

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Start: 10:15 A.M.

Recess: 12:04 P.M.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Lynn C. Schulman, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Oswald Feliz
James F. Gennaro
Kristy Marmorato
Julie Menin
Mercedes Narcisse
Susan Zhuang

Other Council Members Attending: Powers

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
A P P E A R A N C E S

Christina Farrell,
First Deputy Commissioner at New York City
Emergency Management (NYCEM)

Carolyn Olson
Assistant Commissioner, Environmental
Surveillance and Policy New York City Department
of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)

Shravanthi Kanekal,
Senior Resiliency Planner at the New York City
Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA)

China Copperstone,
Environmental Justice Research Analyst at We
Stay Nos Quedamos

Shelby Luster,
Resiliency Planner at UPROSE

Raísa Lin Garden-Lucerna,
Environmental Justice Manager at El Puente

Aryanna Osorio
Resiliency Coordinator at The POINT CDC

Anita Kwok,
Policy Analyst United Neighborhood Houses

Deaunte Johnson,
Policy Fellow at the New York League of
Conservation Voters (NYLCV)

Caleb Smith,
Resiliency Coordinator at WE ACT for
Environmental Justice

Elizabeth McMillan,
Member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Sophia Milazzo,
Member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice;
Pediatric Environmental Health Research at Mount
Sinai

Dr. Rex Tai,
Member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice;
Physician at New York City Health + Hospitals

Isabel Friedman,
Environmental Health Advocate at the Natural
Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check for
3 the Committee on Health. Today's date is April 8,
4 2025. Recorded by Tisha Sherman. Located in the
5 Committee Room.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to
7 today's New York City Council Hearing for the
8 Committee on Health. At this time, we ask that you
9 silence all electronic devices. And at no time are
10 you to approach the dais.

11 If you would like to sign up for in person
12 testimony or have any other questions throughout the
13 hearing, please see one of the Sergeant at Arms.

14 Chair Schulman, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

16 (GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING IN)

17 Good morning, I am Council Member Lynn Schulman,
18 Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on
19 Health. Thank you all for joining us at today's
20 hearing on Introduction Number 998, sponsored by
21 Council Member Keith Powers, which would codify the
22 Cooling center program.

23 We will also be hearing Resolution 822, sponsored
24 by myself, calling on the New York State Legislature
25 to pass, and the Governor to sign, the Fair Pricing

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2 Act, which would cap the cost of routine medical
3 procedures at 150 percent of the cost paid by
4 Medicare for the same services.

5 Before we begin, I would like to recognize the
6 following council members, Council Member Keith
7 Powers, and remotely, we've been joined by Council
8 Member Marmorato, Council Member Menin.

9 As climate change accelerates, New York City will
10 continue to face longer, more frequent, and more
11 intense heat waves. The science is clear, extreme
12 heat is the deadliest weather related event we face,
13 surpassing hurricanes and winter storms.

14 According to the New York State Department of
15 Environmental Conservation, urban areas like New York
16 City are more susceptible to extreme heat because of
17 the heat island effect (UHI), where heat absorbing
18 surfaces like roads and buildings elevate
19 temperatures to deadly levels.

20 The heat island effect increases the risk of heat
21 related illnesses and deaths, especially among
22 vulnerable populations, including older adults and
23 people with disabilities. In fact, the city's built
24 environment is making temperatures almost 10 degrees
25 hotter for the average resident than they would be

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2 otherwise, according to a study by the nonprofit
3 Climate Central.

4 According to DOHMH's most recent Heat Mortality
5 Report, extreme heat events led to 570 premature
6 deaths in New York City in 2024 from heat preventable
7 illnesses, a significant increase from the number
8 initially reported, which was 340.

9 The impact of extreme heat is not felt equally.
10 Certain neighborhoods in our city, many of them
11 historically underserved communities, are at the
12 highest risk and experience disproportionate heat
13 exposure due to limited tree cover, dense
14 infrastructure, and higher poverty rates. Residents
15 in these areas are more likely to suffer severe
16 health consequences from extreme heat.

17 Unfortunately, some of the boroughs with the
18 greatest need also have the lowest number of cooling
19 centers. My borough of Queens had the lowest number
20 of cooling centers per 100,000 residents according to
21 a 2022 report from the New York City Comptroller. Per
22 that same report, East Flatbush in Brooklyn was
23 significantly underserved by cooling centers as well
24 with only two available for over 162,000 residents.
25 That is completely unacceptable.

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2 Cooling centers are a lifeline, especially for
3 our most vulnerable populations, older adults, low-
4 income residents, and those with underlying health
5 conditions. Yet gaps in cooling center accessibility
6 mean that many New Yorkers remain at risk during
7 dangerous heat waves. That is why Introduction Number
8 998 is so important. The bill has been around for
9 numerous Council sessions and has failed across the
10 finish line as of yet, but that is going to change.
11 Because of its longevity, there are aspects of the
12 bill that need updating, but we will work to ensure
13 that the final version includes everything necessary
14 to codify a program that is such a vital lifeline for
15 New Yorkers and their health.

16 In closing, as extreme weather events become more
17 frequent and deadlier to our health, it is more
18 important than ever to ensure that every New Yorker
19 can access affordable and quality health care. That
20 is why I am proud to sponsor Resolution 822, which
21 calls on the State to pass, and the Governor to sign
22 the Fair Pricing Act, which would enact a neutral
23 payment policy for routine medical services to ensure
24 that New Yorkers are not charged arbitrarily high
25 prices because of hospital market power.

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2 I want to conclude by thanking Council Member
3 Powers on his leadership with this bill, the
4 Administration for being here, as well as the
5 dedicated organizations, advocates and members of the
6 public. I also want to thank my staff as well as the
7 committee staff for their preparation for this
8 hearing.

9 I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by
10 Council Member Narcisse, and I will now pass the mic
11 to Council Member Powers to make a statement on
12 Introduction Number 998.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you. Let me find my
14 remarks here.

15 Thank you, Council Member Schulman. I'm City
16 Council Member Keith Powers, who oh, here we go. You
17 know, I gotta get organized over here.

18 I want to thank Council Member Chair Schulman,
19 and committee staff for holding this hearing. I want
20 to thank 43 colleagues in the City Council who signed
21 on to support a tremendous amount of support for this
22 bill. I also want to recognize Council Member Kalman
23 Yeger, who carried this bill in the past.

24 As we know as New Yorkers, extreme heat is a
25 serious public health threat. It's a leading cause of

1
2 weather related deaths in the United States and the
3 cause of approximately 580 deaths in New York City
4 last year according to the City's Annual Heat Related
5 Mortality Report.

6 As we know, climate change will not only make
7 summertime heat waves hotter and more common – while
8 New York City has been proactive in taking measures
9 to reduce the impact of climate change, we also must
10 be prepared for these worst events.

11 Studies have indicated by the end of the century,
12 thousands of New Yorkers may be at risk of losing
13 their lives each year due to extreme heat, so we must
14 be doing more to protect our neighbors.

15 During the week long heat wave in July of 2022,
16 some communities were severely underserved by cooling
17 centers. For example, one especially heat vulnerable
18 neighborhood in Brooklyn only had two cooling centers
19 to serve over 160,000 residents.

20 Even when cooling centers are open, they're not
21 always accessible to everyone. They can be closed on
22 weekends or in the evenings. And senior centers which
23 serve one portion of the population counted for
24 almost half of the City's cooling centers in July of
25

1
2 2022—or at least advertised as serving one portion of
3 the population.

4 My bill brings much needed improvements to the
5 City's approach to cooling centers and codifies the
6 program that is here to stay. Legislation makes sure
7 there's a reasonable baseline for the number of
8 cooling centers during heat related emergencies and
9 prioritizes an equitable distribution of these
10 services. It also ensures information about cooling
11 centers, including locations and hours operations, is
12 available to New Yorkers year round. It also mandates
13 a public education campaign and focused data
14 gathering efforts, two important steps in further
15 preparing the City for future emergencies.

16 In the face of budget cuts or instability, it's
17 important we enshrine this program into law so New
18 Yorkers can rest assured that no matter how hot our
19 summers get, there will be a permanent, reliable
20 Cooling center program available to reduce risk and
21 save lives. By passing this bill, we can expand
22 access to these cooling centers and save lives in the
23 most vulnerable communities. It's just that simple.

24 So thanks again to Chair Schulman for holding
25 this hearing and to my fellow sponsors, committee

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2 staff, and advocates for their support. I look
3 forward to hearing the testimony today and moving
4 this legislation forward.

5 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Council Member
6 Powers. I will now pass the mic to the committee
7 counsel to administer the oath to members of the
8 Administration.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Good
10 morning, if you could please both raise your right
11 hand? In accordance with the rules of the Council, I
12 will now administer the oath to the representatives
13 from the Administration.

14 Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth,
15 and nothing but the truth, and to respond honestly to
16 council member questions?

17 *PANEL AFFIRMS*

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may proceed.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Good morning,
20 Chairperson Schulman, and members of the Committee on
21 Health. I am Christina Farrell, First Deputy
22 Commissioner at New York City Emergency Management
23 (NYCEM). I am joined today by my colleague, Carolyn
24 Olsen, from the Department of Health and Mental
25 Hygiene. And as stated, we are here today to discuss

1
2 Introduction 998, a bill to codify the City's Cooling
3 center program.

4 Emergency Management, with Department of Health
5 and other agencies, maintains plans and protocols to
6 guide New York City's response to heat emergencies
7 including plans for cooling the public, messaging,
8 and providing guidance to individuals, agencies, and
9 the private sector actions for the public to remain
10 safe during periods of extreme heat.

11 When the City's Heat Emergency Plan is activated,
12 extensive messaging is disseminated through citywide
13 channels, including press releases, City agency
14 websites, Notify NYC, the New York City Advanced
15 Warning System, 311, elected officials, community
16 partners, and social media channels.

17 Cooling center facilities are not operated by our
18 agency but are managed by public and private sector
19 agency partners, each with their own hours of
20 operation and differing levels of accessibility.

21 Cooling centers are air conditioned spaces such
22 as older adult centers, community centers, public
23 libraries, and other facilities that typically
24 operate during daytime hours and are free and open to
25 the public.

1
2 Cooling centers that are available for public use
3 are listed on the City's Cool Options Finder, a 24/7,
4 365, online tool where New Yorkers can see open
5 options during a heat emergency. New Yorkers may also
6 call 311 for this information.

7 The cooling center program is only one of the
8 ways Emergency Management addresses extreme heat. In
9 2024, our agency revised our Heat Emergency Plan to
10 emphasize additional cool options and updated the
11 Cool Options Finder to ensure year round
12 accessibility.

13 New York City Emergency Management has expanded
14 its partnership to offer more cooling centers
15 including cultural sites and elected officials'
16 offices. We are also focused on our approach on where
17 to tell New Yorkers to go on hot days, which can
18 include many options throughout the city, including
19 friends and family, museums, commercial facilities
20 and pools. On heat emergency days, the City ensures
21 that our partner sites are available as cooling
22 centers, a type of cool option. We are grateful to
23 the four city council members who have agreed to have
24 their offices identified as a cooling center added to
25

1
2 the Finder, and we hope that other elected officials
3 will do so this year.

4 This legislation, as relates to cooling centers
5 for heat emergencies, is largely already in action.
6 There are a few details as noted that we would like
7 to discuss further with the Council, such as updating
8 definitions to be consistent with those used in our
9 plans, and discussing the survey component, which
10 comes with a significant cost, yet we believe would
11 not yield actionable results. Further, in 2020, the
12 New York City Council passed Local Law 85, which
13 codified the Cooling center program under Emergency
14 Management's administrative code, with the
15 requirement that the Agency submit an annual report
16 to council detailing various components as well as
17 publishing it on our website. This report, which we
18 are in compliance with each year, is largely
19 duplicative to the reporting requirements detailed in
20 this legislation.

