

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

----- X

March 21, 2025  
Start: 10:51 a.m.  
Recess: 1:57 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

18           I would like to thank you, Commissioner  
19 Gross and Deputy Commissioner Forte, for testifying  
20 today. I would also like to thank SBS' staff, who  
21 have consistently been responsive to our many, many,  
22 many requests, at all hours by the way. We would not  
23 be able to analyze the City's budget at such a  
24 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

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

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

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

4           Today, small businesses face other  
5 challenges, including an ever-changing regulatory  
6 landscape, shifting consumer behaviors, and economic  
7 pressures from trade tensions and other factors.  
8 Through our FY26 Preliminary Budget, SBS is well-  
9 positioned to continue delivering high-impact  
10 programs that help New York's small businesses adapt  
11 to changing conditions and advance New York City's  
12 economic momentum. SBS' FY26 Preliminary Budget  
13 stands at 182.1 million dollars. Approximately 40  
14 percent, or 73.2 million dollars, represents pass-  
15 through funding for other City entities, including  
16 the New York City Economic Development Corporation at  
17 38.7 million, NYC Tourism and Conventions at 18.6  
18 million, and the Trust for Governors Island at 15.8  
19 million dollars. As a conduit for these entities, SBS  
20 does not manage or spend any of these funds. The  
21 remaining 108.9 million dollars includes SBS' core  
22 programming, primarily delivered by our four  
23 programmatic divisions, the Division of Business  
24 Services, the Division of Economic and Financial  
25

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

4 Our Division of Business Services helps  
5 small businesses open, operate, and grow through a  
6 range of programs and tools, including neighborhood-  
7 based business solution centers, our SBS hotline,  
8 888-SBS-4NYC, and the MyCity business site. We  
9 provide financing assistance, legal support, business  
10 courses, mentorship, emergency preparedness, and  
11 more, ensuring that New Yorkers have the support they  
12 need at every stage of their business journeys.

13 Addressing one of the biggest challenges for small  
14 businesses, SBS has helped entrepreneurs secure over  
15 294 million dollars in financing in the current  
16 Administration, including the 85-million-dollar New  
17 York City Small Business Opportunity Fund. Working  
18 alongside the New York City Economic Development  
19 Corporation, we also launched the first-ever  
20 CannabisNYC Loan Fund last October to connect  
21 licensed cannabis entrepreneurs with the resources  
22 needed to turn their regulatory approvals into  
23 thriving businesses. The story of Lifestyle 1104  
24 Juice Bar exemplifies the impact of SBS Business  
25 Services. Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar in the Bronx

2 turned to SBS' New York City Business Express Service  
3 Team, or NYC BEST, as they worked to open their first  
4 location. Over the years, the owners have returned to  
5 SBS for assistance with permits, legal matters, and  
6 compliance questions, relying on expertise from our  
7 pro bono legal services and the NYC BEST team. Thanks  
8 to our support, Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar successfully  
9 expanded and opened its second location near Penn  
10 Station this past January. Similarly, when Jackson  
11 Heights entrepreneur Poonam Bhalla, owner of Red  
12 Chilli, called SBS' hotline for help rescheduling an  
13 FDNY fire safety inspection, our team went beyond the  
14 original request to provide additional support. We  
15 walked her through key City regulations for food  
16 service establishments and worked with National Grid  
17 to ensure her utilities were turned on. As a result,  
18 Red Chilli officially opened for business on November  
19 15, 2024.

