

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Diana I. Ayala  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés  
Chris Banks  
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Lincoln Restler  
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Althea V. Stevens  
Sandra Ung

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

Molly Wascow Park  
NYC DHS Commissioner

Joslyn Carter  
DHS Administrator

Scott French  
HRA Administrator

Jill Berry  
DSS First Deputy Commissioner

Richard Johns  
DSS Chief Program, Performance and Financial  
Management Officer

Kristen Miller  
Homeless Services United

Carol Siegel  
Center for Family Representation

Eric Lee  
Volunteers of America Greater New York

Naima Dahir  
Arab-American Family Support Center

Cathy Battista  
Anthos Home

Nicholas Buess  
Food Bank NYC

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

Greg Silverman  
West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Keith Carr  
City Harvest

Terry Troia  
Project Hospitality Staten Island

Agnes Kim  
Family Homelessness Coalition

Jade Vasquez  
WIN

Juan Diaz  
Citizens' Committee for Children

Judith Rosenfeld  
Breaking Ground

Sabina Saleh  
Project Renewal

Cristina Abbattatista  
Urban Pathways

Annie Terrizzi  
Partnership to End Homelessness

Nadia Swanson  
Ali Forney Center

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

Gabriela Sandoval Requena  
New Destiny

Daniris Espinal  
New Destiny

Diana Ramos  
Safety Net Project

Aditi Bhattacharya  
Anti-Violence Project

Lauren Schuster  
Urban Resource Institute

Lisa Rivera  
NYLAG

Munonyedi Clifford  
Legal Aid Society

Tiffany Liston  
Mobilization for Justice

Shervon Small  
Legal Services NYC

Mary Fox  
Legal Services for the Working Poor

Jack Boyle  
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

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

Bill Bryan  
Brooklyn Defender Services

Keriann Pauls  
TakeRoot Justice

Daniel Alvarez  
Youth Represent

Marlene Polanco  
Infant Toddler Specialist at Chinese-American  
Planning Council

Marcus Jackson  
Encore Community Services

Chanya Holness  
Children's Health Fund

Omarax Rosa  
Harlem Community Justice Center

Danna Dennis  
Riders Alliance

Jeremiah Gonzalez  
Riders Alliance

Brian Fritsch  
PCAC

Sharon Leslie Brown  
Rose of Sharon Enterprises

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

Stephen Grimaldi  
New York Common Pantry

Joel Berg  
Fortune Society

Jennifer Hinojosa  
Community Service Society

Jimmy Meagher  
Safe Horizon

Natalie Interiano  
Care for the Homeless

Lily Shapiro  
Fortune Society

Adaeze Okoli  
Rethink Food

Christopher Leon Johnson

Jeanette Estima  
Citymeals on Wheels

Jason Cianciotto  
GMHC



SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for the Committee on General Welfare. Please silence all electronic devices. If you wish to submit testimony, you need to fill out an appearance card by the Sergeant's desk in the front. If you wish to submit testimony online, you may do so at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Moving forward, nobody is to approach the dais, and I repeat, nobody is to approach the dais. Without further ado, Chair, we're ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Please do not approach the dais, I don't want you to get hurt. Good morning everyone. I'm Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala, Chair of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for joining me for the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget hearing for the General Welfare Committee. We will hear from two agencies, the Human Resources Administration, HRA, and the Department of Homeless Services, DHS, testifying under the umbrella of the Department of Social Services, DSS. The City's proposed Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget totals \$114.5 billion of which \$15.05 billion or 13.1 percent funds DSS. This encompasses \$11.47 billion for HRA and



\$3.58 billion for DHS. DSS serves some of the most vulnerable populations in New York City, and these services are more vital now than ever. There were notable changes made in the Preliminary Plan for both agencies. HRA saw \$334.4 million in city-funded new needs added in fiscal year 25 with a majority of that funding going towards CityFEPS vouchers. Funding was only added for CityFEPS in fiscal year 2025, and the program lacks adequate baseline funding in fiscal year 26 and beyond. On a positive note, I was very happy to see the Preliminary Plan restored baseline funding which had been reduced at adoption for HRA's Anti-harassment Tenant Protection Program contracts as part of the points of agreement in the City of Yes Housing Plan. In the Preliminary Plan, DHS has \$625.8 million in city-funded new needs in fiscal year 2025. Notably, including \$554.2 million in one-time funding for growing non-asylum-seeker shelter population. City fund savings decreased DHS budget by \$283.4 million in fiscal year 2025 and \$1.34 billion in fiscal year 2026 due to asylum-seeker response cost re-estimate. Additionally, \$1.4 billion in fiscal year 2026 was transferred from DHS' budget to other city agencies that are projected to

be part of response efforts. I am concerned about the areas where the budget does not adequately support the essential programs administered by HRA and the necessary levels of staffing required to provide clients with services in a timely manner. While HRA has made headway on their backlog of SNAP and cash assistance applications, denial rates have increased which is troubling. We have still been hearing that it is very difficult to get through to HRA by phone and that clients are experiencing very long wait times at HRA centers. The threat of federal funding cuts to social safety net programs also imposes a risk to DSS operations with 1.4 percent, \$1.91 billion, of HRA's total budget in fiscal year 2025 and 15.5 percent, \$628.1 million of HDS' budget in fiscal year made up of federal funding. I am also concerned that not enough support is being given to community-based organizations. They are at risk of losing federal dollars and continue to face difficulties with getting paid on a timely bases for city contracts. HRA Community Food Connection Program is a vital resource for the city's most vulnerable residents, yet the baseline budget in fiscal year 2025 and beyond is just \$20.9 million, a third of the

fiscal 2025 of \$60 million. additionally, there are vital social service net programs, safety net programs such as rental assistance and cash assistance, as well as legislatively required expenditures such as the prevailing wage for DHS shelter security that are not budgeted at current spending levels starting in fiscal year 2026. While the budget maintains the essential benefits programs administered by HRA and the shelter programs administered by DHS, we need to think more deeply about where we can most effectively allocate our limited resources, especially during these uniquely challenging times. DHS shelter census continues to grow. At the end of February, there were over approximately 85,000 individuals in DHS shelters, nearly a third of them asylum-seekers. While shelter exits to permanent housing did increase in fiscal year 2025, so did the shelter census and the process for subsidized housing placements must be accelerated in order to significantly decrease the number of people living in our city's shelter system. Programs such as CityFEPS and more important than ever-- are more important than ever, and the best way to move long-term shelter residents into stable, permanent

housing. However, this program suffers from both underfunding and numerous process bottlenecks on top of the difficulty of finding affordable housing in a very expensive city. In today's hearing we look forward to discussing adjustments made in the Preliminary Plan, staffing for benefits Administration, how DSS is working with contracted nonprofit providers to improve contracting, the plan for asylum response efforts going forward, and the metrics included in the Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. It is the council's job to carefully review the budgets and operations of city agencies to ensure that we are good stewards of public dollars and that we are providing our city's most vulnerable residents with the services that they need. This is a job I take very seriously. Before I welcome the Commissioner, I would like to acknowledge my Council-- my colleagues Council Member Avilés and Cabán is on Zoom. Finally, I would like to thank the General Welfare Committee staff for their work on preparing this hearing, Phariha Rahman, Finance Analyst, Elisabeth Childers-Garcia, Finance Analyst, Julia Haramis [sp?], Unit Head, Sahar Moazami, Assistant Deputy Director, Penina

Rosenberg [sp?], Policy analyst, and my Chief of Staff Elsie Encarnacion. And now, Commissioner Park, our Counsel will swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Will you please raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before this committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Good morning. I want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the members of the General Welfare Committee for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify about the Department of Social Services, DSS, Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget. My name is Molly Wasow Park, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services. We, I thought had a deck, but so I will-- but it doesn't seem like it's up, so I will skip the description that goes with the deck. DSS is made up of both the Human Resources Administration, HRA, and the Department of Homeless Services, DHS, so accordingly I am also joined by my colleagues, DHS Administrator

Joslyn Carter, and HRA Administrator Scott French, as well as DSS First Deputy Commissioner Jill Berry, and DSS Chief Program, Performance, and Financial Management Officer, Richard Johns. Collectively we represent the approximately 14,000 hardworking staff who dedicate their lives to supporting New Yorkers living at or below the poverty line. Today we will provide an overview of the FY 26 preliminary budgets for both agencies, and highlight the programs and services supported by these resources. DSS is the largest local government social services agency in the country, comprised of the Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services. Under the consolidated management structure and the shared mission of DSS, HRA and DHS provide a seamless and integrated continuum of client services to millions of New Yorkers every day. Across the agencies, our primary goal is to create a path to sustainability for low-income New Yorkers through three pillars: Streamlining Access to Social Services; addressing Homelessness and Housing Instability; and Creating Economic Stability. Terrific. We are on slide three, if we could advance. Thank you. We'll refer back to these three

pillars throughout our presentation. So, this next slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the tittle of the next portion of our presentation, the DSS/HRA budget. So I'm going to now move to giving an overview of the HRA budget. This slide shows a pie chart highlighting the different portions of the DSS/HRA budget. DSS/HRA is dedicated to fighting poverty and income inequality, providing essential benefits including cash assistance, nutrition and food programs, public health insurance, employment and transportation services, and access to housing, homelessness prevention and emergency assistance. DSS/HRA helps more than three million New Yorkers annually through the administration of more than 15 major public benefit programs, with a budgeted headcount of approximately 12,000. The FY25 budget for DSS/HRA is \$13.3 billion, including \$10.4 billion in City funds. The majority, over 80%, of HRA City tax levy budget is earmarked for benefits that the City administers on behalf of New York State. Almost 97 percent of the DSS/HRA City budget provides direct benefits and support to New Yorkers. Cash Assistance benefits, benefit levels, and eligibility rules are set by

State law and regulation. Medicaid, which is the blue portion of the pie chart, including homecare, managed care, mental health, substance use services, and hospital care is administered by New York State. The City pays a portion of Medicaid costs out of City tax levy. That is 64 percent of the DSS/HRA City-funded budget shown here. HRA sends these funds directly to New York State, and the State uses it along with State and federal funds it controls to pay medical providers and managed care plans. Fifteen percent of the DSS/HRA budget goes to public assistance, which is the red portion of the pie. Eleven percent to rental assistance and homelessness prevention, the green section. Three percent for administration, which is purple. Two percent for legal services orange, and one percent each for HASA, Employment Services, CFC, and Domestic Violence Services. HRA also administers the SNAP for 1.8 million clients. These benefits which are federally funded at about \$5 billion a year do not flow through our budget, but they represent another critical benefit that HRA is mandated to provide. Similarly, HRA also administers another \$48 billion in state and federal funds supporting NYC Medicaid clients which are not part of



our City budget. And I should note that the DSS budget for administration covers shared services for both HRA and DHS. So the next slide, again, shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, the DHS budget. So now we will pivot to provide an overview of the projected DHS budget for Fiscal Year 26. This slide shows a pie chart highlighting the different portions of the DHS budget. DHS is committed to providing safe temporary shelter, connecting New Yorkers experiencing homelessness to permanent housing, and addressing unsheltered homelessness. DHS has an FY25 budget of \$4 billion, of which \$2.5 billion is City tax levy. The agency has a headcount of 1,929, and with its not-for-profit partners, is the largest municipal organization dedicated to addressing homelessness in the United States. Over 98 percent of the DHS budget supports shelter for families and individuals and services for the unsheltered, including outreach and low-barrier beds. The DHS budget is broken out as follows in FY26: \$1.1 billion for family shelter. That's the purple section of the pie. \$813 million for adult shelter which is green. \$405 million for street outreach,

which is red, and the remaining two percent is for Administration, which is blue. The next slide shows a pie chart highlighting the breakdown of the DHS client population. As of March 10th, the overall DHS census was 84,604 people, an increase of 41,000 since the beginning of 2022, before the surge in special population asylum seekers to NYC. Of that 84,000 people, approximately 58,500, or almost 70 percent, are families made up of children, more than 31,000 children which is the green section of the pie chart, and their adult parents and caregivers, more than 27,000 people which is the orange section of the pie chart. Children make up 36 percent or more than a third of all the people in shelter. The remaining population are made up of single adult men, about 16,000 people which is the light blue section, single adult women, 5,600 people which is purple, and adult families 4,000 people which is the dark blue section. This next slide shows a linear graph highlighting the DHS shelter census trends from the pandemic to present. Today, approximately 33 percent of the overall census is made up of asylum seekers, or what we are now terming our special population, over 28,000 people. In January 2022, the census was around

45,000, lower than in 2020 pre-pandemic. During the pandemic there was a decline in shelter entries. At the same time, DHS continued to make permanent housing placements leading to a decline in the census. As the special population asylum-seekers came to New York City and began to enter shelter in large numbers, they drove the census increase over the past nearly three years, and the special population asylum-seekers account for 75 percent of the growth in the DHS census, compared today to January of 2022. The non-special population asylum-seeker census remains below pre-pandemic levels; the combination of the public health advisory, pandemic financial supports and ongoing DSS prevention strategies and permanent housing placements from shelter led to census declines during the pandemic before the migrant surge. The non-asylum special population census is about nine percent below the pre-pandemic level and below the pre-pandemic peak of 61,400 reached in January of 2019. This slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, federal budget impact on DSS. It would be irresponsible of me not to focus some of this

presentation on the threats to federal funding currently being contemplated by Congress. As I've highlighted in my testimony, DSS, HRA and DHS budgets are significantly reliant on federal dollars, but more importantly the three million people we serve receive significant benefits from the federal government. We are seeing increasing demand for these services at the same time that they under threat. This slide highlights some examples of real impact proposed federal cuts will have on New Yorkers. The House Budget Resolution could-- proposes eliminating \$230 billion from Agriculture Committee which will primarily impacting SNAP and their 1.8 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP. The House Resolution also targets reduction of \$880 billion from Energy and Commerce Committee, and this reduction is anticipated to come from Medicaid cuts. There are about four million New York City residents who rely on Medicaid for Health Care. Additionally, the House Appropriations Committee has put out a menu of budget options that contemplates eliminating TANF Contingency Funds which would represent a reduction of \$290 million from New York State, as well as an overall 10 percent cut to the TANF block grant. In

New York City there are about 290,000 New Yorkers who rely on Cash Assistance for basic income support, and the agency also uses TANF for programs such as family shelters and workforce development programs. The same House proposal also contemplates elimination of the Social Services Block Grant. DSS supports about 72,000 New Yorkers with-- relying on adult protective services and domestic violence services with this Social Services Block Grant which is also used in other agencies as well. All of these are vital programs that the City and State would not have the budget capacity to replace. The next slide again shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, Streamlining Access to Social Services. Now, I'm going to highlight some of the work where we have successfully modernized and implemented process improvements to streamline access to social services and benefits. This slide shows a linear graph highlighting SNAP recipients in blue and applications in green. First, I'd like to acknowledge that DSS saw the highest number of SNAP applications, 36,000, and caseload, 1.8 million, since the period after superstorm Sandy over the last several years. There

was a surge of applications at the beginning of the pandemic, but because of our investment in AccessHRA and the ability of clients to apply, recertify and interview online and on the phone, we have been able to manage the surge and ensure clients get these important benefits. This next slide shows a linear graph highlighting cash assistance recipients in blue and applications in green. Turning to Cash Assistance. In the preliminary budget, the FY25 budget for Cash Assistance is \$2.57 billion to support a caseload of 590,000 recipients through June 2025. The FY26 budget is \$1.65 billion. \$920 million of which \$468 million was City tax levy was added in the November Plan for FY25 projected Cash Assistance costs. This graph shows both one-time and recurring recipients. In February there were 584,000 ongoing recipients and 5,500 one-time recipients for Cash Assistance. Although the one-time recipients receive rent and utility arrears along with other benefits, it is important to note that many of our clients receiving ongoing assistance also receive emergency payments for rent arrears so they can remain stably housed. In FY24, HRA issued emergency rent payments to over 55,000 households. Next slide.

Along with SNAP and Cash Assistance, DSS/HRA continues to support New Yorkers with other key benefits including, but certainly not limited to, Medicaid, Fair Fares, and Home Heating Assistance Program. I cannot stress enough that automatic Medicaid extensions are ending. Clients must recertify their Medicaid in order to keep their health insurance. This is a requirement that is beyond the agency. It's not something that we have a choice, and we want to make very sure that we are getting the word out there. We are working to ensure that everyone who remains eligible for Medicaid receives ongoing benefits, and we have a robust outreach campaign to remind Medicaid clients of changes to the renewal rules and the urgency of submitting renewal applications to avoid any interruption to coverage. We hope that you will work with us all to continue to remind your eligible constituents that they do need to review. On another note, in collaboration with the Council, we expanded Fair Fares eligibility to 145 percent of federal poverty level, and encourage eligible New Yorkers to submit for benefits as soon as possible. Lastly, in collaboration with the State, DSS/HRA helps to

provide access to Home Energy Assistance, HEAP, benefits. Next slide. One after that. Thank you.

This next slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of our next portion of our presentation, addressing homelessness and housing instability. Keeping New Yorkers in their homes, moving families and individuals out of shelter, and helping these households remain stably housed are all primary goals for the Agency. And I now want to talk about our progress in these areas. DSS remains committed to connecting New Yorkers to permanent housing and keeping them stably housed. We made significant strides over the past year by strengthening our rental assistance programs, providing homelessness prevention services, and leveraging social service dollars to actually create more affordable housing. As a result, DSS has seen record-breaking increases in the number of permanent housing placements. In calendar year 24, more than 10,200 households, or nearly 22,000 New Yorkers, moved out of shelter into permanent housing placements using CityFHEPS. That was a 56 percent increase relative to calendar year 23. This is a subset of the nearly 15,000 households comprised of



more than 31,000 New Yorkers who were able to obtain permanent housing or stay in their homes using CityFHEPS vouchers, reflecting a 43 percent increase year over year. Through our Homebase homelessness prevention services, in calendar year 24, more than 19,000 households or close to 40,000 New Yorkers remained in their homes, and more than 11,000 households, or about 33,000 New Yorkers, received aftercare services to help them stay stably-housed. Last year, DSS announced the launch of the Affordable Housing Services, or AHS initiative, to create at least a thousand affordable housing units for CityFHEPS voucher holders exiting shelter. This program uses social service dollars to help not-for-profit human service providers either finance the purchase of, or long-term lease buildings for use as affordable housing. We are proud of the progress we've made so far. DSS has already opened more than 450 apartments units across six high-quality affordable housing sites in the Bronx and Brooklyn in partnership with not-for-profit providers and over 500 additional apartments are in the pipeline. In New York City 97 percent of people experiencing homelessness are sheltered, but that remaining three

percent of individuals is an area of particular focus for the agency. Since the start of this administration, DSS/DHS has aggressively expanded low-barrier bed capacity which are shelters that are particularly targeted to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, also known as Safe Haven and stabilization beds. At this year's State of the City, Mayor Adams announced 900 new low-barrier beds representing an investment of another \$106 million in efforts to address street homelessness in New York City. These beds will start to come online as early as this summer, and the remaining beds are to be identified in the DHS development pipeline and brought on line in subsequent years. DHS' Safe Haven and stabilization bed total will be 4,900 beds once all is said and done. Because of this investment in street homeless solutions, DHS placed more than 3,000 New Yorkers residing in low-barrier programs into permanent housing during the Adams Administration. And since the launch of the Subway Safety Plan in February 2022, more than 8,300 New Yorkers have been connected to shelter. DSS/DHS has doubled the outreach staffing to nearly 400 outreach staff as of today to support referrals to low-barrier shelters.

