

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS

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June 18, 2024
Start: 10:06 A.M.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Gale A. Brewer,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Diana I. Ayala
Chris Banks
Rita C. Joseph
Shekar Krishnan
Lincoln Restler
Nantasha M. Williams
Julie Won
Kalman Yeger

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

Anastasia Coleman
Special Commissioner of Investigation

Daniel Schlachet
First Deputy Commissioner at SCI

Benjamin Tocker
YAFFED

Sharon Meyer
Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Debbie Meyer
Dyslexia Alliance for Black Children

Christi Angel
Parent Advocate

1 COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS 3

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone test for
3 the Committee on Oversight and Investigations.
4 Today's date is June 18, 2024 located in the
5 Chambers recording is done by Rocco Masiti.
6 [00:00:12]-[00:00:49].

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to
8 the New York City Council Hearing of the Committee on
9 Oversight and Investigations. At this time, can
10 everybody please silence your cellphones. If you
11 wish to testify please go up to the Sergeant at Arms
12 desk to fill out a testimony slip. At this time and
13 going forward, no one is to approach the dais. I
14 repeat, no one is to approach the dais. Chair, we
15 are ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: [GAVEL] Good morning. I am
17 Gale Brewer; I am Chair of the City Council's
18 Committee on Oversight and Investigations. I want to
19 welcome those who are listening. I'm sure there will
20 be more here in person and the public. This is a
21 hearing on the Office of the Special Commissioner of
22 Investigation for the New York City School District.
23 It's known as SCI and it's known as the Departments
24 of Education.

25

2 SCI's independent watch dog for the New York City
3 School system, which includes the Department of
4 Education, the Teachers Retirement system and the
5 Board of Education Retirement System. Although a
6 major portion of SCI's work involves investigations
7 of those who prey on students. The office also
8 investigates fraud and theft of public funds and
9 resources and other serious misconduct.

10 Investigations may result in arrests, criminal
11 prosecutions or administrative proceedings as well as
12 policy recommendations with the Chancellor. I love
13 policy recommendations. Recent cases include a
14 teacher who sought and received paid sick leave while
15 serving time in federal prison. A husband of a
16 deceased pensioner who unlawfully collected \$800,000
17 in benefits over 20 years and a special education
18 teacher who engaged in inappropriate text messages
19 with a 17 year old student.

20 The Department of Education employes 140,000 New
21 Yorkers or maybe 150,000 and has the largest budget
22 of all city agencies at \$32 billion. SCA is an
23 office of 51. I understand with a headcount of 69
24 however, and an annual budget of just a little less
25 than \$7 million. I think I did the math or the staff

2 did the math to be honest with you. DOE allocates
3 .02 percent of its budget to the independent
4 watchdog. And we'll learn later I think from
5 wonderful Commissioner Coleman's testimony and I
6 thank you for sending it in advance that during the
7 FY new needs request of \$202,000 that was denied but
8 it only amounted to approximately \$101.50 more per
9 employee. I think you'll hear me later say you need
10 more money.

11 SCA faces staffing challenges. The number of
12 teacher misbehavior complaints has skyrocketed. The
13 Office fills nearly 10,000 allocations of abuse and
14 misconduct every year. At the same time, attrition
15 is increasing. STI went from 24 investigators in
16 2020 to 20 investigators in 2023 and there are 17
17 vacancies.

18 Some might consider today's hearing several years
19 overdue. The previous Chair of the Committee, the
20 honorable Ritchie Torres, became interested in SCI in
21 2018 when then Department of Investigation
22 Commissioner Mark Peters, who was an intern of mine.
23 He'll appreciate that. Seized control of the agency
24 and asked its top official an independent
25 investigation later concluded that Mr. Peters abused

2 his authority when he absorbed SCI and unlawfully
3 retaliated against his leaders. Commissioner Coleman
4 and Daniel Schlachet, who are here today.

5 They were reinstated and SCI returned to its
6 status quo. In 2019, Torres and his City Council
7 colleagues, Mark Treyger and Bob Holden received a
8 letter that accused SCI leadership of burring
9 investigations perceived as harmful to then Mayor
10 Bill de Blasio. Torres was moving forward with an
11 inquiry in early 2020 when the pandemic shifted
12 everyone's focus and priorities.

13 I didn't call this hearing to relitigate what
14 happened in the past. We're here to look
15 analytically at how SCA is both fulfilling its
16 mandate to root out and prevent misconduct and how
17 the DOE cooperates and complies with investigations
18 and policy recommendations or does not.

19 Before we begin, I would like to thank people who
20 have worked really hard on this hearing or the
21 Committee Staff of oversight and investigations,
22 Legislative Counsel Nicole Cata, Policy Analyst Erica
23 Cohen and Alex Yablon, and Finance Analyst Owen
24 Kotowski and Andrew Lane-Lawless.

2 Within the O&I division staff, Director Erin
3 Mendelsohn, Deputy Director Meg Powers, Assistant
4 Director Zachary Merit Kasalas(SP?), Senior Council
5 Kevin Frick, Investigator Katie Sinise, and Data
6 Scientist Uzair Qadir, and Legislative Fellow Amisa
7 Ratliff, and from my office a very great Sam
8 Goldsmith. And now, I'd like to turn it over to
9 Legislative Counsel Nicle Cata.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Brewer. We
11 will now hear testimony from the Administration. We
12 will hear from Anastasia Coleman and Daniel
13 Schlachet.

14 Before we begin, I will administer the
15 affirmation. Panelists please raise your right hand.
16 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and
17 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to
18 respond honestly to Council Member questions? Thank
19 you, you may begin when ready.

20 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Is this on? Thank you Chair
21 Brewer for your invitation to speak and to testify in
22 front of the Committee on Oversight and
23 Investigations. I appreciate the opportunity to
24 introduce myself, to you and hopefully other members
25 of the Committee who will come in, and to share with

2 you the substantial accomplishments and continued
3 priorities of the office of the Special Commissioner
4 of Investigation for the New York City School
5 District. By way of biography, my name is Anastasia
6 Coleman, and I have served as the Special
7 Commissioner for nearly six years.

8 Previously, I was an Assistant District Attorney
9 in Kings County, an Inspector General with the City's
10 Department of Investigation, and the Title IX
11 Coordinator and Director of the Office of
12 Institutional Equity and Compliance at Fordham
13 University. In my nearly 35 year professional
14 career, I have worked both outside and within City
15 government. As a former prosecutor and career
16 investigator, with no political agenda or
17 aspirations, my focus is and has been, to ensure that
18 the City's children receive a safe and secure
19 education without the interference of fraud,
20 corruption, waste, or inappropriate or unwanted
21 advances.

22 I am pleased to share that SCI, through the
23 efforts of its small but hardworking and diligent
24 staff, has been effective in achieving many of our
25 goals, and adhering to our stated mission to serve

2 the children enrolled in the New York City School
3 District, and to help provide students and their
4 families with a safe learning environment, free from
5 corruption, fraud, and mismanagement.

6 SCI was created thirty-four years ago by then
7 Mayor Dinkins and former New York City Board of
8 Education, BOE, now known as the Department of
9 Education. The historical origins of SCI underscore
10 its critical mission, its need for independence, and
11 its continued importance. SCI was established as the
12 independent watchdog of the City School District to
13 disband and replace the BOE's, which is the Board of
14 Ed's internal Inspector General's office that was
15 deemed corrupt and ineffective. At the time, the BOE
16 IG was appointed by, and reported to, the Board, the
17 governing body of New York City public schools and
18 was, thus, inherently conflicted when investigating
19 matters of policy enacted by their employer.

20 A select mayoral blue-ribbon panel, the Joint
21 Commission on Integrity in the Public Schools, known
22 as the Gill Commission, ultimately recommended a new
23 office, independent of the BOE, to remove inherent
24 conflicts, and with the same statutory authority, but
25 also independent from, the City's Department of

2 Investigation. The Gill Commission specifically
3 considered, but ultimately rejected, incorporating
4 SCI within DOI, concluding that their concern is
5 that, as exigencies evolve, DOI will inevitably move
6 resources that should be dedicated to eradicating
7 corruption in the school system to whatever the
8 target of the hour may be.

9 Although this explanation may appear as ancient
10 history, more recent events have demonstrated that
11 the concerns of the Gill Commission are still
12 relevant. Per Mayoral Executive Order 11 of 1990,
13 the City Charter, the Board of Ed Resolutions, and
14 Chancellor's Regulations, DOE employees are required
15 to report wrongdoing to SCI, and most take this
16 obligation seriously. SCI also receives complaints
17 from numerous other sources including parents,
18 vendors, other City agencies, and elected officials,
19 such as yourselves. The Special Commissioner also
20 serves as the Inspector General of both the New York
21 City Teachers Retirement System, TRS and the Board of
22 Education Retirement System, BERS, and SCI acts as
23 the investigative arm for the New York City Conflicts
24 of Interest Board COIB, and matters involving the
25 DOE, TRS, BERS, and their employees.

2 SCI's investigations can result in various
3 criminal and administrative actions. We regularly
4 work with trusted partners in law enforcement as well
5 as other City agencies to ensure the best possible
6 outcomes for the DOE, the City, and the tax payers.
7 I came into SCI in 2018, as only the third Special
8 Commissioner, and, proudly, the first woman to hold
9 the position. I am preceded by the founding Special
10 Commissioner, Edward Stancik, and then by Richard
11 Condon, who retired in 2017, after a long and
12 distinguished career in City government. 2019 was my
13 first full year as Special Commissioner. Since that
14 time, I have continuously evaluated our
15 investigations and processes, our standards and
16 practices, our available resources, and our needs.
17 We have taken great steps forward and continue to
18 improve our performance. But our work is never done.
19 As a long-term goal, our office intends to expand its
20 role identifying and investigating wrongdoing in the
21 New York City schools and making referrals and policy
22 procedure recommendations for the betterment of the
23 system overall.

24 To do so, however, we must add more highly
25 trained investigators, attorneys, and administrative

2 staff. In general, the structure of our office is
3 not unusual for an investigative body. SCI currently
4 has an allocated headcount of sixty-nine total. That
5 includes investigators, attorneys, administrative
6 staff, and executive staff. Unfortunately, for
7 reasons I will discuss shortly, our current roster is
8 well below that number. At its core, SCI is an
9 investigatory agency, and at the heart of any highly
10 functioning investigatory agency, the heart is the
11 investigators.

12 SCI is currently staffed with thirty-three
13 investigators who make up our Intake Unit, our Field
14 Investigators, a Tech Investigator, and our
15 Supervising Investigators. The remainder of our
16 staff consists of attorneys, all of whom are former
17 New York City prosecutors, data analysts,
18 administrative and I.T. staff, and executive staff.
19 Although we are budgeted for a total headcount of
20 sixty-nine, we currently have fifty-one employees.

21 In recent years our headcount has been as high as
22 sixty, in Fiscal Year '20 and in Fiscal Year '21 and
23 as low as fifty in Fiscal Year '23, certainly a
24 challenge when tasked with the oversight of an entity
25 the size of the DOE and its two retirement systems.

2 While there have been some positive notes in hiring,
3 for example, we brought on ten new hires in Fiscal
4 Year '23, there have been an equal or greater amount
5 of separations, particularly in the post COVID
6 environment. Twelve employees separated from SCI in
7 that same fiscal year.

