

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Crystal Hudson, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Linda Lee
Christopher Marte
Darlene Mealy
Lynn C. Schulman

A P P E A R A N C E S

Jocelyn Groden, Associate Commissioner for the Bureau of Social Services and Active Aging at the New York City Department for the Aging, NYC Aging

Pierre Dejean, Assistant Commissioner of the Property Exemptions Administration Division at the Department of Finance

Kieran Mahoney, External Affairs Outreach Director

Robin Lee, Attorney from the Office of Taxpayer Advocate

Kim Lerner, Director of LiveOn NY's Benefits Outreach Program

Stephanie Taylor, Project Director at Volunteers of Legal Service

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
3 welcome to the New York City Council hearing for the
4 Committee on Aging.

5 At this time, please silence all
6 electronics.

7 If you wish to submit a testimony, you
8 may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov.

9 Just a friendly reminder, do not approach
10 the dais at any moment, and if you need assistance,
11 you may ask one of the Sergeants-at-Arms.

12 Chair, we are ready to begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much and
14 good morning. Welcome to today's Committee on Aging
15 hearing. I'm Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair of
16 the Committee on Aging, and my pronouns are she/her.

17 Older adults are driving most of the
18 population growth in New York State. In New York
19 City, the population of residents age 65 years and
20 older increased by 36 percent over the past decade,
21 and currently it accounts for 16.2 percent of the
22 City's population. By 2040, the New York City
23 Department for the Aging, also known as NYC Aging,
24 projects the population of older adults to reach 1.86
25 million or 20.6 percent of the City's population.

2 Over the past decade, according to the Center for an
3 Urban Future, New York City's older adult population
4 has become more diverse than ever. Across the five
5 boroughs, the older immigrant population increased by
6 49 percent. Meanwhile, the number of black, Hispanic,
7 and Asian older adults has outpaced the older white
8 population. Moreover, as the City's older adult
9 population has grown, so has the number of older
10 adults living in poverty. It is therefore incumbent
11 on the City to ensure that our growing diverse older
12 adult population which is more likely to be low-
13 income, rent-burdened, and living on a fixed income
14 than other New Yorkers is afforded the opportunity to
15 age in place.

16 Today, to that end, we're going to hear
17 two Introductions and one Resolution. Introduction
18 number 896 sponsored by Council Member Lynn Schulman
19 would require NYC Aging in collaboration with the New
20 York City Department of Housing Preservation and
21 Development, or HPD, to submit an annual report on
22 how many older adults live in apartment buildings in
23 each Council District and how many of those
24 apartments are retrofitted for people with
25 disabilities.

2 Introduction number 985 sponsored by
3 Council Member Eric Dinowitz would require HPD in
4 collaborate with the New York City Department of
5 Finance, or DOF, to provide pre-populated Senior
6 Citizen Rent Increase, or SCRIE, application forms to
7 eligible New Yorkers living in City-supervised
8 Mitchell-Lama housing.

9 Lastly, we'll hear my Resolution,
10 Resolution number 757, which calls on the Federal
11 Communication Commission, or FCC, management agency
12 to add alerts for missing persons with dementia to
13 the wireless emergency alert system. The Alzheimer's
14 Association reports that 6 in 10 persons living with
15 dementia will wander at least once and many will do
16 so repeatedly, and up to 50 percent of those who
17 wander risk serious injury or death if not found
18 within 24 hours. My mother happened to be one of
19 those so people. Unlike New York City's Silver Alert
20 system and the State's Missing Vulnerable Adults
21 programs which send notifications only to enrolled
22 mobile devices, alerts sent through the federal
23 wireless emergency alert system are sent directly to
24 all compatible mobile devices located in a targeted
25 geographic area, even if the mobile device is not

2 enrolled or subscribed to receive such alerts. The
3 more people notified, the better chance we have at
4 saving more lives and bringing our loved ones living
5 with dementia home.

6 Thank you to my Colleagues and Aging
7 Committee Members, Council Members Schulman and
8 Dinowitz, for introducing these bills which could go
9 a long way in allowing older New Yorkers to maintain
10 independent, safe, and comfortable lives and age in
11 place. The Committee is looking forward to receiving
12 testimony on this legislation.

13 I'd also like to thank my Staff, Casie
14 Addison and Andrew Wright, and Aging Committee Staff,
15 Christopher Pepe, Chloë Rivera, and Saiyemul Hamid.

16 I'd like to acknowledge that we've been
17 joined by Council Member Schulman at this time, and
18 I'll now turn it over to the Committee Counsel to
19 administer the oath.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Thank you, Chair.
21 Good morning, everyone. Please raise your right hand.

22 Do you swear to tell the truth and the
23 whole truth and to respond honestly to Council Member
24 questions?

25 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: I do.

2 ADMINISTRATION: I do.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: You may begin.

4 Thank you.

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Good
6 morning, Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on
7 Aging. I am Jocelyn Groden, Associate Commissioner
8 for the Bureau of Social Services and Active Aging at
9 the New York City Department for the Aging, NYC
10 Aging.

11 Thank you so much for the opportunity to
12 testify today regarding these Introductions. For the
13 purpose of my brief testimony, I will keep my remarks
14 solely to Introduction 896, which pertains to NYC
15 Aging.

16 While NYC Aging does not construct
17 housing for older adults nor placement of older
18 adults in affordable housing units, we do work
19 closely with our partners at New York City Department
20 of Housing Preservation and Development, HPD, and New
21 York City Human Resources Administration, HRA, to
22 address the housing needs of older New Yorkers. In
23 particular, our recent work through the Cabinet for
24 Older New Yorkers, of which HPD and HRA are members,
25 have deepened this relationship and assisted us in

2 addressing older New Yorkers' needs. This partnership
3 is crucial to the ability to develop the broad range
4 of options necessary to satisfy this diverse group.
5 For example, we are currently collaborating with HPD
6 on an upcoming universal design recommendation
7 pursuant to Local Law 30. These are just some
8 examples of our commitment to older adults and
9 accessibility and affordable housing.

10 Regarding Intro. 896, while we agree with
11 the spirit of transparency in this legislation and
12 feel it is positive to understand where older adults
13 are and in what type of housing, NYC Aging would rely
14 heavily on HPD in order to produce such a report. HPD
15 has the expertise and knowledge of housing types,
16 units, age of residents, physical structures
17 constructed throughout the city. As a social service
18 agency, NYC Aging may not readily access this
19 information though we are committed to addressing
20 older adult needs in housing. Additionally, it is our
21 understanding that the reporting requirements for
22 this piece of legislation may be partially contained
23 in publicly available sources, which HPD can provide
24 greater insight into as they relate to the housing
25 needs of older New Yorkers.

2 We look forward to continuing a
3 discussion about this bill with the Council in the
4 future. Thank you for your time today and this
5 important discussion. I'm able to address any
6 questions you might have regarding this bill and
7 happy to discuss other items as they might arise.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Is the testimony
11 written or do we have additional oral testimony from
12 Finance?

13 You can proceed. Thank you.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Good
15 morning, Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on
16 Aging. My name Pierre Dejean, and I am the Assistant
17 Commissioner of the Property Exemptions
18 Administration Division at the Department of Finance.
19 I am joined today by my colleagues, Kieran Mahoney,
20 our External Affairs Outreach Director, and Attorney
21 Robin Lee from the Office of Taxpayer Advocate, and
22 with me is part of my team, Director of the Senior
23 and Disabled Program, June Champion (phonetic).