Now I want to talk about an initiative that I'm particularly excited about, Project CRIB. DSS is consistently looking for ways to impact the lives of the City's most vulnerable. Last year, there were over 2,000 babies born in shelter, and there is no bigger way to impact a child's first days on this earth than to be born into a stable home. To support this mission, DSS will embark on CRIB, or Creating Real Impacted Birth, a pilot program to study the impact of housing stability on the newest of New Yorkers by providing pregnant people applying for shelter with support to avoid entering shelter system. DSS is in the middle of drafting the rule changes necessary to advance with this study, and we expect the pilot to commence this summer. This next slide shows an image of the Manhattan skyline and presents the title of the next portion of our presentation, Creating Economic Stability. And now for our 3rd pillar, creating economic stability. We recognize that more and more New Yorkers rely on the City's resources to make ends meet. In addition to the public benefits, rental assistance and other essential resources we offer to help people get back on their feet, I will provide an overview of our

career services and other supports that enable New Yorkers to secure steady income and live sustainable lives. In calendar year 2024, HRA helped 15,577 clients secure employment, an 89 percent increase over the calendar year 2023 8,252 job placements. In FY24, Hire NYC, which is our initiative that connects Cash Assistance recipients to human service providers, broke their record with human service providers hiring 8,197 public assistance clients, more than 2,000 more than in fiscal year 23. In FY25 through the end of February, 5,564 clients have been hired so far, putting us on track to exceed last year's numbers. I also want to talk about the Pathways to Industrial and Construction Careers Program, or PINCC, which advances training, education and job placements particularly for, as you may gather, industrial construction jobs. PINCC has enrolled 11,026 individuals in construction and industrial training, with 653 completions thus far. We've referred more a thousand individuals to jobs with 513 receiving job offers and 383 job placements with more than eight unions and public and private employers. Going forward we will continue to invest in our career services programming. The Pathways for

Access to Careers and Employment, or PACE contracts, begin October 2025 using centralized "no wrong door" program model with locations throughout the borough. The program will streamline and minimize travel burden, maximize access to all employment and support services, and foster stronger client and staff relationships. It will establish an in-demand occupation and sector focused approach that connects clients to skilled professions that offer family sustaining wages, utilize labor market data to assist clients in gaining marketable skills for success and advancement in their careers, and streamline processes for vendors by offering a hybrid approach to engaging clients. I will close by underlining our ongoing commitment to break down government silos and improve access to services. The challenges DSS/HRA/DHS works to confront bridge across agencies, and further, bridge across jurisdictional boundaries. Overcoming these challenges goes to the heart of creating the kind of caring, compassionate communities we seek to live in. We appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and we welcome any questions that you may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Commissioner. Okay, I have a number of questions here, but just based on your testimony before I get to my questions-- understanding that there's a real, you know, threat that the federal government is going to cut vital resources, has there already been a conversation between DSS and OMB to start strategically talking through some contingency planning for the potential federal cuts?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are actively working on contingency planning as an agency. At this point, it's too early for me to put any of the proposals out on the record. We are still working through ideas. I will say there are-- there are no easy solutions here given the magnitude of the potential cuts, and as the Budget Director said, I believe, when he testified because it's not just DSS, right, it's every agency around the City that's looking at significant federal cuts, I don't see a realistic pathway for the City or even the City and State to backfill what's potentially lost from the federal government. It's really concerning.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You mentioned that nearly 15,000 households comprised of more than

31,000 New Yorkers were able to obtain permanent housing or stay in their homes using CityFHEPS vouchers. So, one of the-- I'm trying to get into it without getting into the legality of it. but one of the changes that the Council was advocating for was the ability to keep folks that are already housed with, you know, a threat of eviction house, like, giving them-- that would ordinarily qualify for CityFHEPS had they been in shelter, a CityFHEPS voucher. That kind of sounds like that's what you're doing here. So, if so, how will you-- who's making that determination. Like, where-- how is this working?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, it's been long-term policy that there are certain category of households who apply through Homebase who are able to access CityFHEPS. There's a lot of very specific aspects to the rules, and we can certainly send those over, but generally speaking, households that are facing eviction and who have a prior shelter history are able to access CityFHEPS without-- through Homebase without coming into shelter. It's been relatively consistent that about a third of lease-ups

every year with CityFHEPS are through-- are those clients who are applying via Homebase.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, I would-- a third of the 15,000?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. So, it was approximately 10,200, I believe, who were exits out of shelter using CityFHEPS and then the remaining 5,000 or so were in community households, meaning that they applied through Homebase.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do they have to be-- the community vouchers, are those specifically for like DV clients, or does it make?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No, and the most typical category-- as I said, there are nuances on the eligibility, but it is people who are facing eviction and who have shelter history, which--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: could mean as a child or something like that, but that is a relatively strong predictor of who will enter shelters. So that is a population that has been eligible for in-community CityFHEPS vouchers for many years now.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect. Just a follow-up question, just piggy-backing off of that.



1 If an individual-- if a client is receiving FHEPS,  
2 has a FHEPS voucher from the State and they become  
3 ineligible, is there some sort of conversation that's  
4 happening between the State and the City that says,  
5 hey, this person doesn't qualify for StateFHEPS, but  
6 may qualify for CityFHEPS? Or is it on the-- does it  
7 fall on the client to make that determination?  
8

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: There's not an  
10 automatic transition from FHEPS to CityFHEPS. Some  
11 of those clients will be eligible. Not all of them  
12 will be, and we can certainly look at those on a  
13 case-by-case basis.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm just trying to  
15 figure out what is the most seamless way of making  
16 that connection, because year as people-- you know, I  
17 just-- I had a-- just because you helped me with a  
18 case like this the other day and it kind of-- you  
19 know, it triggered a whole bunch of questions in my  
20 own head about how do we-- you know, how are we  
21 connecting the dots? Because some of these folks are  
22 coming out of shelter and getting a FHEPS voucher,  
23 and so we don't want them to go back into shelter  
24 should their circumstances change.  
25

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, the best option there would be for that family or individual to connect with their local Homebase office. We have more than-- we have 26 offices around the City. There are our staff there who can assist to evaluate the individual circumstances, because it is very household specific. Administrator French, anything you want to add there?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I think you covered most of it, Commissioner. I think one of the things-- it is based on each household because one will often come off of FHEPS, because they've also come off of Cash Assistance, because you need to be on Cash Assistance to receive FHEPS. So there's definitely been the change in income in the family, and we'd really need to look at that on a case-by-case basis.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm just afraid that people will fall off, you know, the cliff because they don't know, right, that they may qualify and they may see CityFHEPS and FHEPS as one program, right? And so I don't know if that's on the State level, that folks should be informed, right, that they should at least check. Because in the case that

the Commissioner and I were discussing, the individual got off of Cash Assistance because they qualified for SSI. So their income didn't really change dramatically, right. They weren't getting enough income coming into the household to afford the apartment that they moved into coming out of shelter, and so there has to be some sort of connector that says okay, listen, this person may qualify-- either to the client or DSS, I'm not sure how that would work. But I just-- I'm really concerned that folks will just end up back in shelter because they won't know any better and they won't be able to make rent. Out of the 19,000 households that remained in their homes, do we know how many applied, because that seems like a really good-- and again, this is all really good. Like, I love the fact that we're giving our community vouchers, so it's not a critique. Just really just I'm trying to understand. Out of the 19,000 households that went through Homebase that were able to remain in their homes, do we know how many didn't make it, what the actual number was? Were there 40,000 applications and 19,000 made it? I just-- I'm trying to figure out like how--

COMMISSIONER PARK: I believe our-- the Homebase track record is something upwards of 97 percent of those served are able to remain in their homes. We can follow up with the exact number. And really, Homebase is able to help connect people to the full complement of services that we have for housing stability, right? So, CityFHEPS is a piece of it, but so is connecting people to emergency rental assistance, helping to refer to people to an attorney if they need it. And then also, people will come to Homebase for other kinds of services, assistance with benefits access, or even employment assistance. So it is a wide range of services that Homebase is offering.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I want to recognize that Council Member Ung and Council Member Riley have joined us. Regarding the CRIB pilot program, could you just kind of walk me through that? Is that-- so, I'm a young person living in-- well, I'm a birthing person and I need housing. I'm living with my mother, maybe. Are you encouraging me to stay with my mother, giving me the voucher and I can stay there while I look for an apartment, or?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, when a pregnant person applies at PATH, they will be-- we're going to be testing a couple of different of models of rental assistance for that population. So, some people who are enrolled in Project CRIB will receive a CityFHEPS voucher with the hopes that they can-- as long as they know that their tenure should-- staying with family members could be a shorter one, because they have rental assistance that they're able to remain out of shelter, or that because they're-- if they do need to enter shelter, right, if they don't have a safe place to stay, that they are able to exit relatively quickly. And then an additional cohort of people will get what we call our Pathway Home benefit which is actually a payment to stay with friends or family. It's something that has been around for a while that we've used on a fairly limited basis, but we think has potential real utility here. You know, something that is very interesting to me and we alluded to in the testimony, during COVID the numbers of families with children entering the shelter system dropped really substantially which is frankly exactly the opposite of what I thought was going to happen, but I think one of the reasons that that happened is

1 because there were really significant federal income  
2 supports and families could actually afford to stay  
3 together. so we are looking to see can we support  
4 people in staying with their friends and family, and  
5 that, you know, in a moment of a lot of different  
6 change, right, associated with the birth of a child,  
7 this may be the most viable option. But we really  
8 don't know, so we are looking to test these two  
9 different models and to see which does best help  
10 pregnant people either avoid shelter altogether or  
11 have very short shelter stays so that we minimize the  
12 number of babies born in shelter.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So what are the  
15 require-- what are the qualifying factors for the  
16 subsidy part of it, the voucher?

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: So it'll be targeted,  
18 as I said, to pregnant people applying for shelter.  
19 We do still need to qualify-- income qualify, so at  
20 or below 200 percent of federal poverty level, but  
21 other than that we're able to have fairly flexible  
22 income-- or eligibility requirements.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, if they were  
24 living with a family member, they would potential--  
25 they could still qualify?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And the Pathways to Home program, that is on a year to year basis, or?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, one year it's-- month to month, but one-year payment to specifically to stay with friends and family. So with CityFHEPS you have to have a lease of your own. So, you know, if you receive a voucher at the point of application because your-- a shelter application because you're a Project CRIB participant, you might stay with your family while you search for an apartment, but then ultimately, you're going to have a lease of your own. With Pathway Home, the idea is that you actually are staying with your family and we're able to support the cost associated with having additional people in the household by paying to the primary lease holder.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is that payment consistent amongst the individuals in the program, or does it vary by household?

COMMISSIONER PARK: There is a slight variation by household size, but it's largely \$1,200 a month.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And that's-- you said month-by-month, right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. I mean, so we pay-- we don't pay the full year up front, but it's a year's worth of subsidy paid on a monthly basis.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Okay. Thinking outside of the box, I like it.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We're trying.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. Okay. So now I'll get to my questions. The threat to providers-- providers have reported that a portion of their budgets come from federal sources that are now vulnerable due to the changes in political climate at the federal level. These funds go directly to providers for a variety of social safety net programs. How does DSS plan to support providers if they lose significant portions of their budgets from the federal resources?

COMMISSIONER PARK: And as I said before, we are deeply concerned about the threats coming from the federal government. I talked largely about what is the proposed cuts that will affect the DSS budget and then our directly client entitlement programs, but certainly it affects our not-for-profit providers



as well. We are in close communication with people. we are thinking about contingency planning, but the magnitude of the cuts that are being proposed are so large that there's no way we're going to be able to backfill them. So, we are going to have to think about how services are delivered.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are you talking to the providers, or--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing]  
Absolutely, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, because I would imagine that that communication needs to be-- that line of communication needs to be opened until, you know, we have more determined outcome from the federal government. Okay, on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025, the House of Representatives passed a budget resolution for the federal budget which will move to the next phase of negotiations between the House and the Senate. The budget resolution is expected to incorporate massive cuts to Medicaid and Medicare, food systems and other safety net programs that many New Yorkers rely on. Importantly, \$1.91 billion or 14.4 percent of HRA's total federal funding is for safety net supports, including food assistance,

energy assistance, income support, and Medicaid. For DHS, \$628.1 million or 15.5 percent of its fiscal 2025 budget is made of federal funding with most of it going towards family shelter operations. You've mentioned that you do have, you know, serious concerns about this. Given the federal threats to the social safety net, what is DSS doing in preparation other than I guess, you know, speaking with OMB? Have there been any conversations with the federal government?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we're taking really a two-fold approach. One is the contingency planning that I mentioned earlier to think about what we might do in the case in the worst cuts. And the other is really embarking on an education campaign so that we make sure that our elected officials and the general public are aware of how critical these income supports are, and hopefully we can do some work to mitigate the worst of it, right, to-- I want people to understand that there are 1.8 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP, for example. A third of those are children. A third of those are older adults. And it's not just the impact on clients, right? Every dollar of SNAP spent in New York City generates a

1 \$1.54 of economic activity. So, I think one of the  
2 things that we had started doing in the context of  
3 the Farm Bill reauthorization, right-- the Farm Bill  
4 is where SNAP is authorized, and we know it's up for  
5 renewal. We started in the fall trying to build what  
6 we think of as our big tent coalition of people who  
7 can advocate for these programs. It's not just the  
8 anti-hunger organizations that have been doing this  
9 work for a really long time, but you know, housing  
10 organizations should care about these entitlement  
11 programs, because if people are paying more for food,  
12 for example, they can't pay for rent. If a child is a  
13 hungry, it's very hard for that child to learn. So  
14 we want the education groups involved. We want the  
15 business organizations engaged because of the  
16 economic impact of these pogroms. So we've been  
17 building that coalition. As I say, it was originally  
18 around advocating for SNAP and SNAP growth, but we  
19 will pivot that and use it to support the programs  
20 instead.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. It's really  
23 scary, but it's heart-breaking. I mean, at a time  
24 when we're facing, you know, the largest number of  
25 unhoused individuals in shelter, you know, food

insecurity continues to climb. Like, this is-- this is a really big deal, and I think that, you know, we all need to be paying attention to what's happening in our government.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Nonprofit organizations provide community-based human services on behalf of the City to most vulnerable residents. This is especially true for HRA and DHS. DHS contract budget totals \$3.7 billion which is over 85 percent of the Agency's budget largely related to shelter services. HRA's contract budget is \$922.8 million and includes programs such as domestic violence shelters, workforce development programs, for Cash Assistance clients, and food pantries. Many nonprofits are struggling because City contracts do not keep up with the actual cost of providing services, and payments are often delayed. In October of 2024, MOC's launched a payback-- backlog initiative focusing on clearing outstanding payments from fiscals 23 to 25. How is DSS working with MOCS to ensure that provides are receiving their outstanding payments, and what is DSS doing to expedite the contracting and payment timeline for these nonprofits?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you for that.

Let me start by saying we can't do the work that we do without our not-for-profit partners, and we understand absolutely that the not-for-profits can't do their work if they don't get paid. We are in a challenging place right now. It has been a difficult process on those payments, but it's something that we are very, very focused on. I will say it's a very complicated and nuanced issue. When a provider- the providers' experience of I'm not getting paid actually translates back to a number of different challenges on the city side of things, right? It may mean that there's an invoice-- we have received and invoice and we haven't processed the invoice. Could also mean that there's a budget modification that needs to be done. It could mean that there is subcontractor approval that needs to get done. There's a variety of other issues. So what we are doing is really looking holistically at all of that and trying to expedite payments on emergency basis, but we're working very closely with provides. DHS in particular is meeting one-on-one with every single provide that we have, but we're also looking at the

structural issues so that we can make this better going forward.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Does DSS have an accounting of all nonprofit contracting and payment delays?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Because the-- as I say, the issue of not getting paid is actually a reflection of so many different issues, it's not possible to create a single report or summary that says here's everything that's an issue, here's the total dollar value at issue. Because in there could be new needs that aren't yet-- they're very real to the provider, but they haven't yet been approved through the process. So, they wouldn't show up on any reports. We're working-- we're looking holistically, but no, I can't put a single figure on it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm just trying to figure out, you know, where the immediacy is in trying to resolve these issues, because the truth is that a lot of these nonprofits are already working with bare bones, and they're not able to make payroll, you know, and that's also-- right-- concerning, because we're talking about primarily

Black and Brown individuals that are working in our social services agencies and we want to be able to ensure that they're paying rent and that they're able to purchase food and take care of their families.

And so how do we-- you know, I'm just trying to figure out. I guess, you know, I mean, these things are unpredictable and that for a variety of reasons these contracts can be delayed, but the fact that they're already seriously underfunded, and then on top of that they have a delay, and many of them don't have the cash flow on hand. I'm sure Council Member Brewer is going to get to you in a little bit about. I'm sure Council Member Brewer is going to get to you in a little bit about.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We're absolutely approaching this with urgency, and as we say, it's really a two-track effort so that we are-- what do we need to do to get cash into people's hands today? And working very closely with the not-for-profits in very regular communication so that we don't want to get anybody to the point where they can't make payroll so that we're addressing issues on, you know, real-time basis working hand in glove with the providers, but then also trying to tackle all of

these more systemic issues so that next year we're in a better place.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, we need a better system. The-- do you know what the average of delays and number of days is that providers are seeking in the contract registration and payment process?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, our registrations, contract registrations are in a relatively good place. Very little of what we're seeing right now has to do with registrations. With respect to the larger issues that I have talked about again, it's really all over the map, because what the provider is experiencing is I am not getting paid, but sometimes it is a month, sometimes it is an invoice issues. Some-- it's very different if a provider is on enhance review which means we have to do more review of their invoices than if they're not. You know, one of the challenges for this year, in particular, as you know at the end of last fiscal year the City migrated to the Passport system. I am entirely convinced that Passport will leave us better off having everything in one system over the long-run, but it was certainly a challenging process to



1 get there. Because of the Passport migration, every  
2 contractor started the year with what we call a one-  
3 line budget, meaning their budget is \$10 million, but  
4 it's not broken out into all the things that they  
5 actually need to invoice for. We did that so that we  
6 could do advances at the start of the fiscal year. It  
7 made a lot of sense, but it meant that with every  
8 single budget we had, that we had to go back and redo  
9 it from a one-line budget to an actual allocated  
10 budget. So it added workload to the process. So this  
11 year has been really challenging, and I'm not going  
12 to deny that we have real issues to solve, but we are  
13 absolutely focused on it.