8 In Fiscal year '23, SCI had an overall attrition
9 rate of 23.5 percent. SCI is not unique in our
10 hiring challenges, agencies citywide are facing
11 similar difficulty. Where SCI is different is our
12 unique responsibility to oversee a department as vast
13 and crucial as the DOE. Our hiring goals, first
14 detailed in the Gill Commission report, are to seek
15 out seasoned investigators, with strong backgrounds
16 in established investigative models, procedures, and
17 investigative techniques. As such, we regularly seek
18 211 waivers for many of our current and prospective
19 employees from DCAS. We have found that hiring
20 retired law enforcement professionals meets our
21 particular needs because these individuals arrive
22 with the requisite training and experience to perform
23 at a very high level from their first day on the job,
24 a standard required to protect the integrity of the

2 public school system and the safety of its school
3 children.

4 During my tenure, however, we have expanded
5 recruitment efforts, sought out unique areas for
6 posting, and taken steps to grow our workforce with
7 greater representation and diversity, including
8 diversity in background and experience. We have also
9 added analysts, both legal and statistical, to assist
10 investors with the day-to-day work on our
11 investigations. We have increased the size of our
12 Intake Unit; updated our website to make it more
13 interactive and user friendly and added an online
14 reporting portal. We have pressed and succeeded in
15 having the DOE include a direct link to SCI reporting
16 on its website and updated our outdated record
17 retention system. SCI is also currently updating our
18 evidence collection and retention system, and we are
19 in the process of determining how best to upgrade a
20 more than 25-year-old case management system. This
21 update will be crucial in assisting our investigators
22 in the management of their heavy caseloads. But
23 there are goals not yet accomplished. For example,
24 although SCI regularly sends supervising
25 investigators and attorneys to speak at DOE staff

2 conferences, and conducts outreach through the use of
3 newly produced pamphlets and social media pages, it
4 has been a longer-term goal to create a separate
5 training unit within SCI. A stand-alone training
6 unit would allow our investigators to focus entirely
7 on their primary task of conducting casework and
8 would work closely on producing and delivering
9 specific training to DOE employees and vendors on
10 corruption, prevention, reporting requirements, and
11 other areas of concern to the school district.

12 Currently, SCI relies heavily on the DOE to raise
13 awareness of their employees' reporting obligations,
14 and to regularly train them on their financial
15 responsibilities. The DOE currently enrolls nearly
16 one million students at approximately 1,800
17 facilities; it employs approximately 140,000 people,
18 about half of whom are teachers and maintains a
19 budget of more than \$39 billion.

20 Last year, SCI received more complaints than in
21 any single year in its history, crossing the 10,000
22 complaint mark threshold for the first time. SCI is
23 on pace to end the current year with similar numbers.
24 In calendar year 2023, SCI concluded 404
25 investigations, the most since before the pandemic,

2 including 152 involving sexual or inappropriate
3 conduct, and fifty-two that involved the
4 inappropriate use of social media or electronic
5 communications between DOE employees or vendors and
6 students.

7 SCI substantiated 224 total cases in 2023. In
8 2023, the most frequently opened category of
9 investigation involved employee misconduct, a general
10 category that encompasses a range of malfeasance by
11 DOE employees and vendors. In addition to cases
12 involving inappropriate actions of a sexual or
13 suggestive nature, employee misconduct includes cases
14 involving: financial irregularities, 109 cases,
15 falsifying documents 99 cases, and theft of services,
16 52 cases, to name just a few.

17 SCI investigated twenty-four cases involving
18 theft of DOE property, and seventy-one involving
19 allegations of vendor irregularities, including false
20 billing, lack of certification or DOE approval, or
21 failure to provide services. In addition, SCI
22 received twelve complaints specifically involving
23 violations of Chapter 68 of the City Charter and
24 identified potential conflicts of interest in an
25 additional twelve cases. Thirty-two cases involved

2 either a failure to supervise a child or a failure to
3 report a potential danger to a child. SCI also
4 received seventeen complaints alleging a violation or
5 violations of the City's Whistleblower laws. In
6 2023, SCI referred fifty-nine substantiated cases to
7 the New York State Department of Education and made
8 287 personnel recommendations based on substantiated
9 findings.

10 SCI recommended disciplinary action in fifty-six
11 instances, a majority of which included
12 recommendations up to and including termination of
13 employment. SCI also made recommendations of 101
14 problem codes as possible bars to future employment
15 or contracts, forty financial recovery actions, and
16 ninety recommendations for appropriate disciplinary
17 actions by DOE administrators. Last year, SCI
18 substantiated thirty-three cases that identified to
19 the DOE precise amounts of loss, theft, or
20 mismanagement of funds, totaling more than \$1.5
21 million dollars.

22 SCI also identified thousands of dollars due to
23 loss, theft, or mismanagement of other monies for
24 which an exact amount could not be determined. In
25 addition, SCI continued collection and monitoring of

2 restitution or fines from previous cases, totaling
3 more than \$6,000,000.

4 Since 2020, SCI has made 215 Policy and Procedure
5 Recommendations PPRs to the DOE, all of which are
6 publicly available on our website pursuant to Local
7 Law 43 of 2020. Of those 215 recommendations, the
8 DOE has accepted forty-nine, partially accepted
9 another five, claimed that sixty were already their
10 current practice, and rejected forty-seven. Forty-
11 two PPRs remain pending at the time of this
12 testimony. SCI also posts regularly updated
13 information regarding the status of the PPRs and the
14 DOE's explanations or reasonings for their decisions,
15 most often posting their responses in their own
16 words.

17 SCI did not face any cuts to our budget under the
18 City's most recent Program to Eliminate the Gap.
19 However, SCI operates on a slender budget of just
20 over six million dollars per year, covering both PS
21 and OTPS dollars. SCI's budget has remained exactly
22 the same since Fiscal Year 2020, \$6,361,054. Of
23 that, \$6,000,000 is designated PS dollars, and
24 \$335,131 is our annual operating OTPS budget.
25 Although there was a slight increase in PS dollars in

2 our Fiscal Year 2019 budget, approximately \$250,000,
3 SCI's OTPS budget has remained exactly the same
4 during my entire tenure as Special Commissioner,
5 \$335,131.

6 Obviously, there is a great discrepancy between
7 the operating budgets of the watchdog agency and the
8 entity it was charged with overseeing. But this is
9 not for want of trying. SCI's annual funding is a
10 pass-through budget of the DOE. During my tenure as
11 SCI Commissioner, we have made several asks to the
12 Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, OMB
13 Education Task Force for increases in both PS and
14 OTPS funding. For example: In March of 2019, SCI
15 submitted a new needs request for an increase in PS
16 dollars in the amount of \$176,000. This request was
17 rejected. In fact, the last PS dollar increase SCI
18 received not due to a citywide Mayoral order was in
19 Fiscal Years 2017. On March 6, 2020, immediately
20 before the pandemic struck, SCI made a new needs
21 request for FY21 of \$2,565,000. This request was
22 part of an ambitious several-year plan to increase
23 SCI's headcount by twenty-four, twelve per year over
24 two years, and an increase of \$535,000 in OTPS to
25 support the increased staff.

2 This request was not rejected outright, but
3 rather was put on hold indefinitely due to the COVID
4 crisis. In March 2021, SCI submitted a request for a
5 Capital improvement project, a much needed upgrade to
6 our record retention system in the amount of
7 \$190,695. This amount was approved and funded
8 through the School Construction Authority. In March
9 2022, SCI submitted a new needs request of \$202,000
10 to OMB consisting of \$162,000 in PS dollars, and an
11 additional \$40,000 in OTPS dollars. This request was
12 specifically targeted to address post-pandemic
13 attrition and retention. The request was denied by
14 OMB.

15 Currently, SCI has a new needs request of
16 \$275,000 for OTPS pending with OMB. The present ask
17 includes funding for necessary training for our
18 investigators, including: annual peace officer
19 training, firearms qualifications, and investigative
20 interview technique training, to name just a few. We
21 have been told that we will receive an answer upon
22 completion of the adoption process.

23 As you can see, these budgetary requests are not
24 extravagant, and do not contemplate unreasonable
25 increases or luxury expenses. As an example, our

2 monthly wireless carrier expenses, to name just one
3 such account, has increased from \$300 per month to
4 approximately \$1,500 per month \$18,000 annually,
5 while our OTPS remained unchanged. This may seem
6 like a minor expenditure, however, when considering a
7 total OTPS annual budget of \$335,000, a 500 percent
8 increase in a vital vendor service is significant.
9 SCI, as a watchdog agency, has always been mindful of
10 agency spending, both the DOE's and our own.
11 However, SCI must also grow with the times and the
12 challenges we face.

13 In conclusion, I am pleased to have had the
14 opportunity to introduce SCI to so many members of
15 the Council, particularly yourself Chair Brewer and
16 to have been given a little insight into the hard
17 work and accomplishments of this really extraordinary
18 office, I look forward to answering any further
19 questions you, or the members of the Committee, may
20 have. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much for an
22 excellent testimony. Most Commissioner don't give us
23 as much information, so I'm deeply appreciative. I'm
24 also deeply appreciative of Council Member Lincoln
25 Restler being here. We're the two watch dogs.

2 We're going to start with questions. I'll do a
3 few and then I'll be glad to ask my colleague, he
4 always has questions. So, uhm I know you talked
5 about this but just to be a little bit more specific
6 about you have oversight of what I would call DOE and
7 other retirement systems. Are they different kinds
8 of oversight? Could you be a little bit more
9 specific about them?

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Sure, so uhm just the nature
11 of the pension systems is different from what the DOE
12 does. For the pension systems, we've had
13 conversations in the past historically and with them
14 over how they find whether a pensioner is dead or not
15 for a lack of better terms. Because that is a
16 problem when pension money is being sent and either
17 someone is stealing that money or a relative is
18 cashing that money when the person has already passed
19 away.

20 So, we've asked them and they put into place
21 different ways to check on whether somebody is alive
22 or not. Actually one of the PPRs that we did
23 recommend, uhm was to see if they could have like an
24 annual certification from the pensioner to say I'm
25 alive, like an alive check and that was one of the

2 things that we did recommend. I don't remember if it
3 was Burrs or TRS. And I don't believe they actually
4 did want to do - I don't think they were up for that
5 recommendation and they had different reasons for why
6 they were not going to do that but that was one of
7 our recommendations.

8 So, the pension system, there's a tendency to
9 have cases where someone is stealing the pension
10 money. For the DOE, you know it's the broad scope.
11 We've got safety concerns you know LaBonte's Law was
12 actually put into effect by the City Council to make
13 sure that you know students who need building and you
14 know those proper doors and things like that. So,
15 there is a safety aspect for missing students in that
16 respect. There's also a safety aspect of the sexual
17 and misconduct cases where it's something sometimes
18 the police would automatically go ahead and arrest
19 somebody but we're in that middle ground sometimes
20 where there is text messages, there's no way to prove
21 to show that where a prosecutor is going to take a
22 particular case. Where we'll take the case and
23 develop it to make sure that that person is no longer
24 working for the city school system.

2 So, we have those safety types of cases, then we
3 also have basic procurement type of cases and then we
4 also have billing types of cases also. So, I mean
5 I'm just putting them into general buckets but our
6 cases vary all the time based on different complaints
7 and the different proactive investigations we
8 conduct.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and this is sort of
10 almost too current. This whole issue with the
11 cellphones and the governor, I must admit I feel it's
12 challenging to always have a cellphone as a student
13 in the classroom. On the other hand, I was around
14 when the you know you have to pay the Bodega or pay
15 the truck on the corner a dollar to keep your
16 cellphone during the day. In fact, I'll be honest
17 with you, my office, I didn't charge but I'm right
18 near a high school. I let them bring in them in.
19 They came in after school, it was crazy.

20 So I mean I hope that actually doesn't happen and
21 we have some other solution to that issue. You'll
22 have a lot more complaints on that topic. I assume
23 you have not taken a position on cellphones in or out
24 of the schools?

25 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Nah.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But uh, we don't need more
3 problems. How many SCI employees conduct
4 investigatory work? I know you mentioned the total
5 number but could you be more specific on that?

