

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

1

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

----- X

December 3, 2025

Start: 10:12 a.m.

Recess: 2:09 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 1

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés
Chris Banks
Chi A. Ossé
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Gale A. Brewer
Yusef Salaam

A P P E A R A N C E S

Reesa Henderson, Chief Housing Officer at the New York City Human Resources Administration

Christopher Gonzalez, Chief Strategy Officer at the New York City Department of Social Services

Andrea Reid, Executive Deputy Commissioner of Housing Services Administration at the New York City Human Resources Administration

Calvin Michael, Safety Net Activist Project at Urban Justice Center

Elizabeth Mackey, VOCAL-NY

Kezzie Thomas, Family Action Board

Noam Cohen, VOCAL-NY

Diana Ramos, Safety Net Activists

Robert Desir, Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Society

Alexandra Dougherty, Supervising Attorney at the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services

Christopher Mann, Women in Need

Graham Horn, Coordinating Attorney at New York Legal Assistance Group's Shelter Advocacy and Economic Stability Project

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

Maritza Rico, New Destiny Housing

Molly Zeif, Housing Navigator at Sanctuary for Families

Katie Liptak, Special Assistant at Anthos Home

Eustacia Smith, Westside Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing

Basha Gerhards, Executive Vice President of Public Policy for the Real Estate Board of New York

Miranda DeNovo, community organizer

Alexis Foote, self

Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing and Policy at Neighbors Together

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Paris Dickey, self

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone check for the Committee on General Welfare, recorded on December 3rd, 2025, located in Hearing Room 1 by Nazly Paytuvi.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, good morning. Welcome to the New York City Council hearing on the Committee on General Welfare.

At this time, please silence all electronics and do not approach the dais. I repeat, please do not approach the dais.

If you are testifying today, make sure you have filled out a slip with the Sergeant-at-Arms in the reception area.

Chair Ayala, you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [GAVEL] Good morning, everyone. My name is Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy Speaker of the New York City Council and the Chair of the General Welfare Committee.

We are here today to hold an oversight hearing on the administration of the City's CityFHEPS program. We are also hearing several bills, Intro. 1366, sponsored by Council Member Yusef Salaam, Intro. 1430, sponsored by Council Member Tiffany Cabán, and Intros 1458, 1459, and 1477, sponsored by

Council Member Gale Brewer. All of these bills are related to making the application process for benefits, including rental assistance vouchers, easier to navigate and more transparent. The sponsors will be speaking in further detail about their bills shortly, hopefully.

As this will likely be our Committee's last oversight hearing this legislative session, I can think of no more important topic than CityFHEPS to close off the session. It is no surprise that affordable housing is at the top of the list of issues New Yorkers struggle with. Our homelessness crisis is ballooning. As policymakers, we need to be thoughtful about our approach to support those who are at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness. To our outgoing Mayor, that does not mean that we put forward every possible roadblock that our partners in government make to strengthen the social safety net. What it means is working together. The City has a long history of developing housing voucher programs to support New Yorkers into stable, permanent housing. In 2018, then-Mayor de Blasio consolidated several such voucher programs to create what is now known as the CityFHEPS program.

CityFHEPS assists households in the community who are at risk of homelessness or are referred by specific City agencies to avert the need to enter the shelter system. CityFHEPS also helps households who are already in the City's shelter system to obtain permanent housing. This program not only provides individuals with vital resources to secure housing, but also provides individuals the opportunity to work with specialists after securing housing to ensure that the housing is maintained and that they do not enter back into homelessness or become at risk of eviction.

Housing vouchers have proven to be an effective solution to addressing homelessness and affordability. Rental assistance programs in Fiscal Year 2025 assisted 14,065 households, or 30,777 individuals in New York City through April of this year. 87.4 of those were with CityFHEPS vouchers. While CityFHEPS has the potential to serve as a sustainable solution to the economic crisis households and individuals continue to experience in New York City, it is undeniable that there are practical challenges. We have heard that voucher programs, including CityFHEPS, can be plagued with

administrative issues, delays, and complications such as source of income discrimination that make the voucher difficult to access and use. The General Welfare Committee hopes that this hearing can provide a forum to understand the administration of the CityFHEPS voucher program, including successes, obstacles, and lessons learned.

We recognize that several improvements have been made to the administration of this program in recent years and we also celebrate those improvements. We look forward to hearing from representatives of the Administration about the administration of the CityFHEPS program, including current data on how the program is benefiting New Yorkers and where the potential pitfalls lie in ensuring that it is effectively and efficiently implemented.

Separately but relatedly, we recognize that the CityFHEPS program continues to be the subject of ongoing litigation. We are here today not to discuss the litigation but to rather understand the way the program is being implemented and has been implemented since before the City Council passed the legislation that is subject to ongoing litigation.

We thank members of the Administration for speaking to these issues today. I also want to thank the advocates and the individuals who are here today that can speak to their direct experiences with CityFHEPS.

We also will be hearing from several voucher holders today, and I encourage members of the Administration to remain in the room to hear their testimony.

Finally, I want to thank the General Welfare Committee who helped to prepare this hearing and all hearings. They are a fantastic crew and I have been very humbled and proud to work alongside them. They have become family and have made this experience so unforgettable. So, thank you guys. Let me give them a little round of applause. (APPLAUSE)

Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel; Nina Rosenberg, Senior Policy Analyst; Justin Campos, Policy Analyst; Julia Haramis, Unit Head; Phariha Rahman, Finance Analyst; Elisabeth Childress-Garcia, Finance Analyst. And finally, my Staff, Elsie Encarnacion, Chief-of-Staff.

I will now turn it over to Council Member Salaam to give remarks on his bill.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Good morning, and thank you Chair Ayala for bringing my bill into Intro. 1366 to a vote today, and my sincere thanks to our Committee Staff, to all my Colleagues who have co-sponsored this legislation, and to my Budget and Legislative Director Mufazzal Hossain for his leadership and thoughtful brainstorming in shaping this bill.

Intro. 1366 is about something very simple, but deeply impactful. Accessibility. For too long, applying for benefits and services has required children, older adults, and people with disabilities to make repeated trips to DSS and HRA centers, or to navigate the slow and uncertain process of mailing forms back and forth. For many families, that means taking time off from work, securing transportation, arranging child care, or physically enduring the process that should not be so demanding. What this bill does is bring our benefits system into the 21st century. It requires the Department to create web-based application forms, mirroring paper applications, interactive, accessible, and completable from the comfort of one's own home. Whether you are a caregiver applying on behalf of a

child, an older adult with mobility challenges, or a disabled New Yorker who simply cannot stand in line for hours, this bill makes it possible to apply with ease, independence, and safety. And importantly, we are not removing any existing options. Paper applications, mail forms, fax forms, and in-person submissions will all remain in place. What we are doing is adding an additional pathway, an option that expands access rather than restricts it. Our social safety net should not be difficult to reach. With this bill, we make it more humane, more efficient, and more equitable for New Yorkers who rely on it the most. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And before we move on to Council Member Brewer to give remarks on her bills, I want to recognize that we've also been joined by Council Members Ossé and Riley.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for all your leadership on CityFHEPS.

And I have three bills, 1458 streamlines inspections. I know we've all had individuals who contacted our office because a missing fire escape, a dirty stove, they're all treated the same. They

trigger a full re-inspection, delaying the move-ins. Sometimes owners say, goodbye, I'm not renting. It establishes clear standards that distinguish major safety hazards from minor issues, allowing small repairs to be fixed on-site or through an online portal so it doesn't delay the rental. This cuts down unnecessary re-inspections and clears apartments faster so that move-in can take place.

Intro. 1477, 15-day application response. Families can't wait forever, weeks, months, to find out whether their application is approved. That uncertainty leads to missed opportunities and extended shelter time. It requires the Department of Social Services to respond within 15 days, whether it's an approval, a denial, or where are your missing documents. This brings predictability and fairness to a system that impacts some of our most vulnerable households.

And finally, 1459, transparency on lease-up time. As you know, I'm a huge data nut. We can't fix what we don't measure. This Intro. mandates annual reporting on lease-up times, how long it actually takes for a family to go from voucher to keys. It'll identify bottlenecks and help us to hold

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

12

2 the city accountable. I hate asking more work on
3 behalf of DSS, but this, I think, lease-up time will
4 give us the data we need. Thank you very much, Madam
5 Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, and seeing
7 no other Members, I would now like to turn it over to
8 our Committee Counsel, Aminta Kilawan, to swear in
9 the members of the Administration.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KILAWAN: Good morning,
11 everyone. Will you please raise your right hand?

12 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
13 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
14 testimony before this Committee and to respond
15 honestly to Council Member questions?

16 Andrea Reid.

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: I do.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KILAWAN: Thank you.
19 Christopher Gonzalez.

20 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KILAWAN: Thank you, and
22 Reesa Henderson.

23 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KILAWAN: Thank you all
25 so much, and you may begin when ready.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Good morning, Deputy Speaker Ayala and the Members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Reesa Henderson, and I serve as the Chief Housing Officer at the Human Resources Administration, HRA. Joining me today are Christopher Gonzalez, Chief Strategy Officer at the Department of Social Services, DSS, and Andrea Reid, Executive Deputy Commissioner of Housing Services Administration at HRA. Thank you for holding today's hearing on the CityFHEPS program.

CityFHEPS is a City-fighting homelessness and eviction prevention supplement. Today, CityFHEPS is the second-largest rental subsidy program in the nation. More than 60,000 households made up of more than 136,000 New Yorkers are using CityFHEPS to support their housing needs. Eligibility for CityFHEPS depends on a variety of criteria, including household income, housing situation, and history of homelessness.

CityFHEPS is one component of a larger strategy to provide an integrated continuum of client services and a path to sustainability for low-income New Yorkers. We continue to see that path as rooted in three pillars. One, streamlining access to social

services. Two, addressing homelessness and housing instability. And three, creating economic stability.

Though our focus today is on CityFHEPS, I do want to highlight our vision placing CityFHEPS in a broader context in assisting the more than three million New Yorkers we serve. In addition to CityFHEPS, the New York State Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement, StateFHEPS, the Housing Choice Voucher Program, also known as Section 8, and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, HPD, and the New York City Housing Authority, NYCHA Housing, all serve as important tools in providing crucial aid and support to New Yorkers.

In the broader policy context, it is also important to recognize that other levels of government share the responsibility to devote resources to support housing stability broadly and through rental assistance in particular. As Commissioner Park has related to the Council, we underscored a need for further investment by our New York State and federal government partners. Their shared investment in housing subsidies is essential to ensuring New Yorkers at risk of housing

instability receive as many resources as possible.

DSS has done significant work to strengthen

CityFHEPS, but it is also important to note that this

work is happening in a context that presents numerous

ongoing challenges. The New York City vacancy rate of

1.4 percent is the lowest since 1968. Furthermore,

the vacancy rate is lower than 1.4 percent for

affordable rental units. For households searching for

units under 1,100 dollars, the vacancy rate was 0.39

percent. Those vacancy rates make it extremely

difficult to secure affordable housing, even with a

voucher. We recognize the urgent need to sustain

efforts on the housing supply side of the challenge.

Even as a record number of New Yorkers are using

CityFHEPS to pay their rent, there are more than

10,000 households with CityFHEPS vouchers in shelter

looking for housing.

In the face of these challenges, the City

and DSS continue to innovate and partner with City

agencies in mobilizing resources to assist our

clients. Despite the challenges, our City's

investment in rental assistance has proven

successful. FY24 saw over 12,000 households

permanently housed through CityFHEPS. FY25 saw 15,000

households permanently housed with CityFHEPS. Counting by households served since FY22, CityFHEPS has seen more than 200 percent growth in the program. During the Adams Administration, the program has grown even more rapidly with a 120 percent increase in the number of households using the voucher and nearly five-fold increase in funding from the program. FY21 at 253 million to FY25 at 1.1 billion. In FY25, CityFHEPS continues to be the primary driver for shelter move-outs, accounting for two-thirds of subsidized exits.

In sum, CityFHEPS continues to be the most valuable, beneficial, and significant resource supporting shelter move-outs. CityFHEPS outcomes serve as a testament to the steps forward that DSS has taken in expanding access to CityFHEPS and expediting the process of vouchers by streamlining systems, strengthening oversight, and implementing a technological overhaul to enhance efficiencies. The average days from submission to approval has come down from a high of 33 days during 2024 to a recent low of around 23 days, which represents a decline of 33 percent. This progress has been the result of deliberate, intentional work. For example, we

established a Concierge Unit as a pilot program in the last year. The Concierge Unit focuses on working with shelters to assist in meeting move-out goals. The team engages with providers both on-site and off-site to share resources and best practices in the rehousing process. Sending support staff to shelters and providing concierge support has yielded promising results thus far, with the first two cohorts of participating shelters showing increases in subsidized exits. In the first two cohorts, we saw an improvement in total placements for a majority of shelters that participated in the program. We aim to strengthen the unit in the future.

With regard to the clearance process, which looks at administrative records, example deeds and violations, in advance of a package being processed, we have taken steps to make this component of the larger process move more quickly. For example, instead of simply failing offers that incorrect owner information, we can now provide the correct information to the submitter and offer guidance. Through taking various measures to further automate the clearance process and linking the process to

tools like HPD online, we have made progress in expediting this step in the larger workflow.

Another area we further refine with an eye towards expediting the process is processing cash assistance applications for CityFHEPS. Previously, a household receiving cash assistance would have their CityFHEPS application sent for rebudgeting, that is processing an examination of household income information, for example pay stubs, potentially serving as a site of delay. Now, we are able to use the New York State Welfare Management System, WMS, and need not rebudget cash assistance cases.

Cumulatively, taking steps like bolstering providers' capacity to engage a system with a Concierge Unit, streamlining the clearance process, and taking advantage of WMS where practicable results in fewer obstacles delaying the overall process timeline.

Homebase serves as a key pathway for access to CityFHEPS in the community. HRA oversees Homebase sites across the five boroughs. The Homebase program provides various homelessness prevention services as well as aftercare support services to families and individuals exiting shelter and moving

to permanent housing. New Yorkers may be eligible for Homebase if they are at imminent risk of entering the New York City shelter system, are low income, and want to remain stably housed in their community. Once in the program, dedicated Homebase staff are available in each borough to evaluate a household's specific needs and offer supports such as services to prevent eviction, assistance obtaining public benefits, emergency rental assistance, utilities and rent payments, support to address arrears, short-term financial assistance, educational job placement assistance, and help relocating.

Part of CityFHEPS success rates stem from DSS, HRA, DHS provision of assistance to clients in their search to find permanent housing from day one. Beginning at the point of shelter entry through the issuance of the shopping letter and to the point of move out from shelter, our dedicated DHS and provider staff support clients in their housing search process. The process includes case management, connecting clients with the tools to obtain employment, the work of shelter housing specialists engaged in finding apartment leads, and the work of the HRA apartment search team and the public

engagement unit make apartments available to all shelter providers. We are focused on working together to make sure subsidy applications are accurate and process efficiently.

In addition to the work of our staff, I would also like to recognize the enterprising work of providers, advocates, and all other stakeholder partners in this process. Further, I would like to recognize the strong determination of our clients in being absolutely central to taking that next step in their path to housing stability.

At DSS, we understand the need to make the system of social services as navigable for clients and those assisting our clients as possible. We work to connect every New Yorker with the benefits and social services for which they're eligible. We also have to recognize that the needs and eligibility of households vary. For instance, eligibility for assistance for a given program for a veteran may differ from that of someone needing supportive housing. There will be documentation requirements involved because we are working to link people with the resources that serve their individual circumstances best, and because we're working with

the state and federal partners with their own requirements.

We continue to work to reduce administrative burden borne by clients as much as we can by designing innovative systems like AccessHRA and CurrentNYC. We're also in the process of creating sensible workflows and automated linkages that assist our clients, our community partners, and our staff through the process. We recognize that doing so eases the burden and reduces the stress that our clients face as they endeavor to secure an affordable apartment in the housing market where there is a short supply.

I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the Council's June 2025 report which focuses on process improvements and streamlining access. We remain committed to working closely with the Council and hearing your ideas on creating efficiencies and improving our service delivery. When assessing changes, we keep in mind that a regulatory, operational, timeline, and cost considerations all need to be taken into account. That includes taking into consideration where our New York State oversight body, the Office of Temporary and Disability

Assistance, OTDA, has offered direction on where federal authorities have issued mandates, where a given change may require significant technology investment, where stakeholders flag that a timeline may not be realistic, or where change may be cost prohibitive.

Turning now to the legislation being heard today. Intro. 1366, sponsored by Council Member Salaam, would require the Department of Social Services, DSS, to create web forms for any forms that must be completed by an applicant to apply for benefits and services through DSS. The web forms would allow applicants to directly input information and electronically sign applications and forms online. DSS would be required to continue to accept paper applications and forms that are mailed, faxed, or delivered in person. We are supportive of the aims of this legislation. That is why AccessHRA, our online benefits portal, and mobile app for New York City residents has served as a critical tool in connecting New Yorkers to benefits. We appreciate the constructive dialogue we have had with the Council thus far on Intro. 1366 and look forward to continuing to share our insights about our processes

to use technology at our disposal to link New Yorkers to benefits. Note that our systems operate in the context of New York state and federal laws, regulations, and directives on various aspects of the benefits administration process, including applications, processing, security, and confidentiality. DSS works with the guardrails that state and federal oversight bodies have established. In addition, the way DSS operationalizes some of the programs does not lend itself well to an external web form apparatus. In some instances, staff and providers guide clients through a process. In those instances, web forms are not necessarily the best and most efficient way to enroll clients for those services. Nonetheless, with amendments to recognize that legal and regulatory context, we can support this legislation.