14  
15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'm going to--  
16 I have a whole bunch of questions, but I'm not going  
17 ask them right away, because I want to make sure that  
18 while we have quorum that we allow members to ask  
19 questions, and then I'll come back. Okay, Council  
20 Member Cabán, do you have questions? Council Member  
21 Cabán? Alright, while we get to Council Member  
22 Cabán, Council Member Avilés?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
24 you so much, Deputy Speaker, and thank you for being  
25 here to testify. I guess I'd like to go a little

hyperlocal, and I know this is a Preliminary Budget hearing, but certainly it is endemic of some of the challenges that we face. So, in October 2024, a DOI report-- DOI examination finds compliance and governance risks of 51 city-funded nonprofits and flawed oversight of DHS-funded providers on page 73 of that report. It also states that local Council Members have a say or influence in the decisions to site shelters. Can you describe what that actually means, role or influence?

COMMISSIONER PARK: so, we always engage with local Council Members. We send a letter every-- typically April, April/May to both Council Members and to local Community Boards soliciting sites for siting new shelters, and then as we do identify sites for new shelters, either through that process which I will acknowledge is rare, but occasionally we do get a proposed site through that process, or not-for-profit provides bring us sites. We will do a formal notification process and then engage. We generally go to a Community Board meeting or other-- and then we have a Community Advisory Board where the Council Member is-- we work with the Council Member to assign members to the Cab. Virtually all the sites, the

shelter sites that we do do are as-of-right, meaning that they can move forward with-- based on current zoning. We do that understanding that shelter siting is-- can be challenging, but we do have a legal and moral obligation to provide shelter and that it is important.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, Commissioner, I guess I've never received a solicitation request, but I have received calls when shelters are going to be sited. They've included 10 hours before a shelter is actually being opened, and in this case potentially a couple of months before, which is the first time that we have ever received so much notification. I guess, in relation to-- this says our residents review this as we actually have a real role in the siting of the shelters, which is not true. We are informed, but we don't have decision-making authority. For the record, can you just clarify the role of the City Council Member in siting of shelters?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The City Council Member, except in the very rare instance where the site is not as-of-right land use process, the City Council Member does not have a final decision-making

over the-- over a shelter siting. I will note that is-- there are a variety of concerns that we had about that DOI report. That is not the only one.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I'm sure. I'm sure you do. In terms of-- I think that's helpful clarification, because that language is often cited. We know we have a-- we have-- the City has a fair share of policy. Can you tell me how you manage the fair share policy? And in particular, my district has pretty much significant number of shelters compared to districts of-- actually all around me. How do you manage this fair share policy?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, I'd say there are two answers to that question. There is a formal fair share process, right? So, every non-emergency-- actually, let me take a step back here, and this is also gets to some of the notifications that you mentioned. Over the last several years because the shelter census has increased extremely dramatically, particularly in-- from the spring of 2022 through early 2024, right, we saw tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers entering the City, and it really changed the nature of our shelter system. There were points in time where DHS in particular was

opening three, four, five hotels a week in response to the asylum-seeker crisis. We absolutely did very short notifications in those instances. That is not how we like to operate and not our standard operating procedure. It was very much a reflection of the emergency. With our more standard and contracted shelters, we looked to do much longer advance notification. I know the site that you're talking about. As you note, it's several months. Even that for us is a relatively short notification period. So, I think there is-- when we were responding to the emergency, we were using-- we had to use hotels because that what we-- that's what could be turned on very quickly, and so we were-- there are more hotels in certain neighborhoods than others, and so it came to a--

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: [interposing]

Yeah--

COMMISSIONER PARK: disproportionate location.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Commissioner, this site-- Chair, if you don't mind. In this site, it blows my mind actually that we would be building shelters from scratch and/or fully rehabbing a

1 building to a shelter when our problem is homes,  
2 housing individuals. So, this is another  
3 circumstance where a building is getting gut  
4 rehabbed-- it was a manufacturing building-- for a  
5 shelter when we should be building supportive housing  
6 to build down the census, because our community is a  
7 very welcoming community. We have had shelters for  
8 many, many years, but the concentration and seeing  
9 buildings flip into shelters rather than homes is  
10 problematic for-- especially at the expense that we  
11 are putting into these temporary facilities.

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: So, from my  
14 perspective, we really need-- it's not an or it's an  
15 and, right? And I'm the biggest cheerleader for  
16 affordable housing that you will ever find. I  
17 started my career in the affordable housing space.  
18 One of the things that I am very proud of is that  
19 under my tenure as Commissioner is that we have  
20 really been able to expand DSS' housing footprint  
21 including and actually into housing finance. But  
22 there are literally a million low-income rent-  
23 burdened households in New York City, right? Any one  
24 of those households is an emergency away from needing  
25 shelter. The analogy that I like to use is this is

really the emergency room for the city for the housing sector. We don't want anybody to getting their primary healthcare from the emergency room, but that doesn't mean that we don't need an emergency room. In previous years, previous administrations, there have been instances where actually apartment buildings like full-on existing residential apartment buildings have been converted to shelter. That in my mind is the worst of all possible worlds, because we're actively taking housing out of the housing stock and using it as shelter. It's my policy and our policy now not to do that, but we will-- but we do need to add to the shelter stock. We are in about 18,000 hotel rooms. Those are poor-quality shelter for clients, and they are very expensive for the City of New York. And while we are absolutely committed to reducing the size of the shelter census, given the size of our hotel footprint, the-- we need to also be adding regular contracted shelters. They are better suited for serving clients, for being able to provide the wrap-around social services that are valuable to us. They are less-expensive for the City and it's an important thing to do. without speaking specifically to the site in your district because I don't know the

1 details off the top of my head, but generally there  
2 is more flexible zoning on shelters than there is for  
3 housing so that there are sites that we can use for  
4 shelter that are actually not available.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, just the last  
7 bit here. This is-- this shelter is replicating the  
8 hotel model which doesn't have what people need to be  
9 successful and to transition, so I find that deeply  
10 problematic. But more importantly, I think what we  
11 see is a concentration of a siting in the same  
12 neighborhoods consistently with no-- DSS is not  
13 providing ancillary funding to support the local  
14 ecosystem that it's absorbing, right? Additional  
15 folks who need and should be integrated into  
16 communities. so, is there a thinking around an  
17 approach that when you have-- you continue to  
18 saturate communities with no ancillary investments in  
19 their local infrastructure, like the nonprofits that  
20 are there already serving the community or getting  
21 even more overloaded with service requests, and the  
22 City doesn't support those communities, and yet,  
23 continues to say, well, we understand. It's a-- we  
24 have fair share problems, but not mitigating that at  
25 all. Instead we see the perpetuation of siting in



the same communities over and over again and other communities receiving no shelters. So, I guess we can have a longer conversation. I would love-- I know we're working on a time to meet in the neighborhood. Our residents are very frustrated by an additional facility with no additional resources to the neighborhood. So, we look forward to meeting you.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to meet separately.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I just want to add to that. I think-- you know, I think that part of the problem is that, at least from what I've witnessed, is that our community landlords are going to DHS and saying hey, we have these properties, because they feel like they can profit better. They're going to-- they feel like it's in a short check, which is a problem. It's problematic. But Council Member Avilés is correct in that when we have so many and now we have more people that may have specific social service needs-- we may have-- that may, you know, contribute to more garbage to, you know, a variety of maybe more children in schools, maybe-- you know, and the community still is operating with the same public dollars that they

were, right, before the census count continued to climb. So I think it's a fair, you know, point to make.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Certainly, and we are committed to spreading siting out on our contracted shelters. We have a number in the pipeline that will address the remaining districts that do not have shelters. So that is something that we have said all along that we're committed to and we are actively working on it. you know, I want to just note that every shelter that we contract for does have wraparound social services, always have caseworkers, housing specialists, and then sites-- other services that vary depending on the population some have childcare. Some have an employment focus. Some have a healthcare focus. As I say, a variety, but happy to talk about--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Yeah.

COMMISSIONER PARK: specifics [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I always say-- I've always said-- I like throwing this in the air, you know, hoping that it'll catch one day, but I think a more-- a community-based analysis of like what programs already exist in a community, like a smaller

1 environmental impact statement, if you will, to  
2 determine-- alright, we have, you know, 20 locations  
3 for our homeless men, right, in a 10-block radius.  
4 Like, maybe it's not a good idea to add another one,  
5 right? Because now you're adding more and more  
6 density and creating pockets of poverty. You know,  
7 and even when we're talking about on the supportive  
8 housing end, like we've been having that conversation  
9 as well about how do you ensure that you're not just  
10 putting a specific-- you know, we're not just  
11 targeting a specific population and then  
12 oversaturating in that way, right? Like, you have to  
13 blend people in. I have a shelter across the street.  
14 Well it used to be a shelter. It was, you know,  
15 thankfully under the de Blasio administration turned  
16 into permanent housing, but when it was there I  
17 didn't know that those families were there. Like,  
18 most of the time we don't know, right? And I am not  
19 opposed to having families, you know, living in  
20 shelter in my community, because these are people  
21 that belong in somebody's community. These are  
22 people, right? At the end of the day they're people,  
23 but there are challenges with some of the settings.  
24 So, you know, deepening on if you have folks that  
25

1 are-- you know, that have serious mental health and  
2 substance use disorder that require more-- a more  
3 detailed kind of, you know, social service  
4 interaction, and they're-- you know, it's difficult,  
5 right? Because people are tra-- you know, they're  
6 coming and they're going. So it does, you know, beg  
7 the question like what are we doing to ensure that  
8 those communities that have more than their fair  
9 share are also the recipients of some resources that  
10 help to mitigate any of the unintended consequences.  
11 So I think that both things can happen, right. I  
12 don't think they're mutually exclusive. With that,  
13 because I don't want to lose quorum, Council Member  
14 Cabán?  
15

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yes, thank you.  
17 Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Commissioner. I wanted  
18 to ask you about a-- I heard that there's a new  
19 policy, a sanctions policy that's getting set to  
20 start. I know it's something that's been used in the  
21 past by DHS and is being brought back, essentially  
22 saying that shelter residents who engage in either  
23 misconduct or don't make efforts to obtain housing or  
24 public assistance can then be kicked out of the  
25 shelter. And so I just wanted to ask, you know, a

few questions about that. One is if whether DHS plans on implementing this policy at any mental health shelters or shelters that serve people with disabilities who have been granted reasonable accommodation requests?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council Member. So, let me just take a step back and explain what it is that we're doing before I answer this specific question. So we are launching a small pilot program that is really designed to build a culture of accountability across DHS that-- and when I say accountability, I'm talking about accountability for the agency, for providers and for clients. And so what we will be doing is in the universe of shelters that we are starting which is-- does not-- I want to be very clear, it does not include any families with children site. This is specifically for adults. That we are looking at instances where there have been issues of client gross misconduct, where clients have not been completing their independent living plans or where they have rejected viable offers of permanent housing. When one of those instances occurs, DHS is going to engage first with the shelter provider and then with the client to understand what

has really happened, right. Was it in fact a viable housing offer, or did they-- did a client with a disability, for example, get offered a unit on a fourth-floor walk-up, in which case that's not a viable housing offer, right? And there the issue is really accountability with the provider, right. We need to make sure that the provider is-- understands what a viable housing offer is and is really working to make sure that that is happening. You know, if an independent living plan isn't getting done, why isn't it getting done? How can we make sure that we are supporting both the provider and the client in maintaining their obligations? If there is an instance where we find that the shelter provider has done what they are supposed to do, but the client has say rejected a particular housing offer, there will be a pre-notice. If it happens again, there will be another level of notice, and it would be on the third instance after we have done this very thorough level of support that will-- where there could potentially be a short-term discharge from shelter. That review does include our medical office so that we are not-- the idea is that people who have a disability that would prevent them from making the appropriate choice

will not be impacted. And really, my anticipation is that we will have few if any discharges from shelter, but that it is really about building this culture of accountability.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And so I have a couple of follow-up questions. I just want to be clear, and I thank you for sort of fleshing that out, but just to be clear for the record that means that this policy would be applicable to mental health shelters or shelters that serve people with disabilities, correct?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So--

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: [interposing] I understand the process you laid out, but I just want to be clear on that.

COMMISSIONER PARK: right. So, people with disabilities are not concentrated in any one shelter. So, somebody with a physical disability could yes, be affected. It would impact what is considered to be a viable housing option offer.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And the mental health shelters?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Administrator Carter, are there any mental health shelters in the first phase of the pilot?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Sorry. Commissioner, at this point, no, the pilot does not, but it really depends. Actually, let me take that back. Because in the mental health shelters, if a person is placed there who may not have a mental health issue and is just placed there and they're not following or not working towards exiting to permanency. They may be subject to--

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: [interposing]  
Okay. And--

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: DCFS and DCPS.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. and I'm sorry, I don't mean to cut either of you off, I just am really conscious of my time and also I believe a quorum. I can only participate while there's a quorum. So, I-- there are a couple of things that really concern me about this. one, if you're saying that you anticipate this being maybe nobody, a very, very small number of people, then I would love to know, you know, how many staff at DHS are being allocated to implement this policy and all the



attended processes that you're talking about, because we're talking about an overall system that's already under capacity, underfunded, and then allocating these resources to push people out of housing, and then putting it in the larger context, right, of saying-- well, you know the ripple effect of that is that we are in a city and state and federal environment where people who were then pushed out onto streets are open to other policies that are then removing them from the streets in violent and forceful ways. And then, like, you know, just saying when you're doing that review about who's fault is it, why isn't this happening-- you know, there's data that was made available under Local Law Three of 2022 that 115 DHS and DHS contracted shelters that had zero applications approved for supportive housing or a number so low that it couldn't be reported for concern of identifying a specific individual, right, to protect their privacy. It really begs the question of, you know, here's this-- and I know you're saying accountability for all sides, but it seems like a shelter resident could be penalized when-- for lots of different reasons, shelter providers aren't connecting people with housing

opportunities, and again, I want to be very mindful of the fact that understaffed, not enough resources, all of these different things. So I guess I'm seeing the penalty for the shelter residents. What are the sanctions for the shelter providers who fail to provide housing and case management services under this pilot?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. So, let me start clarifying that we have hired staff both for DHS shelter operations and for our legal fair hearing teams so that we can implement this in a way that is responsible. We also note that we are starting on a very small scale so that we can understand the implications and the workload. But I think you really hit the nail on the head when you're talking about accountability across the board. If a provider is not doing what they need to do with respect to say completing supportive housing applications, there will be no sanctions for the client. The consequences will be on the provider, right? And we have a variety of tools that we use to hold providers accountable, putting them on corrective action plans for example. It, you know, could certainly play into future contracting or lack thereof. So we will work

1 very closely with the provider. The idea here really  
2 is that DHS supporting the system across the board to  
3 get to the outcomes that we all want, which is exits  
4 to permanent housing, but recognizing that we have to  
5 be accountable. Providers have to be accountable as  
6 do clients.  
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So, as part of  
9 this process, if-- are you looking at potential--  
10 does the process start with looking at a potential  
11 resident and then working your way backwards from  
12 there, or are like-- are you-- is DHS auditing  
13 shelters automatically to ensure that they're meeting  
14 with clients on a biweekly basis and that information  
15 gets entered into the CARES [sic], that documents  
16 like the case management is accurate and that they're  
17 doing things required by policy? Like what's-- what  
18 is the accountability part for the provider look  
19 like? Is it, well, we identified this person who may  
20 be a problem, and let's see if-- who's messing up  
21 here. Or is it like, you're regularly auditing that--  
22 -

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing]

24 [inaudible]

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: there that the services are being met?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. I'm going to ask Administrator Carter to talk through the details of this pilot.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and then we have to move on, okay, Council Member?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, thank you. Thank you, commissioner.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah, thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: One of the things that we're doing-- this is a very small pilot. So we already have been meeting with the providers to do some training to really look at the work that they're doing overall with their staff, with their leadership to really think about how are they doing case management, how are they documenting their meetings, how are they actually running their meetings, how are they meeting with clients, what's the work that they're doing to make sure that we're helping clients move to permanency? So it is-- it-- you know, important that the providers are actually doing the work that they're contracting to do. So it's not going after particular client. It is show me the

work that you're actually doing, demonstrate that to us. So, when they say that Joslyn Carter is not doing it, what have you done and how can you really demonstrate that? So we're looking in CARES. We're looking in case records. We're meeting with the client. We're meeting with the providers. So we're hands-on. We've hired a team that are going to be the folks that's going to be hands-on in the shelters with the providers with the clients. So it is not, you know, just kind of looking at paper. It's going to be really embedded in doing the work. So, it's an overall-- you know, if you didn't do the work, you can submit saying this person didn't do the work. So it's both sides. And so my team is out there, because it's accountability to-- because they do-- you know, clients are going to have fair hearing rights. So if we didn't do the work, any one of us, this is not going to proceed.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate you. I just want to conclude by commenting that this seems a little bit backwards. It seems like there's opportunities for like CYA situations and that it doesn't seem like that this process is the best use of the very, very limited

resources that DHS has. Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the time.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I want to recognize that we've been joined by Council Members Stevens, Brewer, Restler, and Joseph. Council Member Stevens?

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Good morning. How's everybody doing? I just have a couple of questions. one, I want to say I know our very fearless leader and Chair, Deputy Speaker Ayala, has been working with you guys on this issue, but I just wanted some clarity around like-- especially with like seniors and CityFHEPS. I had a senior who had an issue and he was having some issues paying his rent, and he went to the-- to get support, and he was told that he should go to the shelter for 30 days. And so I'm just trying to understand like, in this situation-- and I always say this in a lot of hearings is, if this is happening in one incident, it's probably happening in others. And so I'm just trying to understand what the process is. Like I said, I know-- I've been working with the Deputy Speaker and she's been working with the office, and everyone's been super responsive, but I'm just trying

to get a better understanding of this process,  
because telling seniors to go to a shelter for 30  
days is insane to me.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, thank you,  
Council Member. I would agree that that is not an  
acceptable communication. We can certainly follow up  
on the who and the how. We have a complement of  
housing stability programs at DSS. So, CityFHEPS is  
one of them. We also pay an emergency rental  
assistance and other one-shot support for people.  
Last year, there was something like \$540 million  
worth of emergency rental assistance paid. We can  
connect people with an attorney. Homebase is really  
intended to be the gatekeeper there in helping people  
find the resources that they need. To the extent  
that we need to do some training engagement with our  
Homebase providers, that's certainly something that  
we can talk about offline. You know, CityFHEPS does  
have specific eligibility requirements, and simply  
being a senior is not necessarily sufficient to--

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
Obviously.