21 However, we have significant concerns about the
22 tying of air quality indices into the cooling center
23 program. As my colleague at the New York City Health
24 Department will testify, pushing people to leave
25 their homes to go to "clean air centers" poses health

1 challenges that may outweigh any potential benefits,
2 as the impact and effectiveness of clean air centers
3 has not been tested.

4
5 To provide some further context here, and as we
6 testified in the two 2023 Air Quality Hearings,
7 forecasting air quality indices, especially for
8 smoke, is incredibly difficult and complex, because
9 forecasts are issued by the State Department of
10 Environmental Conservation on the day of.

11 Air quality can change rapidly. Predicting if air
12 quality will improve or worsen can be difficult,
13 because of the unpredictable behavior of wildfires
14 and factors such as wind, weather, and terrain.

15 The City does not get an official notification on
16 air quality. Instead, the New York City Health
17 Department monitors the air quality index daily and
18 will issue a health advisory if there is a potential
19 for New Yorkers to be affected by poor air quality.
20 Emergency Management then pushes that messaging out
21 through Notify NYC and other channels.

22 As noted above, the City does not operate cooling
23 centers, but rather we rely on our partners. These
24 partners commit to provide air conditioning spaces
25 with seating and water. Asking them to verify that

1 the air is "clean" within their facilities is
2 scientifically fraught and comes at significant cost.

3
4 The estimated cost for the legislation at hand
5 starts at least \$260 million for initial retrofit and
6 increases each year in perpetuity to maintain the
7 "clean air" standard. This cost reflects the science
8 that most air quality alerts that New York City
9 Emergency Management amplifies are due to high ozone
10 rather than smoke. Traditional air conditioners and
11 HVAC systems do not filter ozone, nor fit the
12 standard and facilities would have to be retrofitted.
13 Even LEED certified buildings, such as New York City
14 Emergency Management Headquarters, do not fit the
15 standards being asked. We have had conversations with
16 our West Coast partners including LA, Seattle, and
17 San Francisco, who have been candid about the
18 different models they have tried to address their air
19 quality issues. They generally work with nonprofit
20 and community centers and have received funding
21 through grants and state boards, yet have not seen
22 high demand for these centers. We will continue to
23 speak with them and learn from their best practices.

24 However, as the Council also knows, there is a
25 growing and concerning unreliability of federal

1 funding. For example, recently the Federal
2 Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to
3 cut hundreds of grants of more than \$1.7 billion. We
4 rely on the EPA for air quality monitoring and
5 guidance, and as a base level, are now unsure about
6 the future of air quality monitoring in general.

7
8 Requiring partner organizations to open for high
9 air quality indices would entail significant changes
10 to how the cooling center program currently operates
11 as an effective and successful program to provide
12 cool options to those vulnerable to heat emergencies,
13 thereby diluting the effectiveness of our extreme
14 heat messaging and potentially causing our critical
15 partners to balk at continuing their partnership. Add
16 to that the fact that cooling centers open for a very
17 real and scientifically backed health reason related
18 to heat exposure, but there is no scientific backing
19 that the same measures for air quality exposure
20 further dilutes the effectiveness of our messaging.
21 We ask the Council not to tie clean air centers to
22 cooling centers as they do not provide relief from
23 air quality changes.

24 Air quality is something that we have long
25 monitored and built into our response procedures.

1
2 We've worked with our agency partners and City Hall
3 to develop the *New York City Air Quality Emergency*
4 *Guide* in late 2023 and have socialized this with
5 training and seminars for our partners. We have masks
6 available at police precincts, libraries, and for
7 elected officials who request them, as Council Member
8 Schulman is aware, having taken us up on this offer
9 and provided masks to hand out to her vulnerable
10 constituents. Having a menu of options that can be
11 used for a wide range of incidents and hazards is
12 essential, especially during air quality alert
13 emergencies because of the challenges in predicting
14 smoke concentrations. Cooling centers are a response
15 to extreme heat. They are not a one-size-fits-all
16 solution. Opening them during times of poor air
17 quality provides a cool space, but not necessarily
18 one with better air. We urge the Council to let
19 scientific findings guide the programming that our
20 communities require.

21 Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I will
22 now pass it along to my colleague from the Health
23 Department.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Great, thank you.
25

1
2 Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the
3 Health Committee. I am Carolyn Olson, Assistant
4 Commissioner for Environmental Surveillance and
5 Policy at the New York City Department of Health and
6 Mental Hygiene. On behalf of Acting Commissioner
7 Morse, thank you for the opportunity to join my
8 colleague from New York City Emergency Management to
9 testify today on this legislation concerning cooling
10 centers.

11 Extreme heat events are, on average, the most
12 dangerous type of extreme weather, killing hundreds
13 of New Yorkers every year. As described by First
14 Deputy Commissioner Farrell, the City activates the
15 heat emergency plan by relying on the National
16 Weather Service's science-based advisories, issued
17 based on their highly specialized forecasted heat
18 index. Advisories recommend that people most
19 vulnerable to heat impacts use their home air
20 conditioner if they have one, or if not, that they go
21 to an air-conditioned place, such as a cooling
22 center, shopping center, or the home of a friend.
23 These advisories also urge the public and service
24 providers to check on people who are vulnerable to
25 heat-related health impacts, especially those without

1 residential air conditioning, who have a chronic
2 physical or mental health problem, or are elderly.

3
4 There are several reasons that cooling centers
5 are an important component of the City's multi-
6 pronged response to heat emergencies. First, health
7 risks from extreme heat are significant. While
8 seasonal hot weather contributes to heat stress, when
9 the heat index reaches about 95 degrees and above,
10 the risk of serious illness or death increases
11 rapidly. Second, heat stress is cumulative.

12 Consecutive days of extreme heat compound the risk as
13 the body's temperature rises and dehydration worsens.

14 Third, our epidemiologic research has shown that lack
15 of air conditioning at home during extreme heat is
16 the strongest risk factor for heat stroke death.

17 About 90 percent of adult New Yorkers have home air
18 conditioning and about 75 percent of vulnerable
19 adults report using home air conditioning often
20 during extreme heat. But about 80 percent of the
21 victims of lethal heat stroke die at home, almost
22 always without working residential cooling. For all
23 these reasons, cooling centers are a key part of an
24 extreme heat public health protection strategy.

1
2 I will turn now to the legislation's proposal to
3 open cooling centers on days with air quality health
4 advisories, regardless of the forecasted heat index.
5 The Health Department concurs with NYCEM in our
6 appreciation for the intent behind this proposal, as
7 well as in our concerns with its implementation and
8 potential impacts. While well-intentioned, this
9 proposal is unlikely to reduce pollution exposure and
10 could have the opposite effect—increasing it in some
11 cases — while placing a heavy financial burden on the
12 City. When there is extreme heat, cooling centers
13 definitely lower people's heat exposure because of
14 air conditioning, which allows for recovery from heat
15 stress. As little as a few hours in a cool
16 environment can decrease a person's risk of poor
17 health outcomes due to heat. In contrast, any indoor
18 location during an air quality event will reduce a
19 person's exposure to air pollution, so we tell New
20 Yorkers to limit their time outdoors as much as
21 possible. When the air quality is poor, a person's
22 short-term exposure to pollution could be increased
23 by any time spent traveling outdoors—including to
24 visit a cooling center. In addition, it is much
25 harder to ensure that a cooling center's air quality

1
2 is any better than in a person's home. The center
3 they visit may have poorly designed ventilation or be
4 in a more polluted location than their home or
5 workplace, like near a high-traffic road.

6 After the air quality event from wildfire smoke
7 in 2023, the City developed a detailed emergency
8 response protocol for any similar events. An
9 important component of this preparation was the
10 development of clear, evidence-based health messaging
11 for New Yorkers based on the EPA's Air Quality Index
12 – or AQI. The Health Department provides guidance for
13 the general public and for child care and school
14 settings on our website for air quality events. The
15 primary message we want to deliver is that short-term
16 ambient air pollution exposure is driven by two main
17 factors – the amount of time spent outside and
18 people's level of activity when they are outdoors.
19 During lower-level advisories for people who are
20 sensitive to air pollution, we do not advise changes
21 in behavior for the general public. Once the AQI
22 reaches 150 it can be unhealthy for anyone and our
23 messaging focuses on staying indoors and limiting any
24 strenuous activity outside. Opening public cooling
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2 centers as "clean air" centers would conflict with
3 the clear, evidence-based messaging to stay home.

4 Lastly, the health effects from short-term air
5 pollution exposure increase gradually, in contrast to
6 the rapid rise in illness and death associated with
7 extreme heat. The best way to protect vulnerable New
8 Yorkers from air pollution will be to continue to
9 implement programs to reduce levels of air pollution
10 in the city and, thereby, decrease the chronic
11 exposures that have the greatest impact on health.

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. First
13 Deputy Commissioner Farrell and I would be happy to
14 take questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, I am going to
16 actually ask Council Member Powers to ask his
17 questions first, because he needs to leave. Council
18 Member Powers?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you, thanks for the
20 testimony. A lot of time, I understand the air
21 quality in the part of it, like, an inordinate amount
22 of time spent on that. So I want to just talk about
23 the cooling center piece of it, and then we can talk
24 about the air quality piece of it.

1
2 The bill, at the heart of the bill, is to codify
3 cooling centers here. Yes, there's the air quality
4 piece of it, too. We can debate and discuss that. But
5 as a standalone, codifying the cooling centers in the
6 bill as we're trying to do.

7 Can you just give me your feedback on that piece
8 of the bill, set separate, setting aside the air
9 quality piece of it?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sure. We
11 have... we've been doing the cooling center program
12 in the summers since the late nineties, and it is,
13 you know, one of our standard programs. We, as
14 everyone has said here, we know that people are
15 vulnerable. We have fantastic partners – all of the
16 libraries, the older adult centers, community
17 centers, you know, new partners that we've brought
18 in. And so we stand by that program. We are very
19 proud that, you know, last year at the beginning of
20 the season, we had over 600 facilities that were
21 signed up. Obviously not every facility is open every
22 day. But by contrast, in the city of Chicago, they
23 opened six cooling centers across the city when we're
24 opening hundreds.

1
2 As we said in 2020, the extensive legislation was
3 passed. We now put a plan on our website and we
4 update it every year. We have, over the last couple
5 of years, been able to change The Cooling Center
6 Finder from a just in time application to something
7 that is 24/7. So even today when it's cold out,
8 people can go on and they can look and plan if they
9 want for the summer.