Intro. 1430, sponsored by Council Member Cabán, would require the Department of Social Services to provide confirmation notice in hard copy or electronically to applicants of public assistance regarding their benefits interview. The notice would include a confirmation number, the date, time, and location of the interview, the phone number from

which the interview was conducted, if the interview is via telephone, and all other relevant information. We support providing applicants with the information they need as they proceed through the benefits application process. If I may briefly review the current process for interviewing for cash assistance and SNAP applications and recertification interviews, the process proceeds along two tracks. One track is for the linked cash and SNAP applications and recertifications on the other side, and the other track is exclusively cash applications on the other side. For cash and SNAP applications and recertifications, the process is as follows. The client submits an application or recertification and calls for an on-demand interview. At the end of the interview, the system automatically generates the interview kept status and the receipt. The kept interview notification is available on AccessHRA for SNAP immediately. The interview receipt, the FIA 1173, is placed in a print-to-mail queue to be mailed and is electronically added to the case file for both SNAP and cash. The receipt is physically mailed within one to five days. The notice, the FIA 1173, is available on AccessHRA when it has completed the

print-to-mail queue. Once mailed, the document becomes available in OneViewer and AccessHRA. For cash applications and recertification interviews, the interview status is not currently available online. We would have to build the functionality to add interview status to our system. We would like to have further discussions with the Council about the bill to clarify the scope of the program covered and to accommodate measures necessary to prevent phishing and fraud attempts targeting clients and to flag that the confirmation number, location, and phone number data points identified in the bill which are at variance with current operation. For cash assistance, our assessment thus far is that 90 days for implementation would not be sufficient to make adjustments to information technology systems to implement the changes this proposal requires.

Intro. 1458, sponsored by Council Member Brewer, in the relation to the procedure for determining that a dwelling unit is habitable for the purposes of the CityFHEPS program, laying out requirements for DSS deeming a dwelling unit habitable before approving CityFHEPS rental assistance for the unit. Intro. 1458 defines certain

conditions as major and minor and describes how DSS should proceed given such conditions. DSS agrees with the spirit of this legislation as we do too want to use the tools in our toolbox to sensibly and safely expedite conditions. That said, we would like to have further discussions with the Council on this bill.

There are three points I would like to share in this forum. First, as written, this bill would require DSS conduct more in-person inspections than is our current process. At present, DSS uses virtual inspections in certain defined circumstances to speed the process. As written, we believe this bill would roll back our ability to conduct virtual inspections and slow some of our efforts to accelerate the inspection process.

Second, DSS is piloting an effort to expedite the unit inspection process. We aim to gain insights from this pilot to further refine our process for addressing condition concerns.

Third, if the aim of this bill is to impose NYCHA public housing assessment conditions on the CityFHEPS program, I would make this point that the two programs are incongruent. Therefore, having this checklist of requirements including in-person

inspections would only serve to delay a process that we're doing our best to expedite as much as possible so we can get people housed quickly without compromising safety conditions for clients.

Intro. 1459, sponsored by Council Member Brewer, would require DSS to submit to the Mayor, Council Speaker, and to include in the Mayor's Management, MMR, Report the average time it takes for an individual to secure housing after receiving a housing voucher. We support transparency and delivering accurate, timely, actionable information to stakeholders to assist in making informed assessments and ultimately public policy choices. In the case of Intro. 1459, we want to have further discussions with Council about the metrics involved in this bill.

Intro. 1477, sponsored by Council Member Brewer, would require DSS to respond to an application for CityFHEPS within 15 days after receiving the application. The response would inform the applicant of whether the application has been approved, denied, or requires correction or additional information. There are many factors in managing the CityFHEPS application. Although we would

like to strive for the 15-day goal, legislating the agency respond within 15 days may not be practical considering our current average is 23 days from completed rental application to decision. Once we receive an application, we work with the housing specialist and provider to make sure the information we have is up to date as possible. Through that process, we do our best to keep the clients informed of the status of their application. Clients check in with their case managers regarding their independent living plans, or ILPs, are a key avenue for sharing information and updates as to the application status. ILPs check-ins occur bi-weekly.

On behalf of my colleagues, I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize Deputy Speaker Ayala's leadership on the Committee on General Welfare. The lived experiences you have shared and the deep knowledge and insights you bring to your work and benefits administration and human services will live on far beyond your tenure as Chair of the Committee, and we are thankful and better off for having worked with such a fierce advocate for New Yorkers in need. We appreciate the opportunity to testify today and welcome your questions.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Don't try to make me cry in my last hearing, but really it's been my pleasure. You know, never would I have imagined when I was a wee little girl, you know, that all of those struggles and challenges and lessons learned would, you know, allow me a platform to be able to utilize those experiences to help other New Yorkers that are facing similar challenges so it's really been, you know, one of the best experiences of my life and, you know, all of you have helped to make that statement true so thank you.

I'm going to switch things around a little bit just, you know, as a courtesy to my fellow Members of the Committee. It's my parting gift. I'm going to allow them to ask questions first.

Council Member Salaam.

Oh, sorry, I wanted to acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council Member Avilés, Restler, Banks, and Stevens.

Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I appreciate the fact that, at least for the bills that I'm interested in, you certainly made

clear that there's possibility of working together and trying to improve them.

I guess for the one on 1458, which is how to make a unit habitable faster, when you do the virtual, which is obviously, you know, a good way to go about stuff, what I would be concerned about would be, I'm making this up as an idea, but the stove is broken, that could be fixed faster perhaps than maybe an outdoor escape route, fire escape. I think what happens, these suggestions are coming from providers. They're not because Gale Brewer knows a damn thing. It has to do with the fact that these are all coming from real people dealing with real problems that need to be addressed. Every single day they're dealing with this. So my question is, can you do it, these issues that might be minor, can they do it virtually? I understand not wanting to go, you know, to see everything, but something's wrong when a stove and a fire escape are both in the same bailiwick as to a problem, because you fix the stove fast.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah.

The pilot that we're launching in the coming weeks for reinspections allows us to identify what we qualify as minor. So in your example, like a stove,

heat or hot water, those things qualify as minor. We are going to be giving the provider the ability to reinspect virtually because we believe those could be remedied quite easily, so it's all designed with an eye of speed and convenience as well to all the stakeholders. So, we're looking forward to the pilot and obviously we'll learn from the pilot and if there are other items that can be qualified as minor, we'll add them to our considerations.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So, what percentage of units do fail now? Do you have any in that number?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Thank you, Council Member for your question. I will pass this one to my colleague, Andrea Reid.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: (INAUDIBLE)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You got to push the button. There you go. Thank you.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you, Council Member for that question, Chief Henderson. We take habitability decisions very seriously and we're committed to ensuring that inspections and reinspections are being processed timely. There are different means of conducting the inspections. Some

are done by our providers and some are done by HRA staff. And inspections, as we mentioned, are conducted in two ways, in-person and virtually. The virtual inspections are a tool that we have put in place over a year now when in-person is not feasible. We promote virtual inspection as a mechanism to expedite the scheduling and results. A unit that is inspected by a provider may fail. They use the checklist that we provide, but when they fail, they then work with the landlords and providers to make sure those failures are corrected. As part of our policy, we require that any unit that's in a basement, cellar, first floor, or attic must be inspected by HRA, given those types of units have a higher likelihood of failure. In Calendar Year 2025, of all the inspections that were conducted on basement, cellar, first floor, or attics, about half of them failed, and so we are intentional in making sure that those units are legal for our participants.

As our Chief mentioned, in a few weeks or in the coming year, we're launching the expedited reinspection pilot, where units that fail for those conditions that you mentioned, you know, the stove, the window guard, the minor ones, that the owners can

send us photos documenting that the failures have been corrected.

Additionally, we have a pilot that is a grant-funded program that's administered by our partner, Anthos, where we can conduct minor repairs for small landlords.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's Laura Lazarus, right? That's Laura Lazarus.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: That's Laura, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know everybody.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Great. Our partners there to conduct minor repairs that are under 5,000 dollars. And so, in addition to that, we have digitized the apartment review checklist, and we think like all those tools will help to get us decisions in sooner and speedier time frames.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I didn't get the percentage, and then I just also want to know of failures. And also, now what's the average time between the failed inspection and the reinspection? Maybe it depends whether it's a cellar or regular apartment. I understand that. But what's the time generally?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: The timeframe
3 depends on the type of repair. If it's minor and
4 small, it could be quick, but sometimes there are
5 capital repairs that may take longer. So, it all
6 depends.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That kind of data,
8 I must admit, is needed, to be honest with you. I
9 know you may not have it now, but we would like to
10 get it to the Committee, and that is sort of what
11 we're talking about in the bills, to have more data.
12 Because that would help us, I think.

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yeah. We look
14 forward to working on that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And what's the
16 average number of inspections that each unit
17 undergoes until it passes? I guess some, what are
18 some of the common reasons why an inspection failed?
19 And then the average cost associated with remedying.
20 Obviously, that should come from the owner, but I'm
21 sure you get stuck with some of it. So the first
22 question is, what's the average number of inspections
23 that each unit undergoes until it passes, virtually
24 or in person or anything?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for
3 that question, Council Member. On average, there's
4 about two.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Two.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Inspection
7 that's required. And as I shared earlier, we are able
8 to support repairs that are 5,000 dollars or less to
9 help small landlords to get those repairs done
10 quickly. Again, if the repairs are based on a capital
11 project or bigger, larger repairs, then that might
12 take longer.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Longer, okay.

14 How many inspectors are there doing this
15 work? I guess you've got inspectors doing it
16 virtually. And then, when you say virtually, that
17 means that the owner has taken a photograph. I don't
18 know, what does that mean? Now, obviously the fancy
19 apartments have somebody, you know, when you look in
20 the newspapers, they got online, they got these
21 beautiful frigging Park Avenue. But that's not what
22 you're doing. So what is virtual mean?

23 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Virtual
24 means that the DHS staff or the HRA staff conducting
25 the inspection is doing so with a mobile device. And

on the other end, the landlord designee or the provider is also on a mobile device. Usually, it's like Skype, FaceTime, something like that we use to conduct the inspection. So, it's a walkthrough that happens.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, the owner or the manager has a device and then you at HRA have a device.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. No 3D stuff, I guess.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, how many inspectors are there? Obviously, some virtual, some in-person.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member. It's hard to say how many inspectors because many of the inspections are done by the provider. But internally, we have about five on board and some vacancies that were filled.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Those folks just focus on CityFHEPS, those five?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yes. Primarily CityFHEPS.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: And the priority
4 floors that I mentioned before, basement, cellar,
5 first floor, and attics.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then,
7 how many inspectors are virtual versus in-person? Is
8 it like half and half? Is it more virtual?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Trained to do
10 both.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're trained to
12 do both.

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, but in
15 general, do you think they're more virtual than in...

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: In-person.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: In person. I guess
18 it depends on whether it's a cellar or a regular
19 apartment kind of situation. Okay.

20 Madam Chair, I could keep going but if
21 you you want to go to somebody else for inspections,
22 I'll come back because I have many for the next bill.
23 Go ahead.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I felt like I had a
25 follow-up question and then I got, I forgot what it

was based on one of the questions that Council... oh, I think, I'm not sure if you answered this but Council Member Brewer asked about the percentage of inspections that are done virtual versus in-person. What is that number?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: We don't have that information with us, but I would say the vast majority is in-person versus virtual. We have to have the agreement of the landlord designated to virtual. Many landlords opt for the in-person option.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I would, I don't want to assume but in the event where virtual is the preferred option, is that used for a follow-up to a failed inspection or would that be used as an initial inspection?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Both.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It can. Okay. I guess I would be a little bit concerned about the reliability.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I don't trust the owners.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I mean, I think that because with technology, right, you can make things look a lot better or a lot worse than they

actually are, and so it's difficult, it would be difficult for me to kind of assess, I guess depending on the nature of the work needed. And in those cases where we're helping the landlord offset the cost of minor repairs, you mentioned that you can, you know, budget up to 5,000. Is there a budget for that?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah, it's grant funded. It's a small budget, about 400,000 dollars that we're trying to expend. We've been marketing the program excessively in the past few months. It's designed for small landlords because we feel there might be inclination for smaller landlords to take on the offer to get into the program so we're excited to see what the results of this brings to bear. But it's a very new program that we launched earlier this summer.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And who determines what the actual cost of such repairs is?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Our partner Anthos is managing the initiative with us. They are the point of contact. The entire network is able to refer to them and they will work with the landlords on corrections.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They can be
3 trusted. Laura can be trusted.

4 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What would you
6 consider a small landlord?

7 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Under
8 100 units.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Under 100 units. Okay.

11 I'm going just quickly move on. I have
12 more questions, but I am going to move on to Council
13 Member Restler because Council Member Riley is not
14 here. He stepped away for a minute.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you very
16 much. I can't say enough about how special a leader
17 our Deputy Speaker has been. And you know, it's
18 today's Steve Levin's birthday, and Steve used to
19 chair this Committee, I think for eight years. He had
20 a good run. And he was my predecessor. And when his
21 time in the Council was coming to an end, the thing
22 he cared most about was having a strong successor on
23 this Committee. And when Diana's name came up as a
24 potential replacement, like Steve was enamored with
25 the idea, because you just don't find a more caring

and decent and thoughtful and effective leader than Diana Ayala. And she has brought, as you noted, Ms. Henderson, all of her lived experience and all of her expertise, a lifetime of expertise to leading this Committee, and we've been incredibly fortunate to have her at the helm of our General Welfare Committee. It's one of the most important Committees in the Council. And Diana, you've just done a superb job so I am very grateful to you from the bottom of my heart.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you give him his whole time? I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: All right. I do love that lady a lot. On the record.

So, I appreciate the topic of the hearing today and appreciate the DSS team for their testimony. Just a few questions from me. I'm particularly interested in SOI discrimination. And if you could share with us how many complaints for source of income discrimination are there relating to CityFHEPS vouchers? I know at different times DSS had thought about kind of creating its own investigative unit to try to rein in the rampant discrimination against voucher holders. I don't believe that's

ongoing. So what data is CCHR sharing with you and what trend lines are you seeing?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Thank you for that question. We would defer to CCHR on that. This function is handled by them. We don't have metrics on it, but we can check in with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Any trend lines that you can share? I mean, we've seen a major increase in the utilization of vouchers so you would assume there's also an increase in discrimination happening against voucher holders that would be consistent. Is there anything you can share with us or any trends? What are the most common reasons that landlords are providing to your team about why CityFHEPS vouchers are being rejected? I mean, I've generally found CCHR's handling of source of income discriminations to be wildly inept and incredibly disappointing and, you know, had been excited when DSS tried to take on some of those functions themselves because of how badly CCHR has failed at this over a period of many years, frankly, since the creation of the CityFHEPS voucher, but that's no longer something that you all are doing. So what are we doing to, I mean, from DSS's standpoint, what are

you doing to try to prevent discrimination? What reasons are landlords giving you for not accepting these vouchers and how are we trying to mitigate it?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: What we have been doing is really doubling down on our marketing and engagement of landlords. We have quarterly sessions with landlords in our network. We continue to expand and promote the subsidy as much as we can in-city and out-of-city. Obviously a tick-up, as you mentioned, has increased over the last recent years. Our internal protocols has been to refer to the CCHR, to the providers in instances where clients have alleged income discrimination. But we have done a lot of work to really explain, educate, and really promote the subsidy. We can get back to you on any data that CCHR may have, but we defer to them on the metrics.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: There was a hearing not too long ago where Commissioner Park testified to a 24-day period from submission of CityFHEPS package to the landlord to lease up. And there was like guffaws in the audience because, no, it just didn't make sense, so could you help me just

understand, what's the average time from the first submission of a preclearance package to move-in date?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Andrea, may I?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you, Council Member, for that question. We take processing CityFHEPS applications very serious. We are continuing to work to strengthen the CityFHEPS program, assisting clients on their housing journey to housing security. The question is not easily answered. There are a number of dependencies from shopping letter to moving into a unit, a number of actions making the timeline relative, but not easily answered. The dependents are based on a client's individual circumstances. They may be experiencing domestic violence survivor experience issues that exclude some boroughs from them. A family, you know, may need to choose to enroll in their child in child care before going on a view-in. There's also the habitability concerns that we discussed earlier.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I recognize there's any variety of concerns that any family is going to have before they move into an apartment that we all have to navigate whenever any of us move, but

the crux of the question, and what I'm really getting at here, is that for CityFHEPS to be competitive beyond cost, we have to be able to move efficiently, right, and so from the time that that package is first submitted to, is (TIMER CHIME) the first moment that that submission of a preclearance package is made to when we actually get to move in, right, if that time frame is three months, four months, five months, we're just no longer going to be able to hold an apartment for that tenant to be able to actually get it. And so what I think Commissioner Park was testifying to when she spoke to us earlier in the year was that it's from the final package being submitted to move in with a 24-day period, which doesn't seem crazy, but if it's that first package, it's taken us many, many months to get to that final package being ready for submission, then we've lost the apartment more often than not. So landlords just aren't keeping these apartments there for us for three, four, five, six months. And I'm not putting words in your mouth, I'm looking for the data, I'd like the data for when that first submission is made, because that's what we should... we should be tracking it. I get all of the different variables that a

2 family needs to figure out, I'm not asking you to
3 solve for all of those, but I do want the data for
4 when, so can you, that's the bill, I get it, but what
5 can we share with us today? And that's why I support
6 your bill.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, thank you,
8 Lincoln.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Council Member
10 Brewer, I'm always proud to support your good
11 legislation.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for
13 that, Council Member. As I mentioned, you know, we
14 take this very seriously, and speed is very important
15 to us. I'm happy to share that, you know, since the
16 testimony, we're now at 23 days from the time the
17 package is submitted.. (CROSS-TALK)

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (INAUDIBLE) Like
19 I'm trying to understand the breadth of the process,
20 not from the final package to move in, because I
21 think that really is the crux of what Council Member
22 Brewer is rightly trying to accomplish.

23 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: The 23
24 days includes all the back and forth.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: It does.

2 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: It does.
3 Right, the average of 23 days includes all the back
4 and forth. Obviously if there are no errors in the
5 package, it's way less, half the time, right? But if
6 there's a back and forth that's required, a deed
7 needs to be resubmitted, or a lease needs to be re-
8 executed, obviously multiple stakeholders are
9 involved, it adds time to the process.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So just so I
11 understand it, the data point you're providing to us
12 on this 23 days is the first submission of a pre-
13 clearance package to move in. You believe that is a
14 20...

15 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: 23 days
16 for a rental application to be reviewed and approved,
17 not pre-clearances.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay.

19 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: This
20 explains the process by which the provider submits
21 the rental application to our office, and we, an
22 average of 23 days for us to approve the application.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay.