COMMISSIONER PARK: be eligible, but as I  
say, we do have a complement of programs. Our goal

always is to keep people in their homes, and it does seem like there was a missed opportunity here.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, and like, that's my biggest issue, right? And I know that when the CityFHEPS voucher was passed, that was one of the things the Chair kept speaking about. How are we keeping people in homes, and like trying to pull back some of the restrictions to ensure that we don't have those instances? And so, you know, thank you guys for being responsive, but I do want us to continue to think about how do we make this process a little more seamless, because I do know that there are a number of programs, but you know, whether it was miscommunication, but even-- you know, like I said, they followed up and even with the senior they told him that they probably won't be able to help him for like six to eight months, and that was some-- okay, so then what are they supposed to do? And then we're putting people in a perpetual cycle of, you know, trauma and poverty and all these things, and so definitely want to think about how do we continue to streamline that, because that was like-- like, that was not right. And like I said, the Deputy speaker was working really hard and I know she reached out to



1 your office, and you guys have been working really  
2 hard, but I really want us to think about how do we--  
3 whether there's getting information and making sure  
4 that all Council Members have this, because I am sure  
5 I'm not the only office that had outreach like this--  
6 to make sure that we have the outreach and we know  
7 all the steps and all the different ways. But like  
8 what does this look like? Because he was-- like, I  
9 remember he was like crying when he was told he had  
10 to go to the shelter, and this was an 85-year-old man  
11 who was like, I don't want to go to the shelter for  
12 30 days, and he was crying. And that like broke my  
13 heart.

14  
15 COMMISSIONER PARK: No, I understand.

16 And as I say, it does seem like there was some  
17 miscommunication here, and we're happy to follow up  
18 on it. I will say, our Homebase providers do amazing  
19 work. Their scope of work has grown substantially  
20 over the last, you know, several years since the  
21 program was created. One of the things that we are  
22 looking at is how do we bring some of the more  
23 complicated case processing in-house so that they  
24 have more bandwidth to deal with the cases that are a  
25 bit more routine so that it is-- you know, we are

aware that there is strain on the Homebase providers, and it is something that we are looking at.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And are you guys asking for additional staff? Is that a new need in the budget this year?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We coordinate very closely with OMB on all of our needs, but really looking at how we can make best use of the Homebase providers and the contracts that we already have.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Because it kind of sounds like there needs to be a new need, that we need additional staff. They're overstrained. They're overworked. It sounds like we need more staff so that they can operate at capacity. Because burnout is a real thing, right? And so if you have people who are working and are-- and have overreach, it sounds like we should be thinking about how do we expand that to ensure that they are able to do the jobs, because this is hard work, right? Like, it's really hard work to do this day-in and day-out, and so we want to make sure that they have caseloads that are reflective of this work and be able to deliver. So, you know, just putting it out there. Sounds like it's a new need.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: The last question I have which will be really quickly. You know, on the ACS side with the childcare vouchers, one of the things they're saying was that there seems to be a seven percent-- 700 percent increase in low-income vouchers, because of the eligibility requirements for low income for their vouchers and I just-- they weren't able to give a real concrete example of like why there's such an increase in this population for low income childcare vouchers. They said we would have to come to you guys, because I wanted to know did you guys have an understanding of what was this huge increase for in the low-income vouchers? Because right now I believe we're trying to work with-- get \$1 billion for this deficit we have with the vouchers.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Hi, Council Member, I can take care of that one. So, often times, you know, when it comes to childcare vouchers there's sort of different levels of childcare vouchers based on how people access the vouchers. So for individuals on Cash Assistance who have--

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]

Yeah, that's the Cash Assistance that they said it was going to be about-- they're-- you guys are predicting about a 700 percent increase. I'm just trying to understand what that 700 percent--

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: [interposing] Sure.

So childcare is really connected to when we have mandatory engagement in place, and so individuals who have a barrier to engaging in training, education or other things as part of Cash Assistance, we will connect them to childcare. That's considered the mandatory childcare for the city, where everybody on Cash Assistance who needs it must be given a childcare voucher. The City has had mandatory engagement on pause for the last several years which has allowed ACS and others to increase the low income vouchers. We will be returning to mandatory engagement as we have to, as it is a state requirement. It's a federal requirement. This, you know, April/May, and we'll start to see probably the increase in our childcare vouchers increase starting early summer. And so we've trended out where we think, you know, the need will be with us, and that is sort of what they're indicating right now.

There's about 23,000 individuals who access childcare vouchers, and we expect that to increase significantly as we ramp up mandatory engagement. So that would be what they were referring to as it relates to their need that they're looking for.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, I know this is a major priority, but it has not been brought to us, but like a majority priority, right? I think that especially with ACS and even with them in the conversations I had with them, I'm like well why is this just being brought up? Obviously, we can help support in speaking with the State, right? Like, I know a number of us has been to Albany to lobby, and so it seems like we're behind the totem pole now, especially if this is something that we know that was happening. So, I really want us to make sure that in these instances that we are using the Council as well, because we are partners in this work. And you know, right now working really hard to see that. So it doesn't seem like this is something that's new around the 700 percent increase, because the mandated requirements were going to be uplifted again. So, just thinking about how do we push forward, because without that this is going to be a huge loss, because

there's such a huge deficit, and so I'm really concerned. So, definitely want to continue to talk offline to figure out how both agencies are working together to lobby in addition to the work that we're trying to do here at Council so that we can try to get some of this funding restored, because it is such a great number. But thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Deputy Speaker, I just need to set the record straight, we did exclude mental health shelters from ECPS.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member Brewer followed by Riley.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I think the biggest issue, and you know this better than I, this is more coordination with other agencies-- mental health on the street. So when you talk to Dr. Katz, he-- I think what happens is sometimes they end up in his hospitals and then they go out on the street. So I guess my question is, when I go out with B-HEARD, meaning social workers and EMS, they say their best support is support and connection center run by Project Renewal in East Harlem, and that's psychiatric, OT, and nursing. And they say why can't we have more of those. So that's

my question. I don't know if that's you. I don't know if that's mental health. I don't know if that's the Mayor's Office.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But it seems to me, there's the answer. And Dr. Katz said there's a thousand people, that's it. So why can't we get to that point? I know it's bureaucracy, I got it. It--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] So this important--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: would calm my goddamn constituents down and everybody else's. Go ahead.

COMMISSIONER PARK: This important connection centers are DOHMH's contract, so I will have to defer to them on the specifics. With respect to the number of people, with all due respect to Dr. Katz who is an amazing--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] We love him.

COMMISSIONER PARK: person and we are very thrilled to have him in his role, but I do think the number is a bit more dynamic than to say that it's a thousand people and that's it. Just-- this is

1 a statistic that I keep coming back to again and  
2 again, because it is-- it's so stark. I think it was  
3 calendar year 24. We were able to place-- or sorry,  
4 fiscal year 24, we were able to place 1,100 people  
5 who had been experiencing unsheltered homelessness.  
6 You know, so that does not necessarily equate to a  
7 mental health diagnosis--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] But  
9 many, many of them.

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: but many of them in  
11 to permanent housing. We were-- there were that same  
12 year 1,100 people who were discharged from inpatient  
13 state psychiatric care directly to DHS, right? So,  
14 discharge planning meant send to DHS. So--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
16 That's a wash.

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, exactly. So,  
18 until we are able-- the number of people at any given  
19 point in time who are expiring unsheltered  
20 homelessness and certainly the number of people  
21 experiencing acute mental health issues and  
22 unsheltered homelessness is a relatively finite  
23 number of people. But until we are thinking more  
24 systemically about how we are serving that population  
25



as a whole, you know, DHS/DSS can continue to ratchet up its efforts, and we are, right? We are doing more outreach. We have more Safe Haven and stabilization beds. We are placing more people into permanent housing, but to the extent that we continue to be the safety net of the safety net, it's going to be hard to actually make a dent in that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm just saying that it doesn't feel-- this is-- of course, if you read the tabs or whatever-- it is increasingly placing people, it doesn't feel that way. I guess not right now, but I'd love to hear more of a systemic, as you suggest, response to this. I mean, these people are on the ground and they're really clear that support and connection centers work.

COMMISSIONER PARK: And the support and connection centers are terrific. I mean, the space in--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
there's only one.

COMMISSIONER PARK: It's a DOHMH facility so I will defer to them on the specifics. I think it's something like a dozen beds and people are allowed--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] 11  
for men and three for women.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. And allowed  
to stay in. They're very time limited as well, so--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Six  
days.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, very useful piece  
of the puzzle, but it is very much a piece of the  
puzzle.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright.  
Not now, but I do want to hear more about everybody  
working together to solve this problem.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] It  
is number one in New York City.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to talk more  
about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Secondly, I think  
there was a cut, and maybe I'm wrong, to street  
outreach in Manhattan. Maybe Administrator Carter  
knows. Has that been rectified? Is that still  
existing? What's the story?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. There were--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] By the way, she answers all my calls. Thank you. And you do too, but you also sometimes just say no. That's the problem.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Unfortunately, you sometimes--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] She says yes.

COMMISSIONER PARK: have to say no. SO there were some timing issues with the contracts around some of our outreach work. I think the funding that was added during the Preliminary Budget and announced at State of the City-- addressed the holes that we needed to address in the outreach budget.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Storage fees, that's a big one, and I really appreciate-- you get evicted. You put your stuff in storage, that's fabulous, but some of them-- I don't know what to do with the contract. I don't know if they're the right storage company. Some folks have had their stuff in there since 2017. They seem to all be in my office, everybody who's had their stuff in since 2017. So, I just would like to get a number as to what we're

paying on storage and how we review it and who's paying attention to it, etcetera.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We'll have to follow up and get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But it's a big number.

COMMISSIONER PARK: And let's follow up about specific clients as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. We took care of them, but you know, I can take care of them, but I just know there's many more. The issue of-- quickly-- of the Windermere. That's at 57<sup>th</sup> Street and Ninth Avenue. I want Goddard to purchase it. How can you help them do that? That's many rooms ready to go, move in.

COMMISSIONER PARK: As housing I assume you're talking?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Vacant SRO.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So,--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
Beautifully restored.

COMMISSIONER PARK: without knowing any of the specifics about price or other--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] It was \$70 million. The City says \$30 million. Let's go to \$50.

COMMISSIONER PARK: A program that we have rolled out recently that we are really excited about is our affordable housing services program. Essentially what this is is a project-based CityFHEPS contract. I know you're very familiar with project-based Section 8. It is mimicking that structure, although the contracts include in addition to the rental assistance, some maintenance and operation dollars, and light touch social services. We had three not-for-profits acquire four buildings over the summer. It was terrific because those buildings were leased up, fully leased up with long-term stayer clients coming out of the DHS shelter system within a matter of weeks. We have other projects in three pipeline. This is a finance budget, but happy to talk to Goddard about whether or not Windermere would be an appropriate counter measure [sic].

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, they want to be-- and these are buildings that the nonprofit owns or it doesn't matter?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 86

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: We have both a lease  
3 and an ownership model, but the ones that I mentioned  
4 from over the summer were acquisitions of--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
6 good.

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: not-for-profit--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
9 This is acquisition also.

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: so we can do it,  
12 yes?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: I need-- we need to--  
14 the devil's always in the details. We have to look  
15 at whether or not we have sufficient budget capacity--  
16 -

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
18 Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER PARK: as well. The details  
20 are on the acquisition, but we are happy to talk to  
21 Goddard about whether or not this is a good  
22 candidate.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.  
24 And then food quickly. We're all concerned about it.  
25 how much is the fed-- or maybe I don't know if this

sis in your bailiwick of cutting on terms of food and then there's some hope that there could be more, you know, programs working together to save funding and hopefully feed people. This is, as you know, a major issue right now. So I want to know what the cut is if any in terms of the feds, and then how we're approaching this issue of feeding people if in fact we're going to face this horrific situation.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, the House budget resolution that was passed--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I heard you mention it earlier.

COMMISSIONER PARK: at the end of February, right, included a \$230 billion cut to the committee that administers SNAP. We assume that the bulk of that would-- of that cut would translate to SNAP cuts. Our very rough estimate-- and I should caveat that this is a very rough estimate. We don't have the data to do more detailed-- is that for New York City that would translate to a cut of about \$870 million a year. For a family of three on SNAP that's a loss of about \$1,500 a year which is a very real cut. There are other cuts that are either in play or proposed to other feeding programs. There was an

1 announcement I think last week that pulled back a  
2 billion dollars across the country that was going to  
3 help schools and food pantries purchased from local  
4 farms. So, the SNAP cut is the-- is certainly the  
5 elephant in the room, but it's not the only place  
6 where we're--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]

9 That's my understanding.

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: concerned on the food  
11 side. You know, realistically, as I said before, I  
12 don't see a situation where the city or the city and  
13 the state comes in to backfill that in its entirety.  
14 The numbers are just too large, but we certainly  
15 share your concern. We're going to do what we can to  
16 educate and advocate, and then we remain committed to  
17 programs like the Community Food Connection which  
18 helps to supplement, but frankly is never intended to  
19 be a replacement for SNAP.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right. I mean,  
21 obviously I'm a big supporter of Westside Campaign  
22 Against Hunger, and the feeling there is to  
23 coordinate more of the food programs working with the  
24 City, because God knows any coordination could help



1                   reduce the overall cost. Well, that would take some  
2                   City input.

3                   COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, City input and  
4                   we do coordinate very closely with the emergency food  
5                   community. I would note, you know, we support at  
6                   this point over 700 food pantries and community  
7                   kitchens many of which are quite small.

8                   COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

9                   COMMISSIONER PARK: On the one hand, that  
10                  is probably not the most efficient way of doing it.  
11                  On the other hand, we are also supporting very  
12                  grassroots local not-for-profit organizations which  
13                  brings a certain value in and of itself. So, you  
14                  know, if we are in a-- the most dire situations, we  
15                  may have to go for efficiency over those-- over the  
16                  broad-based, but there's ramifications-- challenging  
17                  ramifications for not supporting the most grassroots  
18                  organizations as well.

19                  COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank  
20                  you. We like the grassroots. Thank you very much.

21                  CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Riley?

22                  COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair.  
23                  Good morning, Commissioner. My line of questioning  
24                  will be regarding street homelessness outreach and  
25

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council Member. Yes, BRC is our contracted agency that does outreach. We work very closely with them, and I think even at the time we disagreed with some of the conclusions from that Comptroller's audit and we have also since in the intervening years done a significant amount of work with BRC, and we very much count on the work that they do on the subway--

COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. Administrator  
Carter, you want to speak to the details?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you, Council Member. BRC is in the subways 24 hours a day just engaging those who are experiencing homelessness underground. And so they are both at end of lines and at subway stations where they rotate through based on-- in terms of the numbers that we're getting. We

look at where we're seeing high numbers of those who are homeless underground. My team is out just doing ride-alongs just because of that report that came out in 2017.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Do you typically see more homelessness towards the end of a subway line?

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, the end of lines. So we do have a--

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: [interposing] So, the reason I'm asking this--

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: pilot that we do-- we actually do have a program that we do at the end of lines at high utilization stations where we see high density of those experiencing homelessness.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: So, the reason I'm asking this, I'm a hybrid commuter in New York. So I drive and I take the train. I cover the 12<sup>th</sup> District, so my train line is by the Five Train, Baychester/Dire [sic] Avenue. I get a lot of homeless people that are on the train and I haven't seen any outreach in my district.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, we're there at-- from 12:00 a.m. which is midnight to 5:00 a.m.

because we're trying to catch those who are there very late of night.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Okay.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: And the end of line teams and that is with BRC, our colleagues at MTA and our nurses are there also trying to engage those who are out.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: So, I had a parent coming to me the other day, and she's seeing a lot of homelessness when she's commuting and taking her child to school. So, I'm not sure if you guys should revisit the specific time that you guys are doing outreach. But I know in the morning time-- I'm sorry to cut you off, but in the morning time, you are seeing an influx of homelessness and people on the subway cars that are just sleeping in my district that are riding all the way to Dire Avenue, that are riding all the way to 241<sup>st</sup> and then taking the train ride all the way back. So I don't' know if you guys could do some outreach in the upper eastern side in the Bronx, but we really would appreciate that.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Council Member, we would do that, because we do rotate through, so we will certainly look at that. So, end of line,

1 looking at the 24 highest end of line stations,  
2 subway stations, and then throughout the city. So, we  
3 will pay at-- but we are on that five and three and  
4 two lines, absolutely doing that. So, we're rotating  
5 those end of line at night or during the day. BRCs  
6 [inaudible] hours, so 24 hours.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Sorry, go ahead.

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, if I could also  
10 note, we have-- between DHS and our outreach  
11 contractors, BRC ad then there are a number of others  
12 that cover above ground, we have about 400 outreach  
13 workers. It is far and away the largest outreach  
14 program in the country, but you know, 400 people  
15 covering the city the size of New York City 24/7, we  
16 are-- obviously can't be every place in real time.  
17 Really strongly encourage people to call 311, because  
18 not only will respond, but more importantly I think  
19 actually we use that data to determine where we  
20 should be sending people. So that's really important  
21 information for us.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you.

23 Commissioner, and I will definitely echo that to the  
24 constituents to reach out to 311. But please, I

would just definitely like to see some outreach done in my district.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I will relay back to our outreach team and to the leadership that does -

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: [interposing]  
Thank you. And my last question, do you guys also partner with other agencies above ground outreach efforts? Usually, a huge issue I've seen in my district towards the Co-op city side is usually they're staying in the-- I want to say adjacent to the highway and the intersection. So it's like DOT's area. Do you guys communicate with agencies like DOT for those kind of outreach? And I could share the specific area that this is happening in my district.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: We do. So, we are involved and we do collaborations with DOT, State DOT, MTA, DOHMH, and us. We are out engaging and canvassing. So we are with a multitude of agencies doing those canvas in the-- on the street. Our outreach team, [inaudible] team in the Bronx is a Bronx Works team, so they're also-- they're along with DHS, directly operated, directly hired staff.

COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Okay. Thank you.  
Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Council  
Member Riley. Council Member Joseph?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.  
Just want to talk about a couple things, FHEPS. I  
have a constituent in my district who's been trying  
to contact Homebase and that his old landlord  
illegally evicted him right, and still receiving  
CityFHEPS, and he's been unable to meet with anyone  
at Homebase. Our constituents consistently miss  
housing opportunity due to slow Homebase responses,  
poor customer service. Can you give me an idea how  
you plan to improve? We know there's an increase, so  
definitely you need more hands or headcount at the  
agency. New needs, absolutely new needs. We reached  
out to Homebase to let them know that he was  
illegally evicted on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. We did not get a  
response from Homebase until March 7<sup>th</sup>. Talk to me,  
Commissioner, please.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely. So let  
me start by saying that's not acceptable. We will--

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]  
Unacceptable, and that's why I'm here.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We will follow up with you separately about the specific client on the larger issue which-- of Homebase capacity. We certainly know that there have been a lot of demands put on Homebase, and that has impacted--

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]  
There's been a lot of high turnovers, as well. A lot of staff are leaving, so that also should signal, as we mentioned, new needs, new headcount. Go ahead.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council Member. So we are aware that it's-- the Homebase providers are terrific not-for-profit organizations, but there have been a lot of demands put on them. so I think one of the things that we're really focused on is what can we pull back in-house so that they can focus back on their core mission, and certainly hear your feedback about needs, and we will consult with OMB on that. Administrator French, anything you want to add?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, I think you covered it, but we'll follow up with you directly about that specific case so that we can talk to that Homebase provider to make it clear that is not an



acceptable way in which to engage with the community.