6 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Sure, so right now, you know
7 we are - what our current headcount is, we have 51
8 employees and out of those 51, 25 are actually field
9 investigators. Then we also have - and they're
10 divided into three teams. Then we have nine
11 investigators that are receiving and taking in the
12 complaints and going back and forth with whoever is
13 complaining or making sure that the case is going to
14 where it needs to go and collecting information, more
15 information so that we can decide about whether
16 there's an investigation to occur by us. Then we
17 have seven attorney's, including myself. So, uhm, we
18 all do some aspect of the investigative work then we
19 also have one person who is our tech person, so who
20 is the tech unit and then in IT we also have someone
21 who will do any of that computer forensics.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. So, you talked about
23 the budget, a little under \$7 million. Does it break
24 down in terms of these different categories? Is
25 there some other way to look at it?

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uhm, sorry.

3 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: In other words, your budget
4 is around \$7 million obviously, you want to have more
5 money. We all agree with that but I didn't know if
6 there were some breakdown as to how much goes to
7 oversight. How much goes to investigations or does
8 it just depend?

9 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It just depends, it really
10 does.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Are there challenges, I mean
12 we all have challenges but are there specific
13 challenges facing investigators to conduct their
14 investigations? I must admit, I'm a real techie and
15 I was a little, I think in your testimony, you
16 mentioned the need for more technology even though
17 you've got some based on the OMB recommendation that
18 you made but it seems to me that you need more. That
19 would be more capital perhaps than but it is
20 technology. What are the issues or are there issues
21 that hamper your investigations or don't hamper?

22 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Well, ideally one of the
23 things that we've been evaluating this year is to
24 update our case management system, which would make
25 it easier for the investigators to enter their

2 material and have things that are - it would make the
3 flow quicker and easier for them. And also, we have
4 actually engaged in conversations with the DOE
5 themselves because they are required to give us data
6 and information and you know we retrieve the
7 information from them. What I'd like to do is to get
8 the more direct access so it makes it easier for
9 investigators to just pull that information from the
10 actual -

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: From the system.

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: The actual system.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Now, is that something
14 that's budget or is it policy to change in terms of
15 access to the system? Is that a budget issue or is
16 more of an access issue?

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Well, it's going to be both
18 right? Because we're going to need to have people
19 who have the skill set to fill that information.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, it's a personnel issue,
21 okay.

22 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And not necessarily a
24 capital issue.

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, but we also software -
3 there's different software that we would like to
4 upgrade and that we need, that's what we'd like to
5 have. We also - I mean it's more of a capital,
6 probably a new capital need that we're going to have
7 because our laptops are getting older. That's also
8 going to be something that we're going to put in for
9 -

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, are those some of the
11 major challenges facing investigators or do you have
12 other ones that you would like to list?

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Well, there are other
14 challenges that the investigators do have because the
15 nature of our investigations - our investigators are
16 going to the schools throughout the entire boroughs,
17 so it's a lot of travel, a lot of going to the
18 different places is something that when we come to
19 interview people to come work for us, when they
20 discover that it's oh, you're driving everywhere and
21 you know that is a negative side of our attraction
22 and getting people because they're like oh, I'd have
23 to be in the Bronx and you know we try to make sure
24 that our investigators can try to geographically set
25 up their day but sometimes that - it's very hard for

2 them to do but that is a challenge for some of our
3 investigators.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, did you want to add
5 something sir? I saw you looking.

6 DANIEL SCHLACHET: I was, first of all, thank you
7 for having us here. My name is Dan Schlachet, I am
8 the First Deputy Commissioner at SCI. I appreciate
9 you having us here. I was just going to add as far
10 as the costs and needs that it will be no surprise I
11 think to members of the Committee that the cost of
12 technology continues to rise and that includes
13 forensic technology. So, that's both hardware and
14 its annual subscriptions that you pay for certain
15 services on there and it is in the same way that we
16 mentioned the rising cost of simple things like a
17 wireless phone account for all of our investigators,
18 the use of forensic technology is more important than
19 ever now for our office and the cost of it is going
20 up annually.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, thank you.

22 DANIEL SCHLACHET: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: In terms of reporting, now
24 how do you - who do you report to specifically if

2 anybody and how do you work with if at all, the New
3 York City Department of Investigation?

4 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, each of our reports that
5 conclude an investigation that we're reporting to the
6 Chancellor, we also give a copy of that report to the
7 DOI Commissioner. And then on an annual basis, we
8 report out to the public our annual statistical
9 numbers and we report that out on our website and we
10 send that out to the Chancellor and the DOI
11 Commissioner to.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, so do you feel that
13 the school system as a whole understands to go to
14 you, not to DOI, not to the - I mean I have people
15 for instance, they get very confused. Not in terms
16 of your agency but if they have a complaint do they
17 go to the City Department of Human Rights, the state,
18 you know the federal? That's very confusing. Do you
19 feel that people understand to go to you or maybe DOI
20 sends somebody to you if it's appropriate?

21 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, we have both, right? One
22 of the things that I wanted to make sure happened was
23 that we put onto the actual and we asked for and the
24 general counsel at the DOE put our information onto
25 their website when they list where to complain and it

2 takes them directly off the DOE website to us. We
3 also receive complaints that come in that go from
4 DOI, they send them over to us so if there's ever you
5 know a mistake and someone goes to the wrong place,
6 it always comes to us and we have a good relationship
7 with them because sometimes we'll get something and
8 we'll send it to them.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: But you know we receive
11 complaints from everywhere and everybody it feels
12 like.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Regarding the
14 retirement, the two retirement systems, do you
15 investigate the systems or just the beneficiaries?
16 Have you encountered issues such as the performance
17 of vendors who conduct physical and mental health
18 evaluations? The whole world of a vendors is always
19 challenging from my perspective but again, the
20 systems themselves.

21 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, uhm, when we done a
22 review as to how they go about their processes, we
23 haven't done a review of here's what happens when
24 somebody comes to - I'm coming to you to get my money
25 and we haven't done one of those reviews. We've done

2 a lot of reviews of people stealing from the system
3 and talking with them and reviewing their processes
4 for making sure they're not continually paying
5 somebody who you know has passed away and that's
6 really a corruption vulnerability for those systems.

7 As far as services to you know anybody who is
8 elderly -

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The vendors, yeah.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, we don't do that.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You don't do that, okay
12 because that's often challenging. Do you work with
13 other city agencies such as NYPD or is does that just
14 depend on a case by case basis?

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uhm, no we work with NYPD
16 frequently right? Because there are also times when
17 NYPD will go and interview, and especially the
18 special victims unit. They'll go and they'll
19 interview and a case will go to them. We'll monitor
20 those cases to see what's the outcome because many
21 times a case, the cases will go to them and the
22 victim isn't able to iterate exactly what may have
23 occurred or they may find that the child is not
24 swearable or whatever reason they're not proceeding,
25 we always will then reach out to them and get those

2 cases from them. So, there is a back and forth and
3 usually our investigators will ask like, you know
4 what is it about this that you know either the parent
5 might not have been cooperative. The child couldn't
6 say because they were nonverbal, so there is a lot of
7 back and forth with NYPD regarding that.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and then uhm do you
9 work for instance with other city agencies like maybe
10 ACS? Are there other city agencies that you have
11 contact with?

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, so when cases - we do
13 get cases that come in from ACS, Department of Mental
14 Health and Hygiene and there is a back and forth as
15 far as who will take like we, we're kind of like the
16 backstop to make sure that things get looked at. So,
17 there's always the phone call, like are you taking
18 this case? What are you doing? So, we don't
19 duplicate our efforts right? So, that is something
20 that's there is constant communication at that early
21 stage, so that we know, did you do an investigation
22 already? What are you doing? Sometimes it's
23 sufficient for us and we'll say fine, let us know or
24 go ahead and you'll do it.

2 We also have other partners that are not just
3 city. Like we do partner up with DOI on cases.
4 We'll partner up with the FBI and other law
5 enforcement because we know it's always best to use
6 partners rather than go it alone. So, that is
7 something that we do do.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And then language, obviously
9 you have a small staff but how do you handle language
10 if you don't have the language as appropriate. If
11 that comes up, how do you handle that?

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, there's a language line
13 that we have.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, it's not great though.

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I know.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: In fact, it sucks.

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: We have some Spanish
18 speakers. We also, our website, bless you, our
19 website has translation into at least five different
20 languages but that is what we're using.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, because to me that's
22 something that we all need to work much harder on.
23 Language line is a challenge in my opinion having
24 used it a few times. I'm going to turn it over to my

2 colleague and I have many more questions but Council
3 Member.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so Chair
5 Brewer and I hope everybody heard her kind words
6 about me on the record. But I do just want to begin
7 by thanking you Commissioner Coleman for your work.
8 You have a sterling reputation. We're very fortunate
9 to have you in this role and appreciate your really
10 as Chair Brewer noted, thorough uhm remarks today.
11 Your testimony is insightful and helpful.

12 So, I just want to understand a little bit better
13 about the high rates of vacancy and the high rates of
14 attrition that you're experiencing on your team.
15 It's critical that SCI have the resources that it
16 needs to conduct thorough investigations. You know
17 in a school system as big as ours, the largest in the
18 country, over one million students and staff, I guess
19 if the DOE was its own city, it would be the 10th
20 biggest city in the country, right. So, it's a big
21 oversight role that you have each and every day and
22 the number of complaints are growing and we don't
23 have the staff to handle it as thoroughly as we
24 should.

2 So, we have a - my understanding is you said 51
3 of 69 positions are currently filled, so that's a 26
4 percent vacancy rate, is that right?

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uh, yeah, no it's a 23.53
6 percent.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That was the attrition
8 rate.

9 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uh, sorry, yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And that 23.5 percent
11 attrition rate year over year, so we're seeing
12 significant turnover and you often see significant
13 turnover when you're severely understaffed right
14 because when everyone is being asked to do a job and
15 a half or two jobs, then it's tough and people
16 burnout and don't stick around, which only creates
17 greater challenges.

18 So, and forgive me for not knowing this but the
19 69 staff lines are DOE staff lines or are they DOI
20 staff lines?

21 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: No, no, no, they're SCI's.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: They're SCI so it's own
23 independent?

24 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It's just, we're independent
25 of both DOI and DOE, so it's just for us.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And what are you - and
3 what do you think have been the greatest challenges
4 in filling these vacant positions?

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, I think it started in
6 2022 and 2023.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Sure.

8 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: The five days in the office
9 was challenging for us because we had investigators
10 who then could go get jobs that were hybrid or remote
11 investigator jobs. So, we had a number of people
12 leave for those types of jobs and for higher paying
13 jobs. Those were two big factors and in addition, we
14 also - we do use 211 waivers through DCAS. So, you
15 know former NYPD or former law enforcement, there's a
16 one year, like the law changed. I don't know the
17 exact date of when the law changed but the law
18 changed where there's a one year separation period
19 where the person no longer - can't work for the city
20 during that one year and then they can work for us
21 after that one year.

22 So, we get many calls for people who are at
23 Special Victims or you know great detectives who are
24 in busy houses, who want to come and work for us
25 because they hear about us and they're like oh this

2 is great because they see us out there and they have
3 to wait the one year. And during that one year, you
4 know that's when someone goes and finds a new job and
5 says well, this is great I like my new job or they
6 forget about us. You know that has been one of the
7 issues. So, those have been like the main issues
8 that I can identify as being, this is the struggle.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That was a new policy
10 that one year?

11 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I think what was it, 2014,
12 2015? I think, it goes back -

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: A decade plus.

