dollar program to build additional capacity for IBSPs. We ask for this for IBSPs, especially knowing that their funding has remained static for years and has not kept pace with inflation or increasing responsibilities, and in addition, they continually face long delays in

receiving payments for their contracted work. And I would just end setting the context of we do this industrial work, again, because we see this as really lying at the heart (TIMER CHIME) of a true equitable economic development strategy. The industrial sector offers high wages, low barriers to entry, and opportunity pathways for a workforce that is 80 percent workers of color and over 50 percent foreign-born. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Thank you again. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you, everyone, for the work that you do in our city and our commercial corridors.

So, two questions. One of the first one about the new containerization rules. So, as we know, the Sanitation Department in our city is escalating the war on rats. All of you have mentioned concerns about the rule, you know, great initiative, but concerns regarding costs for compliance. So, these new rules, if and when they take effect, how will they affect your ability to operate? Also, how much, based on the rough numbers that you've looked into, how much would it cost to fully comply? And also, you could give us information about how big is the BID. I

know different BIDs cover different territories and different sizes so if you could just, yeah, and maybe we could start same thing from left to right. And if you haven't looked into the containerization rules and like the overall cost, it's fine to hit the skip button.

LINDA BARAN: I am familiar with the BIDs, the containerization rule. However, we do not operate a BID. We're in the process of starting a BID, but I can tell you that the individual businesses that are in BIDs are worried about the cost. They're worried about the cost of the containers themselves. I know it doesn't, it's not necessarily that they're cleaning up the city streets. However, one thing that I saw that we did, I believe it was about two years ago, was with the group that were working with the steering committee, we were able to get grants from DSNY for containers, the larger containers that businesses could apply for. And as an organization, we applied for about four of them and we got them and we placed them along the corridor.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you.

RANDY PEERS: So on your second point, I mean, I think it's helpful to kind of tease out the

largest BIDs, almost all of which are in Manhattan, and then the outer borough BIDs. And I think when we think through whether it's containerization or other types of legislation that impact BIDs, that we need to look at the large BIDs and the small BIDs in very different camps, because they face very different challenges, right? There are a few large BIDs in Brooklyn and downtown Brooklyn, but for the most part, the 23 BIDs in Brooklyn are half a million or less in terms of annual budget so they're operating on a shoestring. So, anything that adds an additional cost burden is going to really push them in a tough direction. Now yes, the supplemental funding that was allotted for small BIDs has been super helpful, and the fact that it might, it's going to be baseline, I think that that's great. But remember, we haven't indexed the BID budgets to inflation in years, so we're actually just trying to catch up to some degree. But I would just say for the future, let's look at the two outer borough BIDs versus Manhattan BIDs in two very different camps, because their budgets are very, very different.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah. And about how much would it cost based on the numbers that you've heard from different players?

DIRK MCCALL DE PALOMÁ: Okay, jumping in. So Sunnyside Shines, we're the BID in Sunnyside Queens, we cover 36 block fronts so 12 blocks on Queens Boulevard North and South, and six blocks on Greenpoint Avenue on both sides of the street. So, we do about 80 bags of trash a day, and it's a very heavily restaurant and food corridor so my trash cans are overflowing on a regular basis and have to be emptied on a regular basis. I'm going to have to probably buy five containers, five large containers, and then I have to work on the siting. Nobody wants a container in front of their place so I've had a walk through with Department of Sanitation, they're working very closely with us trying to make sure that we find places that we can site this, but the merchants are gonna basically say, why are you doing this to my business, and the property owners are going to be complaining. It's going to cost me 60,000 for the bins themselves, but then I have to pay an extra staff member, because my staff right now are already overextended. We contract with the



Supplemental Sanitation Service, but in order to take all the bags and put them in the containers and make sure they're still doing everything else, I'm probably going to have to get an extra person. And this is a unionized position, so it's probably 50,000 to 60,000 more so probably at least 120,000 in order to comply with this, and we want to comply with this. And I think there have been some references to the program the Department of Sanitation had earlier, where they would purchase of the can for you, of the bins for you, and then install it. That program doesn't exist anymore. Now they want us to come up with the money, and we adopt our budget like everybody else at the beginning of the fiscal year, or right before the fiscal year starts. Adding an extra 120,000 when my assessment is 360,000, this is really challenging. We all want containerization, we don't want the rats, but we have to have a funding stream that's going to be able to help us do this.

CHRIS WALTERS: I'm not a BID, so I can't speak to this piece, but again, I think we're here to lift up some of the other programs that SBS does, especially around industrial and then the small merchant work.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, and I guess a question for you, Dirk. Do you think a one-time grant would fully resolve the concerns, or do you think there'll be additional operational costs that are going to have to be dealt with every year?

DIRK MCCALL DE PALOMÁ: We haven't really experienced it yet so I'm approaching trying to fund these containers through about four different sources, trying to figure out, I'm hoping that at least one of the sources comes through and I'm able to make the purchase, but then I have to do the siting. A one-time thing would be really, really, really helpful, and if they put that through SBS or they put that to Department of Sanitation, that would really solve a lot of the problems for the smaller BIDs. But still, you have to deal with it with the siting, because you have the containers, if you don't get the DOT to help you with the siting, that's a challenge.