So, very--

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]

Quick question: why shelter clients are not receiving automatic FHEPS and CityFHEPS renewals? Is that a normal practice?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, let me separate FHEPS and CityFHEPS, because the processes are quite distinct. So, with CityFHEPS, about 75 percent of shopping letters, so the initial go out-- you appear to be eligible, you have the dispensation to go out and search, about 75 percent of those are in fact automated. Those that aren't automated are because they don't-- we don't have the data to determine up front that they meet the eligibility requirements, so in that instance the client will work with their housing specialist or their case worker in shelter to do that. For renewals there is a recertification process. It's automated for a certain subset of household that are on very fixed income, but because your tenant share does vary with your income, that there is a process that we need to go through.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And how long does that process take?

COMMISSIONER PARK: It is-- it's fairly streamlined. It can be done online, and frankly if you-- if a client lapses, they can then-- so they can come back and do it retroactively. So we're-- we see upwards of 90 percent recertification every year, and I wouldn't expect it to be 100 percent, because people leave the city. They may unfortunately pass away. Their income goes up. There's a whole variety of reasons why I wouldn't expect it to be 100 percent. So, we're at about 90 percent recertification.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Why does it take so long for leases, for processing lease for voucher holders? It takes a very, very long time, and by then sometimes the voucher expires. They have to start all over again, and if you have a family-- and the whole purpose of it, if I get it right, is to get-- to move them out of shelter, put them in permanent homes. So why does the process take so long?

COMMISSIONER PARK: so, on average right now, it takes from the point in time that we receive a CityFHEPS package until move-out is about three weeks. There is some variation on that average,

1 certainly, and I know there are instances where we've  
2 run into challenges and we have to do individual  
3 problem-solving, but as I say, the average is pretty  
4 tight right now. I think what can take a much longer  
5 period of time is from the point where you get your  
6 shopping letter-- right, where it says you appear to  
7 be eligible, go find an apartment-- until we're able  
8 to get that package, and that I think is really a  
9 reflection of the housing market in New York City,  
10 right? We have a 1.4 percent vacancy rate and it's  
11 even lower for affordable housing. It's part of the  
12 reason why we have started to actually use CityFHEPS  
13 to finance affordable housing as I was talking about.  
14 It's why we've made CityFHEPS usable statewide so  
15 that people have more options, but it's really  
16 challenging. We've been doing a lot of training with  
17 our shelter staff to help them with the CityFHEPS  
18 processing so that-- and a lot of outreach to the  
19 landlord community to try and also help with that  
20 search process.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: If we had a room  
23 full of clients here and I did a survey, do you know  
24 what the number one complaint is, the lack of  
25 communication. And that's across city agencies,

right, not just yours, and that's been throughout this whole Preliminary Budget hearing. That's the one thing we're hearing. No one is talking to nobody. No one is talking to the clients, informing them and giving them a timeline how we move forward. I'm asking today on the record that you improve your communication skills with these clients. Let's talk about APS for a minute. How many-- let's talk about adult protective services. I have a client in my district who's been reaching out and she's due to be evicted march 18<sup>th</sup>. We've been trying to reach out to APS. No one has been returning our phone calls, and this is an older adult. As Council Member Stevens-- this is very bothersome for me. So I came here today to find out some answers. She's been-- supervisor, they called. We spoke to them, and then they stopped communicating. So APS, as well, I know there's an increase. I know there's been a huge 15 percent increase in demand. How many head-- how many staffers do you have in that office, and how many people do you need in that office to get the job done?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We'll pull up the exact number of staffers, but we are reviewing I

think 97 percent of cases within the timeframe that is mandated by state law which is our-- quite narrow timeframe. APS obviously is urgent cases.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: This case is January. We haven't heard from APS since January. It is March.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to follow up offline on the specifics of the case, but our APS does not have a particular staffing issue right now. What I think is challenging around APS is eligibility is set with very specific criteria in state law so that people need-- we can read the actual specifics, but it is-- people must be both unable to take care of themselves and have nobody able to do it.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: But you are involved in this case, so that means she meets the criteria. So what is the standard practice for vulnerable adults in delaying up to imminent evictions? What's the process? So, if she's in your care, she's APS. So that means she's already met all of your criteria, right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: So now, why is she not getting the support since January? We

reached out to APS and no one has responded to her,  
and her eviction is March 18<sup>th</sup>. Those are the  
answers I'm here to get today.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay, I can't speak  
to the specific case. We are happy to follow up  
offline. I just-- I don't know this particular  
individual off the top of my head. If something has  
fallen through the cracks, we will absolutely--

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]  
Through the crack is an understatement. Through the  
crack, Commissioner, is an understatement

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are happy to  
follow up on this specific case.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And I'm ready  
right now if we need to because March 18 is, what,  
tomorrow.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Understood.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: tomorrow. And  
this is an older adult that's in your care. APS,  
that means she's in your care. She met all the  
criteria and she's here. So we need to do everything  
we can in our power. This is an older adult,  
vulnerable New Yorkers that are in your care.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, before we leave today we'll be make sure to get the name of the individual and we will follow up immediately.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member Restler?

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much, Chair Ayala. Really greatly appreciate your leadership with this committee and it's good to see you, Commissioner Park and team. You know, I give you all a hard time at these hearings, but I do just want to take a moment to say that I really appreciate your leadership and city service, and your hard work, and you know, in these challenging times when we are so sorely lacking in leadership here in this building at City Hall, it's really important that we have steady, competent government leaders in these roles, and I'm grateful that you're sitting where you're sitting, and I'll take a second to say that I'm grateful that Anne Williams-Isom was sitting where she was sitting as the Deputy Mayor, as she was a great partner when we needed her, and she will be very sorely missed. I want to shift gears after saying nice things. I already texted her that she

1 did a great job on a podcast last week, and so now--  
2 but I do want to shift to some serious questions. I  
3 am, just following up on Chair Stevens' smart  
4 questioning and leadership, very concerned about the  
5 implications of the mandatory work requirements  
6 coming back into effect and what that's going to mean  
7 for our childcare voucher system. Based on estimates  
8 that I've heard from other city agencies, they think  
9 we're going to see 50,000 families-- 50,000 kids that  
10 have childcare vouchers today lose their vouchers  
11 next year, lose their childcare next year as a result  
12 of this shift in policy. So I just would like to ask  
13 plainly, when will the work requirements start to  
14 take effect? Is there a date certain? And what  
15 deadlines is the city legally obligated to meet based  
16 on either state or federal requirements?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: We will be rolling  
19 out our mandated engagement requirements which is--  
20 you know, Administrator French said is something that  
21 we are required to do. The process will begin next  
22 month for-- not for every client all at one time, but  
23 we will be beginning next month. Clients will then  
24 have time before we get to any kind of consequences,  
25 but there will be-- that engagement process will



1 really start next month. The way that-- I'm trying  
2 to think about the best way to describe exactly how  
3 the sanctions work, but you know, the sanctions get  
4 imposed for not meeting work requirements, get  
5 imposed on the City not on individuals, right? So, we  
6 have deadlines coming up for that in the fall.

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Sure, and I think  
9 what I can just add is, you know, I-- this is  
10 determined by the State and the federal government,  
11 so it's not something that the City can electively  
12 decide we don't want to do. We have been waiving  
13 these requirements for many of the past years when  
14 the rest of other states have implemented them, but  
15 as the Commissioner said, we've come to the point in  
16 time where the State has made it clear and the  
17 federal government has made it clear that we need to  
18 reinstitute these to follow, right, compliance with  
19 those regulations and that if the city failed to do  
20 that, there could be significant fiscal implications  
21 for this city through fines and other things by not  
22 meeting those requirements. So, we--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing] I  
24 know--

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: put it off as long as we can, but we are at the point where, right, we are required to put this forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But is it fair to say that what I think you're hearing is a process that's going to begin in April, sanctions happen over time and it's a gradual ramp-up. This isn't like April 1, a 180-degree shift--

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: [interposing] Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: in policy?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes, and that's also taken into account--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]  
Yes, to what I said?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes, it's gradual over time, right. There will be tens of thousands of people we need to engage in this process. That's also been taken into account in our trend and anticipated ullage of mandatory child vouchers which, right, we have discussed closely with our partners at ACS. So it's also not immediately 50,000 vouchers or whatever the number may be--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]  
Right.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: has to transition to [inaudible] something over time.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But is-- we've heard rumblings that OMB is insistent on stopping recertifications of childcare vouchers as of April 1, which could have extreme disruptions for families in the middle of the school year. Have you been involved in conversations to that effect?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No, I have to defer to our colleagues at ACS on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I understand it's primarily a question for them, but you all are-- it's all interconnected here, and the fact that you're saying it's a gradual ramp up and it will be happening over a period of months. It does give an argument that we shouldn't be disrupting anybody's childcare in the middle of the school year. I have one question on behalf of our friend, Council Member Sanchez. The City of Yes included a commitment of \$215 million for CityFHEPS. Could you provide an update on how that spending is currently being used and what criteria DSS is using for the expansion?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we currently operate a CityFHEPS program that serves 53,000

1 households. It is-- we're actually the largest  
2 rental subsidy program in the country except for  
3 NYCHA. So larger than any other public housing  
4 authority in the country. We are very-- and so the--  
5 we're very grateful for the City of Yes funding  
6 commitment to help us continue to expand the  
7 CityFHEPS program. We've been able to significantly  
8 increase the number of households that are exiting  
9 shelter with CityFHEPS. I think the number of  
10 households for calendar year 24 that exited shelter  
11 with CityFHEPS is a 56 percent increase from the  
12 prior year. we have not changed the criteria, but  
13 what we are really doing is making sure that the  
14 program is working as well as possible and that we  
15 are getting vouchers into the hands of everybody who  
16 qualifies and that they are as many as possible are  
17 able to use them.

18  
19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Chair, might I  
20 have one more question? Thank you so much. I  
21 recently read an IBO report that DSS has a 10.3  
22 percent vacancy rate, if that number is still up to  
23 date, but that number really is misleading because  
24 since the start of the Adams administration, OMB has  
25 slashed 1,600 positions, over 1,500 positions, 1,525

positions from the DSS headcount-- eliminated then altogether. So that's another 10 percent of headcount. So really we're looking at a 10 percent vacancy rate plus 10 percent of headcount is gone as result of just extraordinary OMB budget cuts. And while I do appreciate that the team at DSS has tried hard to do the best it can with limited resources and limited headcount to improve food stamp and cash assistance processing timelines relative to where they were at [inaudible] of this administration. They're still far below what we all want. We're still only at 53 percent of cash assistance applications and 83 percent of food stamp applications being processed on time, way short of the 90 to 95 percent rates that we were consistently at prior to the pandemic. So, just what is the plan for how we get back to actually processing? I know the caseloads have increased, but how are we going to start processing 90 to 95 percent of applicants in a timely fashion again?

COMMISSIONER PARK: so, let me give you the January numbers which are better. The cash timeline rate is 71.7 and SNAP is 91.3.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That is better.

COMMISSIONER PARK: so we are absolutely headed in the right direction, and I should note that it's-- it's also never going to get to 100 percent, because in some instances clients will call in for their interview, you know, on day 27, day 28, things like that. So-- which is their right, but at that point, their case is probably not going to be processed by day 30. We also as a matter of policy will give extensions to people to collect documents, things like that. We think that is a better policy for everybody involved than cutting their case off, but it does mean that cases extend beyond day 30 for that reason. But I think all of the investments that we put into place in order to clear the cash and SNAP backlogs will really stand us in good stead. We invested in significant technology. We changed processes. We're able to get waivers from the state. And so even though applications are really, particularly on Cash Assistance, are at historic highs. We've been able to maintain and keep up with the volume of requests. So, I feel like we are in relatively good shape going forward. I will also say that OMB has been a particularly strong partner with respect to hiring for cash and SNAP. Those frontline

positions have been exempted from the, you know, one for two policy and we've been able to maintain the headcount.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I think that's in part a result of the fact that Chair Ayala, Council Member Stevens, myself and many others have been so loud on this issue and pushed so much and got so much attention around it that OMB had no choice but to make an exception, and I'm sure you were pushing inside as well, although you probably did it less aggressively than we did. Do you have a timeline on the Cash Assistance for when you think we can get back to processing those applications, 90 to 95 percent of those applications in a one-month period?

COMMISSIONER PARK: You know, I think we're on that track. It's going to vary over time. One of the things that happened during COVID was that there were a number of instances where people were granted essentially four-month extensions on their rectification which means that we now have a lot of recertifications due in a short period of time as opposed to even recertification numbers throughout the year. While we are exploring whether or not we

can smooth that out for the time being, we have very uneven processing. So, you know, what I anticipate and Administrator French should chime in, but is that we will have very strong processing numbers or timeliness rates for part of the year and that it will be a little bit more challenging during other parts of the year, but that we are continuing to get benefits into the hands of people in a way that is responsible, and even when things aren't timely, it is slipping by a matter of days not months.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We're going to take a brief break just so that everybody has a moment to stretch their legs and run to the bathroom and then we'll come back in 10 minutes. 12:09, okay. Let's say 12:20.

[break]

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright, thank you. Okay, we're going to just-- we'll try to make this as painless as possible. I'm going to go back to my prepared question.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Commissioner, the Preliminary Plan includes \$1 billion of State funding for the asylum-seeker response efforts in both fiscal years 26 and 27 and \$350 million in both fiscals 28



and 29, all of which is currently budgeted in DHS. The Governor did not include \$2.7 billion in her Executive Budget as she said that cost-sharing between the City and the State would not continue. Has there been any negotiations with the State to include this funding in the enacted fiscal 26 State budget?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council Member. So, first of all, just to clarify on the asylum budgeting, in general because there's been so much uncertainty around what costs will be and which agency will incur them, funding has been parked in DHS and then moved around as needed. So, you know, when you say that it's all in DHS, I think that is that you're seeing. There's ongoing conversations with our agency partners at the State around the logistics of that for the \$2 billion that was-- first the initial \$1 billion then the second tier, the majority of that has been claimed already and we are in discussion with the state around the logistics of those claims. I will have to defer to OMB on any larger scale discussions about more allocations.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright. Does the City plan to replace the State funding with City

funding in the Executive Budget should that funding not come through?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we're committed to our both legal and moral obligation to provide shelter. I am confident that we will continue to coordinate with OMB on the logistics of that, that financing, but I don't have the specifics on that right now.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. On the City for All, the City Council secured \$5 billion in commitments as part of the City for All Housing Plan in recognition of the importance of advancing holistic housing plan that could support working and middle-class New Yorkers and invest in solutions that meet their housing needs. Of the \$5 billion, \$215 million in funding was committed to CityFHEPS vouchers across fiscals 25 and 26. Was this funding added to HRA's budget in the preliminary plan? And if so, what was added in each fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER PARK: There was a significant add to CityFHEPS in this fiscal year. I can pull up the exact number. One of my colleagues may have it faster than me.

RICHARD JONES: So, for CityFHEPS we added about \$325 million in the Preliminary Budget for FY25.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Anything in 26?

RICHARD JONES: We're still negotiating that with OMB, and they did not have that in the Preliminary Budget.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Okay, additionally \$187 million was committed for over 10 years for CityFHEPS vouches and social services to create permanent homes for those in the DHS shelter system. This commitment included the rehabilitation and conversion of homeless housing to create permanent affordable homes, along with an investment of \$122 million over 10 years for affordable housing service contracts. Was funding added to HRA's budget in the Preliminary Plan for this, and if so, how much was added each fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We'll pull up the exact numbers, but yes, we have been funded for our affordable housing services program which as I mentioned is essentially our project-based CityFHEPS contract that allows us to help nonprofits acquire buildings. We're really excited about this program.

1 We think it is a great way that we can leverage  
2 social service dollars to help contribute to the  
3 overall affordable housing solution. I believe the  
4 total amount of funding is \$250 million, but we'll  
5 pull out the exact numbers. If you want to keep  
6 going, we'll pull the exact numbers.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sure. So, it is  
9 crucial that the funding allocated as part of the  
10 City for All commitment is targeted to those with the  
11 highest risk. How is DSS ensuring that the most  
12 vulnerable people are reached with this funding?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: So,-- thank you,  
14 Council Member. As I mentioned earlier, we are  
15 absolutely committed to making sure that CityFHEPS  
16 remains an effective way to get people out of shelter  
17 and that we're serving those most at risk of coming  
18 into shelter. So we've been really focused  
19 particularly on the DSS exit side in making sure that  
20 we're getting vouchers into the hands of everybody  
21 who qualifies, that we are working with our providers  
22 to make sure that they have the training and the  
23 tools that they need to continue to help people exit,  
24 and that we're doing what we can to process, and I  
25 think the numbers that I talked about in my testimony

really speak to that, that we've been able to just incredibly break records on the number of people who are exiting shelter with CityFHEPS, and I do think that the people who are already in shelter are really the most vulnerable. Although, as I mentioned, about a third of the vouchers go to those who are in community who are really at risk-- most at risk of entering shelter.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The Preliminary Plan includes \$325.1 million in City funding added in fiscal year 25 only for rental assistance programs. How is this funding amount determined and can you provide a breakdown of how much is added by rental assistance program including CityFHEPS?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we coordinate really closely with OMB. I believe all of that \$325 million is specifically for CityFHEPS. But we-- we coordinate closely with OMB on a year-by-year basis to determine what the dollar amount that we need for CityFHEPS actually is. It is a function not only of how many people are receiving rental assistance, but what fair market rent has been set at for that year, that's happening with rent guidelines, board

increases, a whole set of factors. So that's why we do the adjustment on a year-by-year basis.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you provide a breakdown of how much is added by program?

COMMISSIONER PARK: It was all for--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] All for CityFHEPS.

COMMISSIONER PARK: At this point, virtually all of our precursor rental assistance programs have been consolidated into CityFHEPS. You know, FHEPS is a largely State-funded program, so it-- and the remaining portion is funded out of, I believe, our Cash Assistance budget.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is this additional funding an estimate of the need to demand for the whole year?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes, correct.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How much has been spent to-date in fiscal year 25 in rental assistance, and how much was spent on 24?

RICHARD JOHNS: Yeah, I can take that question. So, for FY 25 to-date this is through January 31<sup>st</sup>, we spent \$753.9 million. In fiscal

year 24 we spent \$931 million, and that's across all of our rental assistance programs.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know how-- what portion of each of those numbers specifically relates to the CityFHEPS program?