24 The senior citizens and disabled rent
25 freeze programs, SCRIE and DRIE respectively, provide

2 crucial housing affordability assistance to
3 vulnerable New Yorkers. In Fiscal Year 2023, over
4 51,000 seniors and over 10,400 disabled New Yorkers
5 received assistance through these programs. To be
6 eligible for the rent freeze program, an applicant's
7 combined household income must be less than 50,000
8 dollars, the applicant must be at least 62 years old
9 for SCRIE or must have a qualifying disability for
10 DRIE, and the applicant's rent must be one-third or
11 more of their household income. Once the application
12 is approved, the household's rent is frozen at the
13 base year amount, and thereafter the City credits the
14 landlord for an amount equivalent to rent increases
15 through a property tax exemption. The tenant
16 continues to pay their base rent and must renew their
17 status with the Department of Finance every year or
18 every two years depending on the tenant's lease and
19 type of housing. The Department of Housing
20 Preservation and Development administers SCRIE for
21 tenants in subsidized housing including Mitchell-
22 Lamas, redevelopment company developments, certain
23 federally assisted housing, and housing development
24 fund companies.

2 We share the Council's desire to
3 streamline the rent freeze application process and
4 want to highlight a few areas where we've made great
5 strides to accomplish this. In the 2023 State
6 legislative session, we successfully advocated for a
7 State law that changed the income definition for
8 these programs and the senior and disabled homeowner
9 exemptions program. This allows us to align with
10 federal adjusted gross income. The change means that
11 applicants can provide their personal income tax
12 return to verify their income instead of a binder
13 full of documentation that they would need to provide
14 additional information for the definition of income.
15 Additionally, we expect that the change will broaden
16 the base of eligible New Yorkers by thousands.

17 Additionally, we have continued to strive
18 for better efficiency and more transparency. We have
19 enhanced our Tenant Access Portal, better known as
20 TAP. TAP not only allows an applicant or tenant or
21 their approved representative to track and look up
22 the status of their applications, it also now allows
23 initial and renewal applicants to electronically file
24 their applications.

2 Finally, I'd like to highlight our
3 Outreach Team's effort to reach potential applicants
4 for these programs. In this Calendar Year, DOF's
5 Outreach Unit along with the Office of Taxpayer
6 Advocate have conducted 68 events, including events
7 with elected officials, Community Boards, and
8 community-based organizations. Additionally, we
9 worked closely with the Mayor's Office of Public
10 Engagement to ensure eligible New Yorkers are aware
11 of these beneficial programs. In the past, we have
12 worked with HPD on SCRIE/DRIE enrollment and
13 Mitchell-Lama complexes. In fact, June this past
14 year, we joined with State Senator Kavanagh and
15 Council Member Marte at Knickerbocker Village for a
16 massive SCRIE/DRIE enrollment event. Supported by HPD
17 and Volunteers of Legal Service, we were able to
18 provide direct on-site assistance to SCRIE/DRIE
19 eligible Mitchell-Lama residents. Furthermore,
20 earlier this year, we provided SCRIE/DRIE training to
21 the Department of Aging staff as well as their
22 service providers.

23 In addition to my team, the Department of
24 Finance's External Affairs Division and the Office of
25 Taxpayer Advocate, which includes the SCRIE/DRIE

2 ombudspeople, are dedicated to ensuring every New
3 Yorker would benefit from this program and is able to
4 take advantage of it.

5 Regarding Intro. 985, while we support
6 the spirit of the bill and encourage more New Yorkers
7 to enroll in these programs, we have concerns
8 regarding the provisions of the bill as it's written.
9 We have concerns regarding our ability to
10 predetermine eligibility based on Mitchell-Lama
11 income verification and that we will not be able to
12 prepopulate a form with verified accurate information
13 that will improve the process for these applicants.
14 Our agency is reviewing the income definitions used
15 on these forms to assess how they may align to the
16 State laws that govern the SCRIE program. Our goal,
17 like yours, is to ensure that the application process
18 is as easy as possible and that anyone who is
19 eligible is able to take advantage of this benefit.
20 We look forward to working with the Council and HPD
21 to reach these potential recipients and design
22 outreach efforts in collaboration with community
23 groups and Council office.

24 Thank you for this opportunity to speak
25 to you today. I look forward to your questions.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much. I
3 want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council
4 Member Dinowitz, and I'll turn it over to Council
5 Member Schulman for a few remarks regarding her bill.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I'm very proud
7 to have this bill, Intro. 896. When we had a hearing
8 some time back, I asked the question about whether or
9 not if it was known how many accessible dwelling
10 units for people aging in place that we had and there
11 wasn't an answer so that prompted me to come up with
12 this bill. I will tell you, I will admit I am a
13 senior, and we want our seniors to age in place, and
14 it's important, especially when we're talking about
15 building more affordable housing, that the housing
16 actually is something that seniors and people with
17 disabilities can live in that's accommodating for
18 them. So very often it's not so that's why, if
19 there's a way that we can do this, I'll talk later
20 when we do the questions, but I understand that HPD
21 might have it and all that but with the systems that
22 we have now and AI technology and everything else,
23 I'm sure there's a way we can come up with a plan to
24 make sure that people are aware of where these are
25 and how many we have so we can figure out how many we

2 need to have going further because I have senior
3 housing being built in my District now through HPD,
4 but we really need to have an assessment, especially
5 with the aging population that we have. With that,
6 I'm very glad to do this, and thank you, Chair, for
7 having the hearing today.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
9 Member. I'd also like to acknowledge that we've been
10 joined by Council Member Lee.

11 Council Member Dinowitz also has a
12 statement about his bill.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
14 Chair. Thank you for acknowledging me and for having
15 this hearing and, of course, for hearing my bill.

16 I'm proud to advocate for my bill, Intro.
17 985, a bill that will have a direct and meaningful
18 impact on older adults throughout the city. In my
19 District, we have a number of City-run Mitchell-Lamas
20 where one of my developments have seen a 22 percent
21 rent increase over three years and another one as
22 much as 70 percent maintenance increase. This bill
23 requires HPD to provide eligible New Yorkers living
24 in Mitchell-Lama apartment buildings with a prefilled
25 application form for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase

2 Exemption program using information that they already
3 provide to the City on their required income
4 affidavit, which everyone who lives in a Mitchell-
5 Lama has to provide to the City. Affordable housing
6 and support for older adults are two causes of
7 significant importance to both myself and people in
8 my District. The SCRIE program is crucial to
9 achieving both, but it is not being utilized as much
10 as it could. Our City agencies have access to the
11 information that deems a resident eligible for the
12 program so why sit around and wait for our older
13 adults to apply when we can take a proactive approach
14 now? It's not right to expect all qualified residents
15 to have knowledge of the rent increase exemption
16 program or the application process, especially our
17 older adults, and to rely solely on outreach events.
18 An individual may have mobility issues or a lack of
19 internet access, and they might struggle under
20 current standards to submit an application online or
21 in person. We must make a greater effort to
22 understand the needs of our older adult population
23 and support their well-being. No person should be
24 forced out of their home while in retirement due to a
25 lack of affordability. This bill would bring us one

2 step to eliminating this in New York City. I do
3 appreciate that you are reviewing certain aspects of
4 the bill, but I want to be clear, this bill does not
5 require any agency to predetermine eligibility. It
6 simply states that it will fill out as much of the
7 SCRIE form as it can using information that the
8 resident is already submitting to the City.

9 I, again, want to thank Chair Hudson for
10 the opportunity to speak today and encourage all of
11 my Colleagues to sign on to the bill, Intro. 985.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
13 Member.

14 Now I'll jump into questions. Does the
15 Department of Finance have an estimate for the number
16 of New Yorkers who may be eligible for SCRIE and DRIE
17 but have not yet enrolled?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Yes. We
19 have an estimate that in 2019, which was the most
20 recent year for which complete data was available,
21 about 135,000 households were eligible for the rent
22 freeze program. Of the estimated eligible population,
23 about 75,000 received the benefits, which is roughly
24 half. The statistics are available in our Rent Freeze
25 Report which is readily available on our website.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you have the
3 breakdown of the 135,000 eligible, how many for SCRIE
4 and how many for DRIE?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: No, I
6 don't have that broken down here, but we can
7 certainly provide that for you.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What information does
11 the Department believe can be automatically populated
12 on SCRIE/DRIE applications?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: My
14 colleague, Robin Lee, will address that question.