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

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

5 SBS' Division of Economic and Financial  
6 Opportunity supports the growth of small businesses  
7 by providing certification support, technical  
8 assistance, legal services, and connections to City  
9 agencies for minority and women-owned business  
10 enterprises, local business enterprises, and emerging  
11 business enterprises. The impact of our programming  
12 is clear. In Fiscal Year 2024 alone, the City awarded  
13 6.4 billion dollars in contracts to certified firms,  
14 and nearly three-quarters of these businesses had  
15 previously used SBS services to successfully navigate  
16 the procurement process. We continue working to open  
17 doors to growth through government contracting by  
18 hosting impactful events across the city. This past  
19 November, our 16th annual Citywide Procurement Fair  
20 set a record with over 1,250 attendees networking and  
21 learning about procurement opportunities. One of  
22 those businesses is Vivid Marketing Group, a  
23 Southeast Queens-based company specializing in health  
24 and wellness education, training, and employee health  
25 screenings. Vivid has leveraged multiple rounds of

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

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

2 no-cost training, while also helping local businesses  
3 with free hiring services. Since the start of the  
4 Adams Administration, our network has placed over  
5 71,000 New Yorkers into jobs or workforce trainings,  
6 including more than 1,900 people with disabilities  
7 and 3,200 veterans and military spouses. In Fiscal  
8 Year 2025, we further integrated the Administration's  
9 JobsNYC initiative into our workforce services to  
10 deliver a seamless, whole-of-government approach in  
11 neighborhoods with high unemployment rates. The  
12 results of JobsNYC speak for themselves. Through more  
13 than 30 JobsNYC hiring halls across all five  
14 boroughs, we have facilitated nearly 3,400 on-site  
15 interviews, leading to over 1,400 conditional job  
16 offers. This Preliminary Budget continues investments  
17 in JobsNYC, bringing resources, employers, and life-  
18 changing job opportunities to New Yorkers across the  
19 five boroughs.

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

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

12           To showcase the impact of our work, I  
13 want to tell you the story of Maria, a primarily  
14 Spanish-speaking New Yorker experiencing  
15 homelessness, who was referred to SBS by the  
16 Department of Homeless Services. Our Workforce One  
17 Career Center staff provided Maria with resume  
18 assistance, interview preparation, and job placement  
19 support. Thanks to our team's efforts, Maria secured  
20 a crew member position at Chipotle. My team is  
21 preparing for our next JobsNYC hiring hall at the  
22 Staten Island YMCA's Gerard Carter Center on March  
23 27, 2025. This event will connect even more New  
24 Yorkers to life-changing workforce opportunities that

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

4 SBS' Neighborhood Development Division,  
5 or NDD, supports New York City's 76 Business  
6 Improvement Districts, which collectively deliver  
7 more than 190 million dollars in services annually to  
8 over 24,000 storefronts across nearly 300 miles of  
9 commercial corridors in all five boroughs. I was  
10 proud to stand alongside you, Chair Feliz, and Bronx  
11 Chamber of Commerce President Lisa Sorin, and leaders  
12 from the Fordham Road BID and several other Bronx-  
13 based BIDs, to celebrate the baselining of more than  
14 5.3 million dollars for Neighborhood Development  
15 grants, bringing the Administration's total  
16 investment to over 40 million dollars. These grants  
17 have funded innovative lighting projects, murals, and  
18 neighborhood wayfinding initiatives, and other  
19 activities to support commercial corridors post-  
20 pandemic. They've also supported merchant organizing  
21 efforts, BID formation, and community events designed  
22 to boost business attraction and consumer spending  
23 through street fairs, restaurant weeks, and cultural  
24 celebrations. In Council Member Ung's District, the  
25 Downtown Flushing Transit Hub BID used its FY24 Small

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

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

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

2 supplemental sanitation, district marketing, and  
3 business resources. This year, we also anticipate the  
4 formation of a new BID along Harlem's East 125th  
5 Street Business Corridor with an upcoming City  
6 Council Finance Committee hearing scheduled for March  
7 26, 2025. I urge City Council Members to support  
8 community members' BID formation efforts as BIDs  
9 strengthen local commercial corridors, establish  
10 sustainable funding for neighborhood enhancements,  
11 and create lasting economic opportunities for  
12 businesses and communities alike.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. I was going to  
19 save this question for the end, but I guess I'll ask  
20 it now. So of course, this current budget includes  
21 many different items for different programs and  
22 operations. Let's talk about, I guess, the general  
23 SBS wish list. If there was an additional, let's say,  
24 100 million dollars that came from the state or  
25 federal government, in addition to what's already

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

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

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

9 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for the  
10 information.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 businesses with compliance with these new laws and  
3 rules?