10 So, you know, we feel like a lot of what is
11 covered in the bill is already covered by our daily
12 operations and by the 2020 legislation. But for the
13 cooling center part of the bill, you know, we don't
14 have any serious roadblocks.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, thank you for that.
16 Are there any plans at this moment to expand the
17 amount of cooling centers that the City has? I think
18 there's, you said, about 600 right now? Are there any
19 plans? There have been comptroller and others have
20 done reports indicating that certain communities that
21 were going be the most vulnerable did not have
22 adequate access or enough access. So what are plans,
23 in the coming year, to... what is the expected number
24 or are there plans to expand?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So we have
3 been expanding every year. As we noted last year, we
4 were able to add several cultural sites. I believe
5 the Museum of the City of New York, the Brooklyn
6 Museum, some others – which is fantastic. We also,
7 uh, four council members opened, other elected
8 officials had opened up their offices. We are always
9 looking for new partners. You know, one thing we have
10 found is that there are what we call (TIMER CHIMES)
11 traditional cooling centers and nontraditional
12 cooling centers. During COVID, and last year, because
13 several of the hottest days, one was Juneteenth,
14 which was a federal holiday, and a City holiday, and
15 several were on Sundays, when understandably many
16 locations are not open. So we have worked with other
17 partners, for example, New York City Public Schools –
18 at expense to them last year – nobody receives any
19 type of funding to run the program, to be a center,
20 to pay for the air conditioning. You know, there's no
21 funding with this program. Schools did open last
22 year. They on average saw less than five people total
23 for the 20 schools. So most of the locations that
24 opened last year on those Sundays did not have any
25 people visit. And that was born out during COVID as

1 well. You know, I think that people are used to going
2 to libraries. Seniors are ,you know, enjoy their
3 older adult centers. They have a community there,
4 they may get food, they may do other activities. So
5 you know people really go where they feel
6 comfortable, where they know how to get there, they
7 are just sort of going to have them... they're not
8 just going sit there basically. So we are looking...
9 that's why cultural institutions are a really good
10 option to the extent they're able to participate. And
11 outside of just the cooling centers, like we said,
12 there are a lot of cool options. There may be malls,
13 there could be other locations, so we're noting all
14 of that on our website. But we are always... and over
15 the years, I've been at Emergency Management a long
16 time, over the years we, especially years, you know,
17 during COVID or other when we didn't have as many
18 sites open, we've asked people, uh, We Have A Share
19 Your Space Survey where people can note that they
20 would be interested. Specific elected officials or
21 community groups have sent us information and we've
22 followed up with them. So we are, as long as people
23 can give us the basic things we need, we're happy to
24 add them. But we don't have the power, the authority
25

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2 or the funding to compel any organization to be a
3 cooling center.

4 I will also say just looking at the Comptroller's
5 report from a few years ago, that I believe was based
6 on community boards. And so I think we all know you
7 can live on the edge of one community board...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: For sure, yeah...

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: And, you know,
10 but go to things next door. So I mean I think they
11 needed a way to look at their analysis. But you could
12 have something in other community board that's closer
13 than the one closer to you. So we didn't really agree
14 with all the findings in that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it. I got it.

16 I believe the Department of Health had updated
17 their report from last year about individuals that
18 had died related to heat. Originally was 350, and I
19 believe the number is now up to 580. Can you talk
20 about why that number got updated? What was the cause
21 for that number to go from 350 to 580 and the
22 discrepancy? Can you just talk us through that number
23 change?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Definitely, thanks
25 for that.

1
2 So we discovered an error, quite literally a
3 typo, in our estimation of heat exacerbated. So this
4 is an analysis that requires application of a risk
5 estimate, which we didn't have any errors in, to the
6 number of deaths that occurred in the city, and we
7 are then able to estimate the number of people who
8 have had a condition that exacerbated by the heat.

9 So when we identified this error, we immediately
10 corrected it. And what we discovered was that
11 previously our estimate was 350 – approximately 350
12 deaths per year – and that number is closer to...it's
13 more than 500. So in our most recent five-year
14 period, because we estimate for five years at a time,
15 we see that it's about 580, as you said.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: For last year?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: No, I want to be
18 clear...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: All right.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: that this doesn't
21 represent an increase from last year. This just was
22 literally an error. So the last two years, which both
23 took... we do rolling five-year averages, so we add a
24 new year each year. And both of those were around
25 580, more than 500.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: I see. And where did the
3 typo occur?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: It was literally in
5 the code that we have. So, you know, we discovered
6 that we had a character that was wrong, and it was
7 pulling in the incorrect data sets for... in order to
8 calculate that specific number.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: And have you guys gone
10 back to look at previous years to see if the same
11 error...

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Yeah, so those
13 reports include trend analyses, which we actually
14 started producing last year. So this was the second
15 year, so we corrected and updated the 2023 and 2024
16 reports. And in both of those reports for the first
17 time, we did trend analyses, and we have made certain
18 that all of those analyses are providing the correct
19 numbers.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: And how did that get
21 caught? Like how... what was the... what was the
22 cause of going back to look at...

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Oh, yes...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: those causes?
25

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: We're constantly
3 updating those analyses. And this is an annual report
4 that is required by City Council, we've been doing
5 for a number of years. So every year, we work to
6 expand our analyses and improve upon them. And we
7 always have at least two analysts who are working
8 with the code. This year, we added an additional
9 analyst to the team, and in the process of doing
10 that, we had a new set of eyes on the code, and it
11 was discovered.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it. And just a few
13 more questions, and then I want to hand it back,
14 because I know we have a lot to do.

15 I think you guys mentioned this, but the City is
16 not funding cooling centers. They are basically
17 working with partners that are funded, and they're in
18 charge of their needs there. Is that correct?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Yeah, there's
20 no funding. You know, we take our existing staff to
21 administer the program. And we have built really
22 strong partnerships with the libraries, with the
23 older adult centers, with, other community groups,
24 the Salvation Army, other places like that. So we are
25 really grateful for the partnership of those

1
2 organizations, but there is no funding, no line item
3 for any City agency or nonprofit to run these
4 centers.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it. And right now, are
6 all... how many are 24/7 during a heat crisis?

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: No cooling
8 centers are 24/7; the website is 24/7.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Website? Got it.

10 And what are the normal hours for most of them?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: They're
12 whatever the normal hours are for the facility. You
13 know, based on, and I think people probably
14 understand, you know, the hottest part of the day,
15 and when we have heat emergencies, unless it's
16 something really out of the ordinary, which has
17 happened from time to time and we have adjusted, but
18 usually as the sun starts to go down, we are out of
19 the heat emergency around seven - eight o'clock, and
20 then it can start up again the next morning. And so
21 and as Carrie (phonetic) said, you know, most people,
22 you need to get out of the heat for a few hours. You
23 know, this isn't like a coastal storm or something
24 where you're at risk obviously for the whole time.
25 You need relief for a few hours.

1
2 So we do, if we have extreme heat where it gets
3 the heat indices gets above a 100, we will talk to
4 City partners to see if they can extend their hours.
5 But I think as we all know, know, the nonprofits that
6 run senior centers, libraries, these are not you know
7 generously always funded organizations. So they are
8 super responsive, they work really closely with us,
9 but we try not to put too many demands on them as
10 they are not being funded.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, got it.

12 The last question here. What is the minimum
13 standard to be, one, and are there things that you
14 need to have? Like, do you need to have access to
15 public bathrooms? Do you need... obviously, I would
16 imagine, you need central air conditioning or some
17 other cooling mechanism. But, like, what is the
18 criteria to actually be eligible for one?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sure. Again,
20 we keep it pretty low, because we want to encourage
21 different types of organizations to be a cooling
22 center. You need to be open to the public, to the
23 entire public, not to just a specific population. You
24 have to have air conditioning, it doesn't need to be
25 65 degrees. I think it has to be ,you know, in the

1
2 range of the mid-seventies. You need access to
3 seating and access to water. And you have to be able
4 to have a contact that is willing to work with our
5 staff. Because, sometimes, you know, we do have
6 warning that heats coming, but the... if we're on the
7 margins, it can change over the weekend, it can
8 change on a holiday. Like I said last year, we were
9 activated on Juneteenth, we were activated several
10 Sundays, and not all organizations run 24/7 like our
11 organizations.

12 We prefer, obviously, that they are accessible,
13 about 90% of cooling centers are accessible, since
14 they are mostly older adult centers and libraries,
15 but not all of them are.

16 So we work with them. There are, uh, once people
17 have air conditioning, we can probably work through
18 the other things if they really would like to be a
19 cooling center.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it, thank you. Thank
21 you, Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Sure, thank you, thank you
23 Council Member.

24 I just want to mention that we have joined by
25 Council Member Ariola.

1
2 So how many heat emergency days did New York City
3 experience in 2024, and how does this compare to
4 previous years?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So last year,
6 we were activated for 23 days. Sometimes... that was
7 between June and August. Sometimes it was one day, we
8 did have a long heat activation, which I think was
9 about five or six days. The average is usually two to
10 three days. The year before, we were activated for
11 five days. So it's not, you know, just like we might
12 have a rainy spring, or we might have more hurricanes
13 one year than another, or more snow, less snow. It's
14 not like we can predict it. We are seeing over time
15 generally, obviously, that things are becoming
16 hotter. But usually, we're... the least we've had is
17 about five days and the most we've had is 24 days.

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What trends are being seen
19 due to climate change, and what can New Yorkers
20 expect to see regarding the timing and length of heat
21 waves in the coming years?

22 And as a supplement to that question, given that
23 the federal government is looking to pull apart the
24 National Weather Service on some level, what

1
2 mechanism do we have to make sure that we are aware
3 of what weather is coming to New York?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I mean, our
5 number one partner that we work with is National
6 Weather Service. We continue... we had calls with
7 them last week based on some flooding concerns. So we
8 are still working closely with them. I can't speak to
9 what would happen if we start to lose more specific
10 federal partners, like the weather service, it would
11 really hamper our ability to forecast. We also work
12 with a... we have a smaller contract with a private
13 weather forecaster that we use, you know, from time
14 to time as we need them. But, know, NOAA and the
15 National Weather Service cannot be replaced for city
16 and state governments with, you know, some private
17 contractors.

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: For in terms of... I know
19 this is not a budget hearing, but in terms of the
20 private contractors, and if we need to go that route,
21 I would just... we do have Executive Budget Hearings
22 coming up in May, so I'm just putting it out there to
23 be something to think about in terms of letting
24 Council know what might be needed.

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I'll just say,
3 and Council Member Ariola knows, because we had our
4 budget hearing a few weeks ago, you know, New York
5 City Emergency Management is more than 50% federally
6 grant funded. Two-thirds of our staff are federally
7 grant funded through Homeland Security and FEMA. So
8 if some of the predictions come, you know, that have
9 been laid out, come true, we're going have much
10 bigger issues than maybe weather forecasting.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What guidance does the
12 Administration provide to New Yorkers to help prepare
13 for extreme heat events? And where can this guidance
14 be found?

15 I know you mentioned the website. Is there
16 anything else, or?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Yes, we do
18 extensive work to educate New Yorkers in advance of
19 extreme heat events and then of course during extreme
20 heat events. So the Health Department has a lot of
21 information on our website. Our Heat Mortality Report
22 is there. We have great information for New Yorkers
23 about how to stay safe. And a huge part of our push
24 is also to help people get access to residential
25 cooling if they don't already have that.

1
2 So the Home Energy Assistance Program is the
3 primary way for individuals to get access to an air
4 conditioner. Every year, right about this time, we
5 send out a health advisory to all of the providers in
6 New York City, health care providers, and letting
7 them know, reminding them, the heat is coming. If
8 you have a patient who may not have cooling at home,
9 please get them signed up for this program as soon as
10 possible or help them find this program. The last
11 two, actually I think it's three years now, at least
12 the last two years, that program has closed in July
13 because they ran out of funding. This is a federally
14 funded state administered program, and every year,
15 the Administration, the Health Department, Emergency
16 Management, colleagues at the Mayor's Office, we
17 submit a letter to the Office of Temporary Disability
18 Assistance, which administers the program, advocating
19 for additional funds to be allocated to that program,
20 specifically for the Summer Cooling Assistance and
21 also for utility benefits.

22 So you know it's one thing to have an air
23 conditioner, but if you can't afford to turn it on,
24 it's a problem.

25 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So we continue to
3 advocate for that. And again, as we're all kind of
4 sounding the drumbeat, we know that there are federal
5 changes. The Home Energy Assistance Program in
6 particular is one of the ones that has been reported
7 as cut. And so we need to continue to advocate for
8 these funds for New Yorkers who need it.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you know if all the air
10 conditioners last year?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Yes, so last year,
12 the program closed in mid July, so they no longer had
13 funding to provide.

14 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And one of the questions
15 that I was thinking about when both of you were
16 testifying is - because it is true that people... if
17 people have air conditioning, they're not gonna go to
18 a cooling center. Right?