24 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Right?
25 That is after all of the upstream steps have been

done with inspections, right? The provider is only submitting a complete package to us.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. I really think to... we need to have a better accounting for the time frame more broadly, not just from when the rental package is submitted to the turnaround, because we all know with a 1.4 percent vacancy rate, as you testified, and every member of the Adams Administration likes to remind us at every hearing, it's terribly low vacancy rate, especially, and it's even lower for very low-income apartments. So, or for lower, you know, more modestly for rents, for apartments at lower cost. So, these apartments are incredibly hard to get, and if it's taking three, four, five months, which is, I'm just assuming if you're baking in all the inspections and the back and forth to get to that point where the rental package is submitted, we're losing too many units, and I really think that we need to understand this data of the full time frame, and also understand how many units we're losing as a result of that time frame, so that we can all work together to streamline things, and I appreciate the hearing and the package of bills that hopefully...

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member, just one second, the live stream is... I think we're having some technical...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm all set. I appreciate the... and I will say, Ms. Henderson, I...

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Lincoln, we should stop talking.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We should stop talking. All right. Nobody cares what I got to say.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Nobody's going to hear... it's not going to be recorded. You're going to have to say it again.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: It's fine. I was going to say something nice about Reesa. I guess we want that recorded.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On the record.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: All right. Good.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are we good? We're good?

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: The internet stops working when I'm about to say something nice about something in the... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Go ahead, Lincoln. I'll give you back your second.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I was just going to say, I think it was close to a decade ago when we were having significant issues at PATH, and you were brought in to help improve the situation, did a phenomenal job, and I've just heard over many years that you're one of the best people we have who's working on homeless issues in the City of New York, and appreciate all your work and everything you've done to help support homeless individuals in our city.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON:
Appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Avilés followed by Stevens and Banks.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much, Chair.

I will save all my compliments for you, Deputy Speaker, later. But you are quite amazing, and we are lucky to have you.

I wanted to follow up on a couple different things. In terms of the inspectors, you noted five internally, and not sure how many inspectors are in the provider universe. Why is that? Do the contracts that are provided to the, I think

it's 26 home-based sites, do they not stipulate the minimum amount of inspectors?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: So I can start, and Andrea, please jump in and help me. So as Andrea testified a few minutes ago, inspections are done in two lanes. Provider staff are contracted to hire housing specialists, and their core function is really working with clients and supporting them in their journey of finding housing, as well as the rental application. For those providers, we have a sense of the work that they do because we're contracting with them, and they have staff working directly with them. There could be hundreds of staff in this lane. On the home-based side...

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: You just turned it off. There you go.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that, Council Member and Chief Henderson.

On the home-based side, the staffing model may be different for each of the providers, and so some may have someone that's like a housing specialist, but it's mainly their case management team that is working to conduct those inspections. And so the 16 contracts with their 26 sites, they

2 have staff that do conduct the inspections. I don't
3 know how many per...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yeah. It would be
5 important to know, right? I mean, there's thousands
6 of applications that are going at the same time, and
7 we see issues with the inspection timeframes.
8 Obviously, we're trying to make the whole system
9 efficient, but if we don't even know how many
10 inspectors are part of the provider universe that
11 we're funding, it just doesn't make sense. Could you
12 go back and see how many inspectors are actually
13 doing that work in the provider universe?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: We can.

15 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Sure.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay, great. And
17 you noted you consider small landlords 100 units. Is
18 that within a building or across multiple portfolios?

19 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON:
20 Building.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay. And why?

22 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: So we're
23 targeting the smaller landlords who otherwise would
24 pull out of the program, right, because of minor
25 issues. There may be newer mom-and-pop landlords

coming into the program. Larger landlords have the infrastructure to really address work orders and correction in a different way. So this is a support for smaller landlords. We're piloting. If there is a potential to scale up, we'll scale up as we evolve the program.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So what percentage of the stock where vouchers are provided are offered to smaller landlords?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: What percentage of the stock?

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yeah, yeah. I'm trying to understand... well, I don't understand someone holding 100 units being considered a small landlord. Yeah. So let's just start there.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah, small buildings... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: But even smaller, right? Folks where they're actual small homeowners that have two and three units are normally what we consider.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah. So 100 or less, right, will be targeted.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Do you have a
3 disaggregation of actually what it looks like? The
4 number of small buildings?

5 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: How many landlords
7 are actually holding 100 units or less? How many are
8 holding two or three units?

9 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: I'm not
10 sure I understand the question, but the Fast Lane
11 Program is directed to small landlords who are
12 entering the program who have failures, right? So you
13 have to have a failed inspection before we can offer
14 the Fast Lane Program to you, and we have decided
15 that small landlords qualify as 100 units or less.
16 Larger developments, larger companies, larger
17 buildings have the infrastructure to address the work
18 orders and expedite the repairs.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So I'm (TIMER
20 CHIME) just going to, Chair, if I may try to get you
21 a clearer question. So in this 100 units or less, I
22 think what I'm trying to understand is what
23 percentage of that universe are actual landlords that
24 have the larger buildings, let's say 50 to 100 units.
25 How many are holding, you know, in tier to understand

more of that universe and infrastructure? Because they don't need, the ones that have the larger infrastructure of 100 units, right, to handle all the bureaucracy is very distinct than from smaller landlords that maybe hold four units or two units.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: We don't have that data on hand today, but we can check on it.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great.

And then I guess lastly, just would you be able to provide a District breakdown of how many vouchers are within each Council District? Is that data you would happen to have? Voucher holders or applications coming from a Council District?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: We can check with our data people. We don't have that with us now, but we can get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Stevens.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Good morning. And unlike Council Member Avilés, I will not be holding my compliments for Deputy Speaker until later because the reality is I wouldn't be here without her. And

most people don't have the option or time to serve with their mentor, and I have had the pleasure of serving with my mentor for the last four years who showed me how to lead with compassion and love, and that's what she's done as Chair and as a Colleague, and so I'm so honored that I've been able to work with you. And I didn't realize this was her last hearing. So I'm emotional. I feel like I'm more emotional than she is, but I am devastated that she's not going to be side by side with me, but she's going to be somewhere, I'm sure, but I'm really honored that I got to serve with you, and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her because she's the person who gave me the courage to actually say, no, you could do this and so I will continue to hold up your legacy of leading with compassion, love, and really caring about our community and leading with experience because that's the other thing. We come from places where the things that we're talking about, this is not just talking about it because we read about it in a book, it's because we lived it. And that's a different type of experience and it's not taken from anyone else. But me and her, especially all of the CityFHEPS vouchers and when we're talking about

eviction, we're not talking about it because we heard about it or it happened to other people. We were both teen moms and we came up and we had to fight to get where we are so it's just been a pleasure to be here and I really appreciate it and you will be missed and I will continue your legacy.

Y'all can clap for her. I don't care. I know you're not supposed to clap, but I'm sure. Y'all not going to get kicked out. She'll allow it. People be clapping in my hearings. I'm a mess.

But to the Administration, I want to just go in really quickly because y'all know what I have to do. I have to invoke the young people into this conversation. And to me, it's still really unfortunate that young people do not have access to CityFHEPS vouchers in the way that they should. And I just want to just, again, on the record, get a better understanding of even with the expansion and understanding this, why we have not expanded these CityFHEPS vouchers so homeless runaway youths could have access to it in a real way, because we know that if we don't stop the cycle early, it just continues. And we know most people, young people, especially when they're aging out, do not want to go to a DHS

shelter, which is why we have the 18 to 21 shelters, because they don't want to go there because it's not safe and they're not comfortable and that's just not a good atmosphere for them. So why have we not allowed them to have access? And what are we doing to ensure that? Because I truly believe this would be a great way for us to stop the cycle of homelessness. And I just need a better understanding because every time I just don't, it's not a good explanation to me so maybe it's a new one today.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

I do want to share that we share the same passion that you have in ensuring that our young people and New Yorkers are housed. We have been partnering with our partners at DYCD and ACS. They both have had allotments to the CityFHEPS... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yes, we know that they have had allotments. No, this is what I'm saying. We know that they have allotments, but we know that it's not at the rate that they need it to, and we know that they are not having access. And so it does not make sense because it's as if we are

perpetuating the cycle so I just need a better understanding of like, yes, they have allotments. It's clearly not enough. So why have we not said, hey, we're going to allot even more for these young people?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Those are ongoing discussions within the agency and we hope to have more to share in the coming years.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I know. I've been here for four years, so when are discussions going to end?

Oh, you can't clap. I know I'm going to get out of trouble. Only in my hearings. When you all come to, we'll be clapping.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: No. I think Andrea is right. At DSS, we just underwent a reorg so we are a newly minted Housing Services Administration. We have a key focus on consolidating and streamlining and providing access to subsidy. These are conversations that we're going to be taking up internally to see what more we can do.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: It's driving me crazy. I just want to say, we're going to be starting again in January reset. And please do not come here

and tell me you're having conversations about it because I'm telling you I'm going to lose my mind. We've been saying this for four years, that we're having conversations and these young people are still in a cycle of poverty and it's not fair, and it does not make sense when it's like, you could see it, but why we're not doing it? And everyone agrees. You agree. I agree. DYCD agrees. ACS agrees. Everybody agrees. So I'm not really understanding where the disconnect is. If we all are saying this is something we want to see, we're all saying we don't want to see young people homeless. We're all saying this. So then give them access. Again, you're saying you're having conversations. Who do I need to have conversations with? Because I'm confused. Who should I speak to?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: So just to reiterate what...

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: No, no, no. I don't want to reiterate. I want to know who should I speak to because I want to be clear about who's having these conversations because for four years I've been asking the same question and I keep getting we're in discussion, and so who do I need to be in

discussion with because I thought I was in discussion with the right people.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Well, so to answer your question, these are larger Administration decisions that happen with the leadership of City Hall.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay, great. So you're saying talk to the Mayor? Got it.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: And as we... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Anybody else?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: As we are in a moment of transition, these are issues that we will obviously share with the transition team and look forward to figuring out what the new Mayor's vision is.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Got it. I'll speak to him myself. Thank you very much. I will speak to the new Administration because I will not be having this conversation for the next four years. Give young people access to the vouchers so we can stop the cycle of homelessness for these young people so that they are not in DHS shelters six months later and they're there and coming in and out so let's just

start there. So don't worry. I'll do it. Don't worry about it. I'll talk to him. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

Council Member Banks.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I just also want to share the same sentiment. Thank you for welcoming me to this Committee in my first term and I appreciate you, love you, and we know wherever you go, you're going to continue to make great impacts to make, build a bigger and brighter New York City so thank you.

Particularly, and this may be repetitious, duplicative in a sense, but touching on some of the questions of Council Member Restler, the last year's audit from the State Comptroller, State Comptroller DiNapoli highlighted that households are late on average nearly 10 months to move into permanent housing after receiving a CityFHEPS shopping voucher letter. Has the agency implemented any changes to shorten this timeline? And I just want to again highlight, you know, my office continues to receive frequent complaints about the length of turnover, turnaround times, and the difficulty of

finding landlords who will accept the CityFHEPS vouchers so what's being done different?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you, Council Member, for that question. We continue to share that, you know, we take very seriously the time it takes to process our rental applications. The dependencies are not in one place, right, and so a client who is issued a shopping letter and then identifying a unit, you know, that particular client's circumstances add time, right, depending on their circumstances. The habitability of the unit adds time, right? And then also making sure that when the package is submitted, that it's submitted accurately. So, there's lots of things that are in place to help speed that along. Intentional sort of support with our provider partners. Chief Henderson mentioned the Concierge Unit, and this is a unit that's on-site helping and supporting providers and making sure we get accurate packages. We have digitized the inspection process so that, you know, we can get real-time information. We have launched our electronic application system so that, you know, the applications are sent electronically. We have reorganized and restructured so that the entire

continuum of folks that are touching the rental assistance application flow are reporting up the chain to one leadership, and so that we can help to streamline the work, and so just a number of innovations.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you.

When it comes to landlord participation and payment delays, many landlords cite late payments, administrative burdens, communication challenges as reasons they do not accept CityFHEPS vouchers. For example, one landlord in my District has a householder, a tenant, for eight years and has been eligible for a rent increase for three years. But yet, despite submitting all the paperwork through the portal in March of this year, has not received any update. Others have expressed that working with the City is too difficult due to slow processing and inconsistent communication. What concrete incentives beyond the current payment structure are being considered to encourage more landlord participation and to ensure a reliable on-time rent disbursement?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you, Council Member, for that question.

So, in reference to timeliness of payments, we have been leveraging our technology to support this. Coming this year, landlords, in the beginning, when applications are submitted, they're going to be able to select the electronic funds transfer, and so we expect that payments will be sooner and timelier, not dependent on the mail, right? Additionally, the landlord portal will be available so that landlords are able to decipher, you know, what payments they have and know where the government subsidy payments stand. So, in terms of payments, those are some of the things that we're doing.

Can you repeat the second part of the question?

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: I just wanted to know what were the concrete incentives beyond current payment structures being considered to encourage more landlords to participate?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Currently, we're still administering the unit hold that we provide to landlords, and so that's an incentive, in addition to all the work we're doing to strengthen the process.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: And questions, this question is regarding, like, CityFHEPS and more, I guess we're talking about for older adults. As we do know, we have a growing older adult population, especially in my District and probably throughout the entire city. Given the growing population of older New Yorkers who may not be tech savvy and are, you know, definitely sometimes left behind when it comes to tech, are there any strategies that the Department is considering to simplify the CityFHEPS process or provide additional assistance to seniors who struggle with the online system?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member. So, an applicant for CityFHEPS is attached to a provider that's supporting them, and so the expectation is that the case management staff is working to support that client. In addition to, you know, sort of advancing our technology, we also still have manual process for folks who are less tech savvy, and, you know, so we try to ensure that all are accounted for.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So, do they actually go to the senior? Is there any way for them to go to the senior to help them fill out the

application, or would the senior obviously have to come into a...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: I guess it varies depending on if you're in shelter, you have a case manager person that's assisting you. Oftentimes, they're on site. If you're in the community, then you're working with Homebase, and you go into the office. There are some times when Homebase do assist.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: And last question, when it comes to steps the Department taking to improve the response times for HRA cases, my constituent liaisons consistently report long delays in receiving responses from the agency, as well as being redirected from one caseworker to another without resolution. What measures are currently in place or in progress to address these response time issues?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

Part of the restructuring that we've just established is a customer service team, and this customer service team is being put in place to be able to respond to inquiry coming in regarding status. We also, you know, emphasize that the

2 continuum of the process and touches many point. And
3 so, we refer oftentimes back to making sure that you
4 are intentionally communicating with your case
5 manager. You know, those touches are biweekly. And
6 so, we encourage not only the landlords, but the
7 client to also communicate with their... (CROSS-TALK)

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: But if it's a staff
9 member from a Council Member's office that's
10 advocating on behalf of a constituent to help bring
11 resolution, what support is given there? Because
12 obviously, they want us to deliver for them. So, how
13 are you helping us as partners?

14 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Yeah. I
15 can jump in on that.

16 So, I mean, if there's specific instances
17 and cases, you know, you can always... (CROSS-TALK)

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: I can give you a
19 boatload of instances, but I asked the general
20 question, and you could, you know, answer it in a
21 general way, but we can give you a list of cases
22 where the response time from the Administration has
23 been, you know, it's been terrible.

24 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: I
25 understand. So, you know, we have, as the Chief and

the Executive Deputy Commissioner have said, we have a process for questions and for review. But if you are not getting, you know, a quick enough response, we have an Intergovernmental Team and Borough Directors that you can reach out to directly. You can also reach out directly to me, and we'll make sure that you get a response.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Brewer is going to do a second round, and then Avilés, and then I will ask my questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

Again, 1477, which is this 15 versus 23 discussion. Tell me a little bit more about why... 15 days does sound like a lot when you're really trying to get into an apartment. 23 sounds like even further. So, what are the challenges in terms of getting that 23-day number down, number one? And what's the current process for informing applicants about the status? I know you're informing staff, which is important with new technology, and perhaps even the owner, but how do you let the individual

2 applying know, even on a real-time basis, where their
3 application is? Those are my two 1477 questions.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for
5 the question, Council Member.

6 So as I shared before, in AccessHRA
7 leveraging the technology there, when a client is
8 issued a shopping letter, that shopping letter is
9 available in AccessHRA, so they know that the
10 shopping letter has been issued. It's also available
11 in our care system for the providers. Any decisions
12 that are made, so when the case is approved, those
13 letters are also available in AccessHRA for the
14 client.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That gives them
16 real-time... in other words, the stove isn't working,
17 and so we have to do a re-inspection. All of that is
18 in that tech?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Not that level
20 of detail.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's what I'm
22 talking about. That's what I'm talking about.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Again, what we
24 shared earlier was that we are intentional in
25 communicating to our constituents and our clients to

make sure that they're talking and communicating in touch with their case manager.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I got that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: They see them biweekly, and that's where they can get the most real-time status updates.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Technology-wise, everybody could be accessed to. I'm just saying it's something to think about, something to aspire to.

Then the other question is, what is involved with that 23 days versus 15 days? Is there something that you think could perhaps be a medium, or maybe 15 days and then asking for more time, or is there some way in which we could work on that day issue?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

When there's no returns, the packages are done within that timeframe. It's the returns, and so we have a number of efforts underway to help make sure that accurate packages are being submitted. I mentioned before our Concierge Team. I mentioned before we've developed a checklist, a number of tools in our toolkits to help ensure that those

applications, once they're submitted, they're clean and that we can get to that 15 days. More work to come on that in the new year.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I hear you.

Then 1459 is the same issue. It's, again, reporting of lease-up times for housing vouchers. Is that something that you said in your testimony that you would consider it with some changes? Is that true? In other words, this is basically a data bill. Is that something that you could look at? What we're trying to do is get the information, not to change the information, but to get the information.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Yes, Council Member. That's something that we can certainly look at. I think one of the things that we wanted to just make sure and talk to you about was just to make sure that there's context in what data is being put out there, because as both the Chief and the EDC have discussed, there's a lot of different factors that go into those two points in time that you're asking about. We just want to make sure that all of that is factored into what's being presented.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

3 Council Member Avilés?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yes. Thank you so
5 much.

6 Just wanted to follow up on the question
7 of older adults. Do you have a sense of how many
8 older adults have been provided vouchers in the pool?

9 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: We don't
10 have that number on us right now, but we can get back
11 to you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay. If you could
13 provide it to the Council.

14 Similarly, I'd love to understand a
15 little bit more also how providers are equipped to
16 engage with older adults who have very distinct needs
17 to make sure that they are obviously supported. I
18 think we get so many older adults in our office, not
19 only seeking assistance with, well, often at the
20 verge of being unhoused and can't qualify for
21 anything, just real particular challenges for them.
22 I'd love to understand more around how the agency is
23 targeting and making sure that those services are
24 adequate.