15 ATTORNEY LEE: Thank you, Chair. We are
16 happy to coordinate our staff with Council Staff to
17 perform a line-by-line review of the SCRIE
18 application. More routine basic data elements are
19 likely better candidates for pre-population. However,
20 a critical mass of the application data including
21 income information and Social Security information
22 are not ideal candidates for pre-population and
23 transmittal. The practice of pre-populating the forms
24 introducing the risk of disseminating inaccurate data
25 to an applicant, and, additionally, we still need to

2 evaluate how this pre-populated data is shared and
3 stored.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so for that
5 sensitive information, like you mentioned, like
6 Social Security Numbers and rent information or
7 income, do you have a means of securing that type of
8 information on these forms? I understand that your
9 concern is the actual like pre-population of it, but
10 do you actually have access to that information?

11 ATTORNEY LEE: I think we'd have to
12 coordinate and assess a little bit further and get
13 back to you. It takes time to review and then we'd
14 have to coordinate with HPD as well.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. What does the
16 Department view as the biggest hurdle for enrolling
17 more older adults or people with disabilities into
18 SCRIE and DRIE, and does it differ by program? For
19 example, are there different hurdles for SCRIE versus
20 DRIE?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Basically,
22 for DRIE, one would need a qualifying disability to
23 apply for the program. For SCRIE, what's critical for
24 us is not only household income but their rent

2 history and their lease history. If I understand your
3 question...

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The question is
5 what's the biggest hurdle that you find for enrolling
6 more older adults or people with disabilities. You
7 talked about 135,000 eligible folks but only 75,000
8 people who are actually enrolled, so that gap there,
9 what's the biggest hurdle for why you find people are
10 not enrolling in these programs?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Basically,
12 with our program, we need to validate all of the
13 information that's given to us for a qualified
14 candidate. With respect to getting information with
15 regards to rental information and proof of income,
16 that's critical to us, so gathering information for
17 income and for rent are probably two of our biggest
18 challenges.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How do you actually
20 verify or validate that information?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We ask the
22 applicants to provide either for income their tax
23 returns or W-2 statements or 1099 statements.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That is part of the
3 application process or that's a separate validation
4 process after they've submitted the application?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Separate
6 after they've submitted the application.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Is there a
8 reason why that wouldn't be part of the application
9 process to streamline...

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: They can
11 submit at the same time as they're submitting their
12 application.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, but then
14 there's a separate validation process for the
15 information that's already been submitted?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: No,
17 there's not a separate validation. We just require
18 proof of information that's being submitted to us.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and then
20 recipients of these programs have to reapply or renew
21 every one to two years depending on the program. If
22 you already have the information, can you just
23 explain why folks would need to reapply every one or
24 two years assuming their information doesn't change?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We're
3 required by law to have them reapply every year or
4 every two years depending on the program. For those
5 that are a part of the program, we do provide them
6 with notice and an application with their information
7 pre-populated in those applications for those that
8 are already part of the program.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Does
10 the Department of Finance have best practices for
11 reaching older adults, many of whom have limited tech
12 literacy, and educating them about SCRIE? If so, what
13 does the agency currently do to educate these
14 populations.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: For that,
16 I'll pass it over to my Colleague, Kieran.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sure.

18 DIRECTOR MAHONEY: Good morning, Chair. A
19 lot of the things that we do, especially here within
20 the Outreach Unit, in trying to reach the most
21 eligible New Yorkers is meet them where they are so
22 it's either having paper applications or trying to
23 walk them through doing it online, and that's where
24 we work a lot with Council offices, community-based
25 organizations, and older adult centers where they

2 have a representative in those offices that they
3 already trust, and we want to rely on those offices
4 to help fill out the applications with them.
5 Especially within the Outreach Unit as well, we sit
6 with the person that might be eligible that we want
7 to get all their documents together and submit them
8 on their behalf so those are some of the things that
9 we try to do in terms of increasing eligibility.

10 Also, we were talking about the
11 application process as well, in terms of the
12 documents and income documents, one of the things
13 that we do is we kind of go through a checklist of
14 all the documents that they may need, and, ahead of
15 time if we are working with any of the Council
16 offices, we kind of send out lists and add that to
17 the fliers so that people can come prepared. It just
18 kind of creates an easier approval process when they
19 have all their documents together.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Do you
21 think that Intro. 985 would help with ensuring that
22 more people can more easily access the application?

23 ATTORNEY LEE: Thank you, Chair, for the
24 question. Using HPD income data for the rent freeze
25 program only works if the data is apples to apples.

2 In an ideal world, if the income data HPD possesses
3 is based on the same definitely for income that's
4 featured in the State law that governs rent freeze,
5 then a pre-populated application would assist and
6 possibly solve for this problem. However, if the
7 income definition applicable to HPD data varies from
8 the definition of income applicable to the rent
9 freeze program, we run the risk of using inconsistent
10 data and misleading constituents, so pre-populating a
11 rent freeze application with incorrect data will hurt
12 both the constituents and the City. Again, we're
13 still reviewing the process, and we're happy to be a
14 partner.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Does the
16 Department have any staff assigned to working in
17 person to sign up older adults for SCRIE or DRIE, and
18 does the Department work with DFTA-contracted
19 entities such as older adult centers or home-
20 delivered meal providers to educate and enroll older
21 adults in these programs? I know you've mentioned a
22 little bit of this before.

23 DIRECTOR MAHONEY: I know I'm going to
24 sound biased, but I'm going to highlight the great
25 Outreach team that we have at the Department of

2 Finance. We have a team, we work in every corner of
3 the city, and, as I mentioned before, working with
4 the elected officials, community-based organizations,
5 and the older adult centers. Most recently, I know
6 the Mayor had his older adult townhall at the Park
7 Slope Center for Successful Aging. On some of those,
8 we're doing a followup rent freeze event and
9 encouraging enrollment there so we actually just did
10 that last week, two weeks ago, with the Mayor's
11 Public Engagement Unit, Taxpayer advocate as well as
12 Volunteers of Legal Services as well.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that's great.
14 Thank you. Regarding TAP, which was in your
15 testimony, is that portal tested with older adults to
16 determine ease of use and are there trainings
17 offered? I suppose that would go for any and all of
18 your digital portals.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Training
20 is offered to use the TAP portal. It is offered to
21 whomever has access to the computer. Can you repeat
22 your question?

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you test it with
24 older adults so do you do you bring older adults in
25 or go to older adult centers, for example, and pull

2 up TAP and see how easy it might be for older adults
3 to use it?

4 DIRECTOR MAHONEY: Yes, we do. When we are
5 enrolling people, we do try to show the TAP portal to
6 them to see if they are interested. We understand
7 that not every older adult is going to be comfortable
8 using the internet so we try to assist them with
9 that, but, just as recent as October, the TAP portal
10 was expanded to allow renewals in the portal where it
11 previously didn't have that function. It was just for
12 initial applications so now that it's for renewals,
13 we're looking to expand the kind of marketing around
14 that program.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and then when
16 you help folks in those various locations, are you
17 taking feedback and then making adjustments or
18 updates to the portal to ensure that where people
19 might have problems or might be tripping up that
20 those issues are addressed?

21 DIRECTOR MAHONEY: Yeah, absolutely. We'll
22 always take feedback.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

24 DIRECTOR MAHONEY: We take feedback on
25 pretty much any step of the process.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. I'm
3 going to go Council Member Schulman for questions
4 first and then Council Member Dinowitz.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very
6 much, Chair.

7 One question I have is what is the
8 average cost of retrofitting an apartment to be older
9 adult friendly? Do you know?

10 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We'll have
11 to get back to you on that in coordination with
12 feedback from HPD.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: My next question
14 is, maybe we have the answer to this, what kinds of
15 upgrades and work are required to make apartments
16 accessible?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: It depends
18 on the particulars of the unit and the situation.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Can you give
20 examples?

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: HPD really
22 would know better than us. Again, there's a broad
23 range of answers to that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: All right, we'll
25 follow up with them. Beyond the SARA program, do

2 property owners currently receive any City incentives
3 to convert apartment units into older adult
4 accessible units?

