

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

4

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

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

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

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

15 Chair Ayala, you may begin.

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

20 We are here today to hold an oversight
21 hearing on the administration of the City's CityFHEPS
22 program. We are also hearing several bills, Intro.
23 1366, sponsored by Council Member Yusef Salaam,
24 Intro. 1430, sponsored by Council Member Tiffany
25 Cabán, and Intros 1458, 1459, and 1477, sponsored by

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

6

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

7

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

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

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

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

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

11 Finally, I want to thank the General
12 Welfare Committee who helped to prepare this hearing
13 and all hearings. They are a fantastic crew and I
14 have been very humbled and proud to work alongside
15 them. They have become family and have made this
16 experience so unforgettable. So, thank you guys. Let
17 me give them a little round of applause. (APPLAUSE)
18 Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel; Nina Rosenberg,
19 Senior Policy Analyst; Justin Campos, Policy Analyst;
20 Julia Haramis, Unit Head; Phariha Rahman, Finance
21 Analyst; Elisabeth Childress-Garcia, Finance Analyst.
22 And finally, my Staff, Elsie Encarnacion, Chief-of-
23 Staff.

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 10
2 child, an older adult with mobility challenges, or a
3 disabled New Yorker who simply cannot stand in line
4 for hours, this bill makes it possible to apply with
5 ease, independence, and safety. And importantly, we
6 are not removing any existing options. Paper
7 applications, mail forms, fax forms, and in-person
8 submissions will all remain in place. What we are
9 doing is adding an additional pathway, an option that
10 expands access rather than restricts it. Our social
11 safety net should not be difficult to reach. With
12 this bill, we make it more humane, more efficient,
13 and more equitable for New Yorkers who rely on it the
14 most. Thank you.

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 11

2 trigger a full re-inspection, delaying the move-ins.

3 Sometimes owners say, goodbye, I'm not renting. It

4 establishes clear standards that distinguish major

5 safety hazards from minor issues, allowing small

6 repairs to be fixed on-site or through an online

7 portal so it doesn't delay the rental. This cuts down

8 unnecessary re-inspections and clears apartments

9 faster so that move-in can take place.

20 And finally, 1459, transparency on lease-
21 up time. As you know, I'm a huge data nut. We can't
22 fix what we don't measure. This Intro. mandates
23 annual reporting on lease-up times, how long it
24 actually takes for a family to go from voucher to
25 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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 13

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 14

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

4 Though our focus today is on CityFHEPS, I
5 do want to highlight our vision placing CityFHEPS in
6 a broader context in assisting the more than three
7 million New Yorkers we serve. In addition to
8 CityFHEPS, the New York State Family Homelessness and
9 Eviction Prevention Supplement, StateFHEPS, the
10 Housing Choice Voucher Program, also known as Section
11 8, and the Department of Housing Preservation and
12 Development, HPD, and the New York City Housing
13 Authority, NYCHA Housing, all serve as important
14 tools in providing crucial aid and support to New
15 Yorkers.

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 15

2 instability receive as many resources as possible.

3 DSS has done significant work to strengthen

4 CityFHEPS, but it is also important to note that this

5 work is happening in a context that presents numerous

6 ongoing challenges. The New York City vacancy rate of

7 1.4 percent is the lowest since 1968. Furthermore,

8 the vacancy rate is lower than 1.4 percent for

9 affordable rental units. For households searching for

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

11 percent. Those vacancy rates make it extremely

12 difficult to secure affordable housing, even with a

13 voucher. We recognize the urgent need to sustain

14 efforts on the housing supply side of the challenge.

15 Even as a record number of New Yorkers are using

16 CityFHEPS to pay their rent, there are more than

17 10,000 households with CityFHEPS vouchers in shelter

18 looking for housing.

19 In the face of these challenges, the City

20 and DSS continue to innovate and partner with City

21 agencies in mobilizing resources to assist our

22 clients. Despite the challenges, our City's

23 investment in rental assistance has proven

24 successful. FY24 saw over 12,000 households

25 permanently housed through CityFHEPS. FY25 saw 15,000

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 16

2 households permanently housed with CityFHEPS.

3 Counting by households served since FY22, CityFHEPS

4 has seen more than 200 percent growth in the program.

5 During the Adams Administration, the program has

6 grown even more rapidly with a 120 percent increase

7 in the number of households using the voucher and

8 nearly five-fold increase in funding from the

9 program. FY21 at 253 million to FY25 at 1.1 billion.