14 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It goes back a decent amount
15 of time but in the past it was very easy to get
16 people to wait the one year and then come. Now, you
17 know after the one year, people are already like oh,
18 I've moved on to this job and I'm making a decent
19 amount of money you know in the private sector doing
20 investigations. Where I'm doing you know,
21 investigating people shoplifting you know or making
22 more money than what we're going to provide.

23 So, that is one factor for us that's unique to
24 our office.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It sounds like we should
3 change the law, Mr. Restler.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We should look at it if
5 it's a city law or state law. I don't know.

6 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It's a state law.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: It's a state law so we
8 should look at it. I mean I think an exception for
9 SCI would seem totally reasonable.

10 I don't - I wonder what the incentive is on
11 around it and those individuals are probably
12 collecting a pension while they come to take these
13 new positions as well, which I have feelings about
14 but neither here nor there. But I definitely think
15 it's something for us to look into further.

16 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: That'd be great.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But you know recognizing
18 some of the challenges that are specific to SCI but
19 also that are just some broader challenges that we
20 faced in hiring across city government, you know
21 we're now beginning to see across many agencies
22 vacancy rates thankfully decline. Part of that
23 unfortunately is due to the elimination of positions
24 that we've seen by this mayor and OMB that has not
25 happened at SCI thankfully. Could you speak a little

2 further to the challenges on recruitment and what can
3 we do? Are there ways that we can assist or support
4 you or support uhm, support you in filling these
5 vacant positions?

6 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: You know what we've done is
7 we've actually reached out specifically to a
8 different uhm affinity groups directly to see if we
9 can get people you know who are retired who want to
10 come back to work. So, we've gone to you know the
11 National Association of Women's Law Enforcement. We
12 send out you know there's a list of aid that we
13 actually just send out every time that we have a job.
14 You know, here we're looking for a posting and this
15 is what we're looking for and we have tried to change
16 where we look and where we post and our getting back
17 you know has been - we haven't been getting quality
18 applicants.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, you're - if I'm
20 hearing you right, the biggest challenge we're facing
21 is identifying the right applicants. It's not
22 processing, it's not you know being at competitive
23 salaries. It's particularly just identifying quality
24 applicants you think has been the challenge?

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: That has been the challenge
3 and also there has been some challenge as far as DCAS
4 reviewing the 210's but they've been you know it
5 fluctuates on how busy they are as far as the timing
6 because we lost a few candidates who were waiting for
7 the DCAS waivers and they were like, well we found
8 something else because the process took too long.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Could you give us a
10 sense of when you say the process took too long, are
11 we talking about weeks, months, six months?

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: A couple of months.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: A couple months?

14 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah and if you're looking
15 for a new job and you're not happy where you are and
16 something else is there, you'll take it, so-

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You know, I, we can all
18 share stories of people who have accepted jobs in
19 this administration and waited 6, 9, 12, 15 months
20 before they've actually begun from the time that
21 they've been hired. So, it's very challenging.
22 Please.

23 DANIEL SCHLACHET: Uh, I just wanted to add that
24 we can't really emphasize enough the difficulties
25 with the 211 waivers as an obstacle in hiring. Not

2 just because of the period of time that it takes
3 often for them to be approved. Obviously there is a
4 citywide effort to not use 211 waivers but it's my
5 understanding that educators citywide or statewide
6 have a kind of ongoing waiver from the state,
7 pedagogues do and you know and that I need is needs
8 based. And I think in this situation it's the same
9 thing. We do frequently lose people because the
10 process takes so long. We lose people because they
11 don't have to go through that process in other areas
12 of you know outside of city government but certainly
13 in the private sector. So, it's a tremendous
14 difficulty for us.

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: And actually we did have
16 somebody who we had something waiting over at OMB for
17 a promotion and that took quite some time and then
18 that person found a new job in that time period. We
19 were like, congratulations. You know we finally have
20 the money and you're now promoted. And then she's
21 like and here's my resignation letter and you know we
22 really did think that she was a great person and we
23 were happy to promote her.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Had there been any other
3 challenges with OMB in hiring and processing other
4 than that example of the promotion being delayed?

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Salaries obviously. We're
6 keeping them where they are but that's a factor.

7 DANIEL SCHLACHET: And of course that continues
8 to be a citywide issue. I know, I don't think that's
9 unique to SCI investigators but certainly it is a
10 factor in recruitment, especially when you compare
11 other benefits of either the private sector or in
12 other government areas where there's more remote work
13 options, where there are things like that.

14 So, obviously an increase in a base salary for
15 investigators, again not just for SCI but in other
16 investigative agencies would likely draw more
17 qualified candidates.

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, we've had people leave
19 to go to the State AG's Office because their salary
20 was just slightly better and I was like, but aren't
21 we a better place? You know but we've had two
22 investigators leave to go there because they had a
23 higher salary and they had hybrid at the time.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Well, uhm, I'll
25 certainly but some thinking into other potential

2 partners and recruitment ideas and strategies. I
3 think that we can certainly talk to DCAS as well to
4 see if there's anything we can do to speed up those
5 reviews for when you've identified quality candidates
6 that you're looking to bring on for those 211
7 waivers.

8 And if there are any other ways that we can be
9 supportive or helpful in making sure that you have
10 the staff and the resources that you need to do your
11 job. It's critically important and the safety of our
12 children is paramount and you are - you play an
13 essential role in ensuring the wellbeing of our
14 students and our staff at our most important public
15 institutions, our neighborhood schools. And so, we
16 value your work. We appreciate it. We just want to
17 make sure that you have the capacity that you need
18 and I really want to thank Chair Brewer and the whole
19 ONI team for their thoughtful report, the coverage
20 today in the newspaper and holding this hearing to
21 bring attention to this issue because it's really
22 important, so thank you very much.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We've been joined by Council
24 Member Joseph. So, one question is, why is SCI's
25 budget included in the DOE's budget? Because if

2 there's an investigation into employees who play a
3 role in setting the SCI's budget, I don't know if
4 that would be a conflict of interest but why is it
5 included in DOE's budget and it's not you know the
6 general fund?

7 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, it's a passthrough that
8 they put as a one line in their budget. Uhm, they
9 have not touched it. They're not to touch it is my
10 understanding but they leave it in their budget
11 because they fund it.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, so it doesn't feel
13 like there would be a conflict if there was somebody
14 who was involved in the past in the budget in anyway?

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: No, because they can't change
16 that.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. Alright.

18 DANIEL SCHLACHET: And in fact, all of our
19 requests have to go through the Education Taskforce
20 team at OMB so that it is out of the hands of the
21 DOE.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, obviously we feel
23 strongly that you need more staff and more budget but
24 what is the appropriate ratio of SCI employees to DOE
25 employees, if you had your druthers? Obviously we

2 look at it as you know something like I don't know a
3 percentage of DOE is remain - SCI's budget has been
4 at .02 percent over the last five years. So, what -
5 maybe there are other similar organizations around
6 the United States, I don't know, that have a
7 different ratio that would be more appropriate.
8 Obviously not such a large school system but the
9 percentage may be better.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, actually - I actually
11 speak with the oversights for the school systems in
12 LA and Chicago and a few of the other ones and you
13 know we were comparing. Back in 2021, we were
14 comparing the different percentages and Chicago has
15 back in 2021, they had 359,476 students and their
16 budget for their office was \$7,257,957.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Wow, big difference.

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It is a big difference. I
19 think it was .093 percent. I'm not very good at
20 math. I had someone else do that for me.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You don't have to look far
22 to look at the number of students versus the budget
23 to see that's it's very different.

24 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Correct. In LA also, back in
25 2021, they had 495,255 students and their budget was

2 basically a \$5.2 million. So, there's was a .043
3 percent of that. So, yeah, I think that you know our
4 budget is not comparable to those two oversight
5 bodies for the amount of students and employees that
6 they oversee and I think that ours is much bigger and
7 we have a lot less money to do our work.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Chicago is a real
9 difference. If your budget is a little less than \$7
10 million a year, how much would you estimate that you
11 save DOE every year about a loss prevention. I think
12 you gave a number in your testimony.

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I did and you know I tried to
14 calculate and figure out like you know what did we do
15 over time? So, last year, what we actually - there's
16 two ways right? What we've actually identified the
17 specific amounts, uhm and then there's also
18 restitution uhm is another aspect. So, for the
19 annual you know their annual amount for last year was
20 the \$1.5 million and then we go back in 2022 and
21 2023. We've tried to add it up but over the time for
22 the last four annual years, the loss theft and
23 mismanagement of funds totaled, it was \$3,590,758.

24 Back in 2019, we actually identified, there was a
25 contract, it was for the GPS of buses, Navigant was

2 the contracting vendor and we did a robust review of
3 that and in the end, uh, the DOE didn't proceed with
4 that, so we count that as you know that was a \$10
5 million contract that they stopped proceeding with
6 and we identified that.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, I would argue that you
8 generate revenue for the city.

9 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, the money gets, we tell
10 the DOE, the DOE goes to collect that money.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It goes into the general
12 fund I assume or the DOE, we don't -

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I don't know, we give it to
14 the DOE and the DOE I think goes -

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, I mean because we
16 argue and I mean this obviously is Oversight and
17 Investigations. I feel very strongly about more
18 money for Department of Investigations, CCRB,
19 Department of Correction, etc., because all of them
20 are what I would consider because people do
21 unfortunately bad things. They are revenue
22 generated, not different than other agencies which
23 are more obvious like. You know, things like you
24 know Department of Finance collecting the property
25 taxes, that's a bigger one. But they do - they are

2 revenue generated. If you're revenue generating, you
3 should be able to get funding that helps you generate
4 revenue because unfortunately, as I said, people are
5 going to do bad things. So, alright, so that's
6 helpful in terms of numbers. Thank you.

7 Just in terms of what's the complaint intake and
8 review process just could you walk us through that,
9 how that works?

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Oh sure. So, when complaints
11 come in from various forms and actually since we've
12 added the portal, we get a lot more complaints from
13 our portal.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know you said that you
15 gave us a date. When did that go into existence?
16 Was it awhile ago?

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It was in 2020. It might
18 have been yeah; it was in 2020 just before the
19 pandemic.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

21 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uhm, and so, the cases can
22 come in from our website, email, phone, walk-ins.
23 Walk-ins are a lot less now. There's a lot more that
24 come directly into the portal. So, that once it
25 comes in, there's an evaluation process from that as

2 to you know is this something that we can ask the DOE
3 to investigate. There is an investigative arm within
4 the DOE.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Correct.

6 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: And we do refer many of the
7 matters to the DOE to their OSI. Their office of
8 Special investigations or many cases, go to the
9 office OEO over there. Just based on you know our
10 look at what comes in and what goes out. So, we do
11 that evaluation of the whatever comes in and then we
12 refer many of them out to wherever they need to go to
13 make sure that they're actually handled. That don't
14 rise to the level that we're going to take the case
15 and then we assign the cases to our different teams.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and if they go to other
17 agencies, like OSI, do they let you know the outcome
18 in some way and we're handling it or is that just
19 Performa?

20 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, what I instituted is that
21 whenever we refer something to OSI, we have right on
22 the bottom saying like, if this rises to a level of
23 criminality or gross mismanagement, please refer this
24 back to us. So, we do sometimes we will send
25 something to OSI and then we might get a new

2 complaint that relates to it that you know it's
3 basically the same or something different but it does
4 rise to a certain level and we'll say, well, give
5 this back to us. Or if they're reviewing something
6 that they say, oh, well this is actually something
7 criminal, we need to send this back. They send it
8 back but we typically don't go and follow-up to say,
9 you know what's the outcome of your investigations.
10 We have our own. We have enough.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know you have enough of
12 your own, I understand. So, after the investigation
13 is completed, what's the process? In other words,
14 it's done. How do you conclude? How do you know
15 tell the persons etc.?

16 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, at the conclusion if it's
17 substantiated right?