RICHARD JOHNS: Yeah, I can give you those as well. So, for the CityFHEPS programs, or really the City-funded programs, we spent-- in FY 25 through again January 31<sup>st</sup> we spent \$681.4 million, and in FY 24 we spent for our City-funded programs \$833.7 million.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: CityFHEPS is now budgeted at \$1.08 billion in fiscal year 25, but in the out-years the funding drops by 52 percent to \$540.2 million with the imminent risk of New Yorkers losing Section 8 vouchers due to the changes at the federals, there could be a higher demand and need for CityFHEPS than what we have seen in the past years. The current level of need and potential for increased demand are not reflected in the budgeted amount for the out-years. When will the additional funding be added to fiscal years 26 and beyond, and how much-- how much, and will it be baselined?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We're coordinating closely with OMB on that. as I noted, the-- because CityFHEPS is a function both of participation and fair market rent, and Rent Guidelines Board, and income trends, it is very unpredictable, and so we coordinate on an annual basis with OMB.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I think you mentioned that the \$323 million was all for CityFHEPS, but I think that was-- is \$308 million. You can look at it--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] Yeah, we'll confirm and circle back.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Regarding street outreach-- outreach on other programs geared toward City's unsheltered homeless population has been a significant focus of DHS in recent years. When the Mayor first announced the Subway Safety Plan, \$171.3 million was baselined for the program in fiscal year 23's Executive Plan. After the mayor's recent FOC announcement, that-- that these efforts would be expanded, the Preliminary Plan included additional funding for DHS' street homeless programs, \$71.6 million in fiscal year 25, \$116 million in fiscal year 26, \$123 million in fiscal year 27,



\$122.8 million in fiscal year 28, and \$121.7 million in fiscal year 29. Despite additional funding added three fiscal years ago, street homeless and public transit safety concerns persist. The Subway Safety Plan seems to have had limited success. How is the city changing its approach, and will the new funding be used differently?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council Member. Let me start by pushing back a little bit on the idea that the plan thus far hasn't had a lot of success. I actually think that we've been able to connect thousands of people both to shelter, our low-barrier beds as well as traditional shelter, and even more importantly to permanent housing, right? Permanent housing is the goal for everybody including those who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and it's about 3,000 people in this administration who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness, but who are now in permanent housing. I think one of the challenges is that there is-- there remains an inflow of people to the street, right? People are being discharged from psychiatric care or from prison and they're being discharged directly to DHS. So, part of the solution-- in addition to the work that we are

continuing to do to meet the needs of people who are on the street today, I think there is work to do and this is really cross-system work which is incredibly important, but also incredibly challenging to do to make sure that we are reducing that upstream flow of people onto the streets. But to answer the specific question about how the funds will be used, some of that is specifically for outreach needs and to address some of the ongoing needs that we've had for outreach, but the bulk of it is to increase the number of low-barrier beds that we have, so Safe Havens and stabilization beds. We are currently at about 4,000 going up to about 4,900. These are sites that are typically a little bit smaller, a little bit lower density, somewhat more flexible rules and that are targeted specifically to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and we found that those have a very strong success rate in meeting the needs of people who have been living on the street.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How much specifically will go towards the mental health services for street homeless individuals?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We don't have it broken out that way. Mental health services are

frequently incorporated in the scope of services that are provided at a low-barrier site, but there isn't a particular lien item in the budget that is for mental health services.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is the City expecting any additional support from the State that will impact DHS' street homeless programs and the implementation of the City Subway Safety Plan?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we work really closely with state partners and they are quite involved in the overall universe of services that we provide, even if it's not flowing directly through our budget. The State has been investing in their SOS teams. They are also doing outreach and outreach with a particular clinical bent. We find that to be very helpful. We are-- so that has been very useful. There are-- there's other programming. They support much of the shelter-based ACT teams. So these are mobile mental health teams that can provide support to those who are in shelter and then after they leave shelter. So, that's another important state resource where we coordinate closely. The Governor's budget included some funds that we think could be very important funds to expand the welcome center model

1 that we have, which is-- this functions essentially  
2 as assessment for those experiencing unsheltered  
3 homelessness, but the basic idea is that, you know,  
4 if you engage with an outreach worker on the subway  
5 platform at two o'clock in the morning, it's very  
6 difficult to make a-- for anybody to make a good  
7 decision for what a long-term placement might look  
8 like. So the welcome center is an opportunity to  
9 come inside, get a bed, a shower, a meal, sleep, and  
10 then we can-- the DHS staff and provider staff can  
11 work to determine what the next move is. It's  
12 something that we-- we have one in the Bronx and one  
13 in Brooklyn. It has worked very well. The Governor's  
14 budget includes funding to expand that whether or not  
15 it will make it all the way through the budget  
16 process is still to be determined.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, as more  
19 households are enrolled in staying on Cash Assistance  
20 for longer periods of time-- according to the PMMR,  
21 the number of persons receiving Cash Assistance was  
22 580,900 for the first four months of fiscal year 25  
23 which is a 17 percent increase from that period last  
24 year. The November Plan added \$920 million for Cash  
25 Assistance. As of the preliminary plan, Cash

Assistance makes up 19.4 percent-- sorry, I lost my-- 19.4 percent of HRA's fiscal 2025 budget at \$257 billion. However, the Cash Assistance's budget drops by 35.8 percent to \$1.65 billion in fiscal year 26. Is there substantial-- is the substantial increase in funding within the current fiscal year an estimate of the need for the whole year, or do you expect to add more funding in the Executive Plan?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We believe that we're fully-funded for this fiscal year, and we'll coordinate with OMB going forward.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And how much was actually spent on Cash Assistance in fiscal year 24?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We'll see who gets there faster.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, just while you look for that, given that the need is increasing, will this-- will the funding be baselined in the budget to be increased or when?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Total spending for FY24 was about \$2.4 billion. That's total, so that's not just City funds, but the total-- and we are coordinating with OMB on future funding.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And baselining all of it?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are coordinating with OMB to determine how to proceed.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. We just had this song and dance with Jach [sic] the other day. Okay. CFC funding, Community Food Connections is a vital resource providing much-needed food to the city's vast network of food pantries and soup kitchens. This program is especially important given the current number of asylum-seekers in the City who are not eligible for many public benefits programs. In fiscal year 25 Preliminary Budget response, the Council called on the Administration to increase and baseline the budget to \$60 million to help combat the high levels of food insecurity in the City which persists today. As of the Preliminary Plan, the fiscal 2025 budget for CFC totals \$60 million. However, the funding drops substantially to \$20.9 million in fiscal year 26 and in the out-years. This is a critical program for families in need. Will funding be added for this program, and if so, when and how much?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, understood on the need. We agree with you on the critical nature of the program and we are coordinating with OMB on that one.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Do we know what the actual spending thus far in 25 is and how much was spent in fiscal year 24?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We spend the full allocation. It's dispersed out to the not-for-profits so that they can purchase food. I'm not sure if the spending to-date, but it tracks fairly proportionally to where we are in the fiscal year.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I don't have the spending to-date off-hand, but we make sure to reallocate all of the funding every single year to make sure we spend every dollar.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright, can you get those numbers to us? That would be great. Thank you. A report from IBO published in November of 24 found that the Bronx has the highest food insecurity rate, yet it has the second lowest number of active site hours. What is HRA doing to specifically address this food access need in the Bronx, and what

is the distribution of CFC providers amongst the five boroughs?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, the-- for food pantries by borough, there are 223 in Brooklyn, 122 in the Bronx, 97 in Manhattan, 152 in Queens, and 26 in Staten Island. And for community kitchens is 26 in Brooklyn, 15 in the Bronx, 34 in Manhattan, 10 in Queens, and four in Staten Island. I'm going to ask Jill Berry to talk about the process that we go through to set food allocations.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So, first of all, I do want to recognize that we do note and notice that there are fewer pantries in the Bronx probably than there is need in the Bronx. And we have been talking with our partners at United Way, City Harvest, and Food Bank about food allocations going forward, how we can better coordinate. But I think what-- we know that one of the issues in the Bronx and other neighborhoods in the City quite frankly, is that there's just not a lot of infrastructure to-- for food pantries, existing food pantries to receive the funding. And we do want to think about how we do that better going forward through potentially capacity-building grants or other



things that can build up pantries. In the meantime, we do things like working with food pantry providers who have mobile pantries who can bring food to locations like the Bronx that may not have as many pantries or infrastructure, but in terms of setting the allocations every year, we start with the pantries that we've been working with. We do have an open rolling application process throughout the year. we look at the supply gap analysis and then we take into consider-- and how much pantries have received in the past, what their capacity for receiving more food is, and in the-- we have taken into consideration in past allocations things like at the end of COVID when there was a loss of SNAP benefits, when the SNAP benefits were reduced. We looked at the neighborhoods that were most impacted by that and we took that into consideration. As we have opened up more of the emergency shelter locations that don't have-- where there are many people who are not in receipt of benefits to purchase their own food, we have made additional allocations to pantries in those neighborhoods, too, and we will continue every year to look at in addition to the regular supply gap analysis and the capacity of pantries any other

external factors that may be playing in a role-- playing a role to help us determine where we should be allocating more food. And we do need to work more on capacity building for places like the Bronx and other neighborhoods that do-- we do see that there is a high food need and not a lot of pantries. So, I don't have the answer yet.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: It is on our radar. It is something we're talking to our partners--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] I mean, I think one of-- a creative way to maybe go about it is working with some of the local schools. I know that we have a couple of pantries located in some of schools in the south Bronx, maybe one or two, not too many. Working obviously with the churches and the senior centers, that way, you know, you're going straight to the root of the, you know, community. As we-- okay. So, as we agreed upon in fiscal year 25's adopted budget, the eligibility for Fair Fares was expanded to include those making up to 145 percent of the federal poverty level, up from 120 percent of the FPL. This became effective on January 7<sup>th</sup>. Funding

for this expansion was added in fiscal year 25 only, \$10.8 million in new funding and \$10 million in unspent funding rolled from prior fiscal years. As of the Preliminary Plan, the total budget for Fair Fares for fiscal year 25 is \$117 million and drops to \$96.3 million in fiscal year 26 and the out-years. Why did it take more than half of a fiscal year to implement the FPL increase? And the \$20.9 million in additional funding which was estimated as the cost to expand the program has not been baselined. When will the funding be added to the increase Fair Fares baseline budget?

COMMISSIONER PARK: With respect to timing of the implementation of the income limit change, we had to make some rule changes. We also wanted to make sure that we were using the most current definition of the federal poverty line which is what took the time there, and then we're coordinating closely with OMB on the budget.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can you explain a little bit of the outreach efforts to ensure that everybody that is eligible is aware of the change?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely, we have been-- we have funding that we-- and are launching an outreach campaign shortly where we'll actually be able to do, you know, paid media and otherwise really aggressively get the word out, but in the meantime we have been using social media. I believe we've shared a social media kit with every Council Member's office. Certainly happy to re-up that as needed, but it is-- and we talk about it in all of our engagement with community groups. So we do think it is important. Have been doing some out-- as I say, been doing outreach already and will be really ramping that up very shortly.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Do you know what the uptake rate has-- percentage of those eligible applying for the benefit has HRA seen since the new FPL was implemented?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We haven't seen much of an uptick yet, but frankly not surprised. When we increased from 100 to 120 it took several months before we saw a change.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. We would like to see the eligibility continue to expand so that more people in need are able to enroll in this vital

program. What is HRA's estimate for the cost of expanding the program to 200 percent FPL?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We don't have that off the top of our heads, but we can certainly follow up.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. According to the PMMR there has been an increase in participation in Cash Assistance, SNAP and Medicaid with a 17 percent increase in Cash Assistance, a six percent increase in SNAP, and a two percent increase in Medicaid. What is the current average monthly volume of new applications for each SNAP, Cash Assistance, and Medicaid, and how does this compare to pre-pandemic levels?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Alright, applications, this is average for the fiscal year. For Cash Assistance just over 48,000. For SNAP about 33,500, and for Medicaid almost 32,000. I can give you January month numbers as well. Certainly Cash Assistance applications are substantially higher than they were pre-pandemic. SNAP is moderately higher, and-- Administrator French, do you know off the top of head on Medicaid?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We'll have to get back to you on Medicaid. I'm not 100 percent positive.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Are there bigger delays in each program for processing new applications or recertifications or renewals?

COMMISSIONER PARK: No we have been able to resolve our processing deadlines, or backlogs, excuse me. We are moving through on a prompt basis. We will-- you know, as I mentioned earlier, we're never going to be at a place where we process 100 percent of cases within 30 days, because we do give extensions and because clients will call for their interviews sometimes towards the end of the month, but we are aggressively moving cases and are staying on top of that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: we would like to get a better understanding of the budgeted and actual staffing levels for key benefit programs. How many budgeted positions are there for roles that support the administration of each of the following program: SNAP, Cash Assistance, Medicaid and rental assistance?

COMMISSIONER PARK: For SNAP it's 1,225. For Cash Assistance 2,342. For Medicaid it's 955. That's specifically around Medicaid eligibility and administration. I will note, the majority of Medicaid recipients in New York City are actually processed by the State, so we have a very-- a relatively small slice of the Medicaid population. For rental assistance it's a somewhat more challenging answer. There's 348 budgeted positions specifically within the Homelessness Prevention Administration, but we really have people across the agency and across both DHS and HRA working on rental assistance. So for example, Administrator Carter's staff that work on shelter administration are involved in the rental assistance process because we want to make sure that we're getting packages completed and processed before they ever get to HRA. So, as I say, there's 348. Those are specifically within that rental assistance world, but it is a much broader universe of people that actually touch it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are there any vacancy rates in any of those units?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Sorry, I don't have those with me. We can follow up. As I noted

earlier, particularly with cash and SNAP, OMB has been a very good partner. We have been filling those positions aggressively, and they are not subject to the one for two allocation process.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is the current-- would you say that the current need is greater than what is budgeted?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We are keeping up with our application processing and recertifications and so we are comfortable with where we are.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Is HRA currently using overtime to meet the demand?

COMMISSIONER PARK: We use overtime on a very strategic basis across the agency, but I will say we took a substantial PEG last year on our overtime budget, and we are meeting our PEG. We're on track to meet our PEG while still meeting all of our processing deadlines.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Congratulations on that. I know that must be difficult. HRA's Homebase support CityFHEPS and community clients to maintain stable housing. It is a network of community-based organizations that provide homelessness prevention



services. What is the current fiscal 2025 budget for Homebase? Is that amount baselined?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Hold on just a minute. I'm pulling that up.

RICHARD JOHNS: For Homebase, the FY 25 budget is \$63.5 million. That amount-- in the baseline budget we have a little over \$55.2 million, and again, we're working with OMB to assess our budget and make sure that we have, you know, funding to meet our needs in the out-years.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do we know what the actual spending to-date in fiscal year 25 is and how much was spent in fiscal year 24?

RICHARD JOHNS: Yeah, to-date is January 31<sup>st</sup> we spent \$44.9 million, and in FY 24 we spent \$59.5 million.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: In the January CityFHEPS oversight hearing, we heard from the public that the demand for CityFHEPS application renewals and other rental assistance services that Homebase provides cannot be met with the current staffing level of funding budgeted. We also-- we've also heard that CBOs are having difficulty hiring and maintaining adequate staff levels. As the PMMR

notes, in the first four months of 25 this program has over 10,600 enrollments which is a nine percent increase compared to the same period in the year prior. How many contracted providers are within Homebase and what is the current rate-- case ratio for Homebase staff?

COMMISSIONER PARK: There are 26 different offices operated by seven different providers for Homebase. I don't believe that we-- we don't structure it as case ratios, because people may come and some people may need assistance on an ongoing basis. Other people will come in, we'll process the case, and they will move on. You know, with respect to the larger issue, we are aware, as I talked about earlier, that there is significant demand for Homebase services right now. We know that our providers do triage cases. If somebody is facing an immediate need, potentially looking at immediate eviction is typically seen pretty quickly. Somebody with a longer-term need, there may be a wait time for an appointment. We are looking at what we have asked our Homebase providers to do, whether or not we can bring some of those services back in-house so that they can really concentrate on their core services. I

think there has been some expansion of mission in recent years. We are cognizant of those wait times and that's something that we're looking at.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Does HRA plan to increase the budget and headcount for Homebase to match the need?

COMMISSIONER PARK: it's something we'll monitor and coordinate with OMB.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Launched in 2015, IDNYC is the largest municipal ID program in the country. In fiscal year 2024, 200,922 IDNYC applications were processed, and 183,682 cards were issued. Additionally, in the first four months of fiscal year 2025, the number of cards issued and the number of applications processed both increased when compared to that of the same period in fiscal year 24. The PMMR indicators show that there has been an increase in the utilization of the IDNYC. How much has been spent to-date on fiscal year 25 on IDNYC and how much was spent in fiscal year 24?

COMMISSIONER PARK: IDNYC is largely a personnel based program. So the spending is primarily on the staff that operate the program. The-- so the FY25 budget is \$17.8 million-- \$17.9

million of which \$15.7 is for personnel. The actual spending for FY 24 was about \$14.5 million. I will say that we have been-- you know, IDNYC processing is happening timely and we routinely have available appointments. So we are seeing that we are keeping with IDNYC demand.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: As of the Preliminary Plan, the fiscal 2025 budget is \$13.7 million, dropping in fiscal year 26 and in the out-years to the baseline budget of \$12.3 million. Why is the funding for this program decreasing for fiscal year 26 and beyond?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we should follow up on the exact numbers that are-- those don't quite align with our records, but there is a reduction over time on the IDNYC budget. We are investing in technology that is going to allow for people to do online applications for IDNYC. We will still have in-person, but it will allow us to achieve some efficiencies.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the budgeted headcount for IDNYC for fiscal year 25?

COMMISSIONER PARK: 175 people.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 175. How many positions are currently filled?

RICHARD JOHNS: Currently there are 144 positions filled.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And how does that compare to pre-pandemic budget headcount?

COMMISSIONER PARK: The pre-pandemic headcount was higher. We have-- we had more offices that were serving fewer people. We have been able to achieve some economies of scale while still meeting all of our demand. So, we feel like the program is in a good place. Administrator French, is there anything you'd like to add?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: no, I think that through online appointments and other things, we've been able to keep up with demand and have ample appointments across the City for individuals to make sure that they can get an IDNYC card.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Madam Chair, can I just say, I love Luke who works there.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I've heard that before.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I love Luke.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The only question I have following that is has the agency received an increase in applications in specific boroughs? Because I know in the Bronx, for instance, we only had one IDNYC office and then we were able to add a second. But it's-- you know, it's a pretty big borough. If you live in City Island, you're not going to want to travel all the way to the south Bronx to an IDNYC office or you may not be able to, right? How do you consider where to strategically place offices and how many offices you have to meet the demand so that we're not making it harder or an inconveniences for folks to be able to obtain a card?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Sure. I'll have to get back to you on specific borough numbers. I don't have those with me. but the teams do assess and look at the trends over time to look to see that we A: have enough appointments in each one of the locations that we have to make sure that we meet the need, as well as identify areas where, right, we maybe need to think of other ways to approach it. One of the things we are looking forward to is the ability to transition, you know, some applications at least to online will further help people--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] I agree.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: where they live to apply for IDNYC in a simpler way, but it is something that we consistently are looking at to make sure that we sort of adapt as we need to, to what the needs are.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We also have the capacity to do pop-up application events as needed to address particular pockets of demand.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: And we partnered, I know, with many Council Members and continue to, to also do things at Council Member offices.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, okay. I appreciate that. I'm done with my line of questions. I think we have a follow-up question from Council Member Avilés and Brewer in that order. Council Member Avilés?