10 In FY25, CityFHEPS continues to be the primary driver

11 for shelter move-outs, accounting for two-thirds of

12 subsidized exits.

13 In sum, CityFHEPS continues to be the

14 most valuable, beneficial, and significant resource

15 supporting shelter move-outs. CityFHEPS outcomes

16 serve as a testament to the steps forward that DSS

17 has taken in expanding access to CityFHEPS and

18 expediting the process of vouchers by streamlining

19 systems, strengthening oversight, and implementing a

20 technological overhaul to enhance efficiencies. The

21 average days from submission to approval has come

22 down from a high of 33 days during 2024 to a recent

23 low of around 23 days, which represents a decline of

24 33 percent. This progress has been the result of

25 deliberate, intentional work. For example, we

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

17

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

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

25

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 18

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

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

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

20 Homebase serves as a key pathway for
21 access to CityFHEPS in the community. HRA oversees 26
22 Homebase sites across the five boroughs. The Homebase
23 program provides various homelessness prevention
24 services as well as aftercare support services to
25 families and individuals exiting shelter and moving

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 19
2 to permanent housing. New Yorkers may be eligible for
3 Homebase if they are at imminent risk of entering the
4 New York City shelter system, are low income, and
5 want to remain stably housed in their community. Once
6 in the program, dedicated Homebase staff are
7 available in each borough to evaluate a household's
8 specific needs and offer supports such as services to
9 prevent eviction, assistance obtaining public
10 benefits, emergency rental assistance, utilities and
11 rent payments, support to address arrears, short-term
12 financial assistance, educational job placement
13 assistance, and help relocating.

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 20
2 engagement unit make apartments available to all
3 shelter providers. We are focused on working together
4 to make sure subsidy applications are accurate and
5 process efficiently.

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

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

2 the state and federal partners with their own
3 requirements.

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

22

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 23

2 to use technology at our disposal to link New Yorkers

3 to benefits. Note that our systems operate in the

4 context of New York state and federal laws,

5 regulations, and directives on various aspects of the

6 benefits administration process, including

7 applications, processing, security, and

8 confidentiality. DSS works with the guardrails that

9 state and federal oversight bodies have established.

10 In addition, the way DSS operationalizes some of the

11 programs does not lend itself well to an external web

12 form apparatus. In some instances, staff and

13 providers guide clients through a process. In those

14 instances, web forms are not necessarily the best and

15 most efficient way to enroll clients for those

16 services. Nonetheless, with amendments to recognize

17 that legal and regulatory context, we can support

18 this legislation.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 24

2 which the interview was conducted, if the interview

3 is via telephone, and all other relevant information.

4 We support providing applicants with the information

5 they need as they proceed through the benefits

6 application process. If I may briefly review the

7 current process for interviewing for cash assistance

8 and SNAP applications and recertification interviews,

9 the process proceeds along two tracks. One track is

10 for the linked cash and SNAP applications and

11 recertifications on the other side, and the other

12 track is exclusively cash applications on the other

13 side. For cash and SNAP applications and

14 recertifications, the process is as follows. The

15 client submits an application or recertification and

16 calls for an on-demand interview. At the end of the

17 interview, the system automatically generates the

18 interview kept status and the receipt. The kept

19 interview notification is available on AccessHRA for

20 SNAP immediately. The interview receipt, the FIA

21 1173, is placed in a print-to-mail queue to be mailed

22 and is electronically added to the case file for both

23 SNAP and cash. The receipt is physically mailed

24 within one to five days. The notice, the FIA 1173, is

25 available on AccessHRA when it has completed the

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 25

2 print-to-mail queue. Once mailed, the document

3 becomes available in OneViewer and AccessHRA. For

4 cash applications and recertification interviews, the

5 interview status is not currently available online.

6 We would have to build the functionality to add

7 interview status to our system. We would like to have

8 further discussions with the Council about the bill

9 to clarify the scope of the program covered and to

10 accommodate measures necessary to prevent phishing

11 and fraud attempts targeting clients and to flag that

12 the confirmation number, location, and phone number

13 data points identified in the bill which are at

14 variance with current operation. For cash assistance,

15 our assessment thus far is that 90 days for

16 implementation would not be sufficient to make

17 adjustments to information technology systems to

18 implement the changes this proposal requires.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 26

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 27

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 28

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

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

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

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

17 Council Member Salaam.

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

21 Council Member Brewer.

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

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

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

22 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah.
23 The pilot that we're launching in the coming weeks
24 for reinspections allows us to identify what we
25 qualify as minor. So in your example, like a stove,

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

31

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

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

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

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: (INAUDIBLE)

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

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

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

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

2 send us photos documenting that the failures have
3 been corrected.