In terms of the concierge pilot, can you talk to me a little bit more about it? How are providers aware of the pilot? How do people know they're getting concierge service? Please elaborate.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Sure. We're really excited about this pilot. The concierge model was designed to really focus and support providers who might be having challenges with their move-out goals. We have embedded staff at multiple sites. It's usually an invitation, so we work with our providers before we arrive on site. The team is trained to really administer a curriculum of activities that we believe are all geared at managing a successful housing outcome. They're on site for four weeks. Each week has a different agenda of items that they work with the providers on, from everything from data and systems to a voucher eligibility, processing, you name it. The team is able to really support the providers in that way. The goal is that we go in, we support them, and obviously they get the blueprint to continue. We're excited about this program because we're seeing really great results already.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: How many sites,
3 how many providers actually are receiving this
4 support? Do you anticipate cycling through the whole
5 universe of providers, and what does that look like?

6 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: It's a
7 small team of about 20 people, and we go to an
8 average of five to seven sites per month, maybe more
9 sometimes, and for a 30-day stay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: If a provider
11 would like that kind of support, it sounds like you
12 are identifying who needs that support. How about if
13 a provider feels like they could use that kind of
14 support?

15 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah.
16 We'll put them on the queue, and if we are able to
17 address, we will assign someone. In the cases of new
18 providers coming on, we have done that in the past.
19 We have assigned people on.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it.

21 Then lastly, in terms of the, how many,
22 you may have mentioned this in your testimony, so
23 forgive me, but how many households are in DHS
24 shelters right now?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

76

2 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Just in
3 the census?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yeah. Just in the
5 census.

6 Then just curious, how many households in
7 shelter have active shopping letters?

8 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: We have
9 the shopping letter number we can provide you.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you,
11 Council Member, for that question. Currently, there
12 are about 11,000 clients with active shopping letters
13 at this time.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: How many get
15 placed a year? How many people have exited into units
16 this year alone? I guess calendar, which is a little
17 complicated since we work on...

18 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: We have
19 the Fiscal Year number, which was in the testimony.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay, that's fine.

21 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: It's
22 15,000.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yeah, and I
24 think calendar, I believe the calendar year to
25 October is a little over 4,500.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

77

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: To date?

3 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: To
4 October, through October.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So January through
6 October, about 4,500?

7 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: No, July
8 1 through September, the Fiscal Year.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it. Yeah.
10 Thank you. Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Council
12 Member Avilés.

13 This Committee held a hearing on the
14 administration of the CityFHEPS program in January of
15 '25, about a year ago. And since then, can you
16 provide any updates about improvements to the
17 administration of the voucher system, and any
18 possible new pressure points or challenges?

19 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Thank
20 you for that question, Council Member. As I shared
21 before, we take the CityFHEPS program very seriously,
22 and ensuring that our clients get to housing security
23 as soon as possible. One of the updates that we have
24 made is, as I mentioned before, all the applications
25 are now through our current, which is our electronic

application system. That facilitates review process, make it easier for us to track and avoid packages getting lost. The tech advancements for the end of this year and the coming year is that we will have electronic funds transfer available to all landlords, and also that they will be able to enroll in the portal so that they can see their payment histories, know which payments is from the government, and where that stands. Additionally, we are creating reports on the disposition of the shopping letter, so all those timeline questions that you asked, we should be able to have and be able to address that. We continue to review our application paperwork to see where we can make additional cuts, and where we can maximize the technology to further reduce the administrative burdens, all of what we've talked about. We have invested in technology also to modernize the clearance and the apartment review process. We've digitized the apartment review checklist, just to name a few.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm so proud of you guys for moving on to the next step. Finally.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We're moving on up.

Can you tell us within the CityFHEPS recipient population, what portions stay in their units year after year, and what is the turnover rate?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

CityFHEPS continue to be the most valuable, significant resource we have in shoring up housing security for the over 136,000 New Yorkers that are currently active in the program. It is the second largest housing subsidy program in the nation. CityFHEPS renewal rate is pretty high. On average, approximately 90 percent of the CityFHEPS household renew each year. We do not expect it to be 100 percent. There's a variety of reasons why someone might not renew. A participant may leave the city, they may have significant income increase, or they may pass away. For example, those folks are not going to renew. We have flexible renewal policies. If someone renew after the one-year mark, even now after the two-year mark, we're able to bring them back into the program.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

Let me just ask a couple of these first, then I'll go back to that. Could you tell us what the

length of time on average it is that a household typically uses the CityFHEPS voucher for?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question. Again, our retention rate is pretty high. It's the 90 percent of folks that renew and ongoing. We renew because someone has submitted their application and claimed good cause. The good cause is related to having the income requirement and remaining in the unit. A good 90 percent are in their units.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How long do voucher recipients stay in the program, is what I think I'm trying to ascertain.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that. It's a five-year program, but what I was sharing is that ongoing, our participant renew for good cause. I don't have all the participants, how long they've stayed, but for the most part, they're ongoing.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 90 percent of individuals on the voucher program continue to renew.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: They continue to renew.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

We've spoken about this before about the income discrimination issues that voucher holders are facing. I actually had a conversation yesterday with a non-profit landlord who shared with me. They have a building. The building has a lot of vacancies. I said, it would be great if you could. He's not able to lease up the building because the building has some issues. Not necessarily in the units, but there have been some questionable people that have taken over the building. In the conversation, I brought up the possibility of working with the City and leasing out those units to families coming out of shelter. This non-profit has routinely done that. A lot of their residents are coming out, but what they expressed to me was that they have gotten to the point where that's not their first option anymore because even though the income is consistent, a lot of the folks that are being referred to them require some sort of social service support. They are landlords. They're not equipped to provide that service. What they find is that they inevitably end up having to evict those folks because they need more support than they're receiving. I wonder, is that something that DSS has given any consideration to?

How do we work with our landlords, in particular those that are in the non-profit field that tend to take on a larger share of shelter families and singles to help them ensure that those residents stay in place? I think it's a win-win for the landlord. It's a win-win for DSS. It's definitely a win for that resident if we can keep them there and provide. The fact that we don't have enough supportive services to go around, supportive housing to go around, has become an issue. If we can somehow figure out how to offset the cost of that by offering that level of support to landlords in this specific category, I think that it would go a long way. It hadn't occurred to me until I spoke to him. I didn't feel like he was actively trying to discriminate for any other reason than he really felt like it became more of a social services-driven role. He just doesn't have the resources to do that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that, Council Member.

This is a challenge across the system. Homebase can help some, but they're not a mental health provider. It's a conversation, it's a topic that has come up, and we're looking to see how we can

support landlords across the field. I don't have an easy answer for you, but we're partnering with the available resources that are in the community to address indicators of mental health concerns and making sure that that information is available to landlord CBOs that the clients may touch bases with and encouraging those who are experiencing these indicators to seek the help from the resources that are available. That's where we are.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: I was just going to add to what EDC Reid was saying. We work within the resources that we have. We also work across agencies and try to connect people with services to DOHMH, but really what you're getting at is at the core of the Affordable Housing Services Program. This is obviously new construction or renovation, but these buildings are designed with providers to provide light-touch services so that if a person exiting shelter does not necessarily qualify for full supportive housing, this is a hybrid that could address some of those issues that you're bringing up here and that landlord was raising. That's obviously a new model, but it's something that we're consistently thinking about and how we can

connect those dots because we want this to be sustainable. We work within the toolkit that we have.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think that it merits some sort of a study to analyze which non-profits does the City contract with the most and housing a higher portion of individuals and then how many of those folks are eventually back in the system because they've been evicted for non-payment of rent, for hoarding that hasn't been addressed, for maybe... I've heard stories of folks walking in the hallways undressed. I expect those things with individuals that need more supportive mental health services in particular, but it's an interesting idea to I think it allows me... it made me think of how do we think outside of the box so that we're not just putting supportive... people that need supportive housing in one building when there are possibilities to integrate them into the general population if that support was also readily available. I think it's something that's worth looking at because there aren't that many non-profit organizations that are doing housing. There are enough of them, but it's not like it's a huge universe of maybe piloting something like that because at one point, this specific

landlord was able to get some grant funding to be able to assist and they lost the funding and they were not able to finance the cost of this. Even folks that are not coming from shelter, you have low-income residents that maybe lost their job and don't know where to turn, don't know that they can qualify for certain City benefits. As a landlord, my objective would be to have my rent paid, working with those residents and offering that special... what's happening in the household before we initiate an eviction. I think it's an important tool that we also have to make use of if we really want to be intentional about decreasing the number of folks that are in shelter and keeping those that have been housed, housed. It was an interesting conversation that made me think a little bit more broadly about how we address this situation and how do we help an organization like that be more receptive to working with the City and bringing in more folks. Because then that stigma that, now everybody's excluded, whether you have a need for social service assistance or not. Everybody that's in the shelter system kind of gets pulled into that and that will be an unfair assessment to make.

So, DSS had announced the Affordable Housing Services Program in the beginning of 2024, which is meant to fast-track the creation of newly constructed, high-quality, and deeply affordable housing for CityFHEPS voucher holders. What is the progress of this program and how many sites and units have been brought online?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: So, we don't have the exact numbers. We can get them to you, but right now I believe it's around 800 or 900 units either already brought online or in the pipeline, but we can get you a more accurate number.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

And in January, the Administration testified that it was partnering with the non-profit, Re-Institute, to help improve systems and bring down package return rate. What does the partnership look like and what progress has been made there?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member. So our partnership with Re-Institute brought providers to the table, agency staff to the table, looking at how to streamline the package process and identify where the bumps and bubs are and how to correct that. We're

nearing the final phase of that where we have developed the application review checklist, which will go live in coming weeks, early in 2026. And this will help to sort of walk through what is required, every step of the application process so that by the time that application is submitted, it should be accurate and clean and we could get to that 14- or 15-day approval timeframe. That's going to be launched with a complimentary video that's sort of marketing and messaging and challenging our providers to step up and really utilize this tool to help them do the work more efficiently and effectively. So that's the first thing that's coming from there with our Re-Institute partners.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

And could you just remind us that... I'm sorry if somebody asks this question and we get distracted and don't always hear all the questions that are asked, but what is the median amount of time that it takes for an applicant to lease up for the first time?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for the question, Council Member. You know, I want to share again that we take processing the CityFHEPS

application, you know, very seriously and we continue to work to strengthen, you know, the CityFHEPS program and the client experience on their housing journey to housing security. We shared that, you know, we're pleased that, you know, in 2024, we were at 33 days and now, you know, we're at 23 days and that's due to the back and forth and making sure the package is accurate. When everything is good, we're at that 14-, 15-day marker.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Really?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Seems pretty short.

Okay.

Can you tell us what the most common reasons for rejections would be?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

Can you clarify for me rejection?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: When a person is submitting a rental package, you know, for the first time, how many, you know, what is the percentage of those packages that are rejected for whatever reason or what is the reason?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Okay. So just to clarify, very few packages are denied. So when I think of rejection, I'm thinking denied.

In terms of the return, we shared the packages are returned because the forms are not complete, signatures are missing, inaccurately completed. Those are some of the reasons why the packages go back and forth, and part of what we talked about was making sure that that communication is readily available, whether it's a landlord-related issue or the client-related issue or the provider-related issue, that those communications are happening in real time, bi-weekly, so that we know what the rubs are to help to correct those.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'm going to go back to the housing, the income discrimination part of this question because I didn't finish asking it, but when a landlord is engaging in income discrimination and they're refusing an apartment to those with a voucher, has DSS observed any voucher discrimination, like have you observed anything like that? You know, are you guys filing any complaints on behalf of voucher holders? What is the agency doing

to address income discrimination and ensuring that we're holding these landlords responsible?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: What we shared earlier that when it does come to our attention, it's being shared with CCHR and we don't currently have the data in front of us. But the other thing is that, you know, we know that this is a challenging process for many of the clients and, you know, oftentimes they may not even report what's happening. The first thing you don't want to do is get into discord with a landlord as you're trying to, you know, identify a unit, so I think we will get back to you in terms of the data because we don't have it with us today.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I mean, I passed a bill a few years ago that required that the language on income discrimination and like the explanation of what income discrimination looks like be added to the language in the voucher so that families, you know, were aware of that. I don't always read everything that I, you know, like I'm not reading the fine print, and my concern is that if whoever is the point of contact with a potential renter, right, at the shelter setting or not, right, in a community setting, is not communicating to that

person, hey, it is illegal for a landlord to say to you that they cannot accept, you know, voucher holders as potential residents. In the event that that happens, you should document, right, the landlord's name, the address, and report that back so that we can then help you ensure that you're reporting to the appropriate agency and they can handle this, right. Like, that synergy doesn't exist, that level of connectivity is really important if we are, you know, really interested in eliminating this type of discrimination, especially in an environment, you know, such as the one that we're in where the vacancy rates are just so low that we don't have the benefit of, you know, the privilege of saying, you know what, whatever, we'll move on to the next one. There may not be that many next steps, right, not many units left to go to, so I think that the income discrimination component of this, which is still really prevalent, is really important and I'm just curious to find, you know, to hear, like, what is DSS doing? And I know, listen, you guys do everything, you guys, there's a lot of work, you know, that happens within the umbrella of the, you know, of the

organization, but these are nuances that are, like, really important.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yes. We agree, and we can definitely go and dig into some of that some more.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

Let me ask something else here. Can you tell us what the City's actual spending so far for this Fiscal Year on the CityFHEPS voucher is projected to be, and what is the projection spending for the rest of '26?

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

For FY26 expenditure, through October, it's 548 million dollars. The FY26 budget is 1.1 billion dollars, and that includes the 400 million added to the CityFHEPS in FY27 November Plan, and, of course, we'll be closely monitoring the budget, and we'll address any additional fiscal needs as the year progress.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I mean we go through this every single year. Is this a decision by, like, OMB or the Administration? Who decides? I get it, we're not sure what the actual expenses are

going to be for some programs, and so we put what we think we're going to spend, right, and then we come back in November, and we add additional funding if it's necessary, but it seems like we have consistently overspent more than what has been allocated, you know, in the Executive Budget, and we continue to underfund it, you know, so I'm not sure why that rate, if we're adding money in November, it should be very minimal. It should not be half the cost of the program.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: So, we are in constant communication with OMB, in, you know, assessing the needs of the program, and that's on an iterative basis. So, you know, I think it's just part of an ever-growing program and figuring out what the needs are going to be, you know, moving forward. But, you know, again, it's a constant conversation to make sure that we're addressing what the needs are.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I find it ironic, because I know that there are agencies that get extra spending dollars in anticipation of expenses that may have not been accounted for, and then that money, if it's not used, right, gets repurposed, and yet, here we have the opposite, where

we know that we're spending, and I'm making up a number, 800 million a year, you know, for the last five years, but yet, we're only putting in five, you know, in the Exec, knowing that there is a threshold, right? Now, we're funding it at nine, and we actually end up spending 1.1 million, then we can make up that difference, that makes sense to me. Yeah, but a million, yeah, but sorry, billion, that makes sense to me, but to only fund half of the program, knowing that it's going to cost significantly more, and that it has consistently, you know, cost significantly more, to me, is a little bit confusing, so I'm trying to understand if that is a decision that's made at the DSS level, or is that a decision that is, you know, is a recommendation of the Office of Budget and Management?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: It's in consultation, both with the Administration, with OMB, and obviously, with, you know, us as the program.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: When you say consultation, I mean, there's a mutual agreement. It doesn't sound fiscally sound, you know, or responsible to say, okay, you know, I'll take half, when we know that we're spending, you know, more than

that, we've projected that we're going to be spending more than that on an annual basis, and you're saying to me, 90 percent of the folks that are in the program stay in the program so that tells me, right, that we should be accounting for that off the get-go, you know, like, that shouldn't even, so when you say in consultation, you know, is DSS making the recommendation, or is that what DSS is being told, like, this is the budget that we're projecting, and we will have a future conversation later?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: It's an ongoing conversation.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Fair enough.
What is the budget for Fiscal Year '27, and is that sufficient to meet the level of demand?

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: We don't have the '27 number. We can get it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

Do you have any information on the number of folks that have had, they've utilized the CityFHEPS voucher for housing and subsequently returned to shelter within one year and how many have returned to shelter within five years?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for
3 that question, Council Member.

4 That number is 44 for the first quarter
5 of FY26.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 44 households?

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: 44 households
8 that returned to shelter after exiting. The retention
9 is over a one-year period, and so, say, for example,
10 you moved out between July '24 to September '24,
11 which is the quarter, so one year of being out, and
12 so July 2025 to September 2025, 44 households have
13 returned.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: They're returning to
15 shelter.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do we know why? I
18 mean, it's a small number, that's good, but 44 people
19 are still 44 people, 44 households. Do we know why
20 those 44 households are returning?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: I don't have
22 that information with me, but we can get back to you.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The reason that I ask
24 is because, and I brought this up before, I have a
25 constituent who's an elderly constituent who's under

the City's guardianship program, and, you know, she came to our office some time ago, and she was very, you know, she was very manic, and so the staff didn't really understand what it was that she needed, what the needs were, if there were any, or she was just, you know, sometimes we get people that come in, and they feel comfortable in the office, and so they make themselves at home. I know you, you face this all the time, you know.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I kick them out as quickly as possible.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No! Strike that from the record, but we don't, and, in my office, I try to figure out, like, so I was trying to figure out what was going on with her, and she was all over, she was taking out papers, and I'm looking at the papers that she's taken out. She owed over, I think it was like 38,000 dollars in rental arrears, but she has CITYFHEPS. She had a CITYFHEPS voucher. She came from the shelter system and went into this non-profit building, and no one realized on DSS end or on the guardianship end that her rental payments, which were the City's responsibility, were not being made, and so she consistently ends up, like, this has happened

to her several times, not to that extent, but where she's in arrears, and now she's being threatened with eviction, and she doesn't really understand, right, like, the significance of that, but had she not come into that office that day and I had not taken the time to sit there with her and try to figure out, like, what exactly, if there was an issue, because, you know, people just dismiss folks that have mental health issues. You know, they're like, ah, they're making it up, or that's what they think, or whatever. Sometimes that's true. But, you know, a lot of the times, I find that it's not, right, like, there's a lot of lucidity in those manic episodes, and they're able to articulate, like, what the needs are, and she was in trouble. She was about to get evicted, and there were other things that are not necessarily DSS related, but I just wonder if DSS is responsible for managing the CityFHEPS voucher program and making the payments to the landlord, how does nobody realize that this person is delinquent by that much, because that means that, you know, her rent wasn't paid for maybe more than a year. Like, who's responsible for capturing that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: As we shared in previous testimonies, there are a number of notices that go out to the participant in the CityFHEPS program. Month eight, the first notice go out. There's another notice at month level that you need to renew. You have to annually renew.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: She didn't have a renewal issue. She was fine. Actually, there were two things that we dealt with that day. The arrears and that her renewal was about to expire. Well, she had until a such and such date to, you know, renew or her voucher would expire so she had an active voucher. She, you know, almost lost it. Thank God she came to the office and, you know, and Commissioner Parks was really, really, really good and helped, you know, us figure it out. But that, that scares me, right? Because we have 44 people. It doesn't seem like a lot of folks, but if those 44 people end up back in shelter and we're paying more money to house them there, because somebody didn't pick up the fact that their rent wasn't being paid, which is, right, our responsibility. How does that happen? And how do we make sure that it does not happen? Like what mechanisms do you have in place that ring that alarm

and say, hey, you know what, like these checks haven't gone out because landlords are complaining to us that they can't get in contact with anybody at CityFHEPS and so then the landlord is trying and, you know, I've actually been very impressed as I've gotten out of, you know, good landlords that are like, I want to keep these people, but I'm not getting paid and I can't reach anybody, you know, and so I have to then go to the Commissioner and say, hey, you know, could you address this, and it does get addressed. But if I wasn't in the middle, then what happens?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that, Council Member.