RANDY PEERS: Look, DSNY has to also kind of figure out what it's going to do on commercial corridors where there are no BIDs. I mean, this is where we have significant challenges, right? We've got baskets on corners in commercial districts all

over the city that are not governed by a BID or even a Merchant Association. I mean, they're supposed to come around twice a day to at least empty that. That doesn't happen. 8th Avenue and Sunset Park in Brooklyn? Never. Never happens that way. So let's be fair. If DSNY is going to require new requirements and sort of new operations for the BID world, let's look at what it's also going to do to enhance services and support to all of those corridors, the majority of the commercial corridors that don't have a BID or Merchant Association.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. And also another question for anyone who has dealt with these grants. So, we have many different SBS grants, including grants for the smaller BIDs. Can you talk to us, if you've dealt with the program, talk to us about your experience and also what have you used the grants for?

DIRK MCCALL DE PALOMÁ: Okay. Sunnyside Shines has received the Small BID Support grant for the last three years, and we're applying for it again this year. It's been transformative. This has been the best grant that we've had from the City of New York. It's been really, really helpful. We were able

to hire a part-time marketing manager who's made all of our marketing materials and everything really pop. So, instead of hiring individual people, individual graphic designers every single time, I actually have somebody on staff, so everything ties in from the street banners that we do to the website to the graphics that we do for events. It's been incredibly helpful. It allowed us to hire a bookkeeper, which made certain that our financial procedures were really, really helpful. We were able in one year to work with a PR firm. My district is probably about 55 percent Latino and my merchants predominantly speak Spanish so we work with Univision and Telemundo and try to make certain that we're doing everything completely bilingually. But it's also Western Queens, so you have Korean, you have Bangladeshi, you have Arabic, you have Nepalese, so we work with people trying to get the press release out to all the different ethnic media in different places. So, that grant was very helpful with that. We were able to purchase a contract with an organization to do a new website. Our website was in terrible, terrible shape and kept getting hacked. At this point we have one of the better-looking websites, I think, of all the BIDs

in the city and that's because of this grant, that's because of SBS so it's been incredibly transformative, and the way it was structured initially, you would get the first 25 percent and then you would start spending it and once you've done 50 percent of your work, they give you the next 50,000. They changed the process now, so now the process is a reimbursement one, which makes it a lot harder because especially if you're a small BID, you have to expend the money and then you have to do all the paperwork to get the money back, and it's challenging. You have to really be very careful with where you're moving your money around in order to make sure that you can make the expenditures and then request for reimbursement.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Got it. Okay, cool.

Sounds good.

Well, thank you so much, everyone. Thank you again for your testimony, for the information, and for all the work you do in our city. We really appreciate it.

All right. Next is Yanki Tshering from Accompany Capital, Leah Archibald from Evergreen, and

Christian Hidalgo from the Workers' Justice Project, who will be joined by a translator.

All right, so we'll start with Yanki from Accompany Capital. You may begin whenever you're ready.

YANKI TSHERING: Good afternoon, Chair Feliz, nice to see you, and Members of the Small Business Committee. My name is Yanki Tshering, and I'm the Executive Director of Accompany Capital, a certified CDFI established in New York City. Mission is to create pathways to prosperity for immigrant refugee underserved small business owners across the city by providing access to affordable credit, financial education, and training. Over the past 25 years, we have expanded economic opportunities for BIPOC-owned businesses, dispersing over 68 million in business loans, ranging from micro loans of 1,000 to street vendors and hair braiders, to 350,000 to finance larger projects like a green business using rainwater management technology at the Jacob Javits Center. I'd like to thank the City Council for creating the CDFI Initiative last year. We have a proposal pending for this initiative to continue our existing partnership with two other CDFIs, Asian

Americans for Equality and BOC Capital, to create economic opportunity for emerging entrepreneurs across the city. The grant of 330,000 will help us provide up to 250 micro entrepreneurs with resources to start or formalize their business, establish ITIN, and access the capital they need to grow. The capital would be provided by Accompany Capital. CDFIs thrive through partnerships with banks and other CDFIs, private philanthropy, and government. In 2023, the New York City Small Business Opportunity Fund Program, and we heard Commissioner of New York City Department of Small Business earlier speak a little bit about the success of this program, so this was a partnership between City of New York, Goldman Sachs, and MasterCard for Inclusive Growth with the assistance of eight CDFIs. We were one of the CDFIs (TIMER CHIME) and combined we deployed 85 million in low interest loans to small businesses. So, what I would like to quickly say is executive order from the current Administration is putting the future of the federal CDFI fund at risk, and that is why we are here today to request that as you develop the City Council's Fiscal Year '26 Preliminary Budget, we urge you to consider the risks facing the small business

community, which is closely tied to the challenges facing immigrant communities, so many of our small businesses. Thank you for your time. On behalf of everyone at Accompany Capital, we look forward to strengthening our partnership with you.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you for all the work you do.

Next, we'll hear from Leah from Evergreen.

LEAH ARCHIBALD: Hello. So I'm Leah Archibald. I'm the Executive Director of Evergreen. We're the local development corporation that works with businesses in industrial North Brooklyn to help them grow so that we can keep high-quality working-class jobs in our community. And we have done this, right now we are funded, we get some of our funding from the Industrial Business Solution Centers and we have been partnering with the City of New York on providing services to small businesses since our inception in 1982. And, of course, it's a budget hearing so we're here today to ask for some budget requests. As my friend Christopher noted, we would request a 2 percent increase for all funds for all industrial programming, a 50 percent increase in the



industrial business solutions providers funding, we would very much like to reinstitute three-year contracts instead of one-year extenders for the IBSP funding, and finally we would request that City Council discretionary support independent project for the industrial business zones to build capacity with each of our organizations.