19 So, is there a way to figure out where the...
20 where people have the least amount of air
21 conditioners - in terms of the aging population and
22 people with disabilities and all of that - so that
23 maybe we have more cooling centers in a particular
24 place than somewhere else?

1
2 Like, for example, you know, the district that I
3 have is mostly, not all, mostly middle, upper middle
4 class. So there may be less of a need there than
5 someplace else. So I'm just curious as to whether or
6 not that data is available.

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I'll say a
8 couple things. There is the Heat Vulnerability Index,
9 which, not always, but generally will coincide with
10 lower income neighborhoods which, you know may have
11 more vulnerability overall. And so we definitely, I
12 think at a scale of a four or five, are the ones
13 where it really can be a serious issue, so we do
14 focus on those areas.

15 We also, you know, we've received outreach from
16 council members, and others, so depending on
17 different populations, when things may be open, we
18 have worked with them. You know, some areas are more
19 isolated than others. So we're well aware of, you
20 know, where our cooling centers are located, where
21 some may be... you know, and sometimes it's also not
22 socioeconomic - it can also be if you're in Northeast
23 Queens, if you're in Staten Island, public
24 transportation is much more limited.

25 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: And people
3 also may not be isolated in a social sense, but they
4 may not live in, you know, apartment buildings. They
5 may live in homes where someone isn't checking on
6 them every day. So there are many different - with
7 heat - there are many different vulnerabilities
8 things that we're looking at. We work with Visiting
9 Nurse, and with other meal providers, especially over
10 long weekends, times when we know, you know, that
11 there could be a heat emergency.

12 So we're looking at all these different
13 vulnerabilities. And again, we appreciate all the
14 outreach that the Council does, you know, along with
15 us to bring this to the forefront.

16 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So what campaigns
17 initiatives has the Administration conducted to help
18 educate New Yorkers on the health risks of extreme
19 heat?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So as Carrie
21 said, they do a lot of outreach. We also have done a
22 lot. One thing we focused on the last couple years is
23 outdoor workers, you know, delivery workers - we've
24 distributed cool kits, cooling towels, water and
25 other things, because ,you know, as she said, the

1
2 more time you spend outside, and the level of your
3 activity, that can also put you at risk. So that is a
4 population that we have focused on.

5 I'm proud to say that Emergency Management, 100%
6 of our advertising last year went to ethnic and local
7 media. So we have done a lot of advertising around...
8 Our three that we focus on are heat, Notify NYC, and
9 coastal storms, evacuation routes. So we did a lot of
10 messaging in many different languages and very hyper-
11 local papers.

12 And also people may come from another country
13 where they're used to heat and so maybe they think,
14 you know, that they can handle it, and then things,
15 know, I think by the time you start realizing that
16 you're ill, you know, it may be too late to get the
17 help that you need. So we focus very locally...

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Mm-hmm.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: on heat and
20 other advertising.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you do any
22 collaboration, like with the Parks Department, to
23 make...because where there are more trees, the
24 temperature seems to be lower, because you have the
25 asphalt and all that that creates heat. So is there

1
2 any, in terms of planting trees or whatever,
3 collaboration there?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Yeah. If you
5 look... so the overall website, the "Cool It!"
6 website, and the Cool Options, we do put things -
7 like if there are pools - I don't know if we get to
8 the level of, you know, shadier areas, but we do talk
9 about splash pads, about other things that may be
10 available if somebody doesn't want to go to a
11 library, but they want to visit a park or something
12 like that.

13 We're also working with C40, the City got a grant
14 to work with some nonprofits to set up misting
15 stations. So, like, if you've ever been to an
16 amusement park or something like that, you may go by
17 where the cool mist goes on you and you get immediate
18 relief. So we, and other partners, are working with
19 some nonprofits to set some of those up in some of
20 the more vulnerable neighborhoods that you've
21 mentioned as a pilot project.

22 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What factors are used to
23 measure the HVI (Heat Vulnerability Index) in
24 communities?

25 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: I'll take that one.

1
2 So our Heat Vulnerability Index is designed to
3 look at community level heat health impacts and
4 includes both environmental, like green space, as
5 well as social, like access to air conditioning
6 indicators. There's a total of five indicators. It
7 also includes surface temperature, poverty, surface,
8 access to air conditioning, green space, and race.

9 So together, they provide us with the ability to
10 understand, at a community level, where we want to be
11 prioritizing and where people have the greatest risk
12 at, again, a population level for those heat health
13 impacts.

14 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How often is the Heat
15 Vulnerability Index updated?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: We update it... So
17 those five indicators are all ones that are
18 relatively slow to change and the data are not easy
19 to collect. So what we do is we update the analysis
20 when there's new data available for all five
21 indicators, and the last time we did that was in
22 2023. It's included in our Heat Mortality Report, and
23 we can definitely send that to you if you'd like more
24 information.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Which neighborhoods
3 currently have a five HVI rating? Which is the
4 highest risk?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: I don't have that
6 directly in front of me. But...

7 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You can get that to us?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: But we can
9 definitely get that to you. It's also available
10 online. And we have maps as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: And we have an
13 interactive Heat Vulnerability Index Tool that allows
14 people to type in their zip code, and then they can
15 see what the indicators is, and each of those
16 individual ones as well. So we'll make sure to send
17 you all that information.

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, have you been seeing
19 trend the HVI risk?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So the HVI is
21 designed as point in time, so it's not designed for
22 trend analyses.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: But we do have
25 trend analyses, and the best way for us to look at

1
2 that is with our heat mortality data. So I can share
3 with you that, uh, when we look at trends exacerbated
4 deaths, we see that there was a great decline between
5 the early 1970s to 2000s and that directly is
6 associated with the increase in residential air
7 conditioning that we know happened during that
8 period.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: And more recently,
11 we have started to see an increase, which we know
12 reflects the growing number of hot days and extreme
13 heat days that we're seeing in our city. And we've
14 now plateaued out at about, as mentioned earlier,
15 about 500, more than 500 deaths each year.

16 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Can you walk us through the
17 process of activating the heat emergency plan just
18 like step by step?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sure.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thanks.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So we, our
22 watch command is, you know, our eyes and our ears,
23 they're 24/7. So they are monitoring National Weather
24 Service forecasts, you know, continuously. And once
25 they start to see - it could be as much as five to

1
2 six days out – Once they start to see that we might
3 get close to hitting the triggers, the triggers,
4 which I think Carrie mentioned, are a heat indices of
5 95 degrees or higher, for two or more days, or heat
6 indices of 100 degrees for any amount of time.

7 Once they see that we might be hitting those
8 triggers, they will talk to our on call team, they'll
9 talk to me, to the Commissioner, and we'll start to
10 monitor internally to see if, you know, if there's
11 any confidence, if we think it's really going get to
12 that level.

13 We will also, our Human Services Unit, will start
14 to reach out to our partners. Because, as we said,
15 many of them, you know, they're nonprofits, they may
16 have smaller staff, they may not be open every day.

17 So we try to give them – they have let us know
18 over the years – that they would much rather get an
19 early heads up. And then if it turns out we don't
20 have to activate, which is better than on a Sunday
21 calling them and saying, "The forecast has changed.
22 Can you all open tomorrow morning?" So we will be
23 very proactive with them. We will also start
24 messaging to the public, not to scare anyone, but
25 just so people are aware, so they can start to make

1
2 plans, you know, maybe start to look in on people
3 that might be more vulnerable. We'll definitely give
4 a heads up to elected officials, to our nonprofit,
5 and other partners.

6 Once we get within a few days, and we can see
7 that we have confidence that we probably will be in a
8 heat emergency, we set up an interagency heat call
9 that can have upwards of a 100 people on it. All City
10 partners, nonprofit, the Library Systems, all of them
11 - and then we'll have state partners, regional
12 partners - and we'll go through, make sure that
13 people understand, is it gonna be, you know, extreme
14 heat? Is it going be regular heat emergency? Is it
15 going to be something where we're going look for
16 extended hours, or are we hitting a federal holiday?
17 You know, there's Memorial Day, there's Juneteenth,
18 July Fourth, Labor Day. These are all holidays where
19 we could have a heat emergency. Is it going to go
20 over a weekend? - which can be more challenging. I
21 will say Wednesdays are the best day for a heat
22 emergency. Almost every almost every facility is open
23 on Wednesday. So, you know, but we can't we don't get
24 that lucky.

1
2 So then, you know, what we also do is, once we
3 know that we're moving towards a heat emergency,
4 we're working on the messaging, our GIS Unit is also
5 looking – Do we have to update the map? Is anybody
6 offline, because their air conditioning broke,
7 because they have construction, you know, they have
8 something else going on? And so we will do that.

9 We usually will have a press conference. We'll
10 have the Health Department, Aging, and City Hall so
11 we can let people know. Then we'll continue to
12 monitor throughout the heat emergency.

13 We send our Citywide Incidents Coordinators kind
14 of as secret shoppers. I know elected officials do
15 too, Gale Brewer's staff loves to do that. But ,you
16 know, to go into the sites and to see is it open, is
17 there signage? They all have signage in 14 languages.

18 But ,you know, sometimes there can be a little
19 error, and we want people to find them, we want them
20 to use the locations. Then at the end of every day,
21 we get a census, so we'll see you know are people
22 going to them?

23 One thing we haven't talked about is ,you know,
24 people will not go to a cooling center if they have
25 to leave their pet at home because it can be

1
2 dangerous for cats, for dogs. And so a couple years
3 ago we opened up a partnership with Petco. So they
4 are on our Cooling Center Map Now. They are well
5 utilized. I go to the Petco in College Point to check
6 out to see how things are going. So ,you know, that's
7 another thing that we will advertise. We don't want
8 anyone staying home, putting themselves at risk,
9 because they don't want to lose their dog, you know,
10 they don't want to leave their dog at home.

11 And so that is kind of the overall. We'll do a
12 report at the end, we'll deactivate the Cooling
13 Center Finder ,and we'll get ready for the next one.

14 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Are there any projections
15 in terms of the heat emergency for 2025 or not yet? I
16 mean, there's no long range.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: No we do do a
18 preseason call. We also do a preseason call with the
19 Council as I'm sure you're both aware.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Mm-hmm.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: You know,
22 those will be coming later in May. But you know, we
23 being emergency managers, we plan for the worst. You
24 know, so we look at, you know, what if we had 25
25 days? hat if we had 30 days? And we definitely look

1
2 to holidays, to Saturdays, to Sundays, to days that
3 we know are more challenging.

4 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Have you has any thought
5 been given to using hospitals? Sometimes they have
6 auditoriums and things like that.

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sometimes when
8 we've had an extreme heat emergency, we have talked
9 to them about, you know, if there is our facilities.
10 I will also say if there is... because we have a heat
11 emergency, doesn't mean we don't have fires, don't
12 have water main breaks...

13 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Hurricanes,
15 all the things that can happen. But we will also
16 bring out, uh, we'll work with the MTA just like we
17 bring warming buses to sites in the winter. We can
18 also bring buses that can be used as cooling buses.

19 So if you had an incident in your district at a
20 specific building and people had to be out, we would
21 also work to get cooling buses there for that point
22 in time.

23 But again, we're always looking for new partners,
24 new people that we can put on the map that people can
25 avail themselves of.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, is there anything
3 that should be included in the Heat Emergency Plan
4 that's not currently mandated by Local Law 85 of
5 2020?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: We don't think
7 so. I mean, we've laid everything out. Like I said, I
8 think when this bill was first drafted, the website
9 was not 24/7. You know, technology has caught up and
10 we're able to make it 24/7 now, which I think is
11 hopefully helpful for your offices when you're
12 advertising that a heat emergency is coming. It can
13 be helpful for the public.

14 So we feel that, you know, everything that needs
15 to be there for the cooling center to run as
16 efficiently as possible is already codified.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is there any kind of
18 hotline or any way that somebody can locate someone
19 if a cooling center is supposed to be open and it's
20 not, or in terms of locating a cooling center?