I can share with you how the program runs. Once a person move out to permanent housing, they're out in permanent housing, and so it's basically responsible for making sure that their rents are being paid.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Not their portion, your portion.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: No, no, no. And, and if our portion, if there's something wrong, we may not know because the, once you move out, the

payments are ongoing and automatic, and so I can't work the individual case because I don't know all the nuances or what happened, but that shouldn't be the experience. Once you've moved out and the case is processed and approved, the payments are automatic. As you know, the payments are made up of, it could be four payments, right, so depending on your income So, there's the subsidy portion that the subsidy to government pays. And if that household is on cash assistance, then there's two payments that they're getting the beginning of the month, the middle of the month. And if they have a direct share, they're responsible for that direct share. So oftentimes when we get situations like that, and we're reviewing, there's a number of reasons what could have happened. When there's an issue with the subsidy, I don't know, say something happened, system went wrong. We are able to correct that. Part of the information that we're sharing with our active participants and, you know, folks moving out of shelter or leasing up is that the landlord can't just evict you. And so, you know, they have Homebase information that they can go to Homebase to help them.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But this is, see, this is the nuance that I'm talking about, right? We're talking about an individual who is an older adult with a serious mental health issue who was placed in a non-profit building with no supportive services, because supposedly they have a guardianship program that's supposed to be overseeing all of this stuff and they're obviously not overseeing anything so we're now the... you know, who was cleaning her house last week doing before, right before Thanksgiving, doing a heavy duty cleaning? Me. I spent all day there with her because she wouldn't let anybody else in there and, when I got into that apartment, I was horrified that she hadn't even been able to take a bath in God knows how long because you couldn't even get into the bathroom. And, you know, the landlord is, you know, like, I get it. The landlord is frustrated because they're like, you know, this person is posing a fire, you know, risk. They are, you know, there are roaches coming out from the door. It's not her fault, right? We're letting her down, like the people that are there to help her. But in this case, what I'm saying is, and there may not, you may not have the answer for me, but what I want you

to take back is to say, you know what, Council Member, that should not happen. We should be tracking and making sure that the payments on our end are being made because it, then it sounds like victim blaming and, you know, then we don't want to do that, right, we don't want to do that. We want to make sure that, you know, on the government side, whether the tenant decides to pay their rent or not, their share or not that they have to respond for right on their own. And ironically enough, that's the only thing that the guardianship program was doing, you know, consistently was paying her share of the rent. But DSS had not been paying their share for a really long time, and it concerns me that nobody noticed because I'm assuming that there's a budget, you know, somebody is responsible for making sure like there has to be some sort of audit, right? Like are the payments being made? Are they being made timely? You know, how many went out late? Because if you've never been threatened with eviction or lived in a shelter, that experience is very traumatic, right? You can't sleep if you feel like you're not going to have... most people don't understand that a landlord cannot lock you out without an official order from a judge,

right? Landlords will use all types of tactics to scare the living daylights out of you so that you self-evict. They don't understand that. We do. So, we have to try to figure out how do we facilitate that information, getting out to folks, but also how do we recognize when an individual just doesn't have the capacity to understand that and what protections are we putting in place and, in this case, it was something simple because it didn't even have to do with her mental health. It had to do with the failures of the agency to make the payments that they are obligated to make and would have, in essence, forced a situation had she not come to our office where she would have ended up, you know, in housing court and probably wouldn't have shown up because she wouldn't know any better and would have ended up back in shelter where we're now paying three and four times the rate of whatever rent she's paying to house her there. And on top of that, the non-profit gets stuck with, you know, the loss of that money that they were also promised as part of the agreement, right, to house, to set aside a specific portion of those units for people coming out of shelter. So, there's something, you know, amiss here. And, you

1 know, sometimes, you know, I get a little bit
2 frustrated in hearings because I just, I guess,
3 naively, I just want somebody to acknowledge and say,
4 you know what, like, I hear you, that shouldn't
5 happen, we're going to go back and see why it
6 happened and try to make sure that it doesn't happen
7 again. That's all I want.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you,
10 Council Member. We hear you. It should not happen and
11 we will take that back to see, dig deeper into that.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that.

13 And then I know you, I see you have a
14 question, Gale. You wanted to piggyback on that or
15 did you have a question?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want to say
17 we had a similar situation. I think the hoarding is
18 something that these guardians don't deal with, okay.
19 We have so many hoarders and the guardians are not
20 dealing with it. So I guess it's certainly an issue
21 with the City paying, but these guardians need a kick
22 in the butt, okay. And so whether it's APS or the
23 guardian, that's also, I hate to say it, under DSS's
24 and the courts both. But DSS has to do something
25 about the APS program. That's another whole topic and

you had hearings on this already so I just want to add that.

The other thing I just want to add to question is what about the staffing? Other agencies have major staffing issues. Som I know there were five people doing inspections. I guess I want to know how many people are in, if there is such a thing as a FHEPS unit and do you have vacancies? That would be my question.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member. So FHEPS and CityFHEPS are subsidy resources so it's not a unit per se, it's a subsidy. So again, depending on what you're eligible for, that work touches several agencies and then also the provider and then the processing. So for example, FHEPS eligibility is dependent on you being an active cash assistance household member, and so your cash assistant case have to be active. You have to have a child that's under 18 in the household, and so you could be in shelter and eligible for FEPS, you could be in the community and eligible. So, if you're in the community and you're moving, those applications come directly through Homebase to us. If you are staying, it goes through

your benefit access center. If you're in the shelter, it comes through the shelter provider. So you could see it touches many different places so there's not a FHEPS unit and a CityFHEPS unit.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay B is there other units, other vacancies in, you don't have to tell us now, but could you get back to the Chair as to whether there are vacancies in those three or four divisions that you mentioned? I can't believe they're not. This is a whole to-do because obviously 23 days, 15 days, more staff means less time for the process so that's what I'm trying to get at. That's what I was asking.

And also 44 people from July to September, but I guess it would be good to know whether more for the fiscal year last year, but also could you get back to the Chair about just some knowledge as to what happened with those 44? Obviously in some cases it's probably beyond your control, but I think it would be helpful to have that information so that we can address it, can help you to address it. 44 is quite a few for that time period in my opinion.

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: To clarify, it's
3 a monthly cohort so the number is fluid, so I gave
4 you the number for that quarter one.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I understand, but
6 we can all help with these, I mean we did stop one
7 eviction also for the same reason. I kick them out
8 when they bring their papers. Put those papers back
9 in the bag please.

10 Thank you very much.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I have one final
12 question regarding the renewal process. And I ask
13 because I had a case like this the other day where an
14 individual was reaching out to me because their
15 renewal was up, they had submitted all of the
16 documents, and they had not heard back, and so the
17 landlord was freaking out because they're like, are
18 you going to get re-approved or not? And it's a fair
19 question, and you know as, you know, rent-stabilized
20 residents will, you know, tell you like the, you
21 know, landlords have a responsibility to let you know
22 what's going to happen, right, with your lease
23 renewal at least three months ahead of time so that
24 you have time to prepare. And I am just concerned
25 that if the renewal takes effect July 1st that we're

not letting the individual or the landlord know until July 2nd, you know, or June 30th. How far in advance does that work?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you for that question, Council Member.

Som there's a couple of processing around the renewal. We've leveraged technology also on that end. So, about a good third of participants get auto renewed so that's done at month 11. As soon as the renewal is processed, those notices go out to the client and also go out to the landlord.

The other place where we've leveled technology is that applicants can submit their renewal via AccessHRA. That goes directly to the unit that's processing manually the renewal. And so we're continually monitoring the timeliness of that, but we're doing pretty well. We're getting those done. Again, if the renewal don't come in on time, we have flexible renewal policies and so that within a two-year period, we can easily get you back on the program and we will pay back whatever the arrears for the subsidies are.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But is somebody communicating with the landlord during this time?

Like I think that's the problem is that there's a lot of space in between and landlords are becoming increasingly frustrated. And you know why this is important? Because when the advantage, you remember that Gale, the advantage voucher was out, which was a hot mess, you know, and all of those landlords ended up, you know, losing out on, you know, that money and all of those folks ended up going back into shelter. It left a really sour taste in, you know, those landlords' mouths, and so that's why they're reluctant to accept these voucher programs, whether they legally can or not. I understand that. You know, I mean, that was a big hit. And so we have to make sure that we are doing better about communicating and not just saying, well, you know what, if you lose it, it's okay because you can come back and then we can fix it later. There's a consequence to that, right? Like a domino effect, if you will, that occurs once a person loses that, you know, consistency, the comfort, the protections, you know, that come with knowing that you're going to be able to afford to stay in this apartment. And so, you know, I find that a lot in government, and it's ironic that I ended up in government because, you know, I'm often frustrated

with it because we keep saying the same thing, well, we'll come back, you know, oh, don't worry about it because there's so many people in the system that it's hard to give that individual attention. But if we really took the time to just kind of step back and take a better, you know, look and create a unit that specifically addresses, considering the fact that the Commissioner has stated many times that this is the largest subsidy program in the city, you know..

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Second largest.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The second largest. I think that merits having its own division.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: I wanted to add that, I was waiting for you to give me a chance, but yeah, the RE-ORG that we just underwent in the fall has an arm of operation, stakeholder outreach and engagement. We are going to be focusing on really tightening up and really expanding our landlord engagement and operations. Obviously, they're an important stakeholder that cannot be left behind in these conversations. Like, we spent a lot of time looking at processes and technology, but this is a stakeholder that we cannot, this work is not

possible without them. So, you know, strengthening that work is going to be critical into 2026 and technology is going to help us as well as just making sure we have good customer service.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I appreciate that because the knife cuts both ways. We need the landlords too, right? Yeah. We need to hold them accountable when that's necessary, but for the most part, they're good actors and they're trying in good faith, right, to house folks, but they also have expenses that have to be paid, then they should be paid on a timely basis and they should know, you know, with enough time whether or not they're going to, you know, be in a little bit of trouble.

All right, any other questions?

No? Okay.

Thank you.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Deputy Speaker, I have one just update on affordable housing services. There have been 835 units opened within this administration. 300 more have been awarded and are anticipated for Calendar Year '26, but we value this program immensely and think it's another, you

know, great opportunity to kind of see this program grow into the future.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect. No, I love that. I love that. Okay.

Well, thank you all so much and again, it's been, you know, my distinct pleasure to work alongside all of you and I wish you all success as well and I know we'll see each other around, but thank you for making this experience, you know, so much better.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Thank you.

CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Thank you.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We're going to take a very, very, very three-minute break, you know, restroom break, so anybody that needs to use the restroom. And then we're going to call up Kezzie Thomas, Noam Cohen, and Elizabeth Mackey so, as soon as we get back, if you're in the room, you're next.

Oh, hold on. We're going to add Diana Ramos and Calvin Michael.

CALVIN MICHAEL: Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. Okay. Good to see you, Council Member Diana Ayala. Okay. Hello, my name is Calvin Michael, and I'm a member of the Safety Net Activist Project, which is through the auspices of the Urban Justice Center. I'm here to speak about my experience accessing the CityFHEPS voucher. I was residing at the Clark Thomas Men's Shelter when I first started the process of trying to get housed. It's a very difficult and draining experience. The staff at the shelters are not properly trained at all. My housing specialist was not helpful and constantly canceled our appointments. Neither the so-called housing specialist nor any of the staff explained that my options were for getting housed or how to access the CityFHEPS voucher or how to use it. I had to figure all of it out on my own. There was no adequate communication or information provided. These delays in just getting the proper support to get out of the shelter are a huge systematic problem. I've heard so many people discuss these problems and delays. I should not have been stuck in the shelter for three years. The staff at the shelters are not able to support everyone who are suffering in these horrible

conditions. When I should have been housed and able to move out, there's no dignity in living like this in these unsanitary and unsafe conditions. I also was without wi-fi or air conditioning at the time with that shelter. These administrative problems for folks living in the shelter and even for those outside the shelter are not just minor problems. They're extremely troubling and difficult. These delays take a huge toll on our mental, physical, and emotional health. Once I received the voucher, I was also given clear instructions on what I actually owed and what were the discrepancies I was supposed to pay. Unfortunately, my source of information came from my future landlord. I didn't (TIMER CHIME) find out about the exact amount, what I needed to pay until later. After I already got the CityFHEPS voucher, I still didn't know what I had to pay. So then when I finally got the exact number, it was relayed to me and which was relayed to me earlier so I could make my first payment. Not enough can be said to address these issues. I'm making it my business to bring them to you now, to your attention, to fight for them. As a person who faced homelessness for seven years and spent three years in New York City shelter, even

though I'm an Ivy League graduate, I went to Columbia University in New York City. No one is safe from facing homelessness. The truth is that we're only one or two paychecks from being homeless. As a matter of fact, I can correct it, one paycheck, not two, right? So okay, we're two paychecks from being homeless and to wrap it up, Mayor Adams has failed to give homelessness folks the right while he was in office. So now what we're waiting for is the Mamdani Administration. We're looking forward for new FHEPS expansion laws to be implemented finally after 2020 when they're voted in. The Mayor Mamdani comes into office in January 2026, okay? So these new laws are also meant to get people out of the shelter faster. Housing is a dignity. Housing is a basic right. We need to expand access to housing, provide the meaningful support that is needed for homelessness folks, both in shelter and on the street, to get out and get into dignified housing right away. Thank you very much. Appreciate it. And CityFHEPS saved my life. Thank you. Very grateful.

ELIZABETH MACKEY: Good afternoon to the City Council that are left and those that should have stayed. But thank you for allowing me to bring forth

my experience of residing in the shelters and the process it took for me to get out. So let me introduce myself. My name is Elizabeth Mackey, and I used to work for Administration of Children's Services for 29 years, and I was also seven years in teaching. Unfortunately, in January of 2019, going to a training at ACS, I literally died on a train and for a whole year I had to rehabilitate myself. I couldn't see, couldn't talk, couldn't function on my left side. So, because I was a liability to the City and my doctor said that I had 99 percent brain damage that I could no longer work in a stressful environment so that broke my heart. So with that being said, I personally had to do an early retirement because of the fact that I already did my share of working for the City. I found myself using all my savings, trying to keep up on my rent, still being there for my family. So here I go in the year of March 2022. I had to come to terms because I couldn't do it no more to go into the shelter. I didn't know what that was about and it took a toll on me, but I did my own research to find out what that process was like because I'm the type of person I did not like to actually be wasting no one's time and I

don't like my time to be wasted because my time is very valuable like everybody else so I did a lot of research. So, after I got all my documents, got my COVID test, my TB test, got all my main paperwork, I had to literally pray to literally force myself to get into the shelter system, not knowing what that was going to be like. So when I went in there on March 16, 2022, I was scared. I see how people were being treated from day one and I was like, wait a minute, these are shelters that are supposed to be where people come in temporarily for safety, not to be actually abused by people that's supposed to be working in the shelter systems. But because of my faith and my belief that I knew that I had a purpose of being there, I knew it would all bring me back to life to figure out my purpose and my purpose was there to expose the things that was going on in those systems so I had to learn these systems. I had to learn what DHS was. I had to learn what DSS was. I had to learn about HRA because even though I worked for the City in foster care, I used to refer parents to these systems but not knowing about those systems because I didn't really need them because I was working a good job and everything, providing for my

family. So here I am, had to walk the walk, had to see what these systems was about. So during that course of me going there, they said, wait a minute, you have to wait until 90 days to get a voucher. I said, 90 days? I was like, no, I'm not waiting 90 days. I'm like a (INAUDIBLE) woman and I'm like, I'm a child of God and I'm like, I'm not waiting. That's crazy when some people been there for 5, 10, some longer. Why are you there that long? What is going on with the system? So I provided the worker with everything that was needed and she was like, Ms. Mackey, you still need to be there. I was like, no, I do not. I said, I'm entitled to why I'm here. I need a voucher. This waiting period has to stop. So within six weeks, praise the Lord, that I received two, not one, two vouchers. I received a CityFHEPS voucher within three weeks and then two weeks after that, I received the Emergency Housing voucher. So I had the leverage, but here we go. The process of being processed over again. The paperwork, how you don't know how to spell my name out of all this time I've been in there. Been in the shelter for one year. They were getting my name spelled wrong because I'm disabled. They were submitting the paper that Social

Security gave you instead of you submitting my amount that I get, you were submitting the back part of it. So it is the little tactics that these workers was doing and I had to let them know, stop messing with me, stop doing this because you got to remember DHS give them a packet and they give them a checklist of what's supposed to be in that packet. So for that being said, why are you submitting or not submitting my stuff when you got all my stuff in my record? So that was a problem. So even though that I waited for a year and because of me being vocal, I was retaliated from one of the shelters that they requested me to move because I wasn't just there to advocate for myself. I started advocating for others because if you don't know your rights within the shelter system, they can't take advantage of you. So what I did was that I adhere to their rules because I didn't have a choice because I didn't have nowhere to go, you understand what I'm saying. So at the end of the day, there are things that need to be critiqued with these systems, all the systems. Housing is a human right. That's what we say. That's what we chant. But we don't understand what a human is. Let's get that straight. We are human beings. We are

spiritual beings. When they get that right, then they will know that housing is a human right. Housing is very important. As it's stated in Isaiah 58, 6 through the 9th chapter. Understand that we're supposed to shelter the wandering. We're supposed to feed the hunger, clothe the naked. But those are the biblical principles that people tend to not follow. And it's a shame to understand that we here who have experienced understand the policies, thank God for policies, thank God for (INAUDIBLE), but you did not experience what I experienced. And even though that I had Christ on my side, I still, that city that I lived in, experienced the harm of just being in a shelter, waiting and waiting for a voucher. And it was wrong. And the whole thing is, it's still wrong. Because people like me are still there, fighting. And people are dying. See, the one thing that y'all didn't ask, how many people died while waiting for a voucher? And there's thousands of people like me that waited and they died. So what is the City doing? What are they doing? They're failing us. They're using us as commodity. Why? I didn't ask, I didn't ask for none of this. But this is my journey to free my people. That's what I have to do.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Ms. Mackey.
Thank you. Go ahead.