So, a little bit about us, we provide direct business services to industrial businesses, mostly manufacturers. We help them find financing, we help them navigate government, we help them access incentive programs. And we do this, right, we're a tiny little million-dollar-a-year organization. Under 20 percent of our money comes from the City of New York. The other 80 percent I raise or we get from our real estate entity. And the City benefits from this because we're able to leverage that 80 percent of our budget to achieve the contract goals for the 20 percent. (TIMER CHIME) I guess I shall close here, but I'm speaking on behalf of all of the industrial business solutions providers. We would love an opportunity to talk with you guys more about the work that we do and how important it is to maintaining an equitable economy here in the City of New York.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you, thank you so much.

And next we'll hear from Christian Hidalgo. Bienvenidos.

CHRISTIAN HIDALGO: (SPEAKING SPANISH)

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, cool. Okay. All right. And for those that want to read his testimony in English, it's in the papers. (SPEAKING SPANISH)

CHRISTIAN HIDALGO: (SPEAKING SPANISH)

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yep. Just for the record, my question was, Christian arrived in 2013 and he was able to get the work permit. So my question was, what were programs that were helpful? And he did mention different trainings including OSHA and SST and many others, and also the help of the Workers' Justice Project.

All right, no more questions. Thank you so much, everyone. Muchísimas gracias. Thank you for joining us today. Gracias.

All right, and the last in-person panel we'll call Mohamed Attia from the Street Vendor Project and Sharon Brown from Rose of Sharon Enterprises.

Is Sharon still with us?

All right, Mohamed, thank you so much for joining. You can begin whenever you're ready.

MOHAMED ATTIA: Thank you, Council Member. Since I'm the last to speak, do I get ten minutes? It doesn't work this way? All right.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Actually, you're not last. Somebody else is.

MOHAMED ATTIA: Okay. Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and Committee members. My name is Mohamed Attia. I'm the Managing Director of the Street Vendor Project. Thanks for the opportunity to testify. The Street Vendor Project is a membership-based organization with over 3,000 street vendor members. As the only organization here in New York City dedicated to serving the street vendor population across the five boroughs, SVP is the centralized hub for street vendors to access resources and receive essential services as the smallest businesses in our city. We respectfully request support from the City Council to expand our community outreach and education program and the small business consultations program for street vendors. The demand for street vendor education and services continues to grow. It is important to highlight how resources are

being allocated in our city. Looking at the Office of Street Vendor Enforcement housed under the Sanitation Police with an increasing budget that's ranging from 3.7 million dollars to 4.9 million dollars annually, that is not including the NYPD, DOHMH, Parks, and other agencies that enforce vending laws. As was recently reported in City Limits, the Office of Street Vendor Enforcement started with nearly 40 officers back in 2023. Now it is staffed with 87 Sanitation Police officers, 24 lieutenants, and 3 inspectors, almost tripling the number of officers in this office. In the meantime, no other City agency receives any dedicated funding to support street vendors without rich education or resources. On the other hand, SVP receives around 200,000 dollars for the entire year from the Speakers' initiatives and individual Council Members' discretionary funding combined to do the services that is so essential. So when you look at the scale and the numbers, this is a scale of 25 to 1. For every dollar the City allocates for education and outreach, it spends 25 dollars on enforcement. Our (TIMER CHIME) small but mighty team is well-trained and equipped with the resources to conduct the outreach and education program and the

small business consultations to vendors across the city. We offer our services in seven different languages, Arabic, Bangla, English, French, Mandarin, Spanish, and Wolof. We meet vendors where they're at, we do street outreach, we meet them at the cars, tables, the commissaries, the garages, wherever they can be found. We hold monthly meetings and workshops to support the vendor community really understand the system and be in compliance. We fulfill a critical role since there is no other City agency that does that in a meaningful way, and SVP is eager to increase services to the vendors and meet the demand, and we need the City Council support to actually do that. We hope that the Council will consider our funding requests this Fiscal Year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. And next is Sharon Brown from the roles of Sharon Enterprises. Thank you for joining us.

SHARON BROWN: Hello. I'm Sharon Brown from Rose of Sharon Enterprises. Remember the hostages, release the hostages, let Yahweh's people go, defend Israel. That's just a precursor.

For small business funding, we need to make sure that the military is not only in the

vending business, but they are able to open small businesses, take over faltering small businesses. We need for the military to be able to be funded for businesses and military veterans. We also need to engage the youth and the children and take the small business into schools and start them learning when they're young about opening businesses. We also need to fund the seniors for the small business sector. Not only should they be learning about their sicknesses and things like that, they should be learning how to get businesses. They should be learning to travel, business travel, all kinds of things. They are in the prime of their life. They should not be just sitting around talking about their illnesses and the things that are going on. They should be starting again at a late age, at a late stage. So, we should fund all facets of the community with small business. We should start very young with the children, teaching them about business. I want the small business to get into the schools. We're getting a lot of programs into the schools, the Bible, the Ten Commandments, things like that. We also, as part of Judaism and Christianity, teach about monies and business and things like that, so we

want to partner with the small business office, SBA, whatever it's called, and have them go into the schools as [GAVEL] well.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much. Love it. Supporting veterans, youth, seniors. Love it.

A few questions. I guess the first one is for vendors. What has been some of the most helpful grants for you and the work that you do in vendors? The most helpful SBS grant, and which one would you recommend that be expanded on? I know you somewhat touched on the second question.

MOHAMED ATTIA: Sure. So, one of the grants that we receive from SBS, and this is the second time we actually receive it, is the Merchant Organizing Program. It is a program that has been really helpful. It allows SVP to build more with the community and be on the ground in very specific neighborhoods so this is one way to look at expanding the partnership between SBS and SVP and, of course, do more meaningful work on the ground.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Got it. Okay. Cool. Sounds good. And a second question for Sharon Brown. I know you mentioned different programs in our

schools. Any specific programs that you would recommend related to, I guess, business?