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

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

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: That's Laura,
11 yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know everybody.

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

34

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?

25

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 36

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

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

10 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yes.

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

13 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: No.

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

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

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

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yes. Primarily
25 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 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 38

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

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

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

17 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Both.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

40

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

42

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 44

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

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Andrea, may I?

5 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yes.

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 46

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

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

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

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

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

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Lincoln, we should
8 stop talking.

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

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

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

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On the record.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: All right. Good.

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 50

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

12 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON:
13 Appreciate it.

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

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much,
17 Chair.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 52

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 53

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

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

11 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: What
12 percentage of the stock?

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

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

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

23 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Yeah. So
24 100 or less, right, will be targeted.

25

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 55

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

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

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great.

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

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

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great. Thank you
19 so much.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member
21 Stevens.

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 58
2 shelter, which is why we have the 18 to 21 shelters,
3 because they don't want to go there because it's not
4 safe and they're not comfortable and that's just not
5 a good atmosphere for them. So why have we not
6 allowed them to have access? And what are we doing to
7 ensure that? Because I truly believe this would be a
8 great way for us to stop the cycle of homelessness.
9 And I just need a better understanding because every
10 time I just don't, it's not a good explanation to me
11 so maybe it's a new one today.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 60

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

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

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

25

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 61
2 discussion with because I thought I was in discussion
3 with the right people.

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

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

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

12 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Anybody else?

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 62

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

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

6 Council Member Banks.

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 63

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 64

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

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you.

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

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

25

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 65

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

15 Can you repeat the second part of the
16 question?

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

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

25

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 66

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 68

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 69

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

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

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

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
15 much.

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

70

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

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

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I got that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I hear you.

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

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

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank
25 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.

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

6 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Sure.
7 We're really excited about this pilot. The concierge
8 model was designed to really focus and support
9 providers who might be having challenges with their
10 move-out goals. We have embedded staff at multiple
11 sites. It's usually an invitation, so we work with
12 our providers before we arrive on site. The team is
13 trained to really administer a curriculum of
14 activities that we believe are all geared at managing
15 a successful housing outcome. They're on site for
16 four weeks. Each week has a different agenda of items
17 that they work with the providers on, from everything
18 from data and systems to a voucher eligibility,
19 processing, you name it. The team is able to really
20 support the providers in that way. The goal is that
21 we go in, we support them, and obviously they get the
22 blueprint to continue. We're excited about this
23 program because we're seeing really great results
24 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

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

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

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We're moving on up.

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

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

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

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

80

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

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

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

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

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

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: They continue to
24 renew.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

86

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

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

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

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

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

2 nearing the final phase of that where we have
3 developed the application review checklist, which
4 will go live in coming weeks, early in 2026. And this
5 will help to sort of walk through what is required,
6 every step of the application process so that by the
7 time that application is submitted, it should be
8 accurate and clean and we could get to that 14- or
9 15-day approval timeframe. That's going to be
10 launched with a complimentary video that's sort of
11 marketing and messaging and challenging our providers
12 to step up and really utilize this tool to help them
13 do the work more efficiently and effectively. So
14 that's the first thing that's coming from there with
15 our Re-Institute partners.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

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

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

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

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Really?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Seems pretty short.

14 Okay.

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

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

19 Can you clarify for me rejection?

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

25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 92

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

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

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Fair enough.