KEZZIE THOMAS: Good afternoon, Council Members. Thank you for having me here this morning. My name is Kezzie Thomas, and I'm here to speak on why we must stop playing games with housing. Because the delays in the Department of Social Services process are not just numbers. They are years of a person's life, like my sister here said, lost to instability, fear, and uncertainty. My life-altering journey into homelessness reluctantly began in March 2023. I had been a full-time business owner here in New York. But after bankruptcy and facing serious health issues, I entered shelter for the first time. For five months, DSS continually marked me ineligible for shelter because they could not complete an inspection, even though all of my paperwork was correct. During that time, I faced rude treatment from the staff, unsafe conditions, and no path forward, so I left and moved in with my then-fiancé. When I re-entered shelter, I was four months pregnant and escaping an increasingly abusive relationship. Once again, DSS took another five months just to determine eligibility for shelter. My pregnancy

became high-risk, and with no support, no voucher, I returned to my daughter's father trying to survive.

The third time I fled for my safety, I re-entered family shelter again, and it was not treated as domestic violence. This time, I was approved for shelter quickly, seemingly because of the domestic violence, in just 10 days, but then waited another five months for an approved CityFHEPS shopping

letter. I searched everywhere for housing and was blessed to receive an approval through Housing Connect, but at the final step, I was hit with income discrimination. I appealed twice, both times denied.

(TIMER CHIME) By then, my voucher had expired. I waited two more months for a renewal, losing apartment after apartment because I had no active shopping letter. When I finally secured a unit through HHA, I had to advocate for myself every step of the way just to move from shelter into my new home. Council Members, this should not be normal. My case could have gone from entry to exit so much faster if DSS had clear procedures, consistent timelines, and accountability. Instead, what should take weeks took almost three years of my life, and I am just one example among hundreds of thousands. So

give an honor to my faith. What carried me through my brokenness was prayer, faith, and the grace of God, expressed through WIN advocates, the Family Action Board, and other non-profits who became my destiny helpers when the system failed me. As an advocate, I now work with the Family Action Board under the Family Homelessness Coalition, a single mother and founder of a non-profit healing spa retreat center. I urge you today, give families a real roadmap, enforce timelines, stop the delays, and stop playing games with housing. Human lives depend on it. My life depended on it. Thank you.

NOAM COHEN: Good afternoon. My name is Noam Cohen. I'm a proud member and leader in our homelessness union at VOCAL-NY. Thank you, Councilwoman Brewer and Councilwoman Ayala, for hearing our testimony today. As you may have heard me say before, I currently live in a shelter myself in Brooklyn. The bills being considered today that will likely be voted on very soon get to the heart of several of the barriers that I've personally seen people in my shelter experience when trying to secure their housing. I'm 20 years old right now. I became homeless at the age of 18, fleeing a traumatic home

environment. You know, I was a runaway. No, not legally. And I didn't want to go into a youth shelter. I didn't think that would be a safe option. Yeah, I wanted to emphasize that I speak strongly in favor of passing each of the bills that is being considered before the Committee today. I sleep in a room each night with 22 roommates. I've personally seen these hoops and hurdles that so many folks in my shelter have had to jump through in order to get out. One gentleman I met, a man who was elderly, was supposed to get out in April of this year. That moving day kept being moved back over and over again. This is an elderly man who's disabled who walks with a cane, someone who in theory is supposed to be prioritized. But we all know that the reality is far different. There was minor paperwork errors that are easily fixable that kept him in another month, and then another month, and then another month. Many of them on the part of HRA. These bills seek to change that. (TIMER CHIME) And I also wanted to talk about my good friend Jimmy, a loyal VOCAL member, someone I got to know in my shelter, someone who slept right next to me in this room with 22 people. He had a lot of health issues. He was diabetic. He had suffered a

heart attack a few months ago in the shelter, and his caseworker called an ambulance for him and saved his life that day. And unfortunately, just a week or two ago, I heard news that after he had moved out, I got to visit him a few weeks ago. Very shortly after moving out, he's dead. He's dead because he wasn't provided the services that he desperately needed after getting out of shelter. He was pushed out because they knew he was a liability. They knew that if he didn't die in his new apartment, that he would die in shelter. This system far too often discards people like my good friend Jimmy, a friend that I really tried to help with a lot of things, and I only wish that I had that opportunity to help him with the things I promised to help him with. The last time I saw him, I told him that to please, you know, don't hesitate to reach out to me or any of our folks at VOCAL about anything that he would, about anything that he needed help with, and I never, I didn't end up getting that opportunity. You know, Jimmy was failed by a system that discards people the moment that they need, the moment they're in dire need. Whether you're a runaway youth or whether you're elderly and disabled and in need of basic supportive

services, he needed an aide. He needed an aide to accompany him at all times, but the shelter decided to put him in a place on his own, alone, and he died alone, and that's the part that's so devastating to me. You know, I've been grieving for this, you know, for this past week since I found out, and you know, I've been inconsolable at times. I've tried to remember the good memories that we made. We made a lifetime of memories within the past year, and it wasn't good enough to save his life. This system kills people. This system kills people not just by denying them housing, not just through the hoops and the hurdles, the endless hoops and hurdles that I've seen so many people have to go through, whether it be voucher discrimination, whether it be, whether it be the paperwork hurdles, whether it be people's basic services that people need, mental health services. He had a developmental disability as well, in addition to being diabetic, taking multiple medications, and having experienced a heart attack, got a stent put in just a month before he died.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry.

NOAM COHEN: Yeah, and I want to emphasize that someone in my shelter who's diabetic just last

night had a seizure and had to be taken away by paramedics. He did not want to go to the hospital. Actually, he had to be forced there because he was, you know, his blood sugar was very high, and it definitely reminded me of my good friend Jimmy, and it goes to, and staff wasn't even, you know, staff told me they were not even allowed to touch a client to put them on their side when they're having a seizure, which is proper protocol. I had to do that this morning to just, you know, until the paramedics arrived, and thankfully he was all right, but many people are not all right. People die due to the failures of the system to provide people's basic needs, and I want to thank both of you, frankly. You know, Deputy Speaker Ayala, you have given so many people the opportunity, people whose stories, you know, have far too long been ignored by people in positions of power, the opportunity to share their stories, and I can't thank you enough for that. You have amplified the stories of people who are in the most dire need, and you have been quite a fighter throughout your time in the Council for people who are in need of housing, for people who are in need of services, and we're going to miss you on this

Council, but I know that there are people who will carry on that fight, and we will make sure that Councilwoman Brewer, many others, not you. Yes, you. Yeah, I know you. I know you will, and we're going to keep standing up for our communities. The best way to honor my friend Jimmy is to demand accountability from the system, whether it be providers that happily take money from the City, that happily profit off of people like Jimmy despite non-profit status, and then, you know, kill those very people through their negligence, whether it be holding landlords accountable who deny people housing due to the stereotypes of who people believe homeless folks are. The best way to change those narratives is to amplify the stories of people who are directly impacted, and we understand that very well here at VOCAL...

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

NOAM COHEN: And I want to say we'll continue fighting for a society in which people get the housing they deserve, the services they deserve, and where everyone in this great city gets to live in dignity, and I look forward to working with the Council and the incoming Mayor to do just that. Thank you so much.

DIANA RAMOS: Nice to see you again, fellow Diana. I'm no stranger to testimony, and I usually have a statement, and then I end up throwing it out anyway, but I'm going to read part of my statement because it does impact. As you know, I'm a member of the Safety Net Activist Group. I've been doing this for quite a few years and have actually decided to make it a career path in case Trump decides that my SSI don't deserve it anymore, so at least I have something on my resume, but so I'm going to be going back to school, and it's all because of doing this work because I want to be advocating for my community. I'm here to talk about my experience of accessing CityFHEPS while in shelter. So I was a resident of a women's shelter in the Bronx when I first applied. I got lucky, and I was injured in the pandemic, so lucky for me, but the process for me was very draining and difficult. New to the city, didn't know what the heck was going on. I came from no services Florida. I got all my paperwork in. That wasn't the issue. I'm very on top of that, but the was issue was the long wait for approval, waiting to receive my shopping letter, and then the process of finding an apartment with little to no guidance or

support. Yes, we did have a housing specialist, but they were like, no, you should go into the special housing, because I had two different vouchers. I had CityFHEPS and the other one, and supportive housing, but they wanted me to room with someone. I have OCD. I don't room with anybody. Touch my stuff, it could be a big problem. So I said, no, I need my own place, and it wasn't working fast enough, so I went and did CityFHEPS, again trying to find an apartment. Out of desperation to get out of the shelter and exhausted from looking, I signed a lease with a (TIMER CHIME) company that does not care, doesn't take care of their buildings, nor do they do repairs in a timely manner. We have talked about Wavecrest before. It's Wavecrest. If you're looking for an apartment, don't go to Wavecrest. I put that on the record. I was unaware of these issues at the time I signed my first lease. The apartment looked nice. Yeah, so lipstick on a pig's ear. After the apartment inspection and securing a lease, I waited an additional three weeks for checks to be cut, given, and cleared before finally getting my keys to where I could move in. I was suffering in shelter for 18 months, and that's a short term compared to some others, but there were

horrible conditions. I suffered from chronic illness, chronic pain, CPTSD. There was no dignity in my living situation. The food was not adequate to provide me the nutrition I needed as a diabetic with specific dietary needs. My mental health suffered from being triggered by constant fights and a lack of a place where I could completely decompress in silence when overwhelmed and/or triggered. My anxiety was... There was no privacy. My overall health took a downward spiral. I'm just recovering from that now. I shouldn't have to live like that. No one should have to live like that. I should have been housed and moved out and be able to live on my own and continue my healing process. There isn't always enough staff at these shelters to support everyone. The staff is overworked and under extreme backlog due to HRA delays in processing applications and providing shopping letters in a timely manner. Administrative delays for folks living in shelter, and even those of us outside of shelter, are not just minor delays. They're extremely troubling, as we heard before. They took a toll on myself having to figure out what was going on. Having to wait months for a shopping letter, finding an apartment, only to lose that

apartment because HRA took too long to approve the lease or cut the checks to the landlord, and then having to start that process all over again. That is a hamster wheel I no longer want to be on. I am now looking for an apartment again because my living conditions are horrible. It's disheartening, depressing, and most of all frustrating. People need their own space. DHS and DSS needs to stop with the excuses and gaslighting. As the new Administration comes in January, we all hope that they prioritize fixing these issues. Mayor-elect Mamdani promised us the expansion laws implementation since Adams decided that his cronies were better off than those of us New Yorkers. But we're going to hold him accountable, hold his new Administration accountable. I'm going to miss you as Deputy Speaker, and you heard my story for so long. I've also had friends who died a few months after leaving shelter, and a few years after leaving shelter, and they were in shelter two, three, four years. I got lucky, and the only reason why is because I advocate for myself. And now I'm taking my work from what I learned to do for myself as someone healing from massive traumas, and I'm putting that work towards community because it's important. And I

am tired, tired of hearing excuses. We're not prepared. We don't have those numbers. The gaslighting, I'm not even going to say from who, but we all know the gaslighting. That is abusive. We are being abused. We've already been abused. We're already traumatized. Homelessness is traumatizing. Eviction is traumatizing. Coming to New York and being abandoned at Penn Station, traumatizing. We don't need that. We need a strong safety net, especially after all this little nonsense. We need to take care of our New Yorkers. We are a melting pot of many different communities, and I'm afraid that I'm not going to be able to find an apartment before my shopping letter expires. I need to. I have pests. I have roaches. I have mice. I already have to replace about 95 percent of everything in my apartment, including clothes, bedding, and appliances, toasters, coffee, very important coffee. So this is not fair. My apartment passed inspection, but I'm still waiting for two outlets in my living room area and three GFIs, one in the bathroom and two in the kitchen, to be replaced. That was in 2021. They said they would have them replaced prior to me moving in, and they've never gotten replaced. So thank you so much for

allowing me to speak, and I wish you the best, and I'm going to miss seeing your face and being the other Diana in the room. But I know that we have Councilwoman Brewer on our side, and I'll be glad to work with you as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you all for coming to testify. I always say that the best advocates are those with lived experiences, and things happen for a reason, right? Sometimes we don't appreciate it, and it's a lesson that we don't want to have to learn in the way that we do. But I myself, my family was in shelter when I was five years old due to a fire in my building, and I ended up going at that time to a tier two shelter, just three blocks from where the fire occurred. So I stayed in my community, and I benefited from brand new bedding, and cutlery, and utensils, new pots and pans, new pillows, and a clean, safe environment, and then I moved across the street. Within seven months, we were approved for NYCHA across the street. So we tic-tac-toed in the same neighborhood, and the benefits of that, I can tell you, were incredible. But then I also, like you, when I was 17, I emancipated myself and ended up in shelter with my son. I was a teenage

parent. He was one years old, and I remember being in a congregate setting with him, having to sleep with two other families that were very noisy. And thankfully, there was another resident at that shelter who's apartment, I say apartment because she turned her room into an apartment. It was gorgeous. Everybody would go there when they would do inspections. They would go to Belen's (phonetic) room, and she had like a cut from here to here. She and her two children, they took her roommate out, because I think they had the chickenpox, and she was like, please, would you room with me, because I want to pick who comes in. She made that experience livable. I was able to tolerate it. But then I left, and I didn't realize that I had been approved for Section 8, and so I ended up losing my Section 8 subsidy opportunity, because no one forwarded that information to my new mailing address and I didn't know. I was waiting for a number of years before I realized that I didn't have it. And so I say that to say that the reason I got into the work that I'm in is because, having been on the receiving end of a lot of these City safety net programs, which actually, I don't want to poo-poo it all the way, because they

are life-saving for many of us, and I have a lot of really good things to say about those programs as well, but there's a lot that we could fix. And just the overall insensitivity, I think, is one of the things that always comes to mind from those people that were responsible for making sure that I felt safe in an environment and that I left with all of the information that I needed to be able to have that peace of mind that I needed. Because sometimes you don't have the answer, and you don't have a solution. But if I can tell you, and I can walk you through what that experience of going into a shelter is going to feel like, I will make it that much easier on you because you're not going in blind. You know that it's not going to be the prettiest. It might not be the prettiest environment. You know that you may need to bring a snack because there may not be food available. You know that you may not be placed in a permanent place right away, that you may have to go somewhere else overnight. And that helps, right? For me, a person like me, the information, it makes all the difference in the world because I know what to expect. And so when people come to my office, I always, and I've had a couple of instances where I've

had to suggest that a person go into shelter because they had no other alternative. I walk them through that experience, and I am very honest about it because I want them to visualize it, and I want them to walk in there prepared. But then I also make sure, make it my business to let those individuals know that once they're in the system, I'm not going anywhere. They can always come back, and then we can work to try to keep them in their local community if possible. But we can also help them, right, with the next part of their journey. And so because I didn't find that in all places, I decided to go into the social services field. And so I think when people appreciate my honesty, which I get from Gale, she's also been my mentor, and that it comes from a place of genuinely wanting to change a system that I have way too much experience in, and sometimes I wonder if it's a cosmic joke that all these things happened to me. But then I'm grateful that I was also gifted with the platform to be able to inform change and redirect funding and create policy that actually changes the lives of people like us. And that's what you all do, right? When you come here and you testify and you share your stories and you share those experiences,

you use your platform to shed a light on a subject matter that many people don't want to talk about.

So I want to thank you all. I will miss you as well, and we will see each other. I don't plan to go away that easily, but I think I still have a lot to share and a lot to contribute, but so do you. And I want to thank you for your dedicated time and services and for wanting to make a difference, because that's a big deal. Thank you.

I'm calling up my next panel. Robert Desir, Alison Wilkey, Graham Horn, and Alexandra Dougherty, Christopher Mann.

ROBERT DESIR: Good morning, Chair Ayala and Members of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for holding this oversight hearing on the CityFHEPS program, and we also want to thank you for your leadership over the past few years in advocating and championing the rights of people who need to access affordable housing, people who are in shelter. We really enjoyed working with you. We're sad to see you leave and wish you well in your future endeavors.

My name is Robert Desir. I'm a Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Society, testifying on behalf of Legal Aid and also for Coalition for the

Homeless. As the City Council, the State Comptroller, and others have documented, persistent problems in the design and administration of CityFHEPS continue to delay access to stable housing. We support the full set of recommendations in the Council's report, administrative challenges with CityFHEPS and solutions to streamline access to vouchers, and we strongly support the five bills being heard today. Specifically, we support improving application and renewal access through online forums, providing clear confirmation notices, streamlining and prioritizing inspections, requiring reporting on the time it takes to move in, and setting timelines for DSS to decide CityFHEPS applications.

In addition, we urge four key changes. First, we encourage the administration to fully implement the 2023 CityFHEPS reforms and to prioritize households facing evictions from affordable housing who could preserve that housing with a subsidy.

Second, the process to obtain a shopping letter must be simplified. Households are currently required to repeatedly document income changes that do not affect eligibility. Under the rules, income

needs to be verified only twice. Once to establish eligibility for a shopping letter and again at final approval. Requiring constant updates burdens working families, especially hourly workers, and creates unnecessary delays.