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So for elected
22 officials, as always, you can use the inner gov
23 email, and many people do. People can call 311, you
24 know, if they reach out, sometimes they reach out to
25 reporters and they get to us, but definitely if a

1
2 member of the public, if the hours are wrong or
3 something, the most efficient is to call 311. Our
4 representatives are on all the calls that we have and
5 they will route any information. Because once we get
6 that information that a cooling center isn't open or
7 the air condition is broken or something – again we
8 don't manage those sites, so then we will have to you
9 know figure out, okay, that's this older adult center
10 and work with aging and their contractor or we'll
11 work with the library. So it is a multi-pronged step.

12 Also if we get reports like that, we'll send out
13 our citywide incident coordinators to make sure that
14 it wasn't just a blip and see if there's any
15 emergency needs that that site needs right at that
16 moment.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Have any of the
18 recommendations in the New York City Comptroller's
19 Report on Cooling Centers been adopted?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So the site is
21 24/7 now, the website, which I think was ,you know,
22 one of the best things that we could do. We also have
23 looked to expand. Like I said, last year we added
24 some elected offices, we've added cultural locations,

25

1
2 and we continue to talk to other partners to see what
3 other spaces can be added.

4 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You know, according to the
5 2022 report, Queens had the lowest number of cooling
6 centers per 100,000 residents. What steps has the
7 City taken to increase the number of cooling centers
8 in Queens. And how many are intended to open during
9 the next Heat Emergency Plan Activation?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: We're right
11 now working with our partners to see how many
12 locations will be open this year. Like I said, last
13 year we started the season with 620 potential, and
14 many days we had many more than 500 set up.

15 Looking at other locations, I think I mentioned
16 before the city of Chicago for the entire city opens
17 up six centers. There's no...

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is that right?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: There's no
20 city, no jurisdiction to our knowledge that opens up
21 anything remotely close to what we do. But we
22 understand that people want to stay home, stay close
23 to home. And so if you have ideas, you're both from
24 Queens, if there are other places that you think
25 could be helpful, you know, let us know and we will

1
2 reach out to them and see if they want to join the
3 program.

4 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We have a casino soon, you
5 can do that. (LAUGHTER) Is... I said Queens.

6 What I wanted to ask you, other cities, do you
7 know what they do in, aside from cooling... cooling
8 centers aside, do you know what they do in heat
9 emergencies? Because I know, I mean, particularly
10 places like LA and other places? I'm just curious. Do
11 you...

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: They, you
13 know, it depends. I would say that places like LA, we
14 work with Houston, Harris County, Miami. People...
15 and Carrie knows more about the science, but, you
16 know, their triggers I think are higher than ours
17 just because they have so many hotter days. I think
18 they have much more air conditioning saturation
19 there, because I don't think you want to live in one
20 of those cities and not have air conditioning. So
21 it's a little bit apples and oranges, but we have
22 looked, especially during COVID, you both were active
23 during COVID. In the summer of 2020, there was the
24 Get Cool Program that Emergency Management oversaw
25 with many partners, and we actually... the City was

1
2 able to install 74,000 air conditioners in low-income
3 seniors apartments. So you know some of those are
4 still in in effect. And so, you know, there are
5 different things that they do, but our program is by
6 far the most comprehensive.

7 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If somebody is an older
8 adult or has mobility issues, is there any kind
9 transportation program or service to get them to a
10 cooling center?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I think some
12 people already have relationship with the Access-A-
13 Ride and things. What we have done is when we've had
14 extreme heat, like if we have three or four days
15 over, I think the summer of 2019

16 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: There were
18 really, really hot days. There were partnerships with
19 some of the rideshare programs that gave vouchers to
20 people to use that for transportation, especially in
21 areas that don't have strong as frequent public
22 transportation.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Some City Council offices
24 have had challenges in the past with a lack of
25 communication from NYCEM as to when the cooling

1
2 centers are open and where the nearest open cooling
3 centers are located. So you're proactively reaching
4 out you'll proactively reach out to council members
5 and all that?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Yeah, for
7 sure. I think also, again, making the website 24/7.

8 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh (INAUDIBLE)

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: That has
10 really helped. You know, and I think, look, New
11 Yorkers are smart. They generally know how to find
12 out, you know, if they want to go to a library, they
13 want to go to a older adult center, they know what
14 the hours are. But people can also call 311.

15 And you know, Emergency Management, especially
16 our Inner Gov Team, and Commissioner Iscol and I work
17 very hard to be very responsive. So if there are any
18 any communication challenges, we can address those.

19 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE) You
20 spoke about Council Member Brewer, so the Office of
21 Investigation, her, Committee on Investigations went
22 out and audited a bunch of centers and all that.
23 You've made the corrections there, I guess, in terms
24 of the signage and all that. And do you have QR codes
25 there or you just have just text on the signage?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I don't think
3 we have QR codes on our... Again, we don't receive
4 funding for this program. When we do update the
5 materials and everything, we'll see if we could put a
6 QR code on that. We definitely have QR codes on our
7 advertising and things, which will push people to the
8 cool option site and to the cooling partner...

9 (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Pretty easy, yeah.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Mm-hmm.

12 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Then you can do that in
13 other languages, too, which I've done with stuff.

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: We do. Our
15 cooling center, all of that information is available
16 in 14 languages just like Notify NYC.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How many cooling centers
18 are temporarily closed as a percentage of all
19 available cooling centers on average every year?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: On average,
21 about 90 percent are open and 10 percent will be
22 having, you know, some kind of incident.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. So public access...
24 oh, public access to water has been an issue at
25 library cooling centers. Has any work been done to

1
2 coordinate that and make water available to people at
3 the libraries?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: If a library
5 or something is having specific issues, they could
6 reach out. When you sign up to be a cooling center,
7 part of what you promise is that you will have water
8 available. But if there are some specific issues that
9 we can help with, we're happy to see those through.

10 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: California, Washington,
11 Arizona, and Oregon all have Clean Air Center
12 Initiatives. Clean air centers are areas with air
13 filtration systems or portable air cleaners and
14 provide safe places to go during wildfires, smoke,
15 and other air pollution events similar to cooling
16 centers.

17 Has the City considered this as an option, and
18 the bill aside, in light of the increase in air
19 pollution and wildfire smoke in New York?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: You want to
21 start?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So I'll start just
23 by talking from a from sort of a public evidence-
24 based, uh, for public health.

1
2 So we definitely are always looking at ways we
3 can protect New Yorkers' health and protect folks and
4 reduce their exposure to poor air quality. But I
5 really want to draw a distinction between what we
6 know about heat emergencies and what we know about
7 air quality emergencies.

8 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Mm-hmm.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So for heat, we
10 have this acute risk, right? We have data that show
11 us very clearly as the temperature rises, we see that
12 increase in illness and in death. We have hundreds of
13 deaths every summer.

14 But for quality, we're more concerned about
15 chronic exposures, and there isn't the same type of
16 exponential risk for these short term exposures.

17 And so what we've always leaned on and what we
18 have really worked on with the City, with Emergency
19 Management, and others is developing clear messaging
20 around reducing your time outdoors. If you're
21 outdoors, reduce the intensity of your activity and
22 potentially wear a mask if that's appropriate for
23 you.

24 So opening a clean air center here for the very
25 few circumstance... I mean, we're all thinking about

1
2 2023, right? We all were here, was very, very
3 frightening. But the idea of opening a clean air
4 center, we don't want to be introducing a potential
5 increase in risk for individuals from leaving an
6 indoor environment, which by definition is going to
7 be better than that air outside, and travel, which we
8 know all New York... right, we're all going to have
9 to go outside, we're going to take a walk to the
10 subway, whatever it is.

11 So that's our concern. And what we're really
12 focused on is leaning into the evidenced-base,
13 providing clear messaging to New Yorkers in an air
14 quality emergency around reducing their time
15 outdoors.

16 Then for heat emergencies, we lean into cooling
17 centers, because that is a proven evidence-based way
18 to support an emergency response as part of our
19 larger response.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: During the COVID-19
21 pandemic, certain older adult centers throughout the
22 City as well as public schools were outfitted with
23 air filtration systems. Do these air filtration
24 systems also operate to filter out particulate matter
25 from wildfire smoke?

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So there's a number
3 of different types of filtration systems that can be
4 put into a variety of different places. Most air
5 filters are designed to do some level of filtration
6 specifically for fine particulate matter. I can't
7 speak specifically to the ones that were installed in
8 the schools, et cetera. I don't know the details of
9 that, but we could check on that if you're if you're
10 interested.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you know, Christina, or
12 no?

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I don't. I
14 know they have put a lot things in. We focus mostly
15 on the generators in schools and ,you know,
16 outfitting them for coastal storms, for power outages
17 for things like that - looking at an all hazards
18 approach. But they have done a lot of work in this
19 area.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, because the reason I
21 am asking is whether or not they could be used as
22 clean air centers if they do have the filtration. So
23 maybe that's something to look at.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: I appreciate the
25 thought. I think one thing that I will just

1
2 reemphasize is, regardless of our knowledge of the
3 quality of the air in a particular center or school
4 or whatever, we still have this issue that we don't
5 know the quality of the place where somebody is at
6 home and they have to leave their home and go
7 outside, which is gonna increase their exposure to
8 get to that location.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What agency or agencies
10 would be... you've already talked about the issues
11 about the... I know about the cooling center program,
12 but what agency or agencies would be best equipped if
13 we did this?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I think, you
15 know, we would have to look at, like Carrie said, do
16 more research, look, talk to some of our partners on
17 the West Coast. The difference being that they
18 unfortunately experience wildfires and things at a
19 much larger rate than we do, so this is something
20 that they may have to turn on more often.

21 You know, I think, outside of some of the
22 challenges that Carrie said, one thing that we fear
23 is, as we've said, these cooling centers are really
24 an unfunded mandate. Right? That our partners have
25 stepped up and I can't, you know, I can't amplify

1
2 enough how fantastic the libraries have been, the
3 older adult centers, the community centers, all these
4 places. But, know, to put more requirements on them,
5 I mean air conditioning is not getting cheaper. We
6 all know how much, you know, energy and other things
7 cost. And so to put another mandate on them, and to
8 start to say... because I mean there aren't hundreds
9 of community locations that we're not aware of.
10 Right? I mean you all know your districts, Health
11 Department knows, you know, we know. So it would
12 really be going back to the same partners, putting
13 more requirements on them, you know, at a very large
14 cost with money that the City probably, you know,
15 wants to spend on other programs.

16 And then, again, we don't... so we have you know,
17 when that all happened in June of 2023, we quickly
18 made masks available at many locations. We have seen
19 very low demand for that. And so we don't see that
20 these sites would be utilized.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. I'm gonna that's I'm
22 done with my question. I'm gonna ask a Council Member
23 Narcisse if she has some questions.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, Chair. Thank
25 you for being here.

1
2 Like I see home air conditioning is very, very
3 important for those folks that don't have them. Like
4 I usually... I used to say to my staff when I used to
5 have a DME, so diapers and (INAUDIBLE) may not be
6 important to you, but for the person that actually
7 need it, it can be very, very important. But in this
8 situation, home air conditioning can be a life and
9 death situation for some.

10 So from my understanding that you rather, which
11 I'm in agreement with what you said, you rather, the
12 focus should be for people to stay indoors,
13 especially when the AQI increase, right? And even in
14 the heat, when it's really hot, you rather the person
15 stay in their home air conditioning instead, right?

16 So in that, if it's that case, why don't we try
17 our very best to increase the amount, especially when
18 it comes to seniors, to have the air conditioning at
19 home? What are you doing to make sure that can happen
20 in order to have people in the room... I mean on the
21 street trying to get a place? Are we doing any
22 projects together?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Specifically
24 projects around expanding home air conditioning is
25 what you're interested in? Yeah, we are very much.