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right, if it's
19 substantiated.

20 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: If it's substantiated, a
21 letter will go to the Chancellor and then a copy goes
22 to the DOI Commissioner and then it's the DOE that
23 makes - they're the employees and they'll make those
24 decisions or they're the contracting you know agency
25 that will make a decision whether they want to

2 continue with a contractor or not. So, we send a
3 letter and then they are usually, if there's PPRs
4 involved, usually we'll have a conversation, and
5 which ever unit it is, we follow up with them as far
6 as that is concerned. And then the DOE goes through
7 their processes and sometimes they'll ask for our
8 investigator to testify at one of their 3028
9 hearings, so our investigators will have to go
10 testify and then you know, we usually get feedback -
11 I don't know about the timeframe but we'll get a
12 feedback from their trial unit saying we're going to
13 proceed with this case in the trial unit or they'll
14 say what they're doing with the person.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Do they have a timeframe
16 under which they have to get back to you or does that
17 depend case by case? Is there any timeframe on that?

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: It's case by case and they're
19 pretty good in getting you know in making a decision
20 whether something is going to be perceived to the
21 3020A or not. We usually get that feedback pretty
22 regularly but there is no specific timeframe. 3020A
23 has very specific timeframes from when we give it to
24 them, so they have to follow -

25 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, they have a timeframe?

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, they have specific
3 rules to follow.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, Council Member Rita
5 Joseph has questions. Go ahead.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Coming Chair. Thank you
7 so much. I just had a few questions uhm around, what
8 is it like for whistleblowers complaint process?
9 What does that process look like?

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, uhm, whistleblowers come
11 in all forms to our office and in that, it's treated
12 in the same ways as far as the investigation is
13 concerned. We have some reporting requirements back
14 to the whistleblower to let them know you know we're
15 still working on your case or whatever the case may
16 be and then in the end, they are the ones who receive
17 a letter. It's different as far as like we're not
18 sending a letter to the DOE with the outcome. We'll
19 let the person know whether or not they specifically
20 meet the requirements of being a whistleblower and
21 perceive from there.

22 DANIEL SCHLACHET: Yeah, I just wanted to add
23 that in the process, obviously the whistleblower
24 applicant themselves gets a letter defining what our
25 findings were, if in fact we find that there was a

2 violation of the whistleblower statute, then we do
3 make a recommendation to the DOE as the employer that
4 they need to take restorative action and there's a
5 time limit on that, so we do follow up with them to
6 make sure that they do take some action in those
7 cases.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And what is typically a
9 timeline from beginning to end?

10 DANIEL SCHLACHET: Of the investigation or?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yes, in the process for
12 the whistleblower.

13 DANIEL SCHLACHET: That is a very difficult thing
14 to answer as far as timelines because every
15 investigation, including whistleblower investigations
16 are different. It depends on cooperation by not only
17 the complainant but by other witnesses and potential
18 subjects that we speak to. They have - they can take
19 you know can be conducted in as little as a few
20 months. They have taken much longer in certain
21 instances where, for example, a complainant is out on
22 a medical leave and that extends we're not allow to
23 speak with them during the period of their leave. We
24 have very frequently had complaints that are made to
25 our office of whistleblower violations who then don't

2 necessarily want to follow up or are not cooperative
3 in following up on their own complaint. Those take a
4 very long time. So, it kind of runs the gamut I'd
5 say.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So, it's different
7 depending on the case, case by case basis. Okay,
8 thank you. One thing I wanted to highlight was
9 what's the difference between SCI and the Office of
10 Special Investigations. Sometimes they both get
11 twisted and they think they're the same. Could you
12 differentiate that for me?

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Sure and originally when I
14 first got to the office, I was like, we should make
15 sure we have it down here that we're different from
16 them and this is why but the reality is when
17 complaints go to OSI, they will give them to us when
18 they know like this is for you. This is not for us.
19 Not you know because number one, they realize that we
20 do the gross misconduct. We do the you know the
21 sexual misconduct between an adult and a child. We
22 do more of the serious cases.

23 I think every complaint is serious but uhm, a
24 better you know if it's something very serious, we'll
25 be looking at it. If it's something that's like a

2 one off doctors note here at OSI, you can handle it.
3 If OSI says we did the one off doctor's note and then
4 realized that the person went on leave for two years
5 based on this doctor's note and the doctor's note is
6 false, they'll get back to us to give that to us and
7 then we can proceed to see is this something that we
8 can pursue criminally and talk to our partners and
9 make it a little bit more robust.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So, there was an exchange
11 between your office at some time to determine who is
12 going to handle the investigation?

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, we do take the more
14 serious cases.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Of course, of course, of
16 course. Are there instances when allegations of
17 sexual misconduct go to OSI? Why and who decides
18 that?

19 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Well, they shouldn't be going
20 to OSI, right? So, you know if it's something that
21 they could if it's something where the allegation may
22 be - this person was looking at me in a different way
23 you know in a way that I thought was sexual. You
24 know where there's nothing that makes it - but we
25 don't always necessarily send them to them. It will

2 depend. It depends on the allegation too. If
3 someone goes to evaluate that type of where I got
4 looks but I don't - I can't express it further, uhm,
5 then it would be okay, let's see if this is uhm,
6 anything else going on but we typically, they do not
7 handle those sexual cases.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How do you inform the
9 public, public education measures if any, SCI
10 undertake to inform the public about the role of
11 being a watchdog?

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, uhm we do get a lot of
13 complaints from parents because we are on the DOE
14 website now, so that uhm because if you're upset
15 about your child at school, usually you will go to
16 the DOE's website or you'll go to the DOE. The
17 principals and if you're going to a principal or a
18 school, the principals in a lot of those schools,
19 they know the obligation to report to us. We've had
20 cases where you know the public will go to their
21 principal, the principal reported to us and our
22 uptick, we have had an uptick from assistant
23 principals and principals particularly over the last
24 two years of reporting to us of different things that
25 have come in.

2 We also have our public website where we post our
3 work and just as a side note separately, I think the
4 press tends to cover a lot of the sexual cases for us
5 so I think that the public does see those and knows
6 to report those to us too.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: If a case, for example is
8 - it gets a lot of publicity and the case turns out
9 to be false, how do we remedy the person they filed
10 the case against?

11 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uhm, you mean there's
12 something that hits the paper and -

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right and it turns out to
14 be false.

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Okay, so that might be the
16 allegation comes in and we haven't finished the
17 investigation. So, that would be a you know go ahead
18 to the Law Department. You know if an allegation,
19 there are a lot of allegations.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right, I know there's a
21 lot.

22 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: And I think actually you know
23 we're the fact finders right, so whether something is
24 considered not substantiated is very important. It's
25 just as important as substantiated.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Correct.

3 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Because the person has that
4 hanging over their head. So, I completely, we don't
5 uhm, you know our job is to find the facts. If
6 someone was wrong because it was publicized in some
7 way, then that would be, they can take that up with
8 litigation.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uhm, I'm going to ask
10 this weird question. Does SCI conduct anticorruption
11 training for New York City Public School staff and if
12 so, how often? When was the last one?

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, it's not frequent. We
14 do, this is something that we've actually been trying
15 to figure out if we're going to create like a
16 training unit to do it. We've talked with the
17 General Counsel's Office as far as their compliance
18 role and their role in training the staff. I know
19 that the different, there's different attorney's in
20 each of the districts who also remind all the
21 principals every year in the very beginning as to you
22 know, this is the reporting obligations, things of
23 that nature. We do have people go to different units
24 to do special training when we think there's training
25 needed some of the attorneys will go over but we

2 don't have a rotation basis of trainings in that
3 respect.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Give us a few examples of
5 what's considered corruption for New York City Public
6 Schools staff.

7 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Oh.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Just give us a couple for
9 those who don't know.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Uhm, it could be everything
11 from uhm, you know somebody who's providing services
12 for special needs children who doesn't provide the
13 services and then bills for those services. Uhm, and
14 so that's just a frequent, not frequent but that
15 comes up often.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Theft of time.

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Theft of time it comes up but
18 also there's the more complicated ones like, we had a
19 case recently that was with the Department of Justice
20 Anti-Trust unit where it was a bidding issue where
21 vendors were, you know a vendor was collecting bids
22 and then submitting things. So, there's all forms of
23 corruption. It could be everything and anything.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That's why it's important
25 for the training because folks may be doing things

2 and not realizing that they're also getting in
3 trouble or they should not be doing it because there
4 was no training or form of - I think that should
5 happen and it shouldn't take a long time or when a
6 scandal happens for them to have that training, it
7 should be ongoing for them to know.

8 Thank you Chair Brewer.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you Madam former
10 educator for 22 years. Did I get the number right?
11 I had it wrong before.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah, it's 22 years.
13 That's why I was asking those questions because when
14 I was teaching, those were not taught. The only
15 thing we got was a letter every Christmas telling us
16 that we can only allow a gift of \$25 or less.
17 Nothing more than \$25. So, that's why I was asking
18 for that question, what defines corruption for you
19 know New York City Public Staff.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. I just
21 want to continue a little bit on OSI. I think there
22 was a 2015 SCI investigation that said there's
23 insufficient supervision of OSI investigators and OSI
24 investigations and the DOE should take steps to
25 ensure that there is more supervision. That it

2 becomes more part of the unit. Now, I know you can't
3 necessarily comment specifically but I just didn't
4 know, do you feel that it has changed since then?
5 Does the working relationship not only good but also
6 beneficial to the students and to the system as a
7 whole, to the people?

8 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, I wasn't working this
9 role back in 2015 but I do know that our relationship
10 with them is a good relationship and that I think
11 that they too and you can talk with them that I think
12 that they too also have talked about their struggle
13 for investigators but that doesn't stop us from
14 giving them the cases.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You should, if they're
16 supposed to go them, there supposed to go to them.

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, so.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I mean again, since I'm such
19 a tech nut, do you feel that they have some of the
20 forensic needs addressed and case managements needs
21 that obviously I'd like you to have or is it
22 everybody struggling on the same what I would call
23 software, hardware tech needs.

24

25

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: You know I don't know what
3 their struggle is. Uhm, so I don't want to speak to
4 that.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, one more question.
6 So, uhm I think uhm your investigations and others
7 that result in criminal prosecution or
8 recommendations. What is the most recent data and
9 how many investigations have resulted in prosecution
10 and how many have resulted in recommendations?

11 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, uhm in 2023, we had 15
12 cases that were referred to prosecutors that resulted
13 in one arrest. In 2024 so far, we have two arrests.
14 I don't have the specific numbers of referrals this
15 year.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: And then again, how many have
18 been terminated from employment? Is that something
19 that I think - I know that ends up going to DOE and
20 then I guess you get information along those lines.
21 What's the most recent on recommendations that have
22 led to termination of employment?

23 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, we make recommendations
24 for the terminations and uhm -

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right, it doesn't mean it
3 happens but you can make the recommendations.

4 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Let me just get the number
5 for you because I have it. Let's see if I wrote it
6 down.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We've been joined by Council
8 Member Diana Ayala. She has another title but I just
9 go with Council Member.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, for the recommendations,
11 uhm, there have been 287 personnel recommendations.
12 Let me just get the -

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That was in 23 or?

14 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: 2023 and let me just figure
15 out because I don't have the number in front of me.
16 101 problem codes, yeah, so it was uh -

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You said 287.

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I think it's 287 we gave
19 recommendations for them to do some sort of
20 discipline. 101 problem codes, 56 we said strong
21 disciplinary up to termination. So, there's
22 different recommendations that we provided and then
23 90 that were specifically just appropriate
24 disciplinary actions.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay and then what's the
3 date on how many investigations have resulted in an
4 employee being placed in a I'm calling it the right
5 name, Reassignment Center? I call it something else
6 but I won't mention it.