Third, we strongly oppose the elimination of the (TIMER CHIME) unit hold policy. I'll try to wrap up quickly.

Finally, we urge the City to repeal the rule requiring households with earned pay to pay 40 percent of their income after five years. This will destabilize families and push them back into shelter.

We support legislation capping the tenant contributions at 30 percent. We would like to see some flexibility for households that voluntarily choose to pay more than 30 percent of their income to access higher rent apartments. That's a feature that we've used at the Legal Aid Society to assist people to get into housing. If that can be considered, I think that would be very helpful and keep people in a position where they're not stuck to the 30 percent in instances where it would help to go beyond that.

These changes will streamline the program, reduce shelter stays, and help New Yorkers access and remain in permanent housing.

Thank you again for your leadership and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

ALEXANDRA DOUGHERTY: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Alex Dougherty. I'm a Supervising Attorney at the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services, and thank you to the Council for inviting us to testify today.

BDS enthusiastically supports today's bills. We're strongly in favor of expanding access to CityFHEPS vouchers and, in particular, reporting requirements and timeline requirements are an important step towards identifying and fixing some of the big problems in the CityFHEPS program. Access to CityFHEPS vouchers is meaningless without reforms to voucher issuance, apartment search, and the apartment approval process. So first, for our clients, both clients living in shelter and those in the community facing eviction, they continue to face significant delays obtaining CityFHEPS vouchers and shopping letters. For clients in the community facing eviction, they can wait six months or even longer for

the initial approval and to get a shopping letter from HomeBase. And HomeBase remains severely backlogged and unable to serve clients timely, and we urge the Council to ensure that HomeBase is adequately staffed and resourced and importantly to allow other legal services providers and social services providers to compile and submit CityFHEPS applications to HRA. That way all eligible New Yorkers can access vouchers quickly and avoid entering shelter.

We also know that access to CityFHEPS vouchers is not the same thing as access to an apartment and despite our strong source of income discrimination laws, landlords know that they'll likely not face any repercussions for failing to rent to an applicant who has a voucher because source of income discrimination remains not adequately enforced. So, I'll echo what has been said before me and encourage the Council and DHS to work with CCHR to enforce our anti-discrimination (TIMER CHIME) laws and also to make sure that staff at shelter and HomeBase is equipped to give voucher holders the resources and tools to actually find apartments and work with landlords who accept vouchers.

And I'll wrap up quickly but I'll just encourage in addition to today's bills there be additional timeline requirements, especially at the initial pre-approval and shopping letter phase so that folks who are eligible for vouchers can get that shopping letter and start the apartment search as quickly as possible. And we'll direct you to our written testimony for more detailed recommendations and thank you for your time and thank you Chair Ayala for all of your work on this.

CHRISTOPHER MANN: Good afternoon. But thank you Chair Ayala, thank you Council Member Brewer for having this hearing today and also just you know reflecting what everyone has said. Chair Ayala, we'll certainly miss you a great deal. The legacy that precedes you is tremendous, and I think as we were hearing from the panel before, I was just reminded of so many of the things that have changed and got better about CityFHEPS under your leadership and the excitement to actually finally see those 2023 bills passed. I think we're all really looking forward to that and I think it's really a tremendous legacy. So, you know, just to say we're so grateful for your unwavering commitment to improving

CityFHEPS, you and the entire Council. You know, we've come a long way but there's still you know many improvements to be made. We continue to see families stuck in shelter solely because of preventable administrative delays. You know, just highlighting a couple examples from WIN, one mom and her daughter lost an apartment after a months-long delay caused by a misspelled landlord name, a glitch in the current system, and a required rebudget. Delays so long she ultimately lost her job, no longer qualified for the voucher, and she's still in shelter. Another mom with two children lost a two-bedroom apartment because of repeated system errors from an incorrect zip code flag to a wrongly issued voucher for a two-bedroom apartment when she was technically only approved for a one bedroom, forcing her to start over more than a year and a half in shelter, so she's also still in shelter. So, again, you know these administrative issues have these real-world consequences and are just devastating for those families when they're so close to getting into the apartment and lose it at the last minute. So, you know that's (TIMER CHIME) why we've been so proud to work with Council Member Brewer's office on several of these bills, Intro.

1458, Intro. 1477, Intro. 1459, to speed up this process, help speed up inspection times. We're also proud to support Intro. 1472, Intro. 1366, and Intro. 1430. These bills reflect fixes our clients and staff ask for every day, and again we're just so thankful to the Council for championing these issues and really helping to make CityFHEPS better. So thank you so much.

GRAHAM HORN: Good afternoon, Council Members and staff, thanks for this opportunity to testify regarding CityFHEPS issues. My name is Graham Horn, I'm a Coordinating Attorney at New York Legal Assistance Group's Shelter Advocacy and Economic Stability Project. We commend Council as we have continued to do for continuing their push, your push, for the expansion of CityFHEPS eligibility, a push that is now even more critical as federal plans directly threaten to divert funding away from supportive and permanent housing and back towards shelter and other warehousing spaces. Shelter is meant to be a temporary and emergency support, it's named throughout the Code as transitional housing, and yet even as there has been some improvement, the average length of stay for all residents in shelter

is far too long. The bills considered today reflect Council's attention and commitment to improving the functioning of the CityFHEPS program. We thank you so much for this, and I do want to flag as a kind of language question, both Intros 1366 and 1477 use the term applicant to describe who those digital web forms would be available to and who would receive expedited review. Because CityFHEPS is not structured as an application that the prospective tenant submits, I just want to be sure that the language would include access to that, you know, having a prospective client be able to track the progress of their forms and applications, even if they are not themselves the applicant, would radically increase transparency and, you know, allow advocates like us a lot more, you know, tangible documentary evidence of what's going on in these cases because it's incredibly opaque. And housing specialists, perhaps in theory the most essential cog in this system, are far too often, in my experience, my client's experience, what is actually delaying these cases. We also hear from clients that there aren't housing specialists at their (TIMER CHIME) shelter site or that program directors, shelter site directors are

serving as housing specialists. Code Section 21-303 mandates housing specialists in each shelter and requires DHS to make public annual reports. There was a delinquency notice earlier this year. To the public, that report has never been made, and I wonder if Council has ever received that report on housing specialists. I mean, it's staffing numbers, caseloads, and as Council Member Brewer was saying earlier, without this information, it's really actually quite hard to fix any of this. We're also concerned about the functioning of the Homebase offices. They're basically described as inaccessible by our clients. Six-month delays for making appointments. You can't walk in, period. Which for a system that has been, to which DSS has subcontracted enormous amounts of its CityFHEPS's responsibilities, for it to be that inaccessible is really problematic. There's more in the written testimony, and thank you so much again.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I use AI quite a bit for writing and other, and listening to you, it's so clear to me that AI can't handle, can't solve any huge problems. You read the Times every day, they've got a million issues. However, zip codes matching to

addresses, landlord's names next to LLCs, whatever. Has that been discussed at all? I should have asked it earlier to the Administration, but to me, that's easy stuff.

CHRISTOPHER MANN: I don't even think it requires AI.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But if you can't do it because you're whatever reasons, help, help, help. I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER MANN: I think it's absolutely a technology issue that seems very easily fixable. I think it's just about putting the resources there. But the zip code, this is the USPS confirmed zip code.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know.

CHRISTOPHER MANN: And in current, in their system, they just had a different zip code. And we can't change it on our end, we have to put in a ticket to get them to change it. And you put in the ticket, and the ticket goes unresolved, and you request the ticket gets resolved. So it's just, you know...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So between either tech improvements or AI, all of those should be

addressed. I don't know, I love AI, but something should be addressed in that sense.

CHRISTOPHER MANN: Yes, agreed.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. And then I have a question also for you. The issue of just how do you streamline some of these things? It's really frustrating listening to your testimony, I'll read it in full. But are there some, I would say, low hanging fruit that you would suggest in terms of some of these challenges? Obviously, spelling helps.

GRAHAM HORN: Yeah. I mean, I'm curious why a zip code match is enough to reject an entire packet. I think others have mentioned this throughout. I mean, I think staffing is a big issue. I think caseloads are way too high.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I asked about it, but I didn't get an answer.

GRAHAM HORN: Right. And I think as you highlight data delivery, I mean, I think there's a lot of enormous lack of transparency. So when there are so many players involved who are responsible for different elements of submitting packages, and when any error in any piece of that package can result in a complete rejection, without a database or any sort

of online system that shows piece by piece what is missing and what needs to be fixed, it's incredibly frustrating for clients because they have no idea what's going on. I think the answer was given by DSS staff here today, that their case managers who they're meeting with biweekly are able to give them these updates. I can tell you that they aren't either able or providing. I mean, the relationships that my clients have with staff at their shelter, I mean, it's just when they are able to make appointments and those appointments aren't randomly canceled on them, they are not provided with information. They're not treated as participants in this process. I think there's a lot of ways in which advocates like us sitting here are able to, because we're able to go to folks that aren't ground level and get attention to matters, we're able to fix individual cases.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, but you can't do that wholesale.

GRAHAM HORN: Right. We can't help everyone that needs it.

CHRISTOPHER MANN: And I think the package when it's finally submitted is like 70 pages of documentation. You'd need to be a savant to be able

to have that level of attention to detail, to make sure every little piece is correct, so I think that's another big piece. Is there a way to reduce the number of documentation and not have it be 70 pages?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. It's been such a pleasure working with all of you. I thought you were going to cry, Chris, but it's okay. It was nice seeing you all.

We will now be joined by the next panel, Molly Zeif, Maritza Rico, Katie Liptak, Eustacia Smith, and Basha Gerhards.

MARITZA RICO: Hi. My name is Maritza Rico. I'm here with New Destiny Housing. First, I wanted to thank the first panel for their testimony and bravery, and I'm here on behalf of domestic violence survivors. New Destiny is the only organization in New York City solely dedicated to the solution of permanent housing for survivors of domestic violence, and we are the largest provider of supportive housing for New Yorkers impacted by domestic violence across the state. We operate the biggest and longest running rapid rehousing program

for survivors in New York City, and this is a program that helps survivors with CityFHEPS and other subsidies find safe housing and provides wraparound services. We're also here with the Family Homelessness Coalition that submitted written testimony, and we just deeply appreciate this Council's efforts, especially this Committee, to address administrative burdens associated with CityFHEPS. At a moment where federal housing funding is threatened, the City must prioritize full implementation of CityFHEPS expansion that was passed into law in 2023, and ensure funding. We also wanted to mention that we remain opposed to the real change underway that increases CityFHEPS recipients' rent burden to 40 percent of their income, and we testified last month to this effect that we oppose the proposed elimination of the unit hold incentive, the HRA. Our housing navigators have gathered countless examples from survivors who access our services where CityFHEPS administrative breakdowns have led to month-long waits, re-admits to shelter, and at times returning to unsafe housing. New Destiny supports the intent behind the legislation package being heard today. We are encouraged by the focus on

these issues, and upon careful review, we have some systems-informed edits to the bill language that speak to survivors' lived experience using or attempting to use vouchers to finance safe housing. Our comments will be developed in our written submission, and we're also in touch with Cynthia Brewer's team to hopefully help push along some of these edits, but it basically tackles some language to ensure effectiveness. For example, we want to make sure that response times that are being reported account for both the DHS and the HRA review of the applications, and also that there's a mechanism that ensures that responsibility is not deferred or blamed for delays are made to service providers. We also want to make sure that faster response times do not lead to higher application denials, which are already very high and often has been testified to today due to very, very minor mistakes. We are supportive of improvements to the inspection process, especially we're very encouraged by allowing quick fixes to be made on the spot during inspections. We're also worried, though, that additions or integrations to the portal exacerbate some of the technological issues with it. We need the portal working

effectively and being able to maintain the increasing traffic and activity before we add more to it. We also have questions about the inspection checklist and how they will interact with the existing ARC, if it reiterates or replaces (TIMER CHIME) it. And yeah, we'll cover this and everything else in our written testimony. We're very grateful for your time and expertise being dedicated to CityFHEPS.

And yeah, Council Member Ayala, if I may, when I was a young legislative analyst at the DOHMH, the OPC bills that I worked on for the first time ever was with your office and your advocacy and your example and mentorship mean a lot to all of us, so thank you.

MOLLY ZEIF: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and the Member of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Molly Zeif and I'm a Housing Navigator at Sanctuary for Families. We're super thankful for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing for the CityFHEPS program. Sanctuary serves over 9,000 abuse survivors and their children annually, the vast majority whom are low-income families of color. Our domestic violence shelters provide safe, confidential residence for 400 adults and children each year. My

program, the Continuum of Care, assists survivors on the path to stability with rental assistance for 6 to 24 months. Sanctuary also offers legal services, case management, and career training to support survivors facing housing insecurities and homelessness. We're gravely concerned about the systematic, very long delays of FHEPS and CityFHEPS voucher processing for our clients. We know that the Council shares many of these concerns and greatly appreciate your sustained efforts to address the issues. Sanctuary's housing specialists, case managers, and counselors work intensively to identify and secure affordable permanent housing for survivors. After the complicated process of getting a housing voucher approved, survivors struggle to find apartments and landlords willing to take those vouchers.

Unfortunately, the voucher processing time often takes another two to six months, which frequently results in clients losing apartments. Not only does this impact the survivor's stability, it also damages Sanctuary's relationship with landlords and brokers.

A few examples of our clients' recent experiences with FHEPS are Carolina was approved for a voucher one year after her initial application. There were

complications with her lease and each time it took at least one month to get a response to each of our inquiries. Due to these delays, an eviction case was started against Carolina, and it was only thanks to Sanctuary's housing attorneys that she wasn't evicted.

Sasha was discharged from Sanctuary's transitional shelter into permanent housing with her voucher in February of 2025. (TIMER CHIME) Four months later, she contacted us after receiving a rent arrears notice from her landlord. It took Sanctuary escalating the issue up the chain of command to discover it was an HRA system error.

Carmen moved out of our transitional shelter in 2024 with her voucher, which paid for three months but then stopped payments. Carmen was threatened by her landlord to pay a balance of 11,000 dollars. She waited months to find a solution and, during this time, she experienced intense stress.

Isabel moved out of shelter in 2023. After initial payments, CityFHEPS stopped paying her rent, leaving Isabel with 4,500 dollars in arrear. She provided documentation to Homebase and HRA who couldn't find her in their system. The situation is

still ongoing. Despite Isabel reapplying and receiving an approval letter, she is still not receiving rental payments.

Delayed voucher payments compound stress and trauma for survivors who are doing their best to recover from abuse and adjust to new lives in the community. Though our clients are not responsible for the late or missed payments, they bear the stress and potential dire consequences. FHEPS and CityFHEPS are vital programs that make a positive impact on our city and we want to see these programs succeed. We appreciate the Council holding this healing and introducing the bills today to work to address these issues. However, we believe these delays are primarily the result of understaffing at the HRA and respectfully recommend that the City Council also advocate for increased HRA funding to fill vacant staff positions, which will shorten voucher processing times. We applaud the oversight efforts of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you so much for your unwavering commitment to New Yorkers in need. Thank you.

KATIE LIPTAK: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and Council Member Brewer. My name is Katie Liptak,

and I am the Special Assistant at Anthos Home, a non-profit that helps New Yorkers move out of shelter and into permanent homes as quickly as possible by bridging the gaps between voucher holders, property providers, and government. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the CityFHEPS program and the proposed bills today.

In our daily work helping voucher holders, we see the challenges they face, which lead to delays, denials, and prolonged shelter stays, but we also see how impactful small improvements can be to families navigating the voucher process. The proposed bills represent exactly this type of progress. By focusing on efficiency, clarity, and accessibility, the proposed process changes will ease and speed the housing process for voucher holders and landlords alike. Still, while these bills, along with the recent changes to the process that DSS has made, while they represent meaningful progress, there is still more work to be done. Anthos Home recommends the following changes, some of which are echoed by the Family Homelessness Coalition, of which we're a member, and by some of the other advocates here today whose testimony we also support. So we recommend also

reducing duplicative inspections by addressing the inspection rules that require DHS and HRA inspections on certain units. We recommend simplifying the rebudgeting process, for example, by issuing the household share letter at the voucher package submission and allowing that income eligibility to remain valid for a year. We also recommend standardizing form updates so that changes occur only once annually and to allow packages that are submitted with previous forms to follow the existing guidelines at the time of submission. And finally, we recommend increasing the work requirement flexibility for the CityFHEPS voucher by allowing documented job search hours to count towards the 10-hour-a-week requirement.

Each of these changes would remove unnecessary hurdles and reduce the cycles of repeated rejections and resubmissions that we see. (TIMER CHIME) The impact on families trying to secure stable housing would be immediate and meaningful. We urge the Council to vote yes on the bills being discussed today, as well as to continue advancing reforms to help voucher holders access this incredible benefit and to move out of shelter and into safe and

permanent homes. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to supporting New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, and I welcome any questions that you might have.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Say hi to Laura.

EUSTACIA SMITH: Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Ayala and Council Member Brewer for the opportunity to testify. My name is Eustacia Smith. I'm from Westside Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing, or WSFSSH. WSFSSH develops and operates permanent supportive housing for older adults with 2,500 units of housing across 31 buildings and more in development. We also operate a 92-bed shelter exclusively for older adults. CityFHEPS is a vital program and important part of the solution to getting homeless people housed. Often, however, the process is far too slow and too bureaucratic. We have examples where the process has taken up to a year or more to get someone into one of our vacant units. In the shelter, the process is stalled because the application is reviewed piecemeal, getting kicked back for one issue at a time, and each time it is another two-week delay. Because most of our shelter clients are on SSI, the

single-issue process is another huge problem causing delays for us. We have experienced long delays in the pre-clearance process because the City has rejected a package based on a small technical issue, causing a back and forth that has sometimes gone on for six months or longer, even though the building has previously been through a pre-clearance on other applications. In one instance, the package was rejected because when writing the name of the building, we spelled out Housing Development Fund Company and they wanted us to write HDFC. In another instance, it was because we referred to the unit as a room rather than SRO, even though we had used that same language previously many times. At times, it's taken months just to get an inspection scheduled. Sometimes the unit fails the inspection due to a minor issue, such as a missing outlet cover, and the process gets repeated, all the while leaving the applicant homeless. At a time when we're seeing dramatic rises in homelessness, have significant shortages of available units, and are facing massive cuts federally, we need to fix these problems. WSFSSH is strongly in favor of Intros 1458, 1459, 1477, sponsored by Council Member Brewer, that together

would speed up the process and (TIMER CHIME) the time it can take from being homeless to being able to move into housing.