5 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: These are
6 really questions for our colleagues at HPD.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. Here's a
8 DFTA one. Does DFTA refer older adults in need of
9 home repairs or older adult friendly retrofitting
10 services to HPD or to other organizations that
11 provide such services?

12 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Yes, and
13 within our own contract portfolio, we have a program
14 that addresses some of those home modification needs
15 that support older adults successfully aging in
16 place.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: How do older
18 adults find out about that particular program?

19 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: They can
20 call 3-1-1, they can call Aging Connect, and we'll
21 work with them to support that linkage.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Is there any way
23 to put something out that that program is available
24 so that people are aware of it?

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Yeah,
3 absolutely. There's our website, we do a lot of
4 community outreach and awareness, whether it's with
5 our older adults at the older adult centers or with
6 professional colleagues in the community, and then,
7 of course, I'm sure you're aware of our Cabinet for
8 Older New Yorkers which we're actively sharing this
9 information so this is something we continually do
10 across our program portfolio.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Can you provide
12 the Council with some details of how the program
13 works and all that? You don't have to do it now, but
14 if you can provide some materials to us, that would
15 be very helpful.

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Sure,
17 absolutely.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you. How
19 does the City help older adults who live in walk-up
20 apartment buildings and otherwise inaccessible
21 housing relocate to accessible housing if
22 retrofitting their current apartment is not feasible?

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We work
24 with our partners at HRA and HPD both directly as
25 we're working with clients, whether it's through our

2 older adult centers or our case management programs
3 and then again, more broadly, we also work together
4 on these issues through our Cabinet for Older New
5 Yorkers to which HRA and HPD are members.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Chair, can I
7 proceed?

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you. Do
10 you have a number last year of how many older adults
11 you helped in this fashion that live in walk-up
12 apartments?

13 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We'd be
14 happy to get back to you with that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Please. I would
16 like that. Also, again, if there's a way, because
17 even us as Council Members, if we're given materials
18 we can share it with people in our District so we'd
19 appreciate getting at least samples of that and then
20 we can circle back.

21 Does housing accessibility play a role in
22 reducing social isolation and feelings of loneliness
23 among older adults and, if so, how?

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Of course.
25 I think there's a couple of different ways to look at

2 that, but number one, older adults need to get out
3 and participate and contribute to their communities
4 which, you know, looks like a lot of different
5 things. One way it looks is to get out to the
6 community, go to an older adult center, have a meal,
7 connect with your neighbors, participate in
8 meaningful health and social activities so certainly
9 that's very important. We do, as I'm sure you know,
10 also have ways to address homebound older adults
11 through pushing services into the home, but
12 certainly, just like any of us, we want to be able to
13 get out and participate in our neighborhoods and the
14 city as fully as possible.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Does the City
16 conduct wellness checks on older adults living in
17 apartments on high floors, say in a fifth floor walk-
18 up building, or does the City partner with an
19 organization to do the work, and how many checks were
20 conducted in the past year and for how many
21 individuals, which you'll probably have to get back
22 to me on, but the other questions you can.

23 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: I wouldn't
24 say that reflects exactly the way we work.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. If a
3 client is known to us, we fund and support a variety
4 of programs, again, older adult centers, case
5 management, and so on and so on, then we're engaged
6 with those clients. We know who are at higher risk
7 for social isolation because, let's say they have
8 limitations in activities of daily living and so on.
9 In that example, our case management programs would
10 be checking on them regularly, again depending on
11 what the client wants, their connection to family and
12 other supports. We have programs like Friendly
13 Visiting which connects on a deeper level in a lot of
14 different ways. Similarly, the older adults centers
15 know their constituents, many of whom have been
16 members of the centers for many years so they know
17 when somebody is having a difficult time, whether
18 it's a health issue or social isolation and to
19 increase the frequency of those checks.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: You said people
21 who are known to the centers. How do you reach out to
22 people that are not known to the centers? Is there
23 any kind of outreach per se?

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Our active
25 engagement is really about clients that are active

2 with our variety of programs. More broadly, I think
3 you're asking what about older adults who are not
4 connected to NYC Aging. We wouldn't have their phone
5 numbers or...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Right, but is
7 there any outreach to people that...

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Yes, all
9 the time. We're always supporting outreach efforts.
10 One example of that would be our Join Us Campaign
11 which really supported outreach to older adults post
12 the COVID-19 pandemic to come back to our centers or
13 to become members of our centers, and we're always
14 reinforcing through every opportunity we have to
15 continue to bring awareness of our services and the
16 many ways we can support older adults.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: My last question
18 is what support does the Administration need from the
19 Council to ensure that more apartment units across
20 the city are accessible to our rapidly expanding
21 older adult population?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Let us
23 think about it and connect back to you...

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Please, because
3 obviously we want to work with you so please get back
4 to us.

5 Thank you, Chair, for allowing me the
6 extension.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: No problem. I'd like
8 to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council
9 Member Mealy.

10 Now, I will go to Council Member Dinowitz
11 for questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
13 Chair.

14 First, I want to say that HPD should be
15 here, and it's deeply troubling that they are not so
16 I thank all of you for being here.

17 I am providing you with a gift. It is a
18 present that is being handed to you. It is the income
19 affidavit form along with the SCRIE application, and
20 what you'll notice, we even did it in color, there
21 are highlights and it's annotated, and I think there
22 are about nine sections on there, things like name,
23 address, apartment number, everyone else living in
24 the household, income, and I'll get to the income in
25 a second, that are also aligned with areas on the

2 SCRIE application. You'll notice here on the income
3 affidavit form, which again everyone living in a
4 Mitchell-Lama is submit to the City, in a City-run
5 Mitchell-Lama they submit to the City. They have
6 information about things like number of bedrooms,
7 things like income, and the request you make at the
8 top of your SCRIE form is, I'll just read it because
9 that's easier, is you may qualify for SCRIE if you're
10 62 years or older, live in certain type of houses, in
11 this case it's Mitchell-Lama, and the income of
12 everyone is less than 50,000 dollars, and you spend
13 more than a third of your combined household income
14 on rent. All of which, all of that information is
15 available on the income affidavit, a form that people
16 swear to. In fact, I circled a bullet point for you
17 at the bottom, and it says income information shown
18 on this affidavit is subject to verification by the
19 New York State Department of Taxation and Finance in
20 accordance to its provisions of Section 171-B of the
21 Tax Law and further to verification by the Department
22 of Housing Preservation and Development. Given that
23 statement and given all the things on here, I'm so
24 interested to hear what the roadblocks are and why
25 this legislation is problematic?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We have
3 concerns basically regarding our ability to
4 predetermine the eligibility like we've talked about
5 before. There are a variety of factors that could
6 impact the applicant's eligibility. Based on the
7 affidavit alone, the City would not be able to
8 predetermine eligibility absent the provision of
9 additional information that we may require. The
10 practice of pre-populating forms introduces the risk
11 that the City would furnish potentially inaccurate
12 data to an applicant.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I hear the
14 concerns about predetermining eligibility so that's
15 why I want to be clear on what this legislation does.
16 It does not predetermine eligibility, and, in fact,
17 one of the things the legislation requires is that a
18 letter accompany the form and uses perhaps the same
19 language that is used on the SCRIE application which
20 is, as I said earlier, you may qualify, and the
21 legislation is not predetermining eligibility. What
22 it's doing is it's saying based on information you've
23 sworn to and already submitted to the City, we're
24 going to use that information to make your life a
25 little easier and just say, if you qualify based on

2 this nice little paragraph that's written on the
3 SCRIE form, we're going to send you a pre-populated
4 form. Perhaps in the letter, it says with the
5 understanding that you may qualify based on
6 preliminary information.