7 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Right, so uhm, the
8 Reassignment Centers uhm, that is something that the
9 DOE decides who is going to go to the reassignment
10 centers. We don't make those decisions. However we
11 do have communication with their Office of Personnel
12 Investigations, the OPI where they might say, by the
13 way we've reassigned this person or occasionally we
14 have a case and we just want you to be aware of these
15 facts because if it never came through you, that
16 these are some of the facts and it's their
17 determination whether someone should go to the
18 Reassignment Center.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, how many people - you
20 may not know this, on the other end at DOE are
21 deciding what is the outcome for this individual. I
22 mean some of them go to trial, some of them go - I
23 mean how does that work? I mean that's not your per
24 view specifically but I'm just curious.

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, it's not our per view
3 and we let -

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Let them do it.

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: DOE do the DOE.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay. We will be asking
7 them at another time. Uhm, the most recent reports
8 investigations as we understand it, resulted in one
9 arrest and two three. I think you mentioned two
10 arrests and two four. Four in 22 and two in 21. I
11 guess you mentioned slightly different numbers but
12 why does so few investigations result in arrests in
13 criminal prosecution? Again, this is based on your
14 recommendations or DOE's etc.. But it sounds like
15 it's such a huge system, I'm not saying that you know
16 we're looking for bad actors but it just seems like
17 very few considering this huge number of people
18 involved.

19 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Right and it just, if you
20 think about it, many are teachers right, so that
21 they're not sitting there handling money. They're
22 not like doing things -

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But the vendors-

24 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: But the vendors, I'm more
25 interested to be honest with you. I've spent Council

2 Member and I; we spend a great deal of time on the
3 vending issues of a different agency called
4 Department of Social Service and the migrants. It is
5 making me crazy, so I understand we're not
6 necessarily in the same situation but these vendors
7 take advantage of our city I feel.

8 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, so that is one aspect
9 that if we have our investigators are not so
10 overworked with what they're currently doing and one
11 of things that I would like to obtain from the DOE is
12 that direct information from contacting and
13 purchasing, I think it would make it easier for us to
14 do more of the vendor type of procurement cases. But
15 we do have some cases under way that are with
16 different prosecutors right now that involve you know
17 a vendor and different things, so we're trying to
18 work on that, and it's also the prosecutors decision.
19 There are many times that we've gone to prosecutors
20 offices and we think this is a great case and it's
21 not a sexual in nature and they are the ones that
22 make the decision. I'm not the prosecutor, I wish I
23 could be and be able to prosecute the cases but
24 that's not the situation.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, is most of the conduct
3 investigated by SCI not criminal or is there a
4 percentage?

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Well, many of it is criminal.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right.

7 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Right.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: But if you did more on the
9 vendor side, it may or may not be.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: No, you know I think that
11 yeah, it may or may not be that's you know.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The reason I ask is my
13 experience is when I was borough president, I had all
14 of Manhattan, I went to all of the hundreds of DOE
15 slash school meetings and these book vendors are
16 something else. I mean that's just one example, I
17 mean there are just taking us for rides and again, I
18 don't know if it's criminal but it's certainly waste
19 and fraud at least in my opinion.

20 So, would that be the kind of thing that SCI
21 would look at? I'm not saying it's criminal but I'm
22 saying your overcharging for something that's a
23 product that's not worth purchasing at least from
24 what I could see.

2 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Right, so from what I recall
3 there was a case in the past where it was a book
4 situation and it was - was it taxes that they were
5 not paying or was it uhm, I figured out what it was.
6 It was - right so we did actually have a tax case,
7 not a tax but it was a discount for the DOE for uhm,
8 you know where a vendor for books was not applying
9 that discount. That the contract actually you know
10 required the discount but they didn't you know apply
11 that discount. So, we have, we are very aware that
12 this is an angle that we would like to pursue.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I feel so strongly about it.

14 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, I mean in 2020 when we
15 asked for and you know we wanted more lines, we
16 really wanted to beef up and have 25 more people and
17 that was the plan is to have a much more robust
18 procurement reviews going on. So, that you know if
19 we can get this balance of you know getting more
20 investigators in and more analysts, I think that uhm,
21 you know we can handle the flow of -

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm sure you recover money.

23 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes, yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, what proportion - maybe
25 you mentioned this investigated by SCI or sexual

2 inappropriate conduct cases and I also want to follow
3 up on that because I know in the past recently, and
4 you mentioned this somewhat, there was an article to
5 the effect that you know you are concerned about
6 teachers texting students at inappropriate times and
7 on inappropriate devices.

8 So, I don't know if that means that you're going
9 to necessarily lead to a sexually inappropriate
10 situation but it could. I just want to know what
11 percentage of cases are and if you've had any
12 movement on your request to stop the sex abuse with
13 social media.

14 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, in general, there's
15 roughly about 37 percent of our cases fall into that
16 sexual bucket. You know many if not all but many of
17 them involve social media, texting, being on
18 different sites. And that's something that we've
19 recommended that the DOE not have just a guideline as
20 to you know what -

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You recommended they have a
22 guideline?

23 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: They have a guideline but
24 we'd rather it be something that would be in a
25 policy, a Chancellors reg where someone could be

2 disciplined just for being you know texting a
3 student, you know because from their personal device.
4 Where it's not from a DOE device because there's not
5 reason for you know -

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: None.

7 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: A 45 year old texting someone
8 at 11:00 at night or on the weekends and there's some
9 way to curb that, that would be something we'd look
10 for.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: When matters investigated by
12 your investigators on this issue of sexually
13 inappropriate conduct be referred to the NYPD Special
14 Victims Unit? Or maybe they refer more to you
15 probably. How does that work in terms - I know you
16 mentioned earlier you do work with NYPD in this unit,
17 so I just want to know how often does that happen or
18 when does it happen and who makes that determination
19 that it either goes from them to you or you to them.

20 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, we'll get notified from
21 the school and there will be an ORs report and we'll
22 find out about what's going on and sometimes you know
23 the school will call 911 and you know the police will
24 show up and they'll either you know - they're not
25 going to take a report because the student is not

2 there or they take a report but they're not following
3 up further because they say well, it's not a crime to
4 be you know texting 500 times you know in one day to
5 a student, that's not a crime. You know, so there is
6 this balance that we have with special victims. Uhm,
7 we've taken cases and developed them and then
8 arrested the person where you know it's not often but
9 Special Victims might say, we don't have this and
10 they'll refer it back to us but I recall one since
11 I've been here where they referred it back to us and
12 we reviewed it and talked with the witness you know
13 more and got more information and then you know the
14 person opened up to our investigator. You know
15 because our teams 1 investigators really do conduct
16 trauma informed interviews and can speak and get
17 information from children. So, there is a back and
18 forth all the time.

19 Special Victims does a great job and we work with
20 them you know we'll get the results of their - you
21 know they'll say hey, this didn't proceed and things
22 like that. So, there is a good relationship with
23 Special Victims.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, uhm there's a huge
25 increase as you said in the testimony and in our

2 report, 60 percent increase in complaints from 20 to
3 2023. And so, you talked a little bit about how to
4 address this increase but could you talk a little
5 about a. Why do you think it's happening? That's
6 number one. Maybe because it's easier as you said to
7 report on the portal. That's one good reason. I
8 think there's more complaining in general and I think
9 it's good if people have a concern, they should say
10 something. Not be quite about it. And then how do
11 you, I think you talked a little bit about this but
12 how do you read out the complaints that are
13 retaliatory in nature? That's always a concern.
14 Council Member Joseph was hinting at that also.

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, I think - well, I'll
16 first just talk about the retaliatory complaints
17 because I think uhm, that does sometimes happen,
18 right and I think there was also the higher level of
19 anonymous complaints that might be retaliatory
20 because someone is not happy with -

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I get them all the time you
22 know you're destroying the city Gale Brewer but they
23 don't sign it.

24 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So uhm, so I think there is
25 that certain number but we can't just assume

2 somethings retaliatory right? You know each one is
3 going to be investigated based on the information
4 that we have and we are going to go and investigate
5 it if it rises to that certain level. So, uhm, you
6 know that is one aspect that once, sometimes you'll
7 go and you'll talk to like our investigators will go
8 and talk to the principal and say oh, yes, this is
9 what this person is upset about and explain what it
10 is and then you have more context as to why this
11 complaint came in for the timing of it or whatever
12 the case may be.

13 But as far as the number of complaints, I think
14 it's because of honestly, we get a that come in from
15 the portal and I think it is because where we placed
16 our uhm, you know how to complain. If you don't know
17 about us, you're going to find us from the DOE.
18 Whether it's from and we have more principals and
19 assistant principals referring to us and aware and
20 know what the obligations are combined with the
21 portal because our numbers for the portal have just
22 you know increased you know - when we - actually when
23 we initially started, we had 855 complaints and then
24 uhm, in 2023, that came in directly from the online
25 portal was 4,724. So, there is an uptick in that.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, if you had training,
3 there would be even more would be my guess.

4 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I know.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: A training on vendors. How
6 to report vendors. I mean it's good to have the
7 training on and hopefully people know if there's some
8 of these allegations that are personal and horrific
9 but I bet they don't realize how many times they
10 should be complaining about vendors. That's my
11 issue.

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I agree with you.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: The issue of complaints
14 resulting in investigations since 2015 has fallen
15 from a high of 16 percent. This was of concern to
16 me. To a low of 4 percent in 2023, so how do you
17 explain the decline in the percentage of complaints,
18 which lead to investigations?

19 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, the 2015 because I said
20 well, what happened in 2015, right? Even though I
21 wasn't here, like what happened? It was the Pre-K
22 was you know instituted and there was a lot of
23 complaints that came in that year.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: On the Pre-K okay.

25 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: On the Pre-K.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, so then, so the 4
3 percent is a more normal number than the 16 percent
4 is what you're saying?

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, it was a Pre-K. That's
7 - so Pre-K was complaining they didn't - what were
8 they complaining about?

9 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: You know I don't know all the
10 specific.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Because you weren't there.

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I wasn't there but I think
13 there was a fair enough -

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I didn't know that there
15 were so many complaints. Now there's complaints that
16 we don't have enough seats and enough money to go
17 with it but that's a different story. It is not an
18 investigation, it's a policy issue of our mayor.

19 What is the average time again, case by case taken to
20 a complete investigation and how has this changed
21 over the past five years if it has or has not?

22 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, we don't put a number and
23 a timeframe for each investigation. It doesn't mean
24 that we don't move our cases along. We have case
25 reviews on a regular basis and it really you know

2 will depend on the facts of the case and whether
3 we're getting the information we want back from
4 subpoenas, whether it's document intensive or not.
5 Whether you know the investigator needs to interview
6 a sampling of students to get their feedback. So, it
7 really depends on the case and I don't want to put
8 timeframes on these because we also do have you know,
9 teachers have a right not to speak with us too and
10 that's also something that comes into the timeframe
11 too. So, um, you know our caseloads have risen for
12 it because we have less investigators, which I think
13 is going to end up you know taking a longer time.
14 But right now, you know everyone's working as hard as
15 they can with the amount of cases that they have.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, again, along with the
17 vendor, something that is concerning to me, I think
18 we've talked about it but proactive investigations
19 not necessarily as important as some of the criminal
20 activity that goes on but to me, again staffing is
21 always an issue but can you give some examples of
22 even though you have less staff to be able to do
23 this, some proactive investigations versus
24 investigations that responded to allegations.

2 I mean, this is again training. This is again
3 you know rooting out systemic issues but go ahead.

4 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, so right now we do have
5 some proactive investigations going on. Like
6 specifically ones that one, I don't want to talk
7 about just yet and another one that's more of about
8 the processes and that's going on too.