1
2 So the Health Department has been working for
3 some time with our partners specifically on trying to
4 increase the resources that are available for the
5 Home Energy Assistance Program. So this is the
6 benefit program that will buy a person and install an
7 air conditioner in their home. And over the last four
8 to five years, we've done tremendous outreach and
9 increased the uptake of that program in here in New
10 York City. It's a statewide program and it's
11 federally funded. However it needs more funding
12 dedicated to it. So in the last two years the program
13 has closed early, the Summer Assistance Program has
14 closed early because they've run out of dollars,
15 right? They don't have any more funds. And so part of
16 what we've done is really done a lot of advocacy with
17 the State to encourage additional funds be put toward
18 that program. And we also want to see that program
19 expanded to also include utility costs, because as
20 you know, you can have that air conditioner, but if
21 you can't afford to turn it on, it's not helping you,
22 right? So this is really our has been our focus to
23 try to help expand access to home air conditioning.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And, please give some
25 focus around NYCHA houses as well. Because a lot of

1
2 folks are not getting the information (TIMER CHIMES)
3 you get from promote that.

4 Now quickly, I want to know how many cooling
5 centers that we have around our city?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Last year, we
7 had 622 locations registered as a cooling center.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: How many that we have in
9 each borough when we talk Brooklyn, by example?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: It...I mean,
11 each one has well over a 100. It you know, some it
12 it's not the same. It's not... I don't have the
13 numbers by borough, but it's hundreds in each
14 borough, over a 100 in each borough.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. About a 100-
16 something in...

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Well, it's 620
18 across the city and then divided up. You know we are
19 working right now with our partners to see what
20 locations will be available this year, and then it'll
21 be broken down by borough.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: For the elected
23 officials, are we talking about New York City elected
24 officials, or are we talking about across the board
25 that can be a cooling center?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Anybody. We
3 reached out, uhm, last year to all of the elected
4 offices. So there were four council members, there
5 are also some assemblymembers and state senators. We
6 talked to the borough presidents. So ,you know,
7 houses of worship can be a cooling center. Any,
8 again, any space that's available to the public that
9 has access to air-conditioning, has some seating, and
10 water, those are the bare bones standards of what we
11 need.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay, so the listing
13 that we're talking about is including those partners?
14 Like the elected officials and all of that?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Mm-hmm.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So that...

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: The 620 was
18 all of the partners from last year.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And what...

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: There were
21 about seven elected officials all together I think.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay, one of my biggest
23 concerns is the fact that elected officials offices,
24 most of them are not open on the weekend. And if they

25

1
2 have a heatwave or AQI increase, there's no place for
3 them to go.

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Right, so
5 that's why on... we list, if you go on Cooling Center
6 Finder today, it will show you the location; it will
7 say that we're not in a heat emergency; it'll tell
8 you to check back. When, if say, June 23rd of this
9 year, it becomes a heat emergency, we will activate
10 the website in advance, and then you can click - if
11 your office were a cooling center, you would click on
12 it, and it would say it's open 9:00 to 5:00, Monday
13 through Friday. If the heat emergency went into
14 Saturday, it would then show that your office is
15 closed. So we always tell people to check ahead.
16 Because libraries, like my branch library, I know
17 Thursdays they don't open until noon but it's open
18 until 8:00 p.m., it's open Saturday 10:00 a.m. to
19 5:00 p.m.; Sundays it's not open. So every location
20 has different hours. So people, you know, there is a
21 little work you have to do to make sure that the site
22 is open.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I appreciate it, that's
24 where I go back to trying to get the smartest out of
25 it, trying to get (INAUDIBLE) especially the seniors

1
2 if they cannot. Just having a home air-conditioning
3 that would be an ideal approach right now. Because
4 we're talking about how expensive it is for us to do
5 the air testing quality and all of that. So now by
6 starting, I think that's one of the areas we should
7 be pushing for. So, thank you, Chair, thank you so
8 much. I'm moving back and forth, I'm sorry, that I'm
9 not sitting in one place, because I have two
10 hearings. I apologize.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I just want to acknowledge
12 that we have been joined by Council Member Feliz.

13 Council Member Ariola, do you have any questions?
14 Do you have any questions, Council Member? No.

15 All right, so, thank you. Thank you very much for
16 your testimony, we appreciate it.

17 PANEL: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, I now open the
19 hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the
20 public that this is a formal government proceeding
21 and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As
22 such, members of the public shall remain silent at
23 all times.

24

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2 The witness table is reserved for people who wish
3 to testify. No video recording or photography is
4 allowed from the witness table.

5 Further, members of the public may not present
6 audio or video recordings as testimony, but may
7 submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant
8 at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

9 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
10 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms
11 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will
12 have two minutes to speak on Introduction 998 and
13 Resolution 822.

14 If you have a written statement or additional
15 testimony you wish to submit for the record, please
16 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at
17 Arms.

18 You may also email written testimony to
19 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the
20 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
21 will not be accepted.

22 The first panel is Shrvanathi Kanekal – okay, so
23 come up and have a seat – Shelby Luster, Raísa Lin
24 Garden-Lucerna, and China Copperstone.

1
2 Okay, just know that you have two minutes for
3 each of your testimonies. After two minutes, I will
4 ask you to summarize, and then you can submit written
5 testimony in a longer form.

6 So, do you want to start? Make sure the mic is
7 on.

8 SHRAVANTHI KANEKAL: Good morning, Chair Schulman
9 and members of the Council. My name is Shravanthi
10 Kanekal, and I'm the Senior Resiliency Planner at the
11 New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-
12 EJA). We are a membership network linking 13
13 grassroots organizations from low-income
14 neighborhoods and communities of color, and we work
15 with them in their struggle for environmental
16 justice.

17 I am testifying here today alongside member
18 organizations from NYC-EJA in support of Introduction
19 998 with necessary amendments.

20 An increasing number of New Yorkers are
21 experiencing the negative impacts of our changing
22 climate, especially the impacts of heat, which is a
23 silent killer. As we've heard from DOHMH today, the
24 number of heat related deaths that occurred annually
25 was corrected from 350 and to 580 New Yorkers, with

1
2 the highest burdens among Black New Yorkers, who are
3 twice as likely to die from heat related impacts as
4 white New Yorkers, and these are alarming figures.

5 The City must appropriately adapt its policy
6 management and response to heat as a climate threat.
7 And it's critical to ensure that there are sufficient
8 publicly available cooling options to help all New
9 Yorkers.

10 We acknowledge that the existing cooling center
11 program does play a lifesaving role for many but
12 there are also many shortcomings. For example, from
13 an informal survey that we conducted in some of our
14 member districts a few years ago, we found that some
15 cooling centers didn't have working ACs, didn't have
16 extended hours, and some staff did not know that they
17 were actually designated cooling centers. And I say
18 all this to emphasize the importance of clear
19 guidelines and dedicated resources for the program.

20 At a minimum, we'd like Introduction 998 to
21 ensure a minimum number of cooling centers that
22 operate across the city, to ensure that there's a
23 subset that work over the nine to five regular
24 working hours, that they have clear guidelines and
25 minimum working standards, and that they ensure risk

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2 information is available all throughout the year and
3 to the top ten spoken languages. We also want the
4 City to evaluate key statistics (TIMER CHIMES)
5 utilized.

6 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just summarize, and then...

7 SHRAVANTHI KANEKAL: Okay, I can summarize.

8 In conclusion, we are supportive of Introduction
9 998. With the right amendments, we know that this can
10 be a good bill that will support and save a lot of
11 New Yorkers' lives.

12 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next?

13 CHINA COPPERSTONE: Thank you, Chair Schulman,
14 and New York City Council members for providing
15 time to testify today.

16 My name is China Copperstone, and I work at We
17 Stay Nos Quedamos. It's a community development
18 corporation in the South Bronx. We Stay Nos
19 Quedamos joins our partners with the New York City
20 Environmental Justice Alliance to request that
21 Introduction Number 998 be amended to incorporate
22 the recommendations we share today to center the
23 lives of community members most vulnerable to
24 extreme heat related impacts.

1
2 Cooling centers are an essential part of urban
3 infrastructure to protect people from the risks of
4 extreme heat days. And our organization is proud of
5 New York City for investing in a program that is
6 meant to ameliorate the threat of extreme weather.

7 However, the current cooling center resources
8 are insufficiently accessible and inadequately
9 equitable from alleviating environmental justice
10 areas from the increased harms of climate and
11 structural exacerbated extreme heat events.

12 The limited availability of cooling centers,
13 both in terms of locations and hourly operations,
14 leaves our most vulnerable populations at
15 significant risk of heat related illness and death.

16 Our organization represents the voices of
17 underserved neighborhoods in the South Bronx that
18 are disproportionately impacted by heat related
19 health risks – due to lack of community green
20 spaces and access to waterfronts, proximity to
21 pollution sources such as highways distribution
22 centers, and peaker plants, as well as financial
23 barriers to health care and owning household
24 cooling units.

1
2 The New York City Department of Health 2024 New
3 York City Heat Related Mortality Report reports
4 that, and I quote, "Heat contributes to the deaths
5 of about 580 New Yorkers on average each year
6 during the warm season of May through September.
7 Inequities by race and income persist in the people
8 and neighborhoods most impacted."

9 Five-hundred-eighty deaths from high
10 temperatures is outrageous and it's preventable.
11 Our organization recommends that there are a
12 minimum number of cooling centers located across
13 communities, especially those with high
14 concentrations of low-income residents, a high heat
15 vulnerability index, and in areas with poor air
16 quality and high pollution. This includes the most
17 vulnerable neighborhoods across New York City where
18 environmental burdens are highest.

19 (TIMER CHIMES) Centers must be easily accessible
20 - I'll wrap it up - by public transit and ideally
21 located within walking distance of each
22 neighborhood.

23 Additionally, we support that cooling centers be
24 operated beyond regular business hours, including
25 evenings, weekends, and overnight, and additionally

1
2 on those days of poor air quality. These operations
3 should be inclusive and accessible to all and
4 equipped to provide the public with health
5 information... (CROSS-TALK)

6 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Summarize, summarize.

7 CHINA COPPERSTONE: Sure - Awareness of cooling
8 centers should also be improved through proactive
9 outreach and multilingual languages. And
10 additionally, we recommend that there is
11 safeguarded funding for these cooling centers to be
12 improved for services in order to maintain that
13 functioning that we heard about earlier today.
14 Thank you for your time.

15 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

16 SHELBY LUSTER: Good morning, Council Members, my
17 name is Shelby Luster, and I am the Resiliency
18 Planner at UPROSE. UPROSE is Brooklyn's oldest Latino
19 community-based organization, serving Sunset Park
20 since 1966 in working at the intersection of racial
21 and climate justice.

22 The Sunset Park neighborhood in Brooklyn is a
23 frontline, working class, environmental justice
24 community of over 130,000, with a population of about
25 80 percent people of color. Sunset Park's industrial

1
2 infrastructure and limited green spaces contribute to
3 heat retention in the neighborhood, making it
4 particularly susceptible to high ambient heat levels.
5 Waterfront districts like ours often experience
6 temperatures that are six to eight degrees higher
7 than the citywide average.

8 Extreme heat is the deadliest natural disaster
9 worldwide, claiming the lives of around 580 New
10 Yorkers each year and disproportionately impacting
11 the health of environmental justice communities.

12 According to the New York City Panel on Climate
13 Change, the frequency and intensity of heat waves in
14 New York City will only continue to rise as climate
15 change worsens, making cooling centers a critical
16 lifeline.

17 In my work at UPROSE, my primary focus has been
18 filling in the gaps in the City's current cooling
19 center program by establishing our own safe havens in
20 the community spaces around our neighborhood.