7 Now, regarding the concern about the data
8 being correct, it's being data that is already being
9 provided by the tenant or the shareholder, and it's
10 subject according to this income affidavit to
11 verification by the very State where you have
12 concerns that the definition of income may be
13 different so I'm still unclear about what the
14 roadblocks are because I hear what you're saying
15 about predetermining eligibility. I'm here saying
16 that's not what the bill does. I'm also here saying
17 that there could be a letter, as per the legislation,
18 explaining all of the caveats and concerns that you
19 have to the resident, perhaps please check the
20 accuracy of the information we've provided, but
21 fundamentally we should be making life as easy as
22 possible for our older adults and as easy as possible
23 to let them know that they qualify for these
24 programs. We have a golden opportunity here of older
25 adults already sending all the information they need,

2 the City has the information, we should be sending
3 that information back to them to make their lives as
4 easy as possible.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Agreed,
6 Council Member. At this time, this has been fairly
7 new for us. We are still examining this legislation,
8 and we want to just have assurances that there's no
9 conflicts and that we can accommodate what the bill
10 is trying to...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: It takes time.
12 Friendship comes first.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: That we
14 can accommodate what the bill is trying to do so we
15 have concerns and we just would like the opportunity
16 to be able to really take a look at the legislation
17 and to be able to assure that we're in alignment with
18 what the law requires.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Sure. I look
20 forward to continuing this discussion, but also
21 assuring you that some of your concerns are kind of
22 addressed in the legislation. The concerns that you
23 brought up in your testimony are not what the bill
24 does, and I think it's important that as we move
25 forward with the conversation about making life

2 easier for older adults and making the city more
3 affordable for them that we do have an honest
4 conversation and a conversation based on what we want
5 to do, and I want to make sure as we move forward in
6 the conversation we're not looking for ways to not do
7 the legislation, we're looking for ways to do the
8 legislation and addressing particular areas of
9 concern, but I would love to start from a place of
10 trying to get this done so that our older adults can
11 comfortably and affordably live in our city and
12 continue to live in our city, particularly in
13 Mitchell-Lamas which are designed to be affordable
14 but more and more are becoming unaffordable for our
15 older adults due to staggering rent and maintenance
16 increases as I listed earlier, 22 percent, 50, 70
17 percent.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: I'd like
19 to just take the opportunity to remind Council that
20 we, at the Department of Finance, administer the DRIE
21 (INAUDIBLE) so we're very happy to work in
22 collaboration with HPD in order to assure that our
23 processes align and that we can meet the requirements
24 of what this bill is attempting to do.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I thank you and
3 I will end with what I began with. HPD should be here
4 to address our concerns as it relates to housing.
5 Thank you.

6 Thank you, Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
8 Member.

9 I'd like to acknowledge that we've been
10 joined by Council Member Marte, and I'll turn it over
11 to Council Member Lee for questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hello. Just had a few
13 questions which actually you addressed a lot of them,
14 Council Member Dinowitz. Always good to be here with
15 DFTA as well as with DOF. Hey Kieran.

16 I just wanted to know because I know
17 obviously that, very familiar with DFTA obviously as
18 having run senior centers and meals on wheels
19 programs and love all the work that you guys are
20 doing, and I know it's challenging given the staffing
21 and budget constraints. I think one thing that we
22 learned during COVID was how this whole government
23 approach can be beneficial in dealing with specific
24 demographics and issues that we're trying, and so I
25 know that the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers is

2 accomplishing some of that, and just out of
3 curiosity, just wanted to hear from you on your
4 thoughts of, I know that a lot of the data does lie
5 with HPD as you're saying for this bill, but from
6 your perspective what would that look like in terms
7 of how we could get that data more effectively
8 because, even if it does lie with HPD, how do you
9 sort of see that coordination happening between DFTA
10 and HPD in order to better serve the older adults and
11 get that information and, if it does sort of lie with
12 them, do you see them as being the overseers and you
13 guys providing support or how would you sort of
14 imagine that looking at to better that information?

15 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Our goal
16 is always to connect older adults with the services
17 and supports that they need, which you're very aware
18 of even if those services are at a partner agency. In
19 terms of what data we collect in the space, it's
20 pretty limited. We do collect some voluntary
21 information about do older adults live alone, are
22 they in a co-op or a condo, and so on. However, we
23 would ultimately rely on HPD for more specific data
24 regarding their role constructing, managing, and
25 monitoring New York City Housing stock. As you're

2 aware, Councilwoman, our role is to provide the
3 social services supports around that and, of course,
4 we would continue to do that and we work very closely
5 with HPD and HRA as part of our part of our Cabinet
6 for Older New Yorkers, and HPD has certainly been an
7 integral part of addressing the needs of housing for
8 older New Yorkers, and we are working with them more
9 broadly to look about how to support accessibility
10 issues and, again, our role is really as the social
11 service entity.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Sorry, if I
13 may, Chair, just a couple more questions.

14 This is more related, we had a similar
15 hearing yesterday with DYCD, DOE, as well as MOPD,
16 the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, and
17 just out of curiosity because I know that MOPD is a
18 teeny tiny agency that needs a bigger budget because
19 quite frankly there's about a million folks in New
20 York City that live with disabilities across the
21 spectrum, and so when it comes to older adults and
22 your coordination, and this goes for both DOF as well
23 as DFTA, just wondering what your relationship and
24 coordination also looks like with MOPD because I'm
25 just wondering, I'm just trying to understand where

2 the information is being shared across different City
3 agencies and maybe perhaps where it's not being
4 shared and how we can disseminate that information to
5 as many people as possible because the folks that you
6 have DFTA may not overlap necessarily with MOPD and
7 maybe there's a benefit of sharing resources there in
8 terms of what services are available, and so just
9 wondering, for the purposes of the SCRIE/DRIE
10 applications as well as for the purposes of anything
11 related to housing improvements, just wanted to know
12 has there been any coordination or conversation or
13 dialogue also with MOPD at all?

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Through
15 our Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, we are looking at
16 home modifications that support older adults to age
17 in place as well as issues around micro-mobility and
18 making our streets and communities as accessible and
19 friendly to older adults as possible. Again, defer to
20 those agencies on the particulars and their purview,
21 and, of course, in the social service space, anyone
22 can call Aging Connect and we're happy to help them
23 on case-specific issues.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Is MOPD part of
25 that Cabinet for Older New Yorkers?

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: All right, great. And
4 for Department of Finance, I don't know what it looks
5 like in terms of your coordination at all in terms of
6 data sharing or anything with the disabilities
7 community, but that would be great to see if you
8 could speak to that, that'd be great.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We've
10 worked with MOPD in the past and are willing to work
11 with them on outreach.

12 DIRECTOR MAHONEY: Of course, we're always
13 looking to expand with any partner agencies, but,
14 yeah, actually we were just having this conversation
15 last week about exploring more with the Mayor's
16 Office for People with Disabilities because I've had
17 conversations with them recently enough but
18 definitely to expand that more and more, to promote
19 outreach specifically to SCRIE and DRIE.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Because I feel
21 like there's a lot of these great City agencies that
22 were started but they're being underutilized, and I
23 know that MOPD also has a very small staff and
24 budget, which we're trying to change on the other end
25 of things, but I think that would be highly

2 beneficial if there could be some coordination there
3 because Commissioner Curry is amazing and has a ton
4 of institutional knowledge and resources and could be
5 very helpful there I think. Just wanted to put that
6 out there.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
8 Member. I'll go to Council Member Marte next.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: First of all, I
10 want to say thank you for doing the outreach program
11 with me at Knickerbocker Village. I think the seniors
12 really appreciate it and looking forward to do more,
13 maybe (INAUDIBLE) Gardens next time, but I thought
14 that was a well-received event.