SHARON BROWN: I think that we need to create...

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Turn your mic on, please.

SHARON BROWN: I think we need to create something, an initiative, where we are dealing with the children. We remember children having lemonade stands and things like that, but we know now that children are making formidable companies, and they are doing things, charitable companies, different things like that, but they can partner and have some kind of training and teaching. And also, if they're ready at a young age to start a business, we won't exploit them, but we will gear them up for what they're ready to do. So, if they're prepared, we can start to implement some kind of program that we create. I can be a part of it, and we can get the children going. I studied accounting and all kinds of things. I taught in the church the Bible school, youth department, children's church, different things like that so I'm well-versed in dealing with the young people, older people, and the different facets



of the society. And I think that we should move business into all society, not just have people as working people. They should also be business owners. That's the American dream.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you both for joining and for the testimony.

SHARON BROWN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.

Next, another in-person testimony, Darry Saldana from the Bronx Chamber of Commerce.

DARRY SALDANA: Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and Members of the Committee on Small Business. My name is Darry Saldana, Bronx Chamber of Commerce Supervisor Specialist to the Small Business Resource Network. I am here on behalf of Lisa Sorin, President of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce. The Bronx Chamber of Commerce is critical in helping local business in Bronx grow, thrive, and remain competitive. The Chamber provides vital resources, advocacy, and services that are instrumental in addressing the challenges facing our borough. These services include, but are not limited to, business development, programs, workforce training, public

advocacy, access to capital, and economic development initiatives. The Bronx is often overlooked and historically underfunded, yet it is home to a growing number of small businesses that serve as the backbone of the local economy and play a crucial role in the quality of life for residents. Despite their importance, these businesses face deep challenges, including high operational costs, complex regulatory requirements, and limited access to capital and technical assistance. One of the most effective programs addressing these challenges is the Small Business Resource Network, also known as SBRN. Unlike other initiatives, the SBRN takes a proactive, high-touch approach in vetting business support specialists directly in communities to provide in-person tailored assistance. This model ensures that small business owners, many of whom are navigating bureaucracy for the first time, can access the resources they need quickly and efficiently. City funding for SBRN is crucial because it enables these specialists to provide ongoing one-on-one support rather than one-time assistance. Through this personalized case management model, SBRN helps businesses secure grants and loans and access to

legal counsel, navigating regulations, connect with small business coaching, secure marketing and technological support, and tap into new sales opportunities. The result speaks for themselves. SBRN has already supported (TIMER CHIME) 53,000 businesses across New York City, including 9,200 in the Bronx alone. Without continued funding, thousands of Bronx businesses would lose access to this vital hands-on support, putting jobs, local investment, and growth economic at risk. I urge the Council to restore 1.5 million for this vital program to ensure small business across the borough continues to thrive. We thank you for your continued support and leadership in considering this important request. We look forward to working together to secure a bright future for the Bronx. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

Quick question. Great work, by the way. Bronx Chamber of Commerce does, yeah, really good work in the Bronx supporting our BIDs, small businesses, and everyone. What has been the most helpful City SBS grant that you've dealt with?

2 DARRY SALDANA: I'm sorry. Could you  
3 repeat that again?

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah. What has been  
5 the most helpful SBS grant that you and your team  
6 have dealt with?

7 DARRY SALDANA: Well, outside of the Small  
8 Business Network grant, I would say Avenue NYC is a  
9 good one, and used to be the Neighborhood Initiative  
10 Grant Initiative, the NDGIs, in which we was able to  
11 go into corridors that are not funded directly  
12 through BIDs or, you know, get the assistance that  
13 they need, and we was able to assist them, you know,  
14 directly without having a BID to help them out.

15 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, cool. Thank you.  
16 Thank you so much for joining and for your testimony.

17 DARRY SALDANA: Thank you for having us.

18 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. All right.

19 Now we'll turn into virtual panelists. For virtual  
20 panelists, once your name is called, a Member of our  
21 Staff will unmute you, and the Sergeant-at-Arms will  
22 set a timer and give you the go-ahead to begin.  
23 Please wait for the Sergeant-at-Arms to announce that  
24 you may begin before delivering your testimony.

Now I'll call our first virtual panelists. First, Alex Grzebyk.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

ALEX GRZEBYK: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Alex Grzebyk, and I am the Deputy Director of the Community and Economic Development Program at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, or Brooklyn A. We are the city contractor for the Department of Small Business Services Commercial Lease Assistance Program. As you may know, commercial tenants do not share the same legal protections as residential tenants in the city, and having access to an attorney can be the difference between staying open and going under for many small businesses. Through the CLA Program, we provide transactional legal services to small business owners across all five boroughs, offering things like negotiating new or renewal leases, terminations or sublets, negotiating rent reductions and payment plans, and combating harassment or breach of contract. The services are for income-qualifying businesses, and we do not serve chain franchises. Our work aims to help vital pillars of New York City neighborhoods. We are proud to have seen our case numbers increase for this program. In

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2 the last year, we handled 1,386 small business legal  
3 matters and reached a small business in all City  
4 Council districts but one. Our team provides  
5 consistent outreach resources through bi-monthly  
6 virtual legal clinics and regular webinars to ensure  
7 all New York City small business owners have access  
8 to our services and other useful resources. Even with  
9 our continued success, we believe the program can  
10 grow. The CLA Program does not allow us to litigate  
11 on behalf of our clients, even though most small  
12 businesses cannot afford to pay for additional  
13 support for court appearances and litigation.  
14 Brooklyn A has seen repeatedly that if landlords are  
15 aware that attorneys cannot appear in court on behalf  
16 of small business clients, they are happy to evict  
17 long-time tenants to hike up rents. We propose  
18 several options for a trial or pilot expansion of the  
19 CLA program: 1) allowing CLA counsel to appear in  
20 court to finalize and file agreements that have been  
21 negotiated out of court; 2) allowing CLA counsel  
22 additional permission (TIMER CHIME) to set contracts  
23 with...