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

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

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

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

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

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Hi,  
16 Commissioner. How are you?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 operational solutions that make sense for their  
3 programs.

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

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

20 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right. Let's take an  
21 example, though. A high-traffic area, a super-busy  
22 area, and a BID decides to get, I guess, the most  
23 expensive option, which I'm sure would be the larger  
24 bins, etc. Do you think a super-rough number of  
25 100,000 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.

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

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

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

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

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

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Thank you  
5 so much.

6 Now let's hear from Council Member  
7 Krishnan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 My other question was the Small Business  
22 Resource funding, you know, that was about 2 million  
23 in total (TIMER CHIME) 1.5 in a one-shot and a  
24 500,000 initiative. Will you support restoring and  
25 baselining of the Small Business Resource Network

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

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

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

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

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

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Absolutely.

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

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

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

20 COMMISSIONER GROSS: 76 today.

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

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

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

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Nice. All right. So, I  
5 just want to do some general math. So, if we have 76  
6 BIDs, and we just give them a grant of let's say  
7 50,000 dollars, that'll be 3.8 million out of the  
8 budget of about 182 million dollars. Obviously,  
9 that's a lot of money, but given the invaluable work  
10 that they do, we look forward to continuing the  
11 conversation about how we could make sure that this  
12 budget helps address literally the top concern of the  
13 BIDs in our city.

14 A few questions about new needs at SBS.  
15 Moving on from the BIDs and the containerization  
16 rules. The Preliminary Plan includes an additional  
17 8.6 million dollars for various programs such as BID  
18 formation, job training and partnerships, and Jobs  
19 NYC. The Plan includes a 1-million-dollar baseline  
20 for job trainings, construction, pre-apprenticeships.  
21 Talk to us about this program and can you provide  
22 details on how the funding will be used?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 more verified hires from employees which requires a  
3 validation process before we report on the verified  
4 hires. We will report on hires, the conditional  
5 offers, the number of employers at the events, and  
6 the number of job seekers at the events. In addition,  
7 we survey both employers and job seekers who attend  
8 these events about their satisfaction and, at a  
9 recent hiring hall, we achieved for the first time a  
10 100 percent satisfaction rate from all of the  
11 employers who participated which include private  
12 sector employers and City agencies that are hiring,  
13 connecting those New Yorkers in those communities to  
14 civil service as well as neighborhood job  
15 opportunities.

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

18 A few questions about BIDs and BID  
19 formation and a few other topics. I guess the first  
20 one is a very broad question. Talk to us about all  
21 the funding and processes related to BID formation.  
22 Different grants that we have available and different  
23 processes. I know it's a very lengthy process as  
24 someone who is going through a BID formation in East  
25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 COMMISSIONER GROSS: 76.

22 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right. 76, sorry.  
23 Yeah, 76 bids. How many do we have in each borough?  
24 Could you give us a breakdown and also how many are  
25 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Got it. Okay. Moving  
14 on to federal and COVID funding. As we know, in  
15 January, the Trump Administration paused federal loan  
16 and grant spending then they rescinded the order two  
17 days later. But an executive order issued by the  
18 Administration to review the funding remains in  
19 effect. The Preliminary Plan includes 43.6 million  
20 dollars in federal funding for SBS in FY 2026 with  
21 32.8 million dollars for the City's workforce  
22 development efforts. How would decreases in federal  
23 funding affect the services that you provide?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Sorry, 14.2, you said?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. And earlier you  
18 mentioned that the citywide vacancy rate right now is  
19 11.04, and we're back to pre-pandemic levels. What  
20 were those pre-pandemic levels? What was the average  
21 vacancy rate?