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank you. Can you hear me? No. Okay. Try again. Now? Kind of sort of? It's just low. Okay. I'll use my outside voice. Thank you so much, Deputy Speaker. So I'd like to ask a little bit-- I guess I have two distinct questions. Has the agency-- can the agency

supply the Council with a copy of their preliminary Racial Justice-- Racial Equity Plan?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't have it with me, but yes, we can certainly follow up.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great. Thank you. Also, in terms of Right to Counsel, why is the administration planning to penalize providers 10 percent in their contracts?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So let me talk about that. I wouldn't frame it quite that way. So, Right to Counsel is an essential program. We think it is really important that we are getting all eligible clients access to legal assistance. We did not traditionally have performance-based contracts. we have pivoted to a-- to including some performance standards in the contracts, because you know, similar to what we talked about in the context of DHS, we think it's important that we are across the board accountable to the standards that we hold. We have just passed that first six-month metric. All of the providers qualified for the performance standards for that six months. I will note there's, you know, variations in performance, not to say that there isn't variations in performance, but the way the



standards were designed we were able to give-- we gave points for a variety of different factors, and then we will continue to use that as a way to strengthen provider performance going forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, given that the current contracts only cover about a third or a 40 percent of eligible tenants, is-- would you consider withholding this additional 10 percent digging into the available program dollars?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm not sure where the third two quarter comes from. That doesn't exactly align with our numbers. Happy to dig in with you offline, but I think as I say we have not withheld funds from anybody at this point. All of our providers qualified for the initial performance allocation, but I think, you know, one of the things that we want to do is make sure that we're using dollars strategically if we do not use them-- if a provider is not meeting the performance goals, which means that there are clients that are not getting served, we want to have the opportunity to reallocate those fund and use them in a way that will get services in client's hands.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, at the end of-- so, I guess if you could talk to me about how the plan operationalizes after you meet your contractual obligations. Does that 10 percent-- is it reimbursed to the organization, or what happens with those resources?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we've done in two-- we split it into two pieces. So, for the first half of the year-- so for five percent of funds, because all the providers met their performance standards, they're now able to invoice for that and will make the payments.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay, and then so at the end of the contract period, the second--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: five percent is reimbursed [inaudible]. Great, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member Brewer followed by Council Member Restler.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I have two quick questions and then some budgets ones. Just the State FHEPS program, there isn't one now, correct? No State FHEPS program?

COMMISSIONER PARK: There is a State FHEPS program. It is specifically for families with children under the age of 18 on Cash Assistance who have experienced or are facing eviction. So it's a much narrower eligibility definition than say CityFHEPS, but it is an important--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] And my understanding is some of the state officials are trying to increase and make it broader, blah [sic], blah, blah. Are you working on that?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm not familiar with those specific conversations, but we're happy to engage with any elected official.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I would suggest and work with Brian Kavanaugh. He wants it very much. And then just quickly, I know this is not just you, but if you talk to some of the nonprofits who are doing supportive housing, they have 100 vacancies. So, my question is-- they're not-- that's HPD, but those are your clients. So how do y'all work together?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we coordinate very closely with all of the agencies that are involved in the supportive housing. It's-- we talk

about supportive housing as if it's a monolith, but as I think you know--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I do know.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Council Member, right, it's a bit of a collection of different programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We manage the placements for-- directly for about half of the supportive housing units that are in New York City give or take. Then there are other agencies. Some of-- many of them are state administered and a handful from other city agencies. What I can say is that for the city administered and the vacancies that are filled through city processes, vacancy rates are quite low. I mean, across the board I would actually say the vacancy rates are quite low. We're at about 95 percent occupancy for all supportive housing in the City of New York.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER PARK: But there is variation. The vacancy rates tend to be a bit higher for two categories of units, one for older units that

are either SRO style, right. So people don't have their own bathrooms and kitchens and shared units, and then the other category where they tend to have slightly higher vacancy rates are some of the state units where the tenant share is such that people are effectively paying about 70 percent of their income in rent.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. These are all 30 percent, but I won't get into it. It's frustrating to hear that.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to follow up on the specific project.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Preliminary Plan includes an additional \$554.2 million of City funding in 25 only for non-asylum shelter costs. Since April 22 when we first started to see the influx of the asylum-seekers, there's a 26 percent increase in the non-asylum shelter census. In April 22, the census was 45,189, and at the end of February the non-asylum census was 57,000. Currently for right now, fiscal 25, \$2.4 billion is budgeted for non-asylum shelter costs which drops a \$1.9 billion in FY26. How much of the funding added in the

Preliminary Plan relates to singles and adult families versus families with children?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I am not sure we have it broken out that way, but we can certainly follow up. My colleagues may be able to contradict me. I will say it is-- for city funds, it's likely to be more for singles than for families just because on families we claim state and federal revenue. So not necessarily a reflection of need, but a reflection of the technical budget split. I do want to address the census numbers that you read off which are--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Yep.

COMMISSIONER PARK: correct, but the census dropped really precipitously during COVID, that I think the income supports that the federal government was offering during COVID, right, so--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Got people to stay in their homes.

COMMISSIONER PARK: They played a really meaningful role, and as those income supports have been rolled back, what we're seeing is higher demand for DHS shelters. We've been able to really continuously increase then number of exits that we are seeing out of the DHS shelter system,

particularly subsidized exits. It's something that I'm very proud of, that the demand figures are also relatively strong. We remain below our pre-COVID numbers for our non-asylum DHS census, and we are working very hard to make sure that we are continuing to keep our exit numbers high.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Sort of along those lines. How much of the funding added is because of the increase in the census, which is what you talked about, and how much is related to the increase in the cost of providing shelter?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I mean, I think both of those are a factor. We have somewhat more people in the system. As I say, below our pre-pandemic numbers, but we do have more people on the system than we did a couple of years ago. There's also cost increases associated with wage adjustments, with cost for things like insurance and food and other factors as well that we have to manage.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What's the total spent to-date in FY25 on DHS' non-asylum shelter costs?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Look and see right now if we can split it out that way. If we can't, we

will certainly follow up. Let us follow up with that number.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. What is DHS' projection for the non-asylum shelter census? Now you indicated that it's less than pre-pandemic, but what is the projection?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Sorry, the projection of what the census will be?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Will be, yes. I know it's less than what it was previously, but it still- you said it's still going up. I just-- a projection. I don't know, projection until what, next year or--

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, our current census for the non-asylum clients is just over 56,000--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
Right.

COMMISSIONER PARK: individuals. Our goal is to keep moving that number down. I don't have had a hard projection number on it because there are so many different interplaying factors there.



COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: If it doesn't go down, what will your costs be do you think going into the future, FY26, for that population?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Again, a tough one to answer. A big driving factor in our DHS spending is the number of hotel rooms that we are in. It is where, as I mentioned earlier, we're in over 18,000 hotel rooms. We have been in hotels since well before the beginning of the asylum crisis. Hotels are a very expensive way of providing shelter. So the more that we can do to site and open regular shelters, which we do-- we have a pipeline and I've talked to all of you about regular shelters. The more we can do to open those new sites, the better we can do in cost containment.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. I think you talked about how you're prioritizing shelter exits and you're proud of it, and you should be, but how do you keep people in your homes or some of these innovative programs that you spoke about earlier would be some examples-- is that what you-- how you would answer that?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, I think there's a number of tools that we have to promote housing

1 stability. The one-time rental assistance is a big  
2 one, and last year--

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I'm  
4 very good at one-shots.

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you. As a way,  
6 we spent last year about \$540 million on one-shots  
7 last year. Homebase is a piece of it. Homebase allows  
8 for a little bit more customization of what people  
9 need. The Right to Counsel is a piece of it. As I  
10 mentioned, about a third of the CityFHEPS vouchers  
11 are going to people who are in community. So, making  
12 sure that we're promoting housing stability is  
13 absolutely something that is important to us.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. What is  
15 the total capacity of Safe Haven and other low-  
16 barrier beds for unsheltered homeless currently?  
17 That's, of course, something that I feel very strong  
18 with. I was very supportive of the one on 83<sup>rd</sup>  
19 Street, and you haven't had a peep since.

20 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you.  
21 Appreciate that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, can you  
23 provide a breakdown of beds by type, Safe Haven,  
24 stabilization, other low-barrier? I guess you can't  
25

talk about my one in East Harlem, but that's the one I like.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We have about 4,000 beds of the low-barrier beds in total with additional in the pipeline. I don't believe I have it split out. The majority of those are Safe Havens. It's a fairly small number of stabilization beds, but we can follow up with you on the specifics.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And what are the vacancy rates and average length of stay? I know on 83<sup>rd</sup> Street it's about a year.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Vacancy rates are very low. We're able to fill those low-barrier beds basically as soon as we open them. Length of stay across the system for all of our population types is just over a year.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I guessed it right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: You know what you're talking about, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, I do. Okay. Client service experience, an ongoing concern for many years has been a client service in centers-- phone wait times. We heard about this earlier, the

ability for clients to return missed calls from HRA, in all the processing and application and the overall client experience of benefits. According to the PMMR, in the first pure [sic] months of 25, first quarter, the average in-person wait time for clients was 84 minutes. The PMMR attributed this to an increase in foot traffic at HRA offices and a higher volume of applications. What's being done to address this? We heard about this earlier from Council Member Joseph a little bit.

COMMISSIONER PARK: So the wait times for on-demand interviews are fairly brief, and I have them some-- hold on. I know I have them here. We did see in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic some uptick in wait times at the in-person centers as people did transition back to-- more people transitioned back to going in-person. That is-- but we have the staff that we need. We are able to process cases, and what we are seeing is the majority of people are applying online, and-- sorry. I know I have this number some place. The specific wait times on the cash and on-demand--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
Right. And how you're addressing it.

COMMISSIONER PARK: This is-- but with respect to addressing it, I think all of the steps that we took to eliminate the backlogs have really stood us in good-- put us in a good place. We hired-- going back to 2023, we've hired a thousand people for our front line programs. We've invested in technology. We've made a number of process changes so that we can-- that we've been able to cut out some of the more challenging aspects of the process, and I think that that has really made a difference. It has allowed us to really keep up with what we're seeing. Sorry, I'm still looking for those wait times.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well--

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: [inaudible] I can--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] If I don't have them, we'll follow up.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We can follow up with specifics.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I can say on average SNAP on-demand wait time is probably around 20 minutes or so. It's not long in cash. The last couple of months it's been around an hour at maximum, but as the Commissioner said--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] I did just find it. Yeah. January it was 53 minutes for cash.

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: And we do have the call-back function so people don't need to stay on the phone for that period of time. But we do everything we can to reduce those--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Okay. I just want to say-- I think the Chair knows this. I have a lot of people using your services living in my house right now, a whole bunch of them. And I have to say it's really pretty good. I mean, I do have everybody's cell number. That helps. But it's-- I just want to say congratulations, because I know it's hard, but they're getting services. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you.

RICHARD JOHNS: Actually, if I could go ahead and get back to you--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] Go ahead.

RICHARD JOHNS: Council Member, on the shelter new needs. So the shelter new need of \$554 million was broken down as follows: single adults

was \$364 million; families with children was \$158 million; and adult families was \$32 million. And our shelter costs for FY 24, excluding asylum-seekers, was \$2.2 billion. And Chair, I can correct our new need for CityFHEPS. So you are correct, \$308 million was for CityFHEPS, and the remaining \$16.5 million was for our other legacy programs.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member Restler?

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Great. Thank you so much. I'd like to continue on the threads of some of the items that Council Member Brewer was just raising. And I want to just start by something that-- to just kind of get some better clarification on. I recently heard you remark, Commissioner, that evictions are lower driver of our shelter census, but I think with many people perhaps assumed that the eviction moratorium had been the primary factor in driving down the shelter census so significantly during COVID and the post-COVID period. That's not your analysis.

COMMISSIONER PARK: No. so, pre-pandemic and pre-asylum crisis, right-- so if we're trying to get to a better denominator here, eviction was-- for

families with children which is where we have the best data. It was about 10 percent of the families with children entering the shelter system did so because of--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]

Compared to DV being--

COMMISSIONER PARK: [interposing] because of eviction. I think the two primary drivers for families with children, it's domestic violence and then it is young families, primarily young women who have never had a lease. They've always lived with other people, and you know, a baby or a second baby is too much and pushes them into the-- for that household and pushes them into the shelter system, right? What we see is that overwhelmingly, people-- families with children entering the shelter system have not had a lease within the last two years, and anecdotal-- that two years is the look-back period that we have looking at people's housing history, but anecdotally it goes even further back, and many people have never had a lease, which is not to say that eviction isn't of concern to us. Eviction is absolutely of concern to us. Housing stability matters very much. It's why we continue to invest in



programs like one-shots and Right to Counsel, but in terms of our ability to affect the shelter census, I don't think evictions is the right place to focus.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And just 10 percent of families entering the system directly resulting from eviction, for the families coming in as a result of DV or families who out of economic need, I guess if you would describe it that way-- I guess everyone's coming in with economic need-- but lack of housing stability and economic need to young families, can you put any percentages on those two populations?

COMMISSIONER PARK: DV depending on which definition of domestic violence you use, because there are a variety. It can be up to 50 percent of the families with children in the DHS system, and then these-- you know, that characteristic of the young family entering, that isn't considered a-- like, that in and of itself doesn't align with a reason for homelessness. It usually would get categorized in one of the, you know, discord or overcrowding or something that. But what I'm giving you is a more qualitative description of the families that we see.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you mentioned just a moment ago that we're currently in 18,000 hotel rooms. In that post-pandemic, pre-asylum-seeker crisis moment, what was the low point of hotel rooms that we were at some time in 22? If anybody has that.

COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't know that we sliced it that way, but it would have, I believe, been under 10,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Under 10. So it's approximately we've doubled the number of hotel rooms in use over the last couple of years.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Let us follow up with you. I don't want to go on the record with something that isn't accurate.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Fair. We'll follow up, but we're on the record. Okay, and then--

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] I would add that at the end of 2020 we had no families with children in hotels.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That's right. I remember that, and we also-- that which was a major accomplishment, and that of course is no longer the case.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Right. So it was a two-year period or so that we were-- two to three year period that we had no families with children, no children hotel rooms.

COMMISSIONER PARK: It was really a matter of months.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Really.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. We started-- the asylum-seeker crisis started in April of 2022 was when we first started to see people coming in, and we fairly quickly had to pivot to hotels.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: The growth in the single adult census which seems to just continue to expand and expand and expand. I think we're at 21,000 or so, single adults today, is that right?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes, when including asylum-seekers. So the number of non-asylum single adults has been relatively stable.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: For how long?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Going back several years. Again, we can get you more detailed data.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. And you mentioned that we're at about 4,000 low-barrier beds

1 in the system today. And you mentioned that I think  
2 it was \$550 million in new needs on shelter costs,  
3 that \$360 I think you said was for single adults. Do  
4 you have that broken down between the traditional  
5 single adult system and low-barrier beds? I assume  
6 that the low-barrier beds are baked into that, the  
7 new Safe Haven beds that the Mayor announced, or are  
8 those separate?  
9

10 RICHARD JOHNS: No, those are separate.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Oh, so that's  
12 totally separate. This is just for the traditional  
13 single adult system. Do you know the cost on the new  
14 Safe Haven beds that we're adding? And it's 900 that  
15 you're adding, is that right?

16 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And over what  
18 period of time?

19 COMMISSIONER PARK: The time period will  
20 depend a little bit on the sites that we identify,  
21 right? As you all know, sometimes our sites are  
22 rehab projects. Sometimes they're ground-up new  
23 construction. Obviously, ground-up new construction  
24 takes a longer period of time. So, we'll start to  
25 see some of the new beds come online as early as this

summer. But I won't have a full timeline until we've sited all of them which we have not done yet.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. So--

RICHARD JOHNS: [interposing] Sorry, and just to answer your question. So the Preliminary Budget added \$71.6 million in FY 25 and 26 for street outreach and sheltering, and then that increases in fiscal year 27 to 20-- \$75.2 million and then \$77.1 million in FY 28.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And that covers the full 900 beds? That's the funding for it?

COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. And then so that takes us from about 4,000 to 4,900 give or take. Commissioner or Administrator Carter, from your all's perspective, how many beds do we need? Right? You say that we fill these beds quite immediately. They're generally quite successful for addressing the needs of most street homeless New Yorkers. I'd like to say that the one thing that unifies all street homeless New Yorkers is that they've been through the shelter system and decided not to go back, right? And so how we convince them to come back into these low-barrier beds, Safe Haven

beds is critically important. And what do we think to actually be able to address street homelessness at scale in New York City? What do you think should be-- in an ideal world, if you had a magic wand and Jacques Jiha didn't exist, how many Safe Haven beds or low barrier beds do we need?

COMMISSIONER PARK: I think the 4,900 that we have committed to is an excellent goal. I think we're going to continue to monitor it, and I think getting to an ultimate number is-- really I think the long-term play needs to be how do we have more systems engaged in the planning, and so that we are doing less of the discharge to DHS, right? Whether it's discharge from carceral [sic] systems, discharge from hospitals, how are we making sure that there are fewer people following through that safety net? You know, I'm not naïve enough to say that it's never going to be never, but if we can do a better job with that upfront planning while continuing to focus on placing people under permanent housing, I am hopeful that that 4,900 is a very good number.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I agree with you. I think that the failure in coordination across the different systems that these individuals cycle

1 through-- our carceral system, our hospital system  
2 and our shelter system is really disappointing. And  
3 you know, I'm pleased that Dr. Katz is creating these  
4 Bridge to Home beds which I think is a positive  
5 model, you know, and a couple hundred beds is a good  
6 thing, but I think that the broader point is that  
7 there are thousands of discharge-- tens of thousands  
8 of discharges from Health + Hospitals every year of  
9 people who have no homes who are going-- being sent  
10 back out on the street. And you know, I was doing a  
11 tour last week with BRC-- and I appreciate their  
12 partnership-- and the Transit Police and the MTA on a  
13 couple stations in my district that we have just a  
14 number of entrenched homeless individuals who've been  
15 living in the station for years, and you know, the  
16 police officers-- you know, I'm speaking to the Chief  
17 of Transit and the Captain and he says to me, you  
18 know, my officers will be invol-- you know, be  
19 involved in an involuntary commitment. We bring  
20 somebody into the hospital because they're a danger  
21 to themselves or the people around them, and 24-36  
22 hours later, 48 hours later, they're back in the  
23 station, and it's hard to convince the officers to  
24 continue to engage those individuals or to help find  
25

constructive solutions when they're just cycling in and out. So, just to that-- just on the hospital piece, in particular-- how are we strengthening those partnerships between the street outreach teams and our public hospital system to try and help fewer New Yorkers fall through those cracks?