21 Our community has made it clear that the currents
22 the City's current cooling center program is
23 inadequate to address the immediate threat of extreme
24 heat. The program does not actively engage with the
25

1
2 communities it serves leading to lack of awareness
3 and trust.

4 We recommend that this bill establish a minimum
5 number of cooling centers in the city, with clear
6 operational standards set by the New York City Office
7 of Emergency Management, particularly focused on
8 environmental justice communities that experience
9 high heat index scores.

10 Cooling centers and environmental justice
11 communities should be hyper accessible and operate
12 beyond the typical nine to five hours. They should
13 provide real time information about heat related
14 health impacts and cooling center operations in the
15 top 10 most spoken languages in the City throughout
16 the year.

17 We urge City Council to pass legislation that
18 addresses the heat lethal outcomes of our city's most
19 devastating natural disaster, and prioritize the
20 safety and health of our communities, especially
21 those that are disproportionately burdened by extreme
22 heat and climate injustice. Thank you for your time.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next?

24 RAÍSA LIN GARDEN-LUCERNA: Good morning, Chair
25 Schulman, and members of the Committee. My name is

1
2 Raísa Lin Garden-Lucerna, I am the Environmental
3 Justice Manager at El Puente. Founded in 1982, El
4 Puente is a human rights organization, located in
5 Brooklyn and Puerto Rico, dedicated to holistic youth
6 and community development through arts for social and
7 environmental justice.

8 I'm testifying on behalf of El Puente in support
9 of the intent behind Introduction 998. However, there
10 are amendments needed for it to have the greatest
11 impact.

12 With the level-four heat vulnerability index in
13 Williamsburg and Bushwick, we know it's caused by the
14 lack of trees and green open spaces and air pollution
15 from truck routes and high traffic roadways. Climate
16 change will only exacerbate these issues from
17 Brooklyn to the Bronx. That is why Introduction 998
18 should not only mandate a minimum number of cooling
19 centers to operate across the city but place an
20 emphasis on EJ communities and neighborhoods with an
21 HVI of four and five.

22 We need greater accessibility for communities to
23 know and utilize these services, too. Many of our
24 members are working class, migrant, and recently
25 arrived families who may not have access to adequate

1
2 cooling at home or in shelters. Urban heat island
3 effect causes heat to linger into the night, and
4 restricting cooling centers to operate during typical
5 working hours neglects these populations. Thus,
6 Introduction 998 needs to expand cooling center
7 operation beyond the nine to five schedule.

8 Additionally, Introduction 998 should prioritize
9 making information on cooling centers and heat risks
10 readily available with live time updates in the top
11 10 spoken languages of the city.

12 Furthermore, three of our NYCHA Cornerstone
13 centers are cooling centers. However, they are not
14 well equipped nor funded to optimally operate and
15 serve the community.

16 Introduction 998 must include clear guidelines
17 for minimum working standards for cooling centers
18 functionality from the New York City Office of,
19 Emergency Management, and dedicate funding to support
20 operations and maintenance for designated sites.

21 Finally, Introduction 998 has the opportunity to
22 directly address extreme heat risk in communities. It
23 won't be perfect at first, but that is why Intro
24 Introduction 998 must also consider the submission of
25 annual reports outlining data analysis and metrics to

1
2 identify areas of improvement to meet the growing
3 risks of extreme heat emergencies.

4 Ultimately, El Puente is supportive of the goals
5 of Introduction 998. Heat affects us all, but we all
6 experience it differently. And we believe with the
7 aforementioned amendments, Introduction 998 can truly
8 serve (TIMER CHIMES) all New Yorkers, especially
9 those most heat vulnerable. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify today.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you all very much for
12 testifying, appreciate it.

13 In the next panel, Jorge Andres Ramirez, Aryanna
14 Osorio, Anita Kwok, and Deaunte Johnson. Okay, go
15 ahead.

16 ARYANNA OSORIO: Good morning, Chair Schulman and
17 members of the Council. My name is Aryanna Osorio and
18 I am the Resiliency Coordinator at The POINT CDC.
19 Founded in 1994, THE POINT is dedicated to youth
20 development and the cultural and economic
21 revitalization of Hunts Point in the South Bronx. Our
22 approach through the lens of arts and education is
23 what enables our community to understand what it
24 means to live in an Environmental Justice
25 neighborhood. Aside from being an Environmental

1
2 Justice community, Hunts Point is home to the largest
3 food distribution center in the western hemisphere.
4 This makes living conditions and the massive
5 infrastructure that's here even worse when it comes
6 to the heat vulnerability index. At times, some the
7 reported temperature within the city is actually four
8 to five degrees higher because of PM 2.5 and because
9 Hunts Point is a heat basin.

10 I am here today to voice THE POINT's support for
11 the intent of Introduction 998. We want to ensure
12 that City government appropriately adapts its policy,
13 management, and response to heat as a climate threat.

14 Since before the pandemic, THE POINT has
15 participated in extensive research and collection of
16 air quality and temperature data for the purpose of
17 understanding the impact that rising climate has on
18 our quality of life. However, as shared in the New
19 York City Heat Related Mortality Report, summers are
20 only getting hotter and our preparedness for such
21 climate emergencies cannot keep pace that safety
22 demands.

23 One strong case is represented by a project we
24 led, with the help of NYCEJA, in Summer of 2023
25 called CAMP EJ, where our organization led community

1
2 members in an air quality and temperature study in
3 efforts to understand our neighborhood climate
4 landscape. While the results of our efforts are shown
5 in NYCEJA's Heat-Related Risks, Air Pollution, and
6 Social Vulnerability in New York City Report, what
7 you do not see is the physical impact the site
8 monitoring had on our members who were outside during
9 those extreme heat conditions. Young people from ages
10 16, staff members, and volunteers ranging from ages
11 30 to 50 (TIMER CHIMES) years were physically and
12 mentally affected by extreme levels of heat trapped
13 in the air, as well as the temperatures that were
14 much higher than reported borough-wide..

15 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If you could just
16 summarize, go ahead.

17 ARYANNA OSORIO: In summary, we support this, and
18 one of the... we support this bill, but one of the
19 things that is missing and that we would like to
20 amend is the communication on a citywide level. We
21 believe that bureaucratic agencies do not do enough
22 work, I guess, like even with the MTA and transit to
23 let people know that this is a serious matter, that
24 climate change is real, and we would propose that the
25 same efforts that were put out for COVID-19, mask up,

1
2 that kind of graphics, we need that kind of backing
3 by LinkNYC, MTA, any kind of local advertisement in
4 our neighborhoods.

5 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Next?

6 ANITA KWOK: Thank you, Chair Schulman, for
7 convening today's hearing on Introduction 998.

8 My name is Anita Kwok, I am a policy analyst
9 representing United Neighborhood Houses, a policy
10 advocacy organization representing settlement houses
11 in New York. Our members operate senior centers,
12 youth centers, and community centers, which serve as
13 cooling centers. These sites are vital as part of our
14 city's emergency response.

15 And as climate change accelerates, the likelihood
16 of more frequent and intense heat waves increases,
17 and the City must have a plan to keep people safe,
18 especially those who are at risk of medical
19 conditions such as older adults.

20 UNH supports Introduction 998, but while the bill
21 sets strong expectations, the City must also ensure
22 that the organizations are supported in meeting these
23 expectations.

24 As one of our members bluntly puts it, "Cooling
25 centers are critical, but we do not like being a

1
2 cooling center." There's poor interagency
3 communication that makes operating a cooling center
4 frustrating. Our members work with multiple agencies
5 like NYC Aging, DYCD, DOHMH, NYCHA, and NYSEM and are
6 often told conflicting things about responsibilities
7 and procedures. We recommend a designated Cooling
8 Czar to coordinate citywide operations, serve as a
9 single point of contact, and ensure all agencies and
10 nonprofits receive clear unified guidance.

11 We also have staffing concerns, because cooling
12 centers often need to be open outside of regular
13 hours including weekends, but no additional staffing
14 support or pay is provided. And we urge the City to
15 provide... to fairly compensate nonprofit workers
16 through time-and-a-half or stipends and provide a
17 pool of city workers to support staff to help staff
18 cooling centers.

19 There's also a concern on the lack of funding and
20 reimbursements for CBOs that operate cooling centers.
21 Sites receive no funding for snacks or activities.
22 People will leave a cooling center if there's nothing
23 to do – computers, TVs, and similar devices aren't
24 standard amenities. And though they may be available
25 at select sites, we urge the City to implement a

1
2 policy of providing reimbursements to nonprofits for
3 meals and activities at their cooling centers.

4 In addition, we urge the City to invest more
5 capital funds to repair HVAC systems. These
6 recommendations will not only increase the utility of
7 cooling centers (TIMER CHIMES) but they'll also save
8 lives. Please see my testimony for more. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.

10 DEAUNTE JOHNSON: Hi, my name is Deaunte Johnson;
11 I am the Policy Fellow at the New York League of
12 Conservation Voters. NYLCV is a statewide
13 environmental advocacy organization representing over
14 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair
15 Schulman, and members of the Committee on Health for
16 the opportunity to comment.

17 NYLCV strongly supports the passage of
18 Introduction 998 of 2024, sponsored by Council Member
19 Powers. New York City is especially prone to extreme
20 heat which is the deadliest weather related hazard in
21 The United States. It has the greatest number of
22 people exposed to the urban heat island effect due to
23 the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other
24 infrastructure that absorbs and reemits the sun's
25 heat. Extreme heat events particularly hit seniors,

1
2 low-income, and communities of color the hardest due
3 to structural racism such as residential redlining.

4 While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple
5 solutions, one way to do so is increasing access and
6 funding for the City's Cooling Center Program in an
7 equitable manner. This Program helps New Yorkers who
8 might not have access to air conditioning or cannot
9 afford increases in their utility bills to take
10 refuge in public places such as community centers,
11 libraries, and senior centers during extreme heat
12 events.

13 Introduction 998 is vital because in the past,
14 the Cooling Center Program had been found to be
15 inequitably administered. For example, a previous
16 study by the Comptroller, which was mentioned earlier
17 today, found that heat vulnerable neighborhoods such
18 as Central Brooklyn, Central Queens, and parts of the
19 Bronx had the fewest per capita cooling centers.

20 While we support this bill, we also recommend the
21 building which consider the following edits:

22 One, using the latest available data when
23 establishing the number of cooling centers of
24 legislative mandates instead of a number based on
25 data from 2017.

1
2 Two, there should be a minimum number of cooling
3 centers operating beyond regular working hour... days
4 and hours in neighborhoods with high heat
5 vulnerability index scores. As we've seen that hot
6 nighttime temperatures is the same as hot daytime
7 temperatures, there's no difference. So, the cooling
8 centers availability should reflect that.

9 Three, the cooling center website should be
10 available in the top 10 spoken languages in New York
11 City. The website should include real time updates on
12 locations, hours, and services provided.

13 And lastly and most importantly, if passed, we
14 urge the Administration and City Council to allocate
15 sufficient long term funding to ensure the City's
16 cooling center program is effectively carried out.
17 This includes funding for staff, extended operating
18 hours if necessary, programmatic needs and more.

19 We look forward to working with City Council,
20 Administration, advocates to ensure New York City is
21 well prepared (TIMER CHIMES) for climate and public
22 health emergencies for all New Yorkers, but
23 especially our most vulnerable. Thank you for the
24 opportunity to comment.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I want to thank this panel,
3 thank you very much for testimony. And if you have
4 longer testimony, uh, we have yours, we have both of
5 yours, so you can always submit. Thank you very much,
6 we really appreciate the work that you do.