15 What is the budget for Fiscal Year '27,
16 and is that sufficient to meet the level of demand?

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

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

20 Do you have any information on the number
21 of folks that have had, they've utilized the
22 CityFHEPS voucher for housing and subsequently
23 returned to shelter within one year and how many have
24 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

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

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

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No! Strike that from
14 the record, but we don't, and, in my office, I try to
15 figure out, like, so I was trying to figure out what
16 was going on with her, and she was all over, she was
17 taking out papers, and I'm looking at the papers that
18 she's taken out. She owed over, I think it was like
19 38,000 dollars in rental arrears, but she has
20 CITYFHEPS. She had a CITYFHEPS voucher. She came from
21 the shelter system and went into this non-profit
22 building, and no one realized on DSS end or on the
23 guardianship end that her rental payments, which were
24 the City's responsibility, were not being made, and
25 so she consistently ends up, like, this has happened

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 100
2 and say, hey, you know what, like these checks
3 haven't gone out because landlords are complaining to
4 us that they can't get in contact with anybody at
5 CityFHEPS and so then the landlord is trying and, you
6 know, I've actually been very impressed as I've
7 gotten out of, you know, good landlords that are
8 like, I want to keep these people, but I'm not
9 getting paid and I can't reach anybody, you know, and
10 so I have to then go to the Commissioner and say,
11 hey, you know, could you address this, and it does
12 get addressed. But if I wasn't in the middle, then
13 what happens?

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

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

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Not their portion,
22 your portion.

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

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

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

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

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

2 know, sometimes, you know, I get a little bit
3 frustrated in hearings because I just, I guess,
4 naively, I just want somebody to acknowledge and say,
5 you know what, like, I hear you, that shouldn't
6 happen, we're going to go back and see why it
7 happened and try to make sure that it doesn't happen
8 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

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

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

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

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

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay B is there
7 other units, other vacancies in, you don't have to
8 tell us now, but could you get back to the Chair as
9 to whether there are vacancies in those three or four
10 divisions that you mentioned? I can't believe they're
11 not. This is a whole to-do because obviously 23 days,
12 15 days, more staff means less time for the process
13 so that's what I'm trying to get at. That's what I
14 was asking.

15 And also 44 people from July to
16 September, but I guess it would be good to know
17 whether more for the fiscal year last year, but also
18 could you get back to the Chair about just some
19 knowledge as to what happened with those 44?
20 Obviously in some cases it's probably beyond your
21 control, but I think it would be helpful to have that
22 information so that we can address it, can help you
23 to address it. 44 is quite a few for that time period
24 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Second
12 largest.

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

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

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

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

16 All right, any other questions?

17 No? Okay.

18 Thank you.

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

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

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

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

12 CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER GONZALEZ: Thank
13 you.

14 CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER HENDERSON: Thank
15 you.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REID: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Ms. Mackey.

3 Thank you. Go ahead.

4 KEZZIE THOMAS: Good afternoon, Council
5 Members. Thank you for having me here this morning.
6 My name is Kezzie Thomas, and I'm here to speak on
7 why we must stop playing games with housing. Because
8 the delays in the Department of Social Services
9 process are not just numbers. They are years of a
10 person's life, like my sister here said, lost to
11 instability, fear, and uncertainty. My life-altering
12 journey into homelessness reluctantly began in March
13 2023. I had been a full-time business owner here in
14 New York. But after bankruptcy and facing serious
15 health issues, I entered shelter for the first time.
16 For five months, DSS continually marked me ineligible
17 for shelter because they could not complete an
18 inspection, even though all of my paperwork was
19 correct. During that time, I faced rude treatment
20 from the staff, unsafe conditions, and no path
21 forward, so I left and moved in with my then-fiancé.
22 When I re-entered shelter, I was four months pregnant
23 and escaping an increasingly abusive relationship.
24 Once again, DSS took another five months just to
25 determine eligibility for shelter. My pregnancy

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

4 The third time I fled for my safety, I re-entered
5 family shelter again, and it was not treated as
6 domestic violence. This time, I was approved for
7 shelter quickly, seemingly because of the domestic
8 violence, in just 10 days, but then waited another
9 five months for an approved CityFHEPS shopping
10 letter. I searched everywhere for housing and was
11 blessed to receive an approval through Housing
12 Connect, but at the final step, I was hit with income
13 discrimination. I appealed twice, both times denied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry.

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

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

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

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 140

2 Homeless. As the City Council, the State Comptroller,

3 and others have documented, persistent problems in

4 the design and administration of CityFHEPS continue

5 to delay access to stable housing. We support the

6 full set of recommendations in the Council's report,

7 administrative challenges with CityFHEPS and

8 solutions to streamline access to vouchers, and we

9 strongly support the five bills being heard today.