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

2 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. So it was about  
3 10-ish percent, more or less, in that ballpark.

4 COMMISSIONER GROSS: More than 10.5,  
5 approaching.

6 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: More than 10.5.

7 COMMISSIONER GROSS: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. My understanding  
9 is that LiveXYZ, which was initially funded by SBS,  
10 is moving to OTI. The SBS program was funded through  
11 FY 2025, but they're seeking to extend it through  
12 2028. OTI submitted a capital needs request for the  
13 Preliminary Plan, but it was not approved. If OTI  
14 doesn't extend this contract, how will SBS continue  
15 to provide reporting on storefront vacancies without  
16 LiveXYZ?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 COMMISSIONER GROSS: How much did you say?  
25

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-

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

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

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

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

2 enough data to provide an average of the loans being  
3 awarded through the program, but the potential loans  
4 were up to 100,000 dollars. And so we closed Phase  
5 One, but some of the businesses that applied during  
6 Phase One are supplementing their applications and  
7 still being considered so we look forward to being  
8 able to report out on impact of this first phase very  
9 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.

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

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

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

12 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you  
13 so much.

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

19 The witness table is reserved for people  
20 who wish to testify. No video recording or  
21 photography is allowed from the witness table.  
22 Further, members of the public may not present audio  
23 or video recordings as testimony, but may submit  
24 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-  
25 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 100,000 dollars from the Speaker for that. Just  
3 really, the Chambers of Commerce do a lot of great  
4 work in all five boroughs, and we are always looking  
5 for funding to support the actual work that we do,  
6 and it's really important this day and age with the  
7 business and climate that exists. And lastly, we are  
8 in the process of hopefully getting our BID, the Bay  
9 Street Corridor BID. We've been working on that for a  
10 number of years now, trying to get that to the finish  
11 line.

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

17 Next, Randy Peers from the Brooklyn  
18 Chamber of Commerce.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14 Turning to the industrial sector and our  
15 work there, we ask that you, one, increase all funds  
16 for NYC industrial programs by 2 percent, provide a  
17 50 percent increase in industrial business service  
18 provider funding, index that funding to inflation,  
19 and shift the funding from a one-year to a three-year  
20 contract, and fund a new 650,000-dollar program to  
21 build additional capacity for IBSPs. We ask for this  
22 for IBSPs, especially knowing that their funding has  
23 remained static for years and has not kept pace with  
24 inflation or increasing responsibilities, and in  
25 addition, they continually face long delays in

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

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

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

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

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

23           CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 in the city and that's because of this grant, that's  
3 because of SBS so it's been incredibly  
4 transformative, and the way it was structured  
5 initially, you would get the first 25 percent and  
6 then you would start spending it and once you've done  
7 50 percent of your work, they give you the next  
8 50,000. They changed the process now, so now the  
9 process is a reimbursement one, which makes it a lot  
10 harder because especially if you're a small BID, you  
11 have to expend the money and then you have to do all  
12 the paperwork to get the money back, and it's  
13 challenging. You have to really be very careful with  
14 where you're moving your money around in order to  
15 make sure that you can make the expenditures and then  
16 request for reimbursement.

17 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Got it. Okay, cool.  
18 Sounds good.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 Next, we'll hear from Leah from  
10 Evergreen.

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

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

9           So, a little bit about us, we provide  
10 direct business services to industrial businesses,  
11 mostly manufacturers. We help them find financing, we  
12 help them navigate government, we help them access  
13 incentive programs. And we do this, right, we're a  
14 tiny little million-dollar-a-year organization. Under  
15 20 percent of our money comes from the City of New  
16 York. The other 80 percent I raise or we get from our  
17 real estate entity. And the City benefits from this  
18 because we're able to leverage that 80 percent of our  
19 budget to achieve the contract goals for the 20  
20 percent. (TIMER CHIME) I guess I shall close here,  
21 but I'm speaking on behalf of all of the industrial  
22 business solutions providers. We would love an  
23 opportunity to talk with you guys more about the work  
24 that we do and how important it is to maintaining an  
25 equitable economy here in the City of New York.