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time's expired.

25

ALEX GRZEBYK: Legal service providers that can support small businesses in litigation; 3) allowing CLA counsel to appear in court for a targeted class of small business clients, such as veterans, people evicted, affected by the carceral system, or business owners engaged in illegal cannabis sales.

With more tools at our disposal, we can keep more small businesses open and serving their neighborhoods. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.  
Next is Jessie Lee.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

JESSIE LEE: Good day, Chairman Feliz and the Small Business Committee. My name is Jessie Lee, the Managing Director of Renaissance Economic Development. We are an affiliate to Asian Americans for Equality. We are a CDFI and also an SBA micro lender. We have partnered with the Department of Small Business Services since 2000. I want to first thank City Council for their support of the Chamber on the Go initiative. This helped organizations like us to give free technical assistance to low-income

small businesses. In Fiscal Year 2024 and to date 2025, we have counseled 1,000 small businesses and gave 13 million dollars in microloans to 209 small businesses, many who are brick-and-mortar businesses. This helped to create and retain over 1,000 jobs.

Second, I want to thank Speaker Adams for prioritizing small businesses through the creation of the CDFI initiative. This year, through this initiative, we worked with City Council and two other CDFIs, BAC Capital and Accompany Capital, to support low-income solopreneurs. Our microentrepreneur hub gave business training and microloans to help these solopreneurs start their business in areas like delivery services and hospitality. We are excited to continue this program in Fiscal Year 2026, and we count on City Council's renewal of the CDFI initiative.

Last week, an executive order from the White House threatened the stability of the CDFI fund at the U.S. Treasury. This is a vital capital resource for our small businesses. The possible elimination of the CDFI fund will hurt our ability to provide affordable loans to struggling small businesses, further pushing them to predatory



lenders. I urge you to support organizations like ours who are helping small businesses access capital and to join us to save the CDFI fund and continue these initiatives. Thank you for your support.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for your testimony.

Next, we'll hear from Brady Meixell.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

BRADY MEIXELL: Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and Members of the Committee on Small Business. My name is Brady Meixell, and I'm with the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation. We're a mission-driven non-profit looking at supporting industrial businesses in the workforce along the working waterfronts of Sunset Park, Red Hook, and Gowanus for over 40 years. Our work is possible due to the industrial business service provider contract with the Department of Small Business Services, and we leverage this funding, along with other sources, to keep quality, accessible, working-class jobs in New York City. Our organization provides a wide range of free support services so that industrial firms can continue to do business in Brooklyn. We help businesses access financing, find new space to

operate, navigate City agencies, access City incentives, and help register M/WBEs. In 2024 alone, SBIDC worked with over 250 unique businesses, and we had 73 businesses take part in our workshops and trainings. The IBSP contract is a vital source of funding which allows our organization to continue to operate, but we also leverage it alongside other sources. Year after year, it becomes more difficult to maintain our staffing and provide the number of free services, but the IBSP contract we rely on has remained static and has not been adjusted for inflation for many years. Given the crucial challenges ahead of us with transitioning to a green economy, rising costs, halting the headwinds of gentrification, and ever-present battles over land use, our industrial jobs are more important than ever.

To ensure that industrial businesses can remain and thrive in New York City and that IBSPs can continue to play a vital role in serving them, we ask the Committee and city Council to help ensure the next year's City budget includes, in the general budget, a 2 percent increase for all funds for all New York City industrial programs, through the

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2 Department of Small Business Services budget, 1) a 50  
3 percent increase in IBSP funding; 2) indexing this  
4 funding to inflation; and 3) shifting the funding  
5 from a one-year to a three-year contract.

6 And then finally, through the Speaker's  
7 discretionary funding, we would ask for a funding new  
8 650,000-dollar program to build additional capacities  
9 for IBSPs supporting projects such as research on  
10 industry and district funds... (TIMER CHIME)

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

12 BRADY MEIXELL: Thank you. Thank you so  
13 much.

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

16 Next, we'll hear from Ahn-Thu Nguyen.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

18 AHN-THU NGUYEN: Good afternoon, Chair

19 Feliz and Members of the New York City Council  
20 Committee on Small Business. My name is Ahn-Thu  
21 Nguyen, and I'm the Director of Strategic  
22 Partnerships at Democracy at Work Institute, a member  
23 of the Worker Cooperative Business Development  
24 Initiative. Thanks to City Council's investment over  
25 the last 10 fiscal cycles, we've provided significant

benefit to aspiring business owners and cooperative small businesses under the administration of the New York City Department of Small Business Services. Our initiative creates and supports resilient employment and business ownership opportunities unlike any other in New York City, providing critical support largely to low-wage and contingent workers, the majority of them foreign-born and people of color, making sure that they're connected to business ownership opportunities, especially when traditional routes to employment and business ownership are unavailable. Our work puts agency and assets in the hands of workers and their communities specifically. Some of our key achievements in the past few years have included the successful launch of AfriLingual, an interpretation and translation cooperative that offers language support in over 10 African languages. In addition, we've established Radiate Consulting, a professional services consulting cooperative building capacity for immigrant services organizations and small businesses led by young professionals who are all graduates of CUNY, or many of them, with deep experience in these spaces and come from these communities themselves. It's doubled in size and

reached profitability within two years of launch.