7 Okay, next panel will be Sophia Milazzo, Rex Tai,
8 Caleb Smith, and Liz McMillan.

9 Which way do you want to start? You can go first.

10 CALEB SMITH: Hi, my name is Caleb Smith. Good,
11 morning, Committee Chair Lynn Schulman, and Committee
12 on Health, I am the Resiliency Coordinator at WE ACT
13 for Environmental Justice. I'm glad to be here today
14 with WE ACT members.

15 WE ACT is a membership-based organization
16 headquartered in Harlem serving all Northern
17 Manhattan. Our mission is to build healthy
18 communities by empowering residents to engage in the
19 creation of sound and fair environmental policy. I am
20 here alongside our members to uplift this critical
21 emergency program to better support safety and health
22 equity in the face of deadly heat events.

23 The cooling center program is an essential safety
24 net for households that do not have air conditioners
25 or cannot afford to run one. Cooling center visits

1 result in an estimated 66 percent reduction in the
2 risk of heat attributable deaths. However, the
3 program is in many ways ad hoc – it has no dedicated
4 budget, little consistency in services and hours and
5 some neighborhoods lack a location within a five
6 minute walking distance. Residents also report
7 limited wayfinding, signage or advertisements.
8 Community members have told us how to remedy these
9 issues in WE ACT’s Cooling Center Audit released in
10 2020. The passage of this bill will ease the
11 allocation of resources to increase awareness of the
12 program and address barriers to access highlighted by
13 the audit. This bill also prioritizes equity in the
14 quantity and citing of cooling center locations to
15 better serve the most vulnerable populations.
16

17 Proven best practices for the program such as
18 extending hours of operations, coordinating outreach
19 with local transit authorities, consistent program
20 reporting and establishing feedback mechanisms for
21 cooling center patrons can be implemented here.

22 If cooling centers are codified and properly
23 funded, we will be a more heat resilient city.

24 WE ACT for Environmental Justice strongly urges
25 the New York City Council to enact Introduction 998,

1
2 and we will be providing written testimony with more
3 detailed recommendations. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

5 ELIZABETH MCMILLAN: Hello, my name is Elizabeth
6 McMillan. I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental
7 Justice, and I live in City Council District 9.

8 I want to thank Chair Schulman for hearing my
9 testimony in support of equitable climate policy. The
10 Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for
11 low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events.
12 The last two years recorded the hottest global
13 temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are
14 becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with
15 so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility
16 bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential
17 part of the solution for our most vulnerable
18 populations.

19 In my neighborhood, the cooling center program
20 needs more support, because extreme heat events are
21 increasing in frequency, severity, and duration in
22 New York City. Cities such as New York are seeing
23 more severe extreme heat events than surrounding
24 areas, not only due to climate change, but because of
25 the contribution of the urban heat island effect, in

1
2 which cities experience much hotter temperatures than
3 surrounding suburban and rural areas due to the
4 prominence of closely placed buildings that radiate
5 heat, high vehicle traffic, concentrated building
6 emissions, and less heat-absorbing vegetation.

7 The New York City Panel on Climate Change (NPCC)
8 2019 Report found that the number of hot days has,
9 and will continue to increase in frequency, duration,
10 and severity.

11 Introduction 998 would significantly improve the
12 accessibility and use of cooling centers in my
13 neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for
14 those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is
15 why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this
16 legislation.

17 We also hope that the City Council will
18 prioritize the cooling center program with adequate
19 funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can
20 only be realized (TIMER CHIMES) if the City
21 reinforces its climate disaster response goals with
22 financial support. Thank you for your time and
23 consideration.

24 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?
25

1
2 SOPHIA MILAZZO: Hello, my name is Sophia Milazzo,
3 and I am here with WE ACT for Environmental Justice,
4 and I live in City Council District 39. I work in
5 pediatric environmental health research at Mount
6 Sinai, which is located in City Council District 8
7 and serves New Yorkers from all districts. Thank you
8 Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in
9 support of equitable climate policy.

10 The cooling center program is a critical safety
11 net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat
12 events. New York's Climate Impact Assessment's
13 climate projections for New York City show some of
14 the state's largest increases in extreme heat. New
15 York City has historically experienced an average of
16 four days per year over 95°F; this number is
17 projected to increase as high as 32 days per year by
18 mid-century, which is over a month each year of
19 dangerously hot days and is to almost two full months
20 per year by the end of the century.

21 Cooling Centers are a vital community resource on
22 these extreme heat days. Extreme heat causes direct
23 and indirect health effects that span acute illness
24 to chronic health issues. These health effects are
25 more likely to affect our most vulnerable community

1
2 members. Children are a particularly high-risk group.
3 As someone who works with a team of pediatricians, I
4 cannot overstate how important it is for families
5 with children and low-income families of color to
6 have options for cool, safe, convenient spaces if
7 they don't have adequate AC where they stay. It's a
8 life-saving health measure.

9 Introduction 998 would significantly improve the
10 accessibility and use of cooling centers across the
11 city, providing a much needed refuge for those who
12 are most at risk from extreme heat. I strongly urge
13 the City Council to pass this legislation.

14 We also hope that the City Council will
15 prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate
16 funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can
17 only be realized if the City reinforces its climate
18 disaster response goals with financial support.

19 (TIMER CHIMES) Thank you for your time.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next?

21 DR. REX TAI: Good morning, my name is Rex Tai, I
22 am a resident of Central Harlem in City Council
23 District 9, a member of WE ACT for Environmental
24 Justice, and a physician working in New York City at
25 Health + Hospitals.

1
2 I want to make the case for addressing heat-
3 related death and illness through crucial steps -
4 improving access to cooling centers is overwhelming
5 and indisputable.

6 Very recently a wide swath of professional
7 medical societies have adopted physician statements
8 to study and prepare for climate related health
9 effects with the utmost urgency. Leading health
10 journals like the *Journal of the American Medical*
11 *Association* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*
12 have all issued advisory reports for how physicians
13 and public health officials should address and
14 advocate around climate health and heat specifically.

15 Heat has multisystem health impacts and a lot of
16 attention is given to the acute health consequences
17 such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, but I also want
18 to bring attention to the statistically significant
19 increase in chronic illness exacerbations that come
20 from heat as well. This includes allergic triggers
21 for asthma attacks, increased risk of cardiovascular
22 disease like heart attacks, pre-term birth,
23 developmental delay, the list goes on and on. Again,
24 it's a whole system, whole body set of health
25 consequences.

1
2 In the post-pandemic era with rising health care
3 costs, hospital closures, systemic staffing
4 shortages, an inability to proactively and
5 comprehensively prepare for extreme heat will stretch
6 the City's health care infrastructure only further.

7 New York City makes political and budgetary
8 decisions about how sick it chooses for its residents
9 to be. Please empower the Department of Health,
10 health care workers, and community advocates to serve
11 New Yorkers in the best ways we can.

12 I strongly urge the Council to support this
13 introduction to enable cooling centers to be widely
14 available, accessible, and operated (TIMER CHIMES) to
15 a high standard.

16 I additionally endorse all of the testimony and
17 recommendations of my environmental justice allies
18 and urge close collaboration in its effective and
19 equitable implementation. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Thank
21 you for all of the work that you do, and thank you
22 for coming to testify today.

23 Okay, next we will be hearing from Misha Sharp.

24 (PAUSE)

1
2 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Before we move on, if there
3 is anyone present in the room that has not had the
4 opportunity to testify, please see the Sergeant at
5 Arms and fill out a card.

6 All right, Misha, go ahead.

7 MISHA SHARP: Great. Thank you, Council Member
8 Schulman, and committee members for the opportunity
9 to testify. My name is Misha Sharp, and I am the
10 Assistant Director of Policy for 32BJ Health Fund. We
11 provide health benefits to over 200,000 32BJ union
12 members and their families using contributions from
13 over 5,000 employers.

14 For many years we have talked about the rising
15 prices at New York City hospitals which drive up the
16 cost of health benefits and squeeze workers' wages.
17 For too long, purchasers and patients have been
18 expected to shoulder the burden of skyrocketing
19 hospital prices. New York needs to act immediately to
20 lower commercial hospital prices and to slow those
21 increases over time.

22 Today, we thank Council Member Schulman for
23 introducing Resolution 822, calling on the New York
24 State Legislature to pass the Fair Pricing Act being
25

1
2 sponsored by Senator Krueger and Assemblymember
3 Jackson.

4 The Fair Pricing Act would lower prices for
5 routine health care services so that the same
6 procedure costs the same price regardless of whether
7 that care is delivered in a doctor's office or a
8 hospital outpatient clinic.

9 This legislation would create over a \$1 billion
10 in savings for New York in one year with over \$200
11 million directly back to New Yorkers by lowering out
12 of pocket costs.

13 Safety net and public hospitals are notably
14 exempt from the Fair Pricing Act because these are
15 not the hospitals charging New Yorkers the highest
16 prices. We can't let the fear of the problems faced
17 by struggling safety net hospitals prevent us from
18 taking common sense action to rein in the highest
19 prices that leave our healthcare market vulnerable to
20 profit seeking behavior. Thank you for your time.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I
22 really appreciate it, and I appreciate you coming
23 here today.

24

25

1 All right, we will now move to Zoom testimony.
2 Please wait for your name to be called to testify, and
3 please select "unmute" when prompted.
4

5 Isabel Friedman?

6 ISABEL FRIEDMAN: Good morning, Chair Schulman and
7 members of the Committee on Health. My name is Isabel
8 Friedman and I am an Environmental Health Advocate
9 at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). NRDC
10 strongly supports Introduction 998, which would
11 codify the City's cooling center program, enabling it
12 to better protect frontline communities.

13 Extreme heat kills more people than all other
14 natural disasters combined, resulting in 350
15 fatalities in New York City alone, each summer.
16 However, the burden of extreme heat falls
17 overwhelmingly on low-income communities, communities
18 of color, and older populations.

19 Cooling centers are an essential tool in
20 combating extreme heat, especially for low-income
21 communities and unhoused individuals who lack access
22 to cooling devices and face higher rates of energy
23 insecurity. In fact, cooling center visits can reduce
24 the risk of heat-related deaths by an estimated 66
25 percent.

1
2 However, the current program lacks consistency
3 across sites, staff trained to identify heat related
4 illness and signage to increase public usage.

5 Introduction 998 would strengthen this program by
6 ensuring environmental justice communities are
7 prioritized in the quantity and citing of the City's
8 cooling centers as well as empower the City to better
9 allocate resources to improve utilization of the
10 program.

11 To maximize the bill's effectiveness, we propose
12 the following short additions:

13 First, the responsible agencies should base the
14 number of cooling centers on the most recent data to
15 account for rapidly changing climate risks and update
16 the number annually.

17 Second, a minimum number of cooling centers that
18 operate outside of the nine to five window should be
19 established in each heat vulnerable neighborhood.

20 Third and most important, sufficient and
21 dedicated funding must be allocated to this program
22 by the City. With what's likely to be another record
23 breaking summer quickly approaching, we must act now.

1
2 On behalf of NRDC and our partners, I urge the
3 City to pass this legislation and allocate funding
4 for these life saving pooling spaces.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

6 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, very much for
7 your testimony.

8 Okay, thank you to everyone who has testified. If
9 there is anyone present in the room or on Zoom who
10 has not had the opportunity to testify, please raise
11 your hand.

12 Seeing no one else, I would like to note that
13 written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by
14 committee staff, may be submitted for the recorded up
15 to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by
16 emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

17 I want to call one more time for Jorge Andres
18 Ramirez? No?

19 I want to thank everyone who testified today on
20 this very important topic. Climate change is only
21 going to make our heatwaves worse. So we need to make
22 sure that we have our cooling centers, and make sure
23 that we have the ability to have places to go for
24 people where the air quality is a problem.

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COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

So, thank you very much to everyone. And with that, I close out today's hearing.

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING OUT)

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 29, 2025