2 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you, thank you  
3 so much.

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

6 CHRISTIAN HIDALGO: (SPEAKING SPANISH)

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

10 CHRISTIAN HIDALGO: (SPEAKING SPANISH)

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

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

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

25 Is Sharon still with us?

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

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

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

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

2 being allocated in our city. Looking at the Office of  
3 Street Vendor Enforcement housed under the Sanitation  
4 Police with an increasing budget that's ranging from  
5 3.7 million dollars to 4.9 million dollars annually,  
6 that is not including the NYPD, DOHMH, Parks, and  
7 other agencies that enforce vending laws. As was  
8 recently reported in City Limits, the Office of  
9 Street Vendor Enforcement started with nearly 40  
10 officers back in 2023. Now it is staffed with 87  
11 Sanitation Police officers, 24 lieutenants, and 3  
12 inspectors, almost tripling the number of officers in  
13 this office. In the meantime, no other City agency  
14 receives any dedicated funding to support street  
15 vendors without rich education or resources. On the  
16 other hand, SVP receives around 200,000 dollars for  
17 the entire year from the Speakers' initiatives and  
18 individual Council Members' discretionary funding  
19 combined to do the services that is so essential. So  
20 when you look at the scale and the numbers, this is a  
21 scale of 25 to 1. For every dollar the City allocates  
22 for education and outreach, it spends 25 dollars on  
23 enforcement. Our (TIMER CHIME) small but mighty team  
24 is well-trained and equipped with the resources to  
25 conduct the outreach and education program and the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Turn your mic on,  
7 please.

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

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

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

9 SHARON BROWN: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.

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

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

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

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

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

21 Quick question. Great work, by the way.  
22 Bronx Chamber of Commerce does, yeah, really good  
23 work in the Bronx supporting our BIDs, small  
24 businesses, and everyone. What has been the most  
25 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.

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

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

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

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.

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

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

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

15           SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

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

2 small businesses. In Fiscal Year 2024 and to date  
3 2025, we have counseled 1,000 small businesses and  
4 gave 13 million dollars in microloans to 209 small  
5 businesses, many who are brick-and-mortar businesses.  
6 This helped to create and retain over 1,000 jobs.

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

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

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

6 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for your  
7 testimony.

8 Next, we'll hear from Brady Meixell.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

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

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

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

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

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

2 reached profitability within two years of launch.  
3 We've also developed a rapid response cooperative  
4 business toolkit in English and Spanish for  
5 community-based organizations to make small business  
6 entrepreneurship using the worker cooperative model  
7 more accessible and inclusive to all communities.  
8 Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2015, Worker  
9 Cooperative Business Development Initiative has  
10 created more than 1,000 jobs and pathways to business  
11 ownership, created more than 200 new worker  
12 cooperative businesses offering higher hourly wages,  
13 better working conditions, and importantly, building  
14 wealth and equity for workers, and reached more than  
15 10,000 entrepreneurs with education and technical  
16 assistance services. Amidst ongoing economic  
17 volatility, as we know... (TIMER CHIME)

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

19 AHN-THU NGUYEN: Need of support more than  
20 ever. We're familiar with navigating and thriving in  
21 times of crisis, especially in COVID times. We  
22 expanded our services, grew our membership in  
23 alignment with increased demand, and moved more than  
24 20 million dollars in emergency funding to help small  
25 businesses thrive. Over the past year, our services

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

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

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

15 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you  
16 so much.