We've also developed a rapid response cooperative business toolkit in English and Spanish for community-based organizations to make small business entrepreneurship using the worker cooperative model more accessible and inclusive to all communities.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2015, Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative has created more than 1,000 jobs and pathways to business ownership, created more than 200 new worker cooperative businesses offering higher hourly wages, better working conditions, and importantly, building wealth and equity for workers, and reached more than 10,000 entrepreneurs with education and technical assistance services. Amidst ongoing economic volatility, as we know... (TIMER CHIME)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

AHN-THU NGUYEN: Need of support more than ever. We're familiar with navigating and thriving in times of crisis, especially in COVID times. We expanded our services, grew our membership in alignment with increased demand, and moved more than 20 million dollars in emergency funding to help small businesses thrive. Over the past year, our services

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2 have been in high demand, especially (TIMER CHIME)  
3 impactful as a tool for providing access to small  
4 business ownership for the city's new immigrant  
5 community. We urge City Council to continue investing  
6 in worker cooperative businesses in New York City  
7 through enhancing WCBDI funding to 5.09 million for  
8 Fiscal Year 2026. Currently, we received 3.67  
9 million, split amongst 14 organizations.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Please conclude.

11 AHN-THU NGUYEN: This would provide with a  
12 startup of 31 new worker cooperative small  
13 businesses, over 100 new jobs...

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

15 AHN-THU NGUYEN: Technical assistance, and  
16 education, reaching over 2,000 existing startup and  
17 aspiring cooperative entrepreneurs. Thank you so much  
18 for your time, and thanks again.

19 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you  
20 so much.

21 Next is Juan Cuautle.

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

23 JUAN CUAUTLE: Good afternoon, Chair Feliz  
24 and distinguished Members of the New York City  
25 Council Committee on Small Businesses. My name is

Juan Cuautle, Director of the Cooperative Development Program at the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, CFL, a 47-year-old social service organization dedicated to providing vital resources to low-income families in Brooklyn. I'm here today to respectfully request that the New York City Council continue to support the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative, WCBDI, by allocating 5.1 million for Fiscal Year 2026. Since 2013, CFL has been a proud participant in WCBDI, an initiative funded by the City Council that enables organizations like ours to incubate and nurture worker-owned businesses. Through this invaluable support, CFL has successfully incubated 27 cooperative businesses in the domestic work industry, empowering over 600 immigrant women with a transformative opportunity to take control of their economic and professional lives. Each year, through our Cooperative Development Program, 420 participants benefit from training and information sessions on worker-owned cooperatives, business management, and community leadership. These sessions are designed to equip individuals with the skills and confidence needed to manage their own businesses. At CFL, we firmly believe that with the right resources,

anyone regardless of socioeconomic status can become a successful entrepreneur. The Council's support also allows us to provide 273 business management consulting services annually to operating cooperatives, ensuring their stability and growth. Importantly, all of our services are offered in the languages spoken by our participants, breaking down language barriers and enhancing accessibility within immigrant communities. On behalf of the Center for Family Life, I thank you for your time, consideration, and unwavering commitment to economic equity. We look forward to your continued support in the Fiscal Year 2026. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Next, we'll hear from Melat Seyoum.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

MELAT SEYOUM: Thank you. Good afternoon, Honorable Chairperson Feliz and distinguished Members of the New York City Council Committee on Small Business. My name is Melat Seyoum, and I'm the Director of Political Affairs and Strategic Partnerships at the New York City Network of Worker-Owned Cooperatives, also known as NYC NOWC. We are



the member-led trade association representing worker-cooperative businesses and democratic workplaces in the New York City metropolitan area. I'm here alongside my colleagues from the Democracy at Work Institute, Center for Family Life, the Working World, and Advocacy Council members representing 10 other organizations that make up the Worker-Cooperative Business Development Initiative, WCBDI. As many before us have shared, we are here during these unprecedented times to support our immigrant worker-owners in New York City, asking the City Council to continue supporting the expansion of worker-ownership in next year's budget and firmly into the future. Since the inception of the initiative, we've created over 200 new worker-cooperative businesses and over 1,200 new jobs that are not only providing higher hourly wages, but also building wealth and assets for individuals who are overwhelmingly BIPOC women and immigrants. We have seen firsthand how the initiative has served to bolster our sector, strengthening existing cooperative businesses and creating new ones. The WCBDI initiative partners have collectively worked to create a comprehensive ecosystem of support for cooperative businesses that not only ensures the

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2 creation of new cooperatives in low-income areas, but  
3 also the technical assistance needed to sustain small  
4 businesses and create jobs, as well as the education  
5 and outreach needed for communities, interested  
6 entrepreneurs, and allied organizations. We did a ton  
7 of work during the pandemic and beyond to bring over  
8 20 million in grants and loans to cooperatives and  
9 keep them afloat. We did this with a 3.7-million  
10 budget. We ask City Council to enhance our funding to  
11 5,097,082 dollars in order for our initiative to  
12 double down and do the essential long-term work  
13 that's needed for economic recovery of cooperative  
14 businesses. We thank City Council for the opportunity  
15 to testify and hope that you consider our budget  
16 priorities and recommendations during this year's  
17 budget negotiation process. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you  
19 so much for your testimony.