10 Specifically, we support improving application and

11 renewal access through online forums, providing clear

12 confirmation notices, streamlining and prioritizing

13 inspections, requiring reporting on the time it takes

14 to move in, and setting timelines for DSS to decide

15 CityFHEPS applications.

16 In addition, we urge four key changes.

17 First, we encourage the administration to fully

18 implement the 2023 CityFHEPS reforms and to

19 prioritize households facing evictions from

20 affordable housing who could preserve that housing

21 with a subsidy.

22 Second, the process to obtain a shopping

23 letter must be simplified. Households are currently

24 required to repeatedly document income changes that

25 do not affect eligibility. Under the rules, income

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

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

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

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

24

25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 146

2 1458, Intro. 1477, Intro. 1459, to speed up this
3 process, help speed up inspection times. We're also
4 proud to support Intro. 1472, Intro. 1366, and Intro.
5 1430. These bills reflect fixes our clients and staff
6 ask for every day, and again we're just so thankful
7 to the Council for championing these issues and
8 really helping to make CityFHEPS better. So thank you
9 so much.

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

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

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

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

2 addresses, landlord's names next to LLCs, whatever.

3 Has that been discussed at all? I should have asked
4 it earlier to the Administration, but to me, that's
5 easy stuff.

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

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

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

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know.

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

150

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

4 CHRISTOPHER MANN: Yes, agreed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Madam
7 Chair.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 156

2 program, the Continuum of Care, assists survivors on

3 the path to stability with rental assistance for 6 to

4 24 months. Sanctuary also offers legal services, case

5 management, and career training to support survivors

6 facing housing insecurities and homelessness. We're

7 gravely concerned about the systematic, very long

8 delays of FHEPS and CityFHEPS voucher processing for

9 our clients. We know that the Council shares many of

10 these concerns and greatly appreciate your sustained

11 efforts to address the issues. Sanctuary's housing

12 specialists, case managers, and counselors work

13 intensively to identify and secure affordable

14 permanent housing for survivors. After the

15 complicated process of getting a housing voucher

16 approved, survivors struggle to find apartments and

17 landlords willing to take those vouchers.

18 Unfortunately, the voucher processing time often

19 takes another two to six months, which frequently

20 results in clients losing apartments. Not only does

21 this impact the survivor's stability, it also damages

22 Sanctuary's relationship with landlords and brokers.

23 A few examples of our clients' recent experiences

24 with FHEPS are Carolina was approved for a voucher

25 one year after her initial application. There were

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 160
2 reducing duplicative inspections by addressing the
3 inspection rules that require DHS and HRA inspections
4 on certain units. We recommend simplifying the
5 rebudgeting process, for example, by issuing the
6 household share letter at the voucher package
7 submission and allowing that income eligibility to
8 remain valid for a year. We also recommend
9 standardizing form updates so that changes occur only
10 once annually and to allow packages that are
11 submitted with previous forms to follow the existing
12 guidelines at the time of submission. And finally, we
13 recommend increasing the work requirement flexibility
14 for the CityFHEPS voucher by allowing documented job
15 search hours to count towards the 10-hour-a-week
16 requirement.

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

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

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Say hi to Laura.

7 EUSTACIA SMITH: Good afternoon. Thank you
8 to Chair Ayala and Council Member Brewer for the
9 opportunity to testify. My name is Eustacia Smith.
10 I'm from Westside Federation for Senior and
11 Supportive Housing, or WSFSSH. WSFSSH develops and
12 operates permanent supportive housing for older
13 adults with 2,500 units of housing across 31
14 buildings and more in development. We also operate a
15 92-bed shelter exclusively for older adults.
16 CityFHEPS is a vital program and important part of
17 the solution to getting homeless people housed.
18 Often, however, the process is far too slow and too
19 bureaucratic. We have examples where the process has
20 taken up to a year or more to get someone into one of
21 our vacant units. In the shelter, the process is
22 stalled because the application is reviewed
23 piecemeal, getting kicked back for one issue at a
24 time, and each time it is another two-week delay.
25 Because most of our shelter clients are on SSI, the

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 163

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

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

10 BASHA GERHARDS: Hello, Committee Chair
11 Ayala, to Council Member Brewer. I am Basha Gerhards,
12 Executive Vice President of Public Policy for the
13 Real Estate Board of New York, the City's leading
14 real estate trade association, and I'm here today to
15 voice full support for Intros 1458, 1459, and 1477
16 regarding the management of CityFHEPS vouchers.