15 My question is in regards to legislation
16 that was passed earlier this year for former
17 Mitchell-Lamas. That legislation increased SCRIE and
18 DRIE to IPN and Tribeca, Independence Plaza, and also
19 Gateway and Battery Park City, both former Mitchell-
20 Lamas. How many people have applied so far, and have
21 those applications been processed or is there
22 anything holding them up because I think this kind of
23 works in parallel with these legislation as more
24 Mitchell-Lama programs decide to privatize, just

2 making sure that once they do we can continue to
3 protect them as well?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Good
5 morning, Council Member. We have to take a look at
6 the data. We haven't accumulated the data, and we can
7 certainly get back to you with that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Great. Thank you.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How many people do
11 you expect to enroll in SCRIE this coming year?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We don't
13 have the number offhand. We can look into that and
14 get back to you on it.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that would be
16 great. How many people are currently enrolled in
17 SCRIE?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: It's about
19 59,000.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How many people are
21 enrolled in the SCRIE program who reside in rent-
22 controlled, rent-regulated, and stabilized units?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: For SCRIE,
24 you have to be in one of those two. We can give you a

1 COMMITTEE ON AGING

47

2 breakdown. I don't have the breakdown today, but we
3 can certainly give you a breakdown.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. How
5 much does the City pay annually in tax abatements for
6 the SCRIE program?

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We have to
8 get back to you on that data.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know the
10 administrative cost of running the SCRIE program?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: No, we do
12 not. That's a budgetary question, but we could
13 certainly get back to you with that.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I'm going to assume
15 you don't know the administrative cost then of
16 running the DRIE program?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Sorry?

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The same question for
19 DRIE. You do not have that, right?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: No, we'll
21 get that back to you.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Is there currently a
23 backlog in processing DOF-administered SCRIE and DRIE
24 applications?

25

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: No, there
3 is not a backlog currently.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How long does it take
5 to approve an application on average?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Generally,
7 about 5 to 10 days assuming we have all of the
8 information together.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What's the process
10 for outreach if you don't have all the information
11 from the applicant?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Well, we
13 send them notices to provide additional information.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Via mail, email,
15 phone call?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Primarily
17 by mail.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: If they've
20 applied electronically, we can communicate with them
21 electronically as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you think the
23 Mayor's recently announced 5 percent cuts across City
24 agencies will impact the processing of SCRIE
25 applications and renewals?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Again,
3 that's a budgetary question. We certainly have a very
4 robust team that works with what we're given. The
5 City will do what they need to do budgetary wise.
6 However, at this point, they'll be an effect, but we
7 can't really measure that effect. Our team is working
8 diligently to ensure that all of the constituents'
9 and applicants' needs are met.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But there will be an
11 effect?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Can't
13 really say at this time.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. What are the
15 most common kinds of errors committed by SCRIE
16 applicants during the application process?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Errors?

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, so when you
19 have to reach out to folks by mail to say that you've
20 received an incomplete application, for example, what
21 are the most common errors, like the information
22 that's most likely or most often left out?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Generally
24 either income information or rent information, lease
25 information.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What steps has the
3 Administration taken to educate eligible individuals
4 in how to correctly fill out application forms? Is
5 that part of the outreach programs?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: It's part
7 of the outreach, but we also have a robust center
8 where we have applicants come and we're able to sit
9 and assist them with their application at our walk-in
10 centers. We do accommodate questions and any issues
11 that they may have in our walk-in centers.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you know how
13 many Mitchell-Lama residents are enrolled in SCRIE?

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: No, we do
15 not. That's an HPD.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Does the
17 Administration have any projections for how key DFTA
18 contractors like those providing home-delivered
19 meals, older adult centers, etc. will be impacted by
20 the announced November Plan mid-year adjustment?

21 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Echoing my
22 colleague, that's a budget-specific question.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: It is your agencies
24 that have to perform with the given budgets so I
25 would expect to have some sense of at least how you

2 might be impacted with the proposed cuts, but I know
3 you have to say what you have to say.

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We're
5 working with OMB in order to make sure the service
6 continuity for older adults is supported, and we at
7 NYC Aging are committed to ensuring that our clients
8 receive the meals they need to remain healthy and
9 safe at home. We're committed to being good stewards
10 of the public dollar, and I'm sure that this will be
11 addressed more fully in budget-specific
12 conversations.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I mean I would
14 just note that NYC Aging has one of the smallest
15 budgets of any City agency. I'm not questioning
16 whether or not you all will be good stewards. I'm
17 really more so questioning whether it's appropriate
18 to cut such a small agency budget to make sure that
19 you can do the work that you all do.

20 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Can you confirm
22 though that no older adults will lose services as a
23 result of the November Plan?

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: This is
25 something that we're working through with OMB.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Regarding your
3 recent concept paper on home-delivered meals, it
4 indicates that they're asking providers to begin to
5 cover weekend and holiday meals to some extent. Will
6 the Administration add additional funding into the
7 program to support this initiative?

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: The
9 concept paper provides an opportunity for the
10 community including the providers to be able to
11 comment and provide feedback which we'll review and
12 will be addressed through the release of the RFP.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So you're not aware
14 of any additional funding for this program at this
15 time?

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: This is
17 something we're continuing to work through and
18 certainly welcome and invite as always robust
19 feedback on the concept paper to inform the release
20 of the RFP.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How do you believe
22 providers can identify funding for these added
23 responsibilities if they were to come to fruition?

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Each
25 budget is unique to the particulars of that community

2 and program. Again, we welcome feedback, and
3 certainly there are different ways to address that
4 including other partnerships.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. What's the
6 current level of need for older adult accessible
7 housing in New York City?

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We work
9 with our partners at HPD to obtain that specific
10 information.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Does NYC Aging
12 track the number of older adults that live in each
13 naturally occurring retirement community, or NORC?

14 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We have
15 numbers through our NORC system that we can provide.
16 I don't have them in front of me.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. What about
18 older adults living in NYCHA housing?

19 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: NYCHA
20 would have that information. We would certainly know
21 of NYCHA members that are active with one of our
22 programs, but NYCHA could speak more holistically.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, but of the
24 senior housing within the NYCHA portfolio, you all
25

2 don't have that information or those numbers or you
3 don't engage with that data at all?

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: It's a
5 NYCHA NORC. Otherwise, we would defer specifically to
6 NYCHA for those numbers.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: It seems like that
8 would be a natural sort of place for outreach even
9 just for OACs, for home-delivered meals, for NYC
10 Aging to be reaching over to NYCHA to ask for some of
11 that information.

12 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Yes,
13 absolutely, and we work very closely with NYCHA, and
14 we work very closely in the NYCHA communities to do
15 outreach and engage with older adults.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I assume this
17 is probably more of an HPD question, but I'm going to
18 ask it anyway and then you can just tell me. Where
19 are the data gaps in understanding how many older
20 adults are living in apartment buildings throughout
21 the city and what steps can be taken to better
22 understand how many older adults need retrofitted
23 apartments?

24

25

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: As you
3 implied quite clearly in your question, I would
4 certainly defer to HPD for that data.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you refer
6 older adults who need retrofitted apartments who've
7 made you all aware through any of your programs or
8 services?

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Yes. Every
10 client's story and situation is unique. As we talked
11 about a little bit earlier with Member Schulman, we
12 have a home modification program that, depending on
13 the particulars of the client need and situation,
14 that would be a consideration. Another consideration
15 is working with HPD and others. Again, it would
16 depend on the particulars of the situation, but our
17 role in the social service space is to be responsive
18 to the unique needs of the clients, and
19 responsiveness might be direct service provision
20 through us or one of our community-based providers or
21 it might include partnering with other City agencies
22 like HPD.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great. Thank you.
24 I'll now turn it over to Council Member Mealy for a
25 question.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Hello. I concur
3 with my Colleague. HPD should be here.

4 At one of the hearings, you said that
5 your Department refers our seniors to a holistic
6 programming. Could you elaborate on that? If they're
7 isolated, I just wanted to know. You said your
8 Department sends them to services.

9 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: We have a
10 lot of differing services. It really depends on the
11 particulars of the client's situation. You're zooming
12 in on social isolation. The most notable thing that
13 we do to address social isolation is we have over 300
14 older adult centers located throughout the city,
15 which give people, again, an opportunity to get food,
16 connect with their neighbors, access health promotion
17 services, healthy nutrition, exercise, opportunities
18 to be artistically engaged, to be mentally engaged,
19 to be socially engaged, and then I think to your
20 question, it also provides a linkage to case
21 assistance so you could get to know that older adult
22 and what they need, which might include a linkage to
23 Friendly Visiting, it might include a referral to our
24 geriatric mental health program, and then conversely,
25 not walking through..