20 Next, we'll hear from Catherine Murcek.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

22 CATHERINE MURCEK: Hello. Thank you for  
23 the opportunity to testify online today. My name is  
24 Catherine Mursek, and I'm a worker-owner at Samamkaya  
25 Yoga Back Care and Sclerosis Collective. We're a

member of the New York City Network of Worker Co-ops, NYC NOWC, and a partner organization in the WCBDI that you've heard my colleagues speak about. Your support of our community of democratically run businesses helps to create and protect small businesses run by women, immigrant workers, and communities of color across the five boroughs and in a wide array of industries. I'm testifying today to urge you to continue to support the great work of WCBDI, enhancing their funding to 5.09 million, and to also support commercial rent stabilization. These measures help create stability and resilience in our local economy and protect New York City's workers and small businesses from displacement. My co-op, Samamkaya, is a wonderful little studio in Chelsea specializing in therapeutic yoga for back care with classes online and in studio. I'm very proud to say my 19 other worker-owners and I just celebrated 10 years of democratically running the studio together in the same space the whole time. To make yoga accessible to all bodies and abilities, we use specialized rope walls and which incurred hefty startup costs that we were still paying back. Our co-op business structure made us unique among yoga

studios in New York and is one of the reasons we were more resilient through the pandemic than many of the other yoga and drama spaces we sadly lost. Even though the pandemic forced us to close our physical space temporarily, we banded together to decide as a team how we would pivot, divide the labor, and work together to keep the studio afloat while also making sure the teachers who most needed to work could keep teaching online classes and make ends meet. And that's one example of how co-ops are so resilient when faced with adversity. We were grateful to have access to technical support from WCBDI partners and a couple grants specific to co-ops. One example is NYC NOWC's co-operative (TIMER CHIME)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

CATHERINE MURCEK: Okay. There's more information in my written testimony. Thank you for hearing my testimony and please continue supporting WCBDI. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.

Next, we'll hear from Christopher Leon Johnson.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, hello?

Hello?

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yes, we can hear you.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hey, my name is Christopher Leon Johnson. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm currently (INAUDIBLE) inside the church.

(INAUDIBLE) I got to get back inside in, like, three minutes before I get in trouble. But let me make this clear. Thanks for giving me time, Mr. Feliz

(INAUDIBLE) I want to make this clear that the two projects, the two non-profits that need funded for FY26 is the Workers Justice Project, which is under (INAUDIBLE), and the Street Vendor Project, which is under the (INAUDIBLE) Center. They serve

deliveristas, and they serve street vendors, people that sell mangoes, the people that deliver our food.

They're business owners, too, because all of them are independent contractors so they pay taxes and

everything comes out of their pocket. They have no

benefits. The City Council needs to start pushing for benefits for these guys and gals and recognize that

deliveristas under the Workers Justice Project and

all these other organizations. And the street vendors

that sell mangoes on our street, like 42nd Street, as

small business owners. And once that happens, these two non-profits, the Workers Justice Project and Street Vendor Project, are able to unlock funding from the City Council for SBS services, especially when it comes to protecting their workers, especially under the (INAUDIBLE) of Donald Trump as President. The City Council needs to be more proactive in protecting deliveristas and street vendors because we get a lot of backlash from the GOP. And just because there's a small constituency of migrants that can commit a lot of crimes doesn't mean that all migrants are bad. People that deliver our food, people that sell our stuff on the street, they're not bad people. They just want to make a living, too. Let's keep that clear. They pay taxes, all that type of stuff. So the City Council needs to allocate money to these non-profits, and we need to make sure that these two non-profits, the Workers Justice Project and Street Vendor Project, gets over 1 million dollars of funding. The Workers Justice Project (TIMER CHIME)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: And Street Vendor Project gets over 1 million dollars of

funding. I gotta get back. Thank you. I'm probably in trouble. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. And actually, a quick question, if you have a second. Are there any grants that you would be in favor of, I guess, expanding to support these groups?

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Right. The grants that you're getting, I think they should be more for, what kind of grants? I think they need a small business grant. They need tax exempt grants. They need grants to make sure that they can be able to build the deliverista hub outside of the City Hall. They've (INAUDIBLE) City Council and Department of Planning. I don't know why they didn't get, it's not open up there yet. I don't know what's going on with that. That's what I was going to say. I think they should get all the grants. They should apply because they're both little organizations, non-profits. They're under (INAUDIBLE) they're under the AG's office. So, they still don't have the same funding that other organizations should be getting. You know what I'm saying?

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right, right, right. Any thoughts on the new containerization rules?

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: What's that?

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: The new containerization rules that DSNY has implemented, and it's going to take effect later this year.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: The new containerization rule?

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: The containerization rules that require that garbage be put in bins and containers.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I believe that bill is not good, man. I believe that bill is horrible. Because they needed, why would they just let anybody buy, if they only wanted to get the Home Depot, (INAUDIBLE) and put it on the sidewalk? If that works, they're being compliant. Why would they have to buy one container from a vendor that doesn't live in the city? I think that's not fair for anybody else because I know there's way better bins out there from other makers. You know what I'm saying? They might be use those in the city, but why would they buy one container from one vendor? And if we don't buy that one container, we're not compliant. Why is that?



CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Thank you.  
Thank you so much for joining us and for your  
testimony.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you, bro.  
Thank you. Thank you. Take care.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Take care.  
Enjoy the weather.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.  
Appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Next is  
Barry Pinckney.

BARRY PINCKNEY: Can I start?

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: We can hear you now,  
yes. You can start whenever you're ready.