17 Next, we'll hear from Melat Seyoum.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

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

2 the member-led trade association representing worker-  
3 cooperative businesses and democratic workplaces in  
4 the New York City metropolitan area. I'm here  
5 alongside my colleagues from the Democracy at Work  
6 Institute, Center for Family Life, the Working World,  
7 and Advocacy Council members representing 10 other  
8 organizations that make up the Worker-Cooperative  
9 Business Development Initiative, WCBDI. As many  
10 before us have shared, we are here during these  
11 unprecedented times to support our immigrant worker-  
12 owners in New York City, asking the City Council to  
13 continue supporting the expansion of worker-ownership  
14 in next year's budget and firmly into the future.  
15 Since the inception of the initiative, we've created  
16 over 200 new worker-cooperative businesses and over  
17 1,200 new jobs that are not only providing higher  
18 hourly wages, but also building wealth and assets for  
19 individuals who are overwhelmingly BIPOC women and  
20 immigrants. We have seen firsthand how the initiative  
21 has served to bolster our sector, strengthening  
22 existing cooperative businesses and creating new  
23 ones. The WCBDI initiative partners have collectively  
24 worked to create a comprehensive ecosystem of support  
25 for cooperative businesses that not only ensures the

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

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

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

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

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

21 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.

22 Next, we'll hear from Christopher Leon  
23 Johnson.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

2 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, hello?

3 Hello?

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yes, we can hear you.

5 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hey, my name is  
6 Christopher Leon Johnson. My name is Christopher Leon  
7 Johnson. I'm currently (INAUDIBLE) inside the church.  
8 (INAUDIBLE) I got to get back inside in, like, three  
9 minutes before I get in trouble. But let me make this  
10 clear. Thanks for giving me time, Mr. Feliz  
11 (INAUDIBLE) I want to make this clear that the two  
12 projects, the two non-profits that need funded for  
13 FY26 is the Workers Justice Project, which is under  
14 (INAUDIBLE), and the Street Vendor Project, which is  
15 under the (INAUDIBLE) Center. They serve  
16 deliveristas, and they serve street vendors, people  
17 that sell mangoes, the people that deliver our food.  
18 They're business owners, too, because all of them are  
19 independent contractors so they pay taxes and  
20 everything comes out of their pocket. They have no  
21 benefits. The City Council needs to start pushing for  
22 benefits for these guys and gals and recognize that  
23 deliveristas under the Workers Justice Project and  
24 all these other organizations. And the street vendors  
25 that sell mangoes on our street, like 42nd Street, as

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: What's that?

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

6 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: The new  
7 containerization rule?

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

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

25

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

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

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

9 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.  
10 Appreciate it.

11 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right. Next is  
12 Barry Pinckney.

13 BARRY PINCKNEY: Can I start?

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

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

2 the work that we do every day. Worker co-ops create  
3 pathways to share wealth, economic stability, and  
4 community power. That's why I ask you to continue to  
5 support the initiative with an allocation of  
6 5,097,082 dollars. The funding will allow us to  
7 deepen our impact and grow the worker co-op economy  
8 right here in New York City with the focus on  
9 neighborhoods that need it most. Because of funding  
10 from the initiative, I get the privilege of working  
11 with working-class people every day in New York City  
12 who have decided together to own a business  
13 collectively. As co-op members, these folks work  
14 together to make decisions and share in the profits  
15 of their business, resulting in better work  
16 environments and higher incomes. An example of this  
17 is Bright Learning Stars, a worker co-op cooperative  
18 daycare in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, established in  
19 2018. They were formed through collaboration between  
20 the parents and the daycare workers following the  
21 sudden closure of the neighborhood daycare. Bright  
22 Learning Stars offers attentive child care services  
23 for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old, including  
24 an after-school program. Each member of the team is  
25 CPR trained and possesses years of experience as

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

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

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

21 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you for your  
22 testimony.

23 Last is Dalaeja Forman.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

25

2                   DALAEJA FORMAN: Good afternoon, everyone.

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

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

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

14 Are there any other witnesses who wish to  
15 testify?

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

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

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

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

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

24

25

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

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

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

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

19           Seeing no one else, I would like to note  
20 that again, that written testimony, which will be  
21 reviewed in full by Committee and Staff, may be  
22 submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the  
23 close of this hearing by emailing it to  
24 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]

7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 17, 2025