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How many people
3 will go to the geriatric health program?

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GRODEN: Mental
5 health. We could get back to you with that data. Just
6 broadly, I'll say we have geriatric mental health in
7 88 older adult centers throughout the city. We know
8 as a City and particularly with older adults, mental
9 health is often heavily stigmatized, so we do a lot
10 to support soft engagement at the centers, identify
11 people with more complex issues meaning anxiety,
12 depression, social isolation who might be interested
13 and benefit through mental health services.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I have a question
15 in regards to having the application streamlined
16 process. I don't know if this is connected. If
17 someone is on Social Security, should you not already
18 know how much their stipend is really and will know
19 that they are eligible for SCRIE or DRIE? I'm just
20 trying to find out. If someone is on Social Security,
21 would it be on the application you should know their
22 process already if they put in an application for
23 SCRIE or DRIE, shouldn't you know whether they need
24 extra funding or not? I'm just trying to see how can
25 we streamline the application process. If you already

2 know they're on Social Security, should you not have
3 all their information, how much they're making
4 yearly?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: If that's
6 the only source of income that they have, then that's
7 what we'll use in order to determine...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Would that be able
9 to streamline the application process for them that
10 they don't have to keep doing it every year because
11 even during the pandemic, a lot of offices were
12 closed, our seniors still needed to fill out these
13 applications or some of these landlords were throwing
14 them out in the streets and I must say I was one of
15 them that helped them through this process so I'm
16 just asking if you already know their annual salary,
17 shouldn't there be a way that whenever they plug in
18 electronically or given their application, it should
19 be automatic every year. Sometimes our young adults
20 may start becoming forgetful maybe next year, and if
21 this process is already in the making and you know
22 their salary has not changed, should it be easier for
23 them to just reapply with their name and
24 electronically it's done instead of maybe falling
25 through the cracks because they don't know how to get

2 online again or maybe their caretaker is not there
3 now that was there last year?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: We have a
5 process of short-form renewals for those who have
6 already been in the program for several years. Once
7 they've been in the program for a certain number of
8 years, they don't have to keep producing income or
9 validating their income to us so that helps to
10 streamline the process somewhat with that. If you're
11 asking whether or not we have an automatic renewal
12 for these folks, we do not. The law doesn't provide
13 for that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Why? This is a
15 population that may need extra help. They're not as
16 young as you are, but we will become their age and
17 the better way to help our aging population is to
18 make it easier and simple for them so why is it not
19 recurring? May I ask?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: That's not
21 currently the process. We are...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How can we...

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Certainly
24 endeavoring to make sure that we try to streamline
25 and make this process as easy as we can.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's also part of
3 the legislation that we're hearing.

4 ATTORNEY LEE: If I may, Council Member.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes, I need to hear
6 a little bit more.

7 ATTORNEY LEE: According to State law,
8 there is a requirement for annual renewal so it will
9 require legislative change. During COVID, we would
10 like to note that there was, according to the
11 Emergency Declaration, there were automatic renewals,
12 but since that's been lifted, again, according to
13 State law, there is mandatory annual renewal for DRIE
14 and then biannual for SCRIE. It's in accordance with
15 your lease terms.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Chair
18 Hudson, you'd asked a question about the enrollment
19 numbers for SCRIE and DRIE.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes.

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: The total
22 numbers that we have in our program are 59,900, and
23 that's broken down to about 49,000 for SCRIE and
24 10,800 for DRIE. Out of that population in DRIE, we
25 have about 762 Mitchell-Lama DRIE recipients.

2 The other thing that I'd like to add..

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. (INAUDIBLE)

4 You said 59,900 total, 49,000 SCRIE, 10,800 DRIE. If
5 I'm not mistaken, are we missing 100? That's 59,800,
6 and you gave me 59,900.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: 49,100.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Oh, 49,100? Okay.

9 Thank you. Sorry. You were saying?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: About 762
11 people are DRIE Mitchell-Lamas.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: The other
14 thing that we just wanted to mention briefly is that
15 we worked very hard with the State to sort of level-
16 set the income definition and what's required for
17 income, and so now the program requires one to
18 submit, if they filed their taxes, the adjusted gross
19 income from their taxes, which reduces the
20 requirement for additional paperwork. We estimate
21 that about 7,300 additional renters may qualify.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. What was that
23 number?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: 7,300.

25 Once we fully implement the law and the Agency is

2 able to socialize the impact of this new law, but the
3 work is not yet done. We must now implement this
4 income definition at the local level by amending the
5 City Administrative Code and look forward to working
6 with you and your team to be able to enable that.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely and thank
8 you.

9 I had one followup question from Council
10 Member Mealy. You mentioned that the short-form
11 renewals are available once someone has been in the
12 program for a number of years. What is the number of
13 years?

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Five
15 consecutive years.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Five consecutive
17 years. Okay. Thank you.

18 I think that's it for our questions. We
19 do have two people here to testify in person. I know
20 usually you all disperse, but it is only two people
21 and so I would ask that if you're able to stick
22 around for another couple of minutes then we would
23 greatly appreciate it. It's three minutes per
24 testimony so I'm only asking you to stay for six
25 minutes.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Of course.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Thank you very
5 much to the Administration. We appreciate it.

6 We're going to be moving on to, as the
7 Chair said, public testimony.

8 As a reminder, for public testimony, you
9 can submit written testimony for the record up to 72
10 hours after the conclusion of this hearing, and the
11 email address for that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

12 We will be hearing from in-person folks
13 first and then we will be moving to virtual
14 panelists.

15 At this time, I'll ask the reps from the
16 Administration to leave the tables here so that folks
17 who signed up from the public can testify. Thank you
18 so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DEJEAN: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Finally, before I
22 call up our in-person panelists, just a note that
23 each person testifying will have three minutes to
24 testify, and we do encourage you to submit written

2 testimony as well. It is all considered by the
3 Committee and is greatly appreciated.

4 At this time, I will be calling Kim
5 Lerner and Stephanie Taylor, please.

6 If you're in the room and wishing to
7 testify and your name was not called, please fill out
8 an appearance card. You can go to the Sergeant-at-
9 Arms and fill out an appearance card. Thank you.

10 Good morning. We will start with Kim
11 Lerner and then we will hear from Stephanie Taylor.

12 KIM LERNER: Good morning. Thank you,
13 Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on Aging,
14 for hosting this important hearing and for the
15 legislation that is being heard today.

16 My name is Kim Lerner, and I'm the
17 Director of LiveOn NY's Benefits Outreach Program,
18 which provides assistance to older adults in applying
19 for most of the benefits that they are eligible for
20 in New York City including SCRIE.

21 LiveOn NY's members include more than 110
22 community-based non-profits that provide core
23 services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our
24 communities as we age such as older adult centers,
25 home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing,

2 NORCs, and homecare. LiveOn NY is also home to the
3 Reframing Aging NYC initiative, part of the national
4 Reframing Aging initiative aimed to counteract ageism
5 and improve the way policymakers, stakeholders, and
6 the public think about aging and older people. With
7 our members and you, we work to make New York City a
8 better place to age.

9 SCRIE is one of the most effective
10 programs in keeping older adults in their homes and
11 their communities, but it is a benefit that only an
12 estimated 55 percent of eligible New Yorkers are
13 utilizing. Within that 55 percent, many New Yorkers
14 only apply for SCRIE when they are faced with
15 eviction or their rent burden has become too high,
16 often many years after they were eligible. Early
17 enrollment in SCRIE is key to ensuring older New
18 Yorkers stay in their homes in the long-term. SCRIE
19 benefits are calculated by the date applicants apply,
20 not based on when they become eligible. This means
21 that if an applicant is applying because of dire
22 financial straits, SCRIE will not change their
23 financial circumstances. It will only freeze them in
24 that state. They must apply as close to their

2 eligibility as possible to ensure long-term housing
3 and financial stability.