Thank you to the Committee for considering all of the avenues to streamline the CityFHEPS process, and to Council Member Ayala, WSFSSH thanks you for everything you've done for us and wishes you all the best.

BASHA GERHARDS: Hello, Committee Chair Ayala, to Council Member Brewer. I am Basha Gerhards, Executive Vice President of Public Policy for the Real Estate Board of New York, the City's leading real estate trade association, and I'm here today to voice full support for Intros 1458, 1459, and 1477 regarding the management of CityFHEPS vouchers. Housing vouchers in New York City are pivotal in mitigating homelessness, increasing housing stability, and improving long-term health, social, and economic outcomes for adults and children. We are incredibly fortunate to have a City-funded voucher program and one where the value of those vouchers meet fair market rents. However, New York City's current administration of its housing voucher programs is deeply flawed. Among the many challenges

with the current voucher system is the fact that it does not set up the voucher holder for success in their apartment search. When competing for an apartment in a supply-limited marketplace, the voucher holder, the family, is placed at a disadvantage to others due to delays in approvals, requests for additional or redundant paperwork, and bureaucratic hurdles such as a lengthy and unpredictable inspection process. Another theme from today is the lack of follow-through once a family leaves the shelter and enters that apartment. New Yorkers deserve a functional voucher system that efficiently and effectively places families in homes and keeps them housed. To advocate for such a system, in 2024, Women in Need and REBNY co-authored the report Housing More New Yorkers to leverage our collective insights and experiences with the challenges besetting the City's voucher program. We all share a common goal, improving the voucher process and helping voucher holders find stable housing. We believe Intros 1458, 1459, and 1477 will address core challenges outlined in the report in the existing bureaucracy around the processing of CityFHEPS vouchers, and we urge their approval

quickly. The aging deadline is December 10th. We thank Council Member Brewer, Speaker Adams, the City Council, Council Member Ayala, it was really inspiring hearing all the support and work you've done in this space as well today, for their continued (TIMER CHIME) leadership to ensure that the CityFHEPS voucher program is a success for tenants who need housing and the property owners who house them. Thank you once again for allowing REBNY to submit testimony in support of these important proposed bills.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want to say congratulations because REBNY probably wouldn't do this without (INAUDIBLE), let me be clear.

BASHA GERHARDS: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We worked together for a long time. Anyway, congratulations to everybody and this was great testimony, but it's great to have, it's unusual to have REBNY and all the non-profits working together. Congratulations.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. All right, we will be calling on two members of the public that aren't joining us via Zoom, Miranda DeNova and Alexis Foote.

MIRANDA DENOVO: Hi. Good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

MIRANDA DENOVO: Okay. Thank you. This is Miranda DeNova. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I'm a community organizer focusing on housing and disability. I testified yesterday against the proposal about SROs, so I don't have a very formal testimony today, but I wanted to share some of what I said yesterday that I think is relevant here to CityFHEPS, and then if there's time, share a couple of examples from other people that I've been assisting.

So in 2020, I was living in an informal shared housing situation. There were three of us in a two-bedroom. When the pandemic hit, the other two lost their jobs and they both moved home with their families, and I didn't have anywhere to go, so I stayed. And so I went from paying about 600 dollars a month on a 40,000-dollar-a-year salary to all of a sudden being responsible for 2,000 dollars a month in rent on the same 40,000-dollar-a-year salary, so my rent burden just skyrocketed to like 60 percent, and obviously I couldn't pay it, but I also made too much

at the time to be eligible for CityFHEPS. The longer story, I wound up homeless, lived in a number of different sort of shared situations, you know, had to make several emergency moves, but that could have been prevented if the expansion was in place at that time and then I would have qualified based on the income requirements. At this point, I am stably housed, but sort of just barely, and do a lot of advocacy for other disabled people who are experiencing homelessness and facing eviction, and there's two people in particular who would benefit from the expansion who have not been able to access the voucher and really need it. The first one is a domestic violence survivor who attempted to get a placement in a shelter and was turned away due to the extent of their disability. I suspect that that is illegal, but you know, you can't always fight things if you don't have the resources. And so due to not being in a shelter, they haven't been able to qualify for CityFHEPS. And then the second person...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Time expired.

MIRANDA DENOVO: Oh, that time. Okay. Just please, please implement the expansion that was voted in in 2023. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

Alexis, and then Amy Blumsack.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alexis.

ALEXIS FOOTE: Can you hear me? I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

ALEXIS FOOTE: Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

ALEXIS FOOTE: So I don't know if you can see it, but this is my mom. Her and I are your most vulnerable population, and New York City is absolutely profiting off of trauma and pain. My husband falsely got me arrested. And for the past two years, I've been fighting for my livelihood. In criminal court, I won my case. I won my case. I'm in family court right now fighting for my kids, but I'm trapped in the shelter. I am under Acacia through the Department of Homeless Services. So I support Intro. 1366. It's not only the technology that needs to be

updated. It's also the office equipment. I've scanned things. It's disappeared into the cloud.

413, I support not only that, but everybody needs to come back to the office. It's more than just sending a confirmation. Everybody needs to come back to the office.

I support 1458. As far as we need more housing inspectors. So New York needs to unfreeze the hiring freeze and hire more housing inspectors. Not only that, we need to expand the housing voucher. The income limit says you have to be below the poverty level. Me and my son do not qualify for CityFHEPS. And I've been fighting to try to get a housing voucher, but Acacia only has a case manager here at the Brewer Hotel, and she's only doing, but so much. And then not only that, but Homebase needs an audit for the past three years. I've been on the waiting list at Homebase for Catholic Charities. Catholic Charities and (INAUDIBLE) says that they cannot service the people of Far Rockaway because they are understaffed and underpaid. There's burnout happening at Acacia, at (INAUDIBLE) and at Catholic charities. I do not want to live in a shelter for the rest of my life. And this is my mother. My mother basically died

because she felt that New York City was, was making her relive, making me relive her situation. My mom did not get a chance to raise me and my brother and my sister. I was a foster kid through Catholic Charities and you're not going to fail me. I need housing for me and my son. I've lost both my mothers. I lost my adoptive mother, July 7th, and I lost my birth mother.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Time is expired.

ALEXIS FOOTE: Let me get one more last word. I don't want to die here. I want a life. I have a good job and I need housing for me and my three kids. HPD, DHS, do you hear me? Look what me and my kids are sleeping. Look, look at the bed. Look what they're paying for 4,000 dollars. Look what me and AJ are sleeping. Look at this. Look at this. This is what HRA is paying (INAUDIBLE) for me to sleep on, for me and AJ to sleep on. I'm pretty sure they don't have to sleep on that. And that's my word. I do not want to be here. I want to be able to raise my kids in housing. Thank you. I appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much.

Amy Blumsack.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

AMY BLUMSACK: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and thank you to the other Council Members on the Committee. My name is Amy Blumsack, and I'm the Director of Organizing and Policy at Neighbors Together. We organize homeless and formerly homeless New Yorkers, many of whom are voucher holders, many of whom are CityFHEPS holders. I just want to take one second to thank all of the impacted individuals who testified today. I found their stories particularly powerful and painful, and it takes a lot of courage and determination to come share your story like that.

I wanted to say our organization is in support of all five of the bills on today's agenda, particularly Council Member Brewer's bills. Anything that can improve the processing timeline of CityFHEPS, we support. I wanted to share two quick member stories that show why improvements to CityFHEPS processing is so important and this oversight hearing is so important. One of our members, after securing an apartment, waited over a year for his CityFHEPS voucher to be renewed, and ultimately he lost his apartment and had to re-enter

the shelter system. He still remains unhoused and he never received his voucher renewal. Our members frequently report that their landlord serves them with an eviction notice because the City failed to pay its portion of the rent.

Another member of ours recently went through the voucher renewal process and was rebudgeted to a higher tenant portion by hundreds of dollars per month, but wasn't notified about her new amount for her rebudgeting until three months after it went into effect. So, by the time she got the news about the new tenant portion, she was already over 1,000 dollars in rent arrears and that is money that she and her family could not afford, so the need for oversight in the CityFHEPS administrative process is critical.

We thank you for this hearing. I did want to quickly say we oppose eliminating the unit hold incentive. We support and strongly encourage the full implementation of the 2023 CityFHEPS expansion bills.

And I also, Deputy Speaker Ayala, wanted to say thank you for mentioning the SOI bill that you passed. It was in 2020, Intro. 1339.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time is expired.

AMY BLUMSACK: We helped work on that bill with you. Thank you. I'll just finish up real quick. And it is important. Sources of income discrimination is a major barrier for people who are trying to access apartments in the city with a voucher. And Neighbors Together is working on addressing that issue. We're working on a bill package which is Intros 1210 through 1215 to address source of income discrimination and help disincentivize the practice by landlords. So, we urge the Council Members to sign on in support of those bills. And I just wanted to say thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, for all of your work in support of voucher holders and improving CityFHEPS and other vouchers over the many years, and we can't wait to see what you do next. Thank you so much for the time and attention of this Committee. Appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much. And thank you for your invaluable input. We wouldn't be able to do the work that we do without our providers and, you know, those of you that understand the issue as well.

Our next panel, next and final panel, Christopher Leon Johnson and Anthony D. Oh, you didn't put your whole last name.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Yeah. Hello. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm here to show support for all the bills, including Intro. 1366, introduced by Council Member Salaam. But I want to make this clear that the City Council has to find a way to make it where all the CityFHEPS applications and CityFHEPS vouchers must be discarded from the non-profit sector and back into the full government via DSS. I'm sick and tired of, like, if people go to get a voucher, you got to go to (INAUDIBLE), VOCAL New York, or, what is it, Acadian Network, or any of these non-profits, and that shouldn't be the case. I understand, I heard the stories of those members from the first public panel when they came from VOCAL New York and Safety Net. But I'm going to tell you this right now, they're part of the reason why I bring everybody in this situation who's trying to get a CityFHEPS because they failed to really bring up the issue to where that, those FHEPS (INAUDIBLE) the non-profit and get sent back to DSS. Now, I heard one of the panelists said that they're going to hold Mamdani

to accountability. I don't think that's going to work because how are you going to hold Mamdani to accountability when one of your members is a member of the Mamdani transition team, and I think they're not going to hold Mamdani to accountability when he becomes Mayor in '26. They're going to stand next to him, take pictures of him, and act like he's doing a great job for the city, which everybody knows that he's not going to do a great job for the city. He's going to just keep on prolonging the problems that Eric Adams had committed as Mayor. So he's the mayor when it comes to CityFHEPS. Eric is pro-REBNY. I'm surprised REBNY support these bills when at the same time that they supported City of Yes but City of Yes will make sure that people who on CityFHEPS can't get apartments with these new developments. Those developers don't want those people who on CityFHEPS living in those luxury apartments. That's why they built the City of Yes plan that got approved by the City Council. But like I said, when you saw this, I said somebody got to introduce (TIMER CHIME) a bill to where that all CityFHEPS must be taken out, must be taken out of non-profits and get sent back to the government sector. And like I said, this is my

prediction that Mamdani is going to do the same job as Eric and make sure that people who still stay homeless, still stay in shelters, still stay dependent on these non-profits that do nothing for the city, still stay dependent on the homeless sector, NGOs that does nothing for anybody, just line their pockets. And I know that you're not your predecessor, but the two previous Speakers ago, Christine Quinn makes 500,000 dollars and I'm sure that the next Committee in the General Welfare and the next Finance Committee should ask them like, what justifies you, Christine Quinn, making over 500,000 dollars as the CEO of WIN, where the people that living there, people that you call shelter clients, which they call shelter clients or guests, can't even get an apartment. This is my base. Next term, there should be a bill to where that the max amount of money an executive director of a homeless-based non-profit should make is 25,000 dollars a year. Because maybe they will know how it feels to be living on a thread, living like, oh, can we, we had to pick and pay rent or we pay for our medicine? Do we pay for a car fare or do you pay for your, or do you pay for, or do you have to buy like McDonald's? Make these

executive directors and start with Christine Quinn, take a big 90 percent pay cut. Because once you start making this happen, and it starts with Christine Quinn, I can't speak on the other NGOs, but this starts with Christine Quinn, who was a former Speaker of City Council, who's the ED of Wynn. Unless you put her to accountability and say, look, you got to take a cut of your salary. Well, you can't do it. You know why? Because there was an NGO leader named Shanda McFadden made almost 40,000 dollars a year and the City forced him to take a 100,000-dollar pay cut. So if they can do that and make, if they can make Shanda McFadden, a Black man, take a 100,000-dollar pay cut, they should make, they should make Christine Quinn take a 450,000-dollar pay cut from 500,000 dollars to 50,000 dollars a year.

So like I said, thank you, Diana, for being a great Welfare Chair. Everybody's going to miss you here. I'm going to miss you. You've been a great person. And, but like I said, that's what happened the most here. That has to start with Christine Quinn. Next term, somebody got to put her to account. Somebody got to hold her account because once that starts, once you put Christine, once you,

so I got to get Christine Quinn, spend my time, advocate mine. But once somebody calls out Christine Quinn publicly, next term, and hold her to accountability to our, including our next Mayor, Zohran Mamdani has to call that lady out for taking that amount of money in a salary. Everything's going to change. The only way we're going to really start fighting back is we got to start calling out Christine Quinn because she's the root of the problem, the root of the problem. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

PARIS DICKEY: Hello. Good afternoon to the Chair. General Welfare Committee, Council Member Diana Ayala. My name is Paris Dickey. I'm a formerly homeless New Yorker, I'm the last New Yorker in the room, who now serves as a licensed real estate salesperson dedicated to housing homeless families and individuals. I have also dedicated time to assist DSS in the past to lay the blueprint for streamlining the City voucher process. Someone mentioned earlier tonight, well, earlier today about the pages being 70. I reduced them from 130 pages to 70 overall. But there are things that I've done with the City in the past. In this role as a real estate salesperson, I

regularly confront and report instances of voucher discrimination, gender discrimination, and HIV status discrimination for some reason that's on the rise again. It's embarrassing. This is what my clients endure. Today, I'm here to testify about how inefficiencies within DSS and HRA not only obstruct my ability to secure housing for those in need, but also drive up the costs and perpetuate the cycle of homelessness. Recently, as of last week, which terminated on Monday, okay, I did everything in my power to assist the family with special needs by holding a three-bedroom across the street from the hospital and the children's doctor for over 45 days. Despite the applicant already having submitted a re-budgeting request to update their voucher two months prior, two months prior, y'all, this is before reaching out to me, the case has remained unresolved. The landlord pulled the unit on Monday due to the length of time, and that apartment is going to go to another person, probably market rate, you know. Right now, the system is failing. CityFHEPS has no standardized training manual. You know why? Because I did a FOIL request for the manual, because I want to know why are there so many mistakes, like my

counterparts that were here earlier. Why are things getting kicked back for the wrong zip code? Why are things getting kicked back because of this and that? You know why? CityFHEPS uses a different database than the Department of Buildings, okay? (TIMER CHIME) So the other thing is, is that no standardized manual has basically, this has delayed over 25 placements, many for over six to ten months. Landlord paperwork has been revised four times in two months, which caused massive delays, and my clients lost over 15 units, 15 people lost over 15 apartments and opportunities. I'm still trying to help them. They're yelling and screaming at me. I'm only one person, okay?

You know, the next thing that I have on my list is shelters without caseworkers, so those with service issues need direct access to the Mayor's Home PEU unit, which also has experience processing vouchers, which they did the HCV emergency vouchers back in 2022 and 2023. That office needs to be utilized so that voucher recipients with barriers to assistance can be processed without further obstruction and bias.

The next thing on my list, please don't cut me off, I keep hearing disturbing reports of sexual harassment in the shelters. I urge City Council to create a dedicated liaison unit trained to investigate and take action. Homeless New Yorkers deserve safety. Homelessness is traumatic enough. I listen to these stories from my clients all the time.

I support Intro. 136, where welfare application is urged. I also urge the City to explore blockchain technology to reduce the areas waste, tampering, and the aforementioned issues that were mentioned by most of these people today, because there's human error in all of this, but blockchain can correct it. You know, and the Mayor Adams, under Executive Order 57, already gives the City the framework to do this, to create blockchain technology, to work with Social Services to get this thing executed, so people don't have to continue to go through this simple paperwork issue that we're experiencing that is just redundant, and people are staying unhoused for over a year.

I support Intro. 147. DSS needs to respond to the applications within 15 days. We need to know what's going on with these clients, you know.

I support Intro. 1459, which requires DSS to report the average time it takes for a CityFHEPS voucher holder to secure housing.

Also, I want to bring this to you all's attention, I'm quite sure you know, under New York Social Service Law 21, passed in 2024, OTDA has the authority to create a modified code necessary to provide services and expedite, okay. New York City DSS only has to do one thing, and simply request these action codes that can be recoded for CityFHEPS to be expedited, for rebudgeting under CityFHEPS to be expedited, they just have to request the codes, OTDA has to comply with the law.

Finally, this is personal, brokers are not being paid. My brokerage alone is owed over 55,000 dollars. I've trained other agents on how to process vouchers in the City at other real estate companies, okay. Some of them were also impacted, or domestic violence survivors, this is why they want to do the work. However, non-payment has pushed agents away from working with voucher holders, and is shrinking housing options. This is one of the many reasons why ghosting and non-assistance happens, and people are being hung up on when people are calling

to get assistance with vouchers. I continue to house people in spite of this 55,000-dollar-plus non-payment. So far this year, I have linked well over 80 cases to homes, again, 80. I have another 50 applications that are working on right now.

So, I'm asking this Council to fix the training gaps, modernize the system, hold agencies accountable, and protect the people like me and this advocacy community that fight and serve our most vulnerable neighbors, irregardless of what our job titles are.

Thank you so much for your time and your dedication and service to all of us. It is greatly appreciated.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much, and thank you for your service.

Is there anyone else that we may have missed?

We have now heard from everyone who has signed up to testify.

If we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify in person, please visit the Sergeant's table and complete an appearance card now.

We are making a final call for Zoom registrants who have not yet spoken.

Anybody?

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

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

And with that, that's it, guys. [GAVEL]

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 28, 2025