BARRY PINCKNEY: Good afternoon, Chairman  
Feliz and Members of the Small Business Committee.  
Thank you for allowing me to testify here today.  
Again, my name is Barry Pinckney. I'm a Senior  
Project Manager at The Working World New York City, a  
community development financial institution that  
provides non-extractive capital and technical  
business assistance to worker-owned co-ops. Today, I  
am here because building a strong, inclusive economy  
through worker-ownership is not just a vision, it's

the work that we do every day. Worker co-ops create pathways to share wealth, economic stability, and community power. That's why I ask you to continue to support the initiative with an allocation of 5,097,082 dollars. The funding will allow us to deepen our impact and grow the worker co-op economy right here in New York City with the focus on neighborhoods that need it most. Because of funding from the initiative, I get the privilege of working with working-class people every day in New York City who have decided together to own a business collectively. As co-op members, these folks work together to make decisions and share in the profits of their business, resulting in better work environments and higher incomes. An example of this is Bright Learning Stars, a worker co-op cooperative daycare in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, established in 2018. They were formed through collaboration between the parents and the daycare workers following the sudden closure of the neighborhood daycare. Bright Learning Stars offers attentive child care services for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old, including an after-school program. Each member of the team is CPR trained and possesses years of experience as

daycare providers. This creates a nurturing environment for the children to learn and grow. The Working World specifically supported the founding members in developing a business plan, identifying a suitable location, and obtaining their license. Since the opening of Bright Learning Stars, they have experienced (TIMER CHIME)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

BARRY PINCKNEY: Nearly doubling their sales and expanding their roster. There are countless businesses like Bright Learning Stars, and we want to ensure we can continue to provide the financial assistance and support needed for them to succeed. With the support of the WBCDI of 5,097,082 dollars, we can continue to build our local cooperative economy and change the lives of thousands of New York City workers, giving them new voice in their workplace and sharing their community profits. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for your testimony.

Last is Dalaeja Forman.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

DALAEJA FORMAN: Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Delaeja Forman. I'm a worker owner in a cooperative named Breadfruit. We are a woodworking cooperative. I'm also an Advocacy Council member alongside the New York City Network for Worker Cooperatives. We'd like to request City Council support for 5,097,082 dollars for Fiscal Year 2026 toward the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative, WCBDI. WCBDI has been essential for the sustainability of our cooperatives, particularly because we are primarily working-class business owners and are facing the rising cost of rents and living conditions in general in New York City. This funding has supported worker cooperatives directly, as well as cooperative developers, education initiatives, legal and application support. It is deeply necessary to support worker cooperatives because we are a type of small business that create not only business sustainability, but community sustainability, due to the community-centered nature of cooperative principles. Supporting worker cooperatives supports community self-determination. Also, we would like there to be a co-op stipulation or cooperative LLC category for the Corporate

Transparency Act due to the disparate impact the act has on our LLC co-ops, which are the majority of our co-ops, many of whom by people who are undocumented. Like many worker owners, I have to do other work to support my business in a city that is systemically challenging for cooperative businesses to sustain. I'm literally on break from work right now. Help us change this dynamic. Thank you for investing in generational community sustainability, and we look forward to your funding. That is all.

CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony.

Are there any other witnesses who wish to testify?

All right, so before we conclude, earlier today at 1:15 p.m., we had Christian Hidalgo, who testified in Spanish, so I'm briefly going to read the testimony as written in English so that everybody can understand it.

March 31st, 1:10 p.m. Good morning to the Members of the Small Business Committee and those present. My name is Christian Hidalgo. I arrived in New York in April 2023 so I'll soon complete two years living in the city. I'm an active member of the

Workers' Justice Project. As a migrant, I have applied for asylum and have already received my permit. I'm filing my taxes and contributing economically to this city.

My first work experience in New York was in the construction sector. The support from the Workers' Justice Project was fundamental in the process because I received health and safety training with OSHA and SST, which were very important. Later, I continued in the area of gardening, and most recently, I have dedicated myself to flower arrangement, participating in various training programs throughout this journey. In Ecuador, my country of origin, I dedicated myself to artistic carpentry with recycled wood, creating ecological furniture, a labor that not only generates useful products, but also contributes positively to the environment and to a sustainable economy. My business idea is to resume activity here in New York, transforming discarded materials into functional and artistic objects. Additionally, I would like to conduct workshops to educate the community in the art of woodworking, signage, and large-scale pyrography, sharing knowledge that I have acquired over the

years. However, to implement these ideas, I face several challenges, the main ones being the availability of adequate spaces and their high costs. It is necessary for the City to create favorable conditions to support initiatives like mine and for community organizations to be actively involved in the growth of small businesses like the one that I aim to establish. I ask you to consider creating programs that facilitate access to spaces for immigrant business owners seeking to establish their businesses in different communities, strengthening support for community organizations like the Workers' Justice Project, developing initiatives that recognize and promote businesses with positive environmental impact, such as my wood recycling project, which contribute to a more sustainable city. Immigrants not only build this city with our hands, we also bring knowledge, skills, and visions that enrich the economic and cultural fabric of New York. With adequate support, we can turn our dreams into realities that benefit the entire community. Thank you for your attention.

And again, that was testimony that was delivered in Spanish earlier today by Christian Hidalgo.

We have now heard from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we missed anyone who would like to testify in person, please visit the Sergeant's table in the back of the room and complete a witness slip now.

If we missed anyone who would like to testify virtually, please use the raise hand function in Zoom, and a Staff Member will call you in the order of hands raised.

I'll now read the names of those who registered to testify but have not yet filled out a witness slip or appeared on Zoom. There's Valdo (phonetic) Garcia, Noah Sharaf (phonetic), Pedro Suarez, Alex Stein.

Seeing no one else, I would like to note that again, that written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by Committee and Staff, may be submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).



2 All right. Seeing no other witnesses,  
3 thank you to everyone who joined today and who has  
4 testified.

5 This hearing is concluded and adjourned.

6 Thank you so much. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 17, 2025