9 As far as you know sometimes our proactive
10 investigations may work out and may not.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, that's why you do
12 them.

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: You know there was one where
14 there was a concern. There was something in the
15 paper about you know two school aged students and you
16 know something horrible happening to them and I'm
17 thinking, well, how come the school wasn't aware that
18 they were malnourished and you know what happened
19 here? Shouldn't the school have had a role? And
20 then I realized that the student was - those two
21 students were home schooled. So, then I was like,
22 well what's the - you know is there any way that
23 somebody from the DOE should have had contact. After
24 reviewing that process but then also finding out that
25 ACS had been involved. You know made us feel better

2 about it. But uhm, so there's the proactive reviews
3 that we currently have underway. Some reviews don't
4 pan out. Uhm, we did proactive review of when we had
5 a case that we expanded right? For like a hot bus
6 case where we say, wow, you know we're getting
7 complaints about students who are you know, it's 100
8 degrees on a bus and there's special ed kids. Let's
9 go find out what is. You know what can we do and what
10 is the process for something like that? So, we'll
11 look at that further.

12 As far as contraband in you know - there is you
13 know just one person saying I think there's an issue
14 with contraband, we say well, why don't we take a
15 sampling. So, we said alright, we're just going to
16 mobilize the entire office and do a sampling. You
17 know go and find out what's in the safe in every
18 school. Like, you know, things like that. So, we do
19 take those when we have enough people and we'll do
20 those and we are currently underway with right now we
21 have some that are going on too.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I mean homeschooling
23 obviously uh increased during the pandemic and again,
24 that will be something that it may not pan out but
25 that would be something that I would think and again,

2 oversight of the City Council could also help.
3 Sometimes we have oversight hearings that could
4 perhaps you could listen and say okay, this needs
5 further investigation. So, again, we also have a
6 wonderful staff here. One of the issues we've been
7 looking at is just getting the special education
8 children in the bus to school on time. That seems to
9 be 100 years of not happening. So, that's an example
10 and the list goes on and on unfortunately but
11 contraband would be one of them.

12 In what instances or investigation reports
13 published or not published online and is that a
14 policy decision or a regulation? You talked a little
15 bit about what you do have to put online but go
16 ahead.

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, it's really a decision as
18 to you know what to post and what not to post
19 publicly. Sometimes you'd say well, you know maybe
20 this is a good idea to post this so that people can
21 be reminded of the Conflicts of Interest Board. You
22 know you're going to get a fine if you do this. Even
23 though it's something that you might say seems
24 smaller but it's still important to post that so
25 people know. And then there might be something a

2 little bit more complicated that we say, you know
3 what? Let's put this as a public report. I think
4 that it would be watered down if we just kept every
5 single letter and posting every single thing, so we
6 try to be selective to give like a more, uhm, an
7 easier way for someone to just look and say oh, this
8 is the types of things.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And sometimes it's like I
10 said personnel is sometimes as vendors, both of them
11 could be posted online.

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, uhm, what percentage
14 of complaints are anonymous? And of course I assume
15 that it's harder to get a substantiation rate from
16 those cases but I wanted to know and if you don't
17 have that data, I would be interested to know even
18 anecdotally whether that's an issue or not.

19 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, we do have that. So, for
20 2022, we had 802 that were anonymous.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's a lot.

22 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I know. And then for 2023,
23 we had 636 that were anonymous and anecdotally, we
24 have one of our - a case that's with one of our
25 prosecuting partners that came in anonymously. So,

2 you know some of them are fruitful and they are taken
3 just as serious as other cases and some people don't
4 want to put their name to it and as they get
5 comfortable, it was somebody in our intake unit that
6 made this person comfortable enough to say who they
7 were so we got more information. So, those cases are
8 very important to us to.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, do you have
10 recommendations regarding the effectiveness of the
11 tracking and reporting required by Local Law 43 of
12 2020.

13 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I would love for the DOE to
14 take all of our recommendations and approve them and
15 accept them. That's you know -

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: They mentioned some that get
17 uh and some that don't earlier, so.

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Some do and some don't and it
19 is a back and forth and some you know we are not the
20 policy makers for the DOE. They are and sometimes
21 they have uh, you know reasons that they - that we
22 may not consider because we are the investigators and
23 we're looking at from the angle in our lens of trying
24 to stop corruption or trying to fix a problem and
25 they may look at it from a different lens but

2 overall, I think that it's a good relationship with
3 them. There are some that we wish that they would do
4 but we're not the enforcement of them. You know you
5 can't enforce policies and procedure recommendations.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, we can follow up on
7 some of your recommendations. Do you have, maybe
8 this is or is not appropriate but do you have regular
9 meetings with DOE or standing meetings to discuss the
10 policy and procedure recommendations that you do
11 make?

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Sure, there's like a monthly
13 back and forth.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Monthly?

15 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, alright.

17 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: They have 30 days to reply.
18 We say on the bottom, please reply in 30 days. They
19 typically do ask for extensions and you know we're
20 okay with that because that means they're considering
21 it and thinking about it and so there is a back and
22 forth.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think the website
24 indicates that there's still 16 policies and
25 procedures from 2019 under advisement. Is that

2 accurate? Can you explain why those recommendations
3 are still under advisement? It would be a very long
4 extension.

5 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: That's a long extension. You
6 know effectively, I would consider those probably are
7 rejections at this point. Uhm, unless they've
8 actually revamped and changed whatever processes that
9 was uh, you know where we made the recommendation but
10 -

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, do you follow up on
12 their old - on these old recommendations? I guess by
13 that point, it's mute perhaps but there is still even
14 some from 2020 still pending. So, how do you decide
15 whether to bug them or not or call us to harass them?

16 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, uh -

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm very good at harassing
18 and so is Council Member Ayala.

19 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Awe, good to know. So,
20 sometimes we'll reissue the same one again and we've
21 done that you know multiple times particularly for
22 the social media one. Or we've done that also for
23 the provider, the billing for providers. We've
24 issued that more than once. And you know there's
25 some conversations with that. I know we've been told

2 that it's an important consideration for, especially
3 for the social media one but that's, we don't agree
4 on that.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right, well, what I was
6 going to ask is I think it was around three years ago
7 when you recommended banding employees from
8 contacting students via text or social media and DOE
9 said it already forbid most contact but there was no
10 blanket ban and he repeated this I don't know many,
11 many times and since 2021, you've listed all those
12 recommendations as pending but they're not pending.
13 So, I guess at this point, you know some other kind
14 of action needs to be taking place. What percentage
15 of how many times do you see this? Has this come up
16 in you know cases in particular? I mean we hear
17 about it but have there been specific cases?

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Right, I don't have the exact
19 number but I would say the majority of our sexual
20 contact cases and sexual misconduct cases are related
21 to that. Sometimes we can't prove a case but will
22 then say, okay, we can show that there's been this
23 much between a student and you know whatever the
24 staff or the CBO or provider. But I would say -

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Majority of cases is
3 important.

4 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: The majority of the cases -

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Wow. If DOE accepts your
6 recommendation, let's say for those that they do, how
7 do you make sure that they get implemented by DOE?
8 Is that something that you track?

9 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Oh, for that particular one?

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: No, no, in general, in
11 general.

12 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Oh, well we ask them when
13 it's implemented but we don't go back constantly to
14 ask but we have had ones that you see that they'll
15 say updated. Uhm, that it has been implemented or
16 partially implemented but it's not something that we
17 go back continuously to do. We have investigating to
18 do.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: No, I know you're swamped.
20 I'm just trying to get people to send some a. what's
21 possible and also the challenges that exist.

22 You talked about the training but just generally,
23 in terms of how do you undertake to inform the public
24 about your watchdog role? Obviously the portal, the
25 website, training would be better. Again, are there

2 other ways that you would like to if you had more
3 staff and sort of doing these anticorruption
4 trainings is what I think you would like to be doing
5 more of.

6 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It's hard to do it you know
8 just by somebody calling as opposed to having a
9 systemic training.

10 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: I mean, it would be ideal to
11 have a training unit and to develop our own training
12 to just for the DOE. I mean that would be really our
13 ideal goal and also to inform the public too. I mean
14 there is different avenues and if I would love for
15 that - if anybody from the Council would like to
16 share with any of their constituents because there is
17 - all Council Members are sitting in every single
18 borough with so many schools within their actual
19 district and you know, I'm sure that you do also get
20 complaints from parents and you know directing them
21 to us and to letting us know you know showing them
22 where our website or just giving awareness would be
23 great and also reporting into us would be something
24 that would be -

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We all have newsletters so I
3 think we should work together on what you'd like the
4 newsletter verbiage to include and we'll do it. I
5 have the best newsletter and the biggest newsletter
6 but I'm sure everybody has a newsletter. I'm very
7 partial to my newsletter.

8 On the state level, we talked a little bit about
9 you know what state has to do for that one issue but
10 are there other laws and policies governing DOE
11 because people forget DOE is still a state agency. I
12 can't tell you how many times I try to introduce a
13 city law regarding DOE. Sorry Gale, your preempted.
14 You have to go to Albany. That happens so many
15 times. So, but are there ways that you would like
16 the state to be supportive of your conducting your
17 oversight?

18 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: So, for us, yeah, I you know
19 as far as specific state laws, I mean well, maybe
20 they'll do something with social media, you know
21 phones in schools. I don't know what they'll do with
22 that. Uhm, but we make our recommendations also to
23 the state if they want to pull someone's license and
24 you know I don't know how often that happens but we
25 do - you know there are times when we'll have a

2 finding and then we'll you know publicize whatever
3 our report is or it will come into light that this
4 person is actually teaching in another state because
5 New York State never pulled their license but that's
6 just you know, I'm just thinking about the state in
7 general. But they have their own constraints as to
8 what they can and cannot do for discipline for a
9 license.

10 But as far as the 211 would be the most pressing
11 issue for us.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's the one we talked
13 about earlier.

14 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Yeah, that really is a
15 pressing issue particularly for us so that we can get
16 the people we need would be ideal.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, well, those are my
18 questions. There's quite a bit of follow up, which
19 we appreciate and the fact that you have not
20 testified here before, so that's good that I think
21 the public and the New York Times was also very
22 helpful in bringing some of these issues to the
23 public. So, thank you very much for your testimony
24 and we hope to talk to you soon. Thank you.

25 ANASTASIA COLEMAN: Thank you.

2 DANIEL SCHLACHET: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I now open the hearing for
4 public testimony. I remind members of the public
5 that this is a government proceeding and that decorum
6 must be observed as such. Members of the public will
7 remain silent at all times. The witness table is
8 reserved for people who wish to testify. No video
9 recording or photography is allowed from the witness
10 table. Members of the public may not present audio
11 or video recordings as testimony but may submit
12 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at
13 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you
14 haven't already, please fill out an appearance card
15 with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized.
16 When you are recognized, you will have three minutes
17 to speak on today's oversight hearing. The Special
18 Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City
19 School District. If you have a written statement or
20 additional written testimony you want to submit,
21 please provide a copy to the Sergeant at Arms. You
22 can also email written testimony to
23 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of the
24 close of hearing and we obviously indicate that audio
25 and video recordings will not be accepted.

2 For in person panelists, please come up to the
3 table once your name is called and now, I will call
4 our first panel. Benjamin Tocker, Debbie Meyer, and
5 Sharon Brown. [01:46:50]- [01:47:16] Debbie Meyer if
6 you want to begin.

7 DEBBIE MEYER: All protocol observed, thank you.
8 I am Debbie Meyer and you probably know me as a
9 literacy and dyslexia advocate. You might know me as
10 the parent of a child that was not taught to read in
11 public school and who had to sue the New York City
12 DOE as it was then called to make sure my kid was
13 taught to read at a specialized dyslexia school.