4 One of our clients, an 86-year-old woman
5 named Marie, perfectly illustrates this situation.
6 Marie was referred to us for a benefits screening and
7 was found to be eligible for a number of benefits
8 including SCRIE, which, of course, was great news.
9 However, she told us that she and her husband had
10 lived in this apartment together until he died over
11 26 years ago. At the time of his death, her rent was
12 1,200 dollars a month. It is now almost 1,900 dollars
13 a month. Marie actually became eligible for SCRIE 24
14 years ago when she turned 62. If she had known about
15 SCRIE then, her rent would now be frozen at 1,200
16 dollars a month.

17 Many New Yorkers do not apply for SCRIE
18 because they do not know about them or they do not
19 know that they eligible. Bases on these factors, we
20 would offer the following recommendations. Pass
21 Intro. 985 and expand these efforts to all eligible
22 New Yorkers that we have the ability to reach. This
23 bill would increase awareness and remove barriers in
24 Mitchell-Lama housing in one action.

2 Create a universal benefits screening
3 tool that informs applicants of all benefits they
4 qualify for.

5 Work with the State to pass S569/A2974, a
6 SCRIE rollback that would make the benefit
7 retroactive to the date the applicant became eligible
8 for the benefit and cap it at 30 percent of their
9 income. The City should pass a resolution in support
10 of this policy and work with HPD and DOF to
11 understand what would need to be done to implement it
12 as efficiently as possible upon passage of those
13 bills.

14 We also would like you to consider
15 requiring the landlords to provide information about
16 SCRIE and DRIE when offering a lease renewal.

17 Furthermore, LiveOn NY strongly supports
18 the passage of all the bills heard in today's hearing
19 and is grateful for the leadership of Chair Hudson on
20 aging issues in our community. We are grateful for
21 the work of Council Members Dinowitz and Schulman
22 and, of course, for everyone who serves on the Aging
23 Committee.

24 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Thank you.
3 Stephanie Taylor.

4 STEPHANIE TAYLOR: Good morning. Thank you
5 to Chair Hudson and the Committee on Aging for the
6 opportunity to testify. My name is Stephanie Taylor,
7 and I'm the Project Director at Volunteers of Legal
8 Service, also known as VOLS. My pronouns are she and
9 her.

10 VOLS was established in 1984, and our
11 purpose is to leverage private attorneys to provide
12 free legal services to low-income New Yorkers to help
13 fill the justice gap. I oversee both our Benefits Law
14 Project and our Incarcerated Mothers Law Project.

15 For over three decades, VOLS has assisted
16 New York City older adults with high-quality free
17 legal services through our dedicated staff and our
18 network of pro bono attorneys. Just the past year, we
19 worked on over 2,000 cases for older adults living in
20 New York City. We provide legal assistance on a wide
21 range of civil legal issues including end of life and
22 incapacity planning, landlord/tenant matters, access
23 to benefits, consumer matters, and other civil legal
24 needs. We work closely with dozens of community-based
25 organizations working with older adults, many of the

2 city's older adult centers, and naturally occurring
3 retirement communities, NORCs.

4 As part of our Benefits Law Project, we
5 help older adults with their Senior Citizen Rent
6 Increase Exemption, SCRIE, applications, and we
7 conduct legal workshops to educate the public about
8 these life-saving benefits. Most older adults live on
9 fixed incomes, and the ability to freeze their
10 shelter costs can often mean the difference between
11 being able to age in place in the community with
12 dignity or being at risk of experiencing
13 homelessness.

14 Over the past few months, we've conducted
15 several SCRIE legal clinics including at Mitchell-
16 Lama buildings. At some of these events, we've worked
17 alongside New York City's Department of Finance and
18 the Department of Housing Preservation and
19 Development, HPD. Through all of this work, we've
20 spoken with many older adults about the SCRIE
21 application and the recertification process. As such,
22 we are well-positioned to weigh in on Introduction
23 985 as it pertains to this vulnerable population.

24 We've found that many older adults are
25 confused by the SCRIE application and recertification

2 process. They have questions on eligibility,
3 requisite documentation, their pending applications,
4 and, of course, application denials. Some of these
5 older adults report to us that their applications
6 haven't been processed in one or two years. These
7 individuals don't know whether their application or
8 documentation was incomplete or whether there is any
9 way to cure their deficient application.

10 Many low-income older adults living in
11 Mitchell-Lama housing are unaware that they are
12 eligible for SCRIE and do not know where or how to
13 apply for benefits. We have teamed up with social
14 services staff who work tirelessly to help as many
15 older adults as possible apply for SCRIE benefits,
16 but, inevitably, there are many who are left behind.
17 Providing eligible residents with prefilled
18 applications could ensure that more older adults will
19 be able to access SCRIE benefits.

20 VOLS recognizes New York City's efforts
21 to better assist older adults with their SCRIE
22 applications, but there is much that can be done to
23 increase access to SCRIE benefits and to make the
24 application process easier. The provisions contained
25 in Introduction 985 would have a positive impact on

2 ensuring that more older adults are aware of the
3 program and will help with the ease of filling out
4 the application. Providing pre-populated SCRIE
5 applications to eligible residents would certainly
6 help many older adults ultimately obtain these
7 critical benefits.

8 We'd be happy to work with the Council
9 Members' offices and the Department of Finance and
10 HPD to help screen people and to help them with their
11 applications. Our city's older adults' lifetime
12 experiences and achievements are woven into the
13 fabric of our city. We should strive to provide them
14 with all the support they need to remain in their
15 communities, stay socially connected, and to remain
16 active and healthy as they age.

17 Thank you for allowing us to submit this
18 testimony and for supporting the needs of New York
19 City's older adults.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you both for
21 your testimony and thank you to the Administration
22 for sticking around. I do think it's valuable for you
23 all to be able to hear these testimonies so thank
24 you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I just wanted to
3 ask do you go out to the community because on some
4 Saturdays I have a (INAUDIBLE) board meetings where a
5 great big population of seniors come to my office. We
6 do free lawyers on Tuesday, pantry on Wednesday, two
7 free immigration lawyers in my office, so I would
8 love if you could come to our office to make sure
9 that our community knows that these programs exist,
10 and we try to do it but, if we don't have the people
11 right there to show them and my office does it also,
12 but having you as a partner would be great so I'm
13 looking forward to working with you.

14 It's sad that the only time our
15 constituents find out about SCRIE is when they're
16 about to get evicted so that's something we have to
17 really put in place as soon as possible. Thank you.

18 Thank you, Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
20 Member.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Thank you so much
22 to this in-person panel. We appreciate it.

23 At this point, if there's anyone in the
24 room who wishes to testify but has not done so,

2 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
3 at-Arms.

4 Seeing none, we will move on to our
5 virtual panelists.

6 I'm going to call the names. Please wait
7 for the Sergeant-at-Arms to call time before you
8 begin your testimony.

9 We are going to hear first from Joshua
10 Bentley.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin when
12 you're ready.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PEPE: Joshua Bentley is
14 not present so we will move on to Sabine Ovide
15 (phonetic).

16 Sabine is not present.

17 At this time, if there is anyone on Zoom
18 who has not had their name called but would like to
19 testify, please indicate so using the Zoom raise hand
20 function.

21 Seeing no hands, turning it back to the
22 Chair for closing remarks.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.
24 Thanks, again, to the Administration, specifically to
25 the Department of Finance and NYC Aging, for their

2 testimonies today, thank you to my Colleagues,
3 Council Members Schulman and Dinowitz, for their
4 pieces of legislation that will certainly help make
5 aging in place here in New York City a lot easier,
6 and thanks to everyone for their testimony and my
7 Colleagues for their questions.

8 I now call this hearing adjourned.

9 [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date December 3, 2023