17 Housing vouchers in New York City are pivotal in
18 mitigating homelessness, increasing housing
19 stability, and improving long-term health, social,
20 and economic outcomes for adults and children. We are
21 incredibly fortunate to have a City-funded voucher
22 program and one where the value of those vouchers
23 meet fair market rents. However, New York City's
24 current administration of its housing voucher
25 programs is deeply flawed. Among the many challenges

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

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

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

15 BASHA GERHARDS: Thank you.

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

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

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

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

6 Alexis, and then Amy Blumsack.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alexis.

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

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

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

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

14 ALEXIS FOOTE: So I don't know if you can
15 see it, but this is my mom. Her and I are your most
16 vulnerable population, and New York City is
17 absolutely profiting off of trauma and pain. My
18 husband falsely got me arrested. And for the past two
19 years, I've been fighting for my livelihood. In
20 criminal court, I won my case. I won my case. I'm in
21 family court right now fighting for my kids, but I'm
22 trapped in the shelter. I am under Acacia through the
23 Department of Homeless Services. So I support Intro.
24 1366. It's not only the technology that needs to be
25

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

4 413, I support not only that, but
5 everybody needs to come back to the office. It's more
6 than just sending a confirmation. Everybody needs to
7 come back to the office.

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

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

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

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

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much.
25 Amy Blumsack.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

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

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

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

7 Another member of ours recently went
8 through the voucher renewal process and was
9 rebudgeted to a higher tenant portion by hundreds of
10 dollars per month, but wasn't notified about her new
11 amount for her rebudgeting until three months after
12 it went into effect. So, by the time she got the news
13 about the new tenant portion, she was already over
14 1,000 dollars in rent arrears and that is money that
15 she and her family could not afford, so the need for
16 oversight in the CityFHEPS administrative process is
17 critical.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Yeah.
6 Hello. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm here
7 to show support for all the bills, including Intro.
8 1366, introduced by Council Member Salaam. But I want
9 to make this clear that the City Council has to find
10 a way to make it where all the CityFHEPS applications
11 and CityFHEPS vouchers must be discarded from the
12 non-profit sector and back into the full government
13 via DSS. I'm sick and tired of, like, if people go to
14 get a voucher, you got to go to (INAUDIBLE), VOCAL
15 New York, or, what is it, Acadian Network, or any of
16 these non-profits, and that shouldn't be the case. I
17 understand, I heard the stories of those members from
18 the first public panel when they came from VOCAL New
19 York and Safety Net. But I'm going to tell you this
20 right now, they're part of the reason why I bring
21 everybody in this situation who's trying to get a
22 CityFHEPS because they failed to really bring up the
23 issue to where that, those FHEPS (INAUDIBLE) the non-
24 profit and get sent back to DSS. Now, I heard one of
25 the panelists said that they're going to hold Mamdani

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

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

2 executive directors and start with Christine Quinn,
3 take a big 90 percent pay cut. Because once you start
4 making this happen, and it starts with Christine
5 Quinn, I can't speak on the other NGOs, but this
6 starts with Christine Quinn, who was a former Speaker
7 of City Council, who's the ED of Wynn. Unless you put
8 her to accountability and say, look, you got to take
9 a cut of your salary. Well, you can't do it. You know
10 why? Because there was an NGO leader named Shanda
11 McFadden made almost 40,000 dollars a year and the
12 City forced him to take a 100,000-dollar pay cut. So
13 if they can do that and make, if they can make Shanda
14 McFadden, a Black man, take a 100,000-dollar pay cut,
15 they should make, they should make Christine Quinn
16 take a 450,000-dollar pay cut from 500,000 dollars to
17 50,000 dollars a year.

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

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

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

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 180

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

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

25

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

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

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

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

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

15 Finally, this is personal, brokers are
16 not being paid. My brokerage alone is owed over
17 55,000 dollars. I've trained other agents on how to
18 process vouchers in the City at other real estate
19 companies, okay. Some of them were also impacted, or
20 domestic violence survivors, this is why they want to
21 do the work. However, non-payment has pushed agents
22 away from working with voucher holders, and is
23 shrinking housing options. This is one of the many
24 reasons why ghosting and non-assistance happens, and
25 people are being hung up on when people are calling

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

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

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

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

18 Is there anyone else that we may have
19 missed?

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

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

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

4 Anybody?

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

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

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

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date December 28, 2025