14 Today, I am worried, we don't even have the tools
15 for proper oversight of this. I want to talk about
16 the Carter funding that allowed my son to learn to
17 read. The Supreme Court decision, Florence County
18 versus Shannon Carter has been the only hope for many
19 families to make sure their kids receive a free and
20 appropriate education. But because of really
21 disparate and poor data entry and record keeping, the
22 money spent to outsource education has not really
23 informed the New York City Public Schools in any real
24 way.

2 Several years ago, some reporters used the
3 Freedom of Information Act to look at DOE spending on
4 Carter cases. The Excel document they received was
5 so undecipherable to them. I was asked to look at it
6 to see if could discern any information from it. I
7 first noticed there was no classification of
8 disability listed for each payment so we couldn't
9 sort by dyslexia or an IDA category. Then I thought
10 I'll start it by dyslexia schools. Well, I had to
11 clean up the data because it was so poorly done and
12 we had Winwad School, Windward School, The Windward
13 School, alphabetized under T. Windward School under
14 W. and every single dyslexia school was like this. I
15 had to clean up the data for a couple days just to
16 get any information.

17 Then I noticed what was missing, the list was
18 only the independent Carter cases where parents
19 fronted the money and then got reimbursed for
20 tuition. Some other list must have the schools that
21 the DOE paid directly, like Church Hill at times,
22 Sterling Community School, they weren't on the list.
23 The tutors the New York City DOE paid directly were
24 not on the list either. You could not see how much
25 money outsourcing dyslexia was costing New York City

2 Public Schools. I did notice however, in cleaning
3 and cleaning the data that the Special Education
4 Yeshivas represented nearly 25 percent of the Carter
5 cases, even though the Hasidic community population
6 is less than one percent of our population. That
7 kind of shocked me.

8 Similarly, the New York City Public Schools keeps
9 a database of independent education providers,
10 including special education teacher support services.
11 But you can't use this data base in print or online
12 because it doesn't tell what these providers are
13 specialized in. You have no idea if any of the
14 providers know the signs of reading and are prepared
15 to teach a dyslexic kid. So, parents, they just dial
16 for days, interviewing providers to find out - to
17 find one that's trained in Norton Gillingham, trained
18 in Wilson. You know people take time off work to
19 find someone that can teach their kid to read.

20 So, while dyslexia is the most common learning
21 disability and New York City Public Schools has made
22 great strides in changing literacy instruction, so
23 dyslexic kids can be identified and supported, this
24 is not enough. We have to keep the pressure on and
25 we need the tools to do so.

2 We need the tools for the public, for their
3 advocates, for journalists, elected leaders like
4 yourselves. You know can the SCI find this
5 information? Can the IBO? Can City Council? I'm
6 just really worried that we're going to fall down the
7 same rabbit hole in a few years and if we create
8 tools for the dyslexic kids, that tool can be used
9 for other learning disabilities and other issues to.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.
11 Needless to say, I should have asked more about
12 Carter cases. I'm quite familiar with them and I
13 know the City Council is trying to, like everybody
14 else for the last many years trying to figure out
15 what makes sense but you make it even worse because
16 if you don't even have a list, I know every school
17 you mentioned, then it's even more challenging. So,
18 thank you for your research. It's embarrassing that
19 you had to do it and it hadn't already been done but
20 thank you very much and we will follow up on your
21 concern. Thank you.

22 DEBBIE MEYER: Thank you.

23 BENJAMIN TOCKER; Good morning honorable Chair
24 Brewer, Committee Members and my fellow New Yorkers.
25 My name is Benjamin Tocker and I am here representing

2 YAFFED. We are an advocacy organization concerned
3 about the quality of education at Hasidic yeshivas.
4 In New York City, there are tens of thousands of
5 students attending yeshivas that fail to provide an
6 education that is consistent with the New York State
7 law. Every nonpublic school in New York State is
8 required under education law Section 3204 to provide
9 an education that is substantially equivalent to that
10 which is provided by the local school district.

11 Unfortunately in the Hasidic community, there are
12 scores of yeshivas that have ignored state law and
13 have created a culture of educational neglect. The
14 situation has been allowed to exist for decades. This
15 is a generational problem in the Hasidic community
16 now. The quality of education at Hasidic yeshivas
17 runs the spectrum of virtually a nonexistent secular
18 studies program, to secular studies programs that are
19 substantially equivalent but this has been allowed to
20 exist as a function of collusion between elected
21 officials, education regulators and yeshiva
22 operators. Thankfully, the state education
23 department produced clarifying rules that provide a
24 clear framework for enforcement by the local school
25 district. As a result of this action and court

2 orders resulting from legal cases brought by YAFFED,
3 the New York City Department of Education performed
4 quality reviews of two dozen yeshiva's that resulted
5 last June and 18 yeshiva's being deemed to be failing
6 their students.

7 Slowly, the system has begun to respond to this
8 problem. Slowly, action appears to be in process.
9 However, this process requires oversight. Delays
10 throughout the initial investigation for over seven
11 years. In 2019, the New York City Department of
12 Investigation declared that then Mayor Bill de Blasio
13 had horse traded the issue in order to gain political
14 favor with Hasidic community leaders. Throughout all
15 this time, these yeshiva's have been generously
16 funded with public dollars in the form of mandated
17 service aid, transportation aid, textbook money,
18 special education funding, and food programs. Each
19 of the government funding programs requires
20 applicants to attest that they are in compliance with
21 all local and state laws. Yet we know that these
22 yeshiva's are not. It is an undisputed fact that 18
23 yeshiva's are not compliant.

24 We urge the Special Commissioner to launch a full
25 investigation into funding that has been provided to

2 yeshiva's that provide only a religious education.
3 We urge the Special Commissioner to provide ongoing
4 oversight to the Office of Nonpublic Schools at the
5 Department of Education. This office is charged with
6 ensuring the compliance of nonpublic schools. This
7 issue has been far too politicized over the years to
8 allow these processes to continue unwatched.
9 Compliance must be verified. Politics must be
10 removed from the assurance of compliance. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you and your Chair
12 Aviafa is the most wonderful woman alive. She is so
13 fabulous. I just want to make sure that I say that.

14 BENJAMIN TOCKER: Thank you. I'll relay it to
15 her but I think she's also watching this right now.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Please, she is so fabulous.

17 SHARON BROWN: Hello, my name is Sharon Brown. I
18 just want to say hello everyone. I want to say
19 release the hostages. Let all these people go defend
20 Israel. I would like to know if you guys are going
21 to do something concerning the hostages here? I'll
22 get into my testimony. Are you going to do something
23 to cover that issue?

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Not today no.

25 SHARON BROWN: Not today I know. In the future?

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That has nothing to do with
3 this hearing, so.

4 SHARON BROWN: Okay, so I just put that out
5 there. Okay, so I want to talk about the sexual
6 abuse procedures. We have to make sure that the
7 teachers are removed immediately when they are
8 charged or someone says that they have done something
9 to them sexually and the student should be put on
10 training at home. They can learn from home or go to
11 a different school until they fix that situation.
12 There needs to be some kind of procedure there so
13 that the child is not still left in danger. So there
14 has to be something done to do a whole full procedure
15 on that.

16 I want to chime in on the yeshiva's. The
17 investigation, whatever they do concerning the
18 yeshiva's, they can't force teaching on someone that
19 is religious, Jewish and Christian but what they can
20 check is how well the students are doing having a
21 religious education versus those who have a secular
22 education. Is it effecting them poorly or is it just
23 not coming up to a certain standard that you think
24 that they should have? How are they doing in the
25 next grade? How are they doing in their schools and

2 colleges when they go on in school? Are they
3 functioning at the proper levels or do you just want
4 them to do a specific curriculum? I think the
5 yeshiva's are doing very well. That we don't have
6 any problem with people saying that their student are
7 falling behind or something like that.

8 As far as secular studies are concerned, they can
9 learn that in other grades. We need to return
10 prayer, bibles, the flag, American flag, the pledge
11 of allegiance into school. We need more religious
12 studies in the public schools, not just in the
13 yeshiva's. So, we need to incorporate what the
14 yeshiva's are doing in our school. You don't see
15 many school shootings in the yeshiva. So, what the
16 yeshiva's are doing, that kind of teaching prevents
17 the shootings in school. So, we want to get those
18 things taken care of and that kind of religious
19 training. So prayer needs to be put in our school.
20 Bibles, flags, religious training, Juda Christian,
21 Jewish, needs to be placed in our school, not taken
22 out of yeshiva's. Thank you very much.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. We
24 have one person on the Zoom. Thank you very much to
25 the panel here. If you want to stay and listen,

2 you're welcome to but thank you very much. Christi
3 Angel.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 CHRISTI ANGEL: My name is Christi Angel and I am
6 the parent of a New York City Public School student
7 within District 75 and a parent advocate and I reside
8 in Queens. Thank you, chair Brewer and members of the
9 committee for convening this meeting. This topic
10 directly has affected me based on parent engagement.
11 Parent engagement is considered to be an issue, but
12 when a parent is active they are considered and
13 treated like a nuisance. I have an example of how
14 this has affected me. During COVID a unilateral
15 decision was made by the principal to ban my court
16 ordered provider based on an assumed zoom bomb. This
17 was after my in-depth advocacy and questions on my
18 son's IEP being out of compliance and a fraudulent
19 SANDI.

20 An investigation was supposedly initiated but no
21 case number was given for 2 years. I was advised it
22 bounced from OSI to SBI to SCI or any other acronym
23 available, this was done without questioning my son's
24 worker who was stripped without due process and had a
25 damage to his reputation.

2 The effects set my son into a regression that we
3 still deal with to this day. He was set back for 5
4 years. Behaviors we had curbed, came back full
5 force. When I attempted to send him back to school I
6 was advised they would call 911 because they could
7 not manage him. We were forced to start over at a
8 new school, which felt like the game plan the entire
9 time.

10 His worker was banned from the school building,
11 was banned from working with my son online within 2
12 days of the alleged event and he was not questioned.
13 Parents have no recourse or protections when they are
14 targeted. They have no real proof of investigations,
15 especially when they are bounced back to the school,
16 even if there's a conflict of interest. The checks
17 and balances are not fair and leave parents subject
18 to the powers that be and cover ups.

19 I still see this happening to this day with no
20 recourse. Parents have reached out for help and I
21 have nothing to tell them. The system feels rigged.
22 Parents voices need to be highly considered and
23 accountability measures put in place for how parents
24 voices are included that extend beyond the blurb in
25 the IEP. Investigations should not be ethically

2 given to the schools with direct conflict of
3 interest. Some preliminary level of groundwork
4 should be done prior to dictating where a case goes
5 for investigation and who does it. Protections need
6 to be in place for parents. I also would ask that
7 the committee check the data to see just how many
8 cases are referred back to school based
9 investigations and the outcomes. Thank you so much
10 for your time and consideration.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. I'm
12 offline if you want to contact me, I'd be glad to
13 follow up. Thank you for testifying today. We has
14 signed up from Eileen Zari Ramirez and Evan Stone, so
15 if you are either online or in person, please let us
16 know. We've had everyone testify who signed up. If
17 we inadvertently missed anyone who would like to
18 testify in person, please visit the table and
19 complete a slip. If we inadvertently missed anyone
20 who would like to testify virtually, please use the
21 raise hand function in Zoom and we will call on you
22 in order of hands raised.

23 I will now read - I think we already did this who
24 registered. Seeing no one else, I would like to note
25 again that written testimony which will be reviewed

2 in full by Committee Staff must be submitted to the
3 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing
4 and you can email at testimony@council.nyc.gov.

5 Thank you everyone. This hearing is ended.

6 [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date July 18, 2024