COMMISSIONER PARK: So, we work really closely with H+H. We're in very close contact with them. Our streets team, the DHS Medical-- DSS Medical Office. So that coordination happens on a really consistent basis. I think that was one of the things that Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Isom really took the lead on was making sure that that coordination occurred, and while it's-- we will certainly miss her, I think there's been very strong relationships in and engagement that has been built on that we will continue to support. You know, I think the-- something that is important to recognize is that there are some number of people who will be taken to the hospital who when whatever is-- substances that they might be using are out of their system are-- no longer meet the qualifications for hospitalization, right? And that is absolutely and issue, and it is an issue that I don't think our



1 system has good tools to address, but that's  
2 something that is incumbent on all of us to find some  
3 answers for. But I want to come back to this  
4 question of where do people go and what should the  
5 long-term solution be. The long-term solution should  
6 be housing, right?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Sure.

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: And you know, we used  
10 to say that when we got somebody off the streets or  
11 subways or into a shelter that, like, check, we were  
12 done. And Administrator Carter and I have really  
13 been rethinking that and bringing our streets team  
14 into the conversations around housing, right, really  
15 making sure that we are-- that we're seeing all the  
16 way through the continuum. We have really good  
17 numbers, excuse me, on our supportive housing  
18 placements for those who'd experienced unsheltered  
19 homelessness, and I think a lot of this is the  
20 ongoing partnership that we're going to need with HPD  
21 and with the State housing agencies to make sure that  
22 we continue to produce supportive housing as they  
23 have been there-- also terrific partners-- so that  
24 the end goal is not more-- I'm highly supportive of  
25 the Safe Haven model. I think it does a lot of good

work, but ultimately the goal should be let's have the Safe Havens and then quickly connect people to permanent housing, and in that case, the 4,900 number should be a good number.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, I really appreciate everything you just said, and I'm on a, you know, parochial level. I'm proud that we opened a 150-bed Safe Haven in Greenpoint at 83 Apollo Street. I think it's the largest Safe Haven in Brooklyn, although maybe the one in Kingsborough is slightly bigger, but just about the largest Safe Haven in Brooklyn. We opened the largest supportive housing in Brooklyn at 90 Sand [sic] Street in the heart of our district, and we want to help to continue to identify sites in our community for those solutions and I hope every Council Member joins me in that effort. But if I had-- but if my-- if I were to tell you what I hear from my constituents every day. They are angry that there are more street homeless New Yorkers suffering with mental illness on our blocks, on our commercial corridors in our subway stations than ever, and they don't feel like the solutions that we are investing in are making a tangible difference in our neighborhoods, and they want

1 compassionate solutions. They want effective  
2 solutions, and of course hospital stays are the most  
3 expensive. So the-- and of course, inherently  
4 temporary. But how we help those people upon exit  
5 from the hospital when they're substance use  
6 condition or whatever it may be wears off or where  
7 they no longer are meeting the criteria for  
8 hospitalization is really important and I don't think  
9 that we're doing a good enough job of connecting  
10 those people at that important interval to the low-  
11 barrier transitional housing solutions that help. And  
12 you know, I think that-- you know, it's-- you know,  
13 from what I can see from the breaking ground Safe  
14 Haven on Apollo Street, the housing placement numbers  
15 have been impressive, and-- already. I mean, that  
16 site's open less than a year and you've got good data  
17 to show that you're moving people into permanent  
18 housing which of course is the goal, but you know,  
19 this is a central issue in the mayoral campaign that  
20 you're hearing every candidate talk about in frankly  
21 increasingly more draconian terms because I don't  
22 think the solutions that we've been advancing are  
23 demonstrating enough results for New Yorkers day-to-  
24 day experience. And so for me, it comes back to when  
25

1 people are leaving that hospital or do we have Safe  
2 Haven capacity as a low-barrier solution, and the  
3 answer today, we don't really. Because you know, as  
4 you answered to Council Member Brewer's questions,  
5 we're at capacity. Hopefully with this 18 percent  
6 increase in capacity over the next couple of years it  
7 makes a difference and we have more capacity, but  
8 based on what it feels like the demand is versus the  
9 capacity that we have and the capacity we have  
10 planned, we're just not meeting the moment, and I get  
11 that you don't-- you're not in a position where you  
12 can say there should be 10,000 beds, because that's  
13 going to put you in trouble, but I do think we need  
14 to have an honest conversation about what the  
15 capacity of those low-barrier beds needs to be so we  
16 can start to actually address these solutions more  
17 effectively at-scale.

18  
19 COMMISSIONER PARK: Appreciate that,  
20 Council Member, and I'm always happy to engage with  
21 you and with others on a range of solutions. But I  
22 do just want to take a step back. I understand the  
23 concerns of New Yorkers in general, the anxiety and  
24 the perception issues that are out-- that there are  
25 more and more people. I think what people don't ever

1 see is the instances where people are coming inside  
2 to shelter in many instances or to Safe Havens, that  
3 they don't see the permanent housing placement. I  
4 think both things can be true, that we are making  
5 progress because we absolutely are and that people's  
6 perceptions feel like we aren't. so, I think, you  
7 know, in addition to the problem-solving around what  
8 can we do differently, I think there's also the-- how  
9 do we understand and how do we convey and communicate  
10 the instances where there are-- instances where  
11 people's live have been changed, where somebody who  
12 was the person on the subway is now the person in  
13 housing, right, who has been able to connect to  
14 whatever form of treatment or stabilization or maybe  
15 just the stabilization that comes with having a safe  
16 place to live, those are happening every day. So, we  
17 can talk about whether or not we want to do more and  
18 whether the scale is right, but the success stories  
19 are out there, absolutely.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And we want to  
22 help promote them. I just-- you know, and so happy to  
23 work with you on that. I just think that, of course,  
24 it's not what people see, and we maybe need to do  
25 more to share information about it, but you know, I

could tell you a story from every other week in my district of a person who is deeply struggling on the streets or in the subways, and who we continue to engage but fail to actually connect to services or help and long-term solutions. That is, I think, eroding confidence among too many of our colleagues, and I just want to help identify ways to actually get those people the help they need and long-term solutions.

COMMISSIONER PARK: We're happy to brainstorm with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: thank you, Council Member Restler. And with that, this portion of the hearing is concluded. Thank you all so much for being here today.

COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, we're taking a five-minute break, and then we will begin our public testimony portion of this hearing.

[break]

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, welcome back everyone. I am now opening the hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this

is a governmental proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times. The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Furthermore, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized you will have two minutes, and I will be very strict with two minutes. We have a lot of people waiting to speak today. So please take time to kind of underscore what it is that you want say, and just you know, be aware that we will be submitting those to the record. So, we will be looking at them. If you-- sorry. When recognized, you're going to have the two minutes. [inaudible] the Preliminary Budget plan for DSS. If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms. You may

also include-- you may also email written testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted. With that, we'll call up our first panel: Eric Lee, Kristin Miller, Carol Siegel, Naima Dahir, and Cathy Batista. You may begin.

KRISTIN MILLER: Good afternoon. My name is Kristin Miller, and I'm the Executive Director at Homeless Services United. I would like to thank the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today, and we'll be submitting a much more detailed written testimony, but for today's hearing I will be highlighting some of the most crucial and urgent issues we face. HSU is a coalition of over 50 mission-driven homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for the expansion of affordable housing and prevention services for immediate access to safe, decent emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers. HSU promotes effective solution to end the crisis of homelessness in New York City. The fiscal year 26 budget must take decisive action to rectify payment issues for shelter and homeless service providers. Our members are together owed hundreds of



millions of dollars by the City of New York for work completed on city contracts, primarily with DHS. We are relieved for recent temporary cash flow due to actions the city took to address overdue payments. The backlog initiative that you brought up earlier moved hundreds of outstanding invoices pending at the Department of Homeless Services alone at the end of calendar year 24. However, providers still have months, and for some years, of catch-up in pending budget, budget updates and invoice approvals that are prohibiting them from being reimbursed for the services we have already performed and are again in a cash flow crisis. DHS talked today about some efforts that they're making, but I'm afraid it's too little too late. You've been hearing me testify about this situation for months. Sadly, the problem has become dire. HSU worked with a sample of 12 DHS contracted providers to assess the outstanding budget actions. Out of this sample group, these 12 providers, just 12 of our members have over \$170 million in outstanding budget actions going back to fiscal year 19 to current. Some providers have stopped bidding on DHS contracts because the risk of doing further business with the City is simply too

high. Other providers are on a timeline for insolvency, for some as soon as two months. And with that, I just want to say that we urge you to continue to push for the payments. We have detailed more in our testimony on outreach and some of the barriers to reduce access to housing programs. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and thank you for submitting testimony in writing. Go ahead.

CAROL SIEGEL: Good afternoon Chairman Ayala, members of the Committee. My name is Carol Siegel and I am the attorney in charge of criminal defense at the Center for Family Representation. On behalf of CFR we are grateful for this opportunity to testify and for your support of our organization. CFR is the assigned indigent defense provider for parents being prosecuted by ACS in Manhattan, Queens, and now in Staten Island. We are also an assigned conflict provider in the Bronx. We represented more than 2,300 people in the last fiscal year of whom 90 percent were Black, Brown or people of color. We ask for your support in urging the City to provide additional funding as follows: We are asking for \$825,000 for the Right to Advocacy Program which assists parents during the ACS investigations and at

administrative hearings to amend and seal State Central Registry Reports. In fiscal year 2024, CFR prevented a court filing 86 percent of the time, helping 91 percent of the children involved avoid the foster system, and 97 percent of parents who worked with CFR during SCR hearings had their records amended and sealed. We're asking for \$425,000 for our Home for Good program which offers holistic support for parents and youth providing wraparound holistic legal social service support in areas such as housing, public benefits, criminal defense, and immigration. We are able to have a full picture of how all these different court systems and other systems impact our client's lives. We're also requesting \$150,000 in DOVE funding for clients who are survivors of domestic violence so that we can provide intensive social work services. The need for CFR services for New York families continues to outpace resources, especially in these critical areas. Thank you for your commitment to CFR and to ensuring that New Yorkers have access to the services they need to survive and to keep them together safely with their children and families. Thank you.

ERIC LEE: Good afternoon. Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Eric Lee. I'm the Director of Public Policy at Volunteers of America Greater New York, or VOAGNY. We are a 128-year-old anti-poverty organization serving more than 12,000 adults and children annually through our 70+ programs including affordable and supportive housing and shelter throughout New York City, northern New Jersey and Westchester. I will submit written testimony with more details, but I would like to use my time to focus on the fiscal challenges that VOAGNY is facing with our city contracts. We've been providing shelter since 1991 when DHS first started contracting with nonprofits to do family shelter. We operate five transitional housing programs as well as three crisis shelters for families with children, serving over 670 families, as well as single women employment [sic] shelter, single men's shelter, as well as a safe haven in our Housing First DHS pilot program placing people from the street directly into supportive housing. As federal uncertainty grows, New York City must meet the moment and shore up our human services safety net to restore

the fiscal health of city-contracted nonprofit providers and to blunt the impact of federal cuts and delays. VOAGNY is grateful for this committee's commitment to improving the procurement process, as well as for the City's efforts to try to pay our contracts, but to-date, we are still owed approximately \$40 million for city contracts dating as far back as FY 17. Timely reimbursements are critical to maintaining our ability to continue to answer the City's call to stand up new programs and to maintain the flow of our development pipeline for affordable and supportive housing sites. To that end, MOCS, DSS and DHS need additional headcount to eliminate the backlog for pending budget amendments and modifications, new needs requests, form 65A, as well as pending invoices. And just one final point, we have spent \$1 million in interest which is not reimbursable this fiscal year because of city contract delays and we forecast \$1.5 million next year if we're not able to get these payments on time. And we support Council Member Brannan's bill 514 which would make this interest reimbursable to our nonprofit. Thank you.

NAIMA DAHIR: good afternoon Chair Ayala and members of the committee. My name is Naima Dahir and I'm here on behalf of the Arab-American Family Support Center with an urgent request. Community-based organizations like ours need immediate support to continue serving vulnerable New Yorkers. Just weeks into the new federal administration, harmful policies are already having devastating impacts. Our federally funded mental health and domestic violence programs face unprecedented shortfalls of \$1.1 million due to funding freezes. Without intervention, these essential services, including counseling and crisis intervention are at risk. At the same time, immigrant communities are in growing danger. Recent federal actions including ramped up ICE enforcement and targeting of Muslim, Arab, Palestinian, Black, and South Asian communities have shown fear [sic]. families are withdrawing from public benefits, students are afraid to leave shelters and mental health referrals at the Arab-American Family Support Center has surged by 80 percent since inauguration day. We are responding by expanding our mental health and legal services, strengthening security, and training staff to ensure

our spaces remain safe, but we need the City's support. We urge you to advocate for emergency city funding to help organizations like ours bridge federal funding gaps. Publicly re-affirm New York City's commitment to being a sanctuary city by ensuring that city's agencies do not cooperate with unjust federal immigration enforcement. Support legal protections and resources for immigrant communities facing increased enforcement threats. Allocate additional funding to CBOs providing mental health, anti-violence, and social services to at-risk families. Now is the time for bold action. Our communities are in crisis and we cannot stand by as federal policies threaten their safety and stability. We ask for your partnership to ensure New York City remains a place for refuge and resilience. Thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working together to protect the most vulnerable amongst us. Thank you so much.

CATHY BATISTA: Good afternoon, Chair

Ayala and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Cathy Batista. I'm the Chief Program Officer at Anthos Home. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I have submitted a more

detailed written testimony, but I want to take a few minutes to highlight our work and how our model is working and how we can help strengthen the City's efforts to move more New Yorkers into permanent housing. Anthos Home is an innovative nonprofit committed to helping people with housing vouchers to secure stable housing as quickly as possible.

Vouchers are one of the most effective tools we have to address homelessness. Yet, families often spend a year or more searching for an apartment. These long wait times extend shelter stays and create unnecessary instability for families who are ready to move forward. Our model is designed to remove these roadblocks. We work directly with landlords and brokers to secure apartments, ensuring that families with vouchers have immediate housing options. We also cover key costs that often delays move-ins such as repairs for inspections, moving costs, and application fees. And because finding an apartment is just the first step, we provide ongoing support for tenants and landlords at least for a year after placement. This includes help with paperwork, monthly check-ins, assistance of repairs, and interventions if payment issues arise. This approach



is working. We have helped more than 250 individuals and families move into permanent housing, including over 100 young adults aging out of foster care through our partnership with ACS. Every single one has remained stably housed, and critically we've also been able to bring new landlords into the program, expanding the housing stock available too voucher holders at a time when to many doors remain closed to them. Our working supplements the city efforts. New York has made tremendous progress in expanding the CityFHEPS program. Last year alone, New York City helped over 14,000 households transition from shelter into permanent housing, but challenges remain. Delays in voucher approvals, difficulties finding willing [sic] landlords and the need for more support services. By working together, we can address these barriers and make the voucher program even more effective. We urge the City Council to continue investing in and strengthening the voucher systems, strengthening approvals, addressing inspection delays and expanding landlord engagement. These steps will help to ensure more families can transition out of shelter and into more stable housing they deserve. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you all for your testimony. We'll be limiting questions today unless it's absolutely necessary, but I just want to say thank you for advocacy. We hear you, and you know, we are on top of it. Thank you. Our next panel is Keith Carr, Nicholas Buess, and Greg Silverman-- Silvera, sorry, I think. You may begin. Turn the-- yeah.

NICHOLAS BUESS: Hi, good afternoon, Deputy Speaker. Nick Buess from the Food Bank for New York City. I'll be very brief. We'll have all the details in our written testimony about assessment, but I just want to underline two big ideas here which is that there's so many federal programs that we've been discussing and the Commissioner and HRA/DSS staff has been discussing. There are immediate losses at food pantries and soup kitchens due to the suspension of federally funded programs. So we can go into all the details of the numbers, but those threats and those changes are happening in real-time which is why it's essential that the Council and that the administration continue to push for investments in the Community Food Connection Program for \$100 million. Food pantries and soup kitchens are the

last line of defense against hunger for people in our city, and we need to ensure that those programs are strong in the face of cuts at the federal level.

Thank you.

: Is he ceding his time?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: There you go. There you go.

GREG SILVERMAN: Okay. Thank you, General Welfare Committee Chair Ayala, for having us here today and holding this hearing. My name is Greg Silverman. I run the West Side Campaign Against Hunger. For four to six years we've been on the front lines handing out food all over the City, this year 110,000 New Yorkers in need. We gave out about three million pounds of that in the form of fresh produce. That's what we're focused on. We're focused on dignity and choice, and choice was what we created long ago in the first pantry, a choice model pantry in the nation. We believe choice is much larger than that now, though. It's not just apples or bananas, but the location of service, the delivery models and how you spend your time in getting food. And food pantries as we all know need more direct support right now, more culturally-appropriate nutritious

1 food with proper staffing and operations. I also--  
2 outside of West Side Campaign Against Hunger run the--  
3 - help found the Roundtable which is a network of  
4 nine other front line anti-hunger organizations that  
5 together give out over 69 million meals a year, and  
6 by working together we've been able to drive down  
7 cost to get more food to community members in need,  
8 not necessarily through pantries, but through any  
9 network possible where there's great community  
10 organizations. That's why we think CFC, 100 percent  
11 agree it needs to be \$100 million. We know that in  
12 the past year the levels, as you said, were like  
13 \$60.1 million. It dropped to 25, and then we did a  
14 lot of advocacy. We brought it back up, and now are  
15 we really going to go through that same process again  
16 when we know the need is catastrophic. And so we're  
17 going to do anything we can to help support that.  
18 We're going to push that forward, and we want to make  
19 sure that \$100 million goes for baseline of CFC.

21 KEITH CARR: Good afternoon. Good  
22 afternoon, Chair Ayala and members of the Committee.  
23 Thank you again for holding this important hearing.  
24 My name's Keith Carr. I'm the Senior Policy and  
25 Government Relations Manager at City Harvest. City

Harvest is the first and largest food rescue organization in the City. We service more than 400 soup kitchens and food pantries all across all five boroughs, and we've been doing so for the last 43 years, but this year is, as we all know, is a little bit different. It's not business as usual, and it hasn't really been the same since 2019. Since 2019, we've been seeing over one million additional pantry visits per week. That's not a month, but per week throughout our network, and compared to data from 2019. Also, we've seen a 30-- I'm sorry, 10 percent increase in the number of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity. We're also seeing twice as many families with children visiting our pantries and twice as many employed New Yorkers, like people who work every single day standing in line to get emergency food. And I hate that term emergency, because this isn't an emergency, it's a crisis. So, in response to the growing demand, City Harvest has increased the amount of food that we distribute to by nearly 30 percent to our network of food pantries and bring us to a total of more than 81 million pounds of nutritious produce that we deliver each and every day as our trucks crisscross the City. For 20 hours a

day, our trucks are on the road delivering food and produce to the folks like West Side Campaign Against Hunger and our entire network. So, as Nick said, we have a couple of key policy asks that we'd love to see the Council take into account and really push for in the 2026 budget. We're looking for, as Nick said, to increase Community Food Connections program, not the \$50 million. Thank you for amplifying the importance of the program, but as our network and everyone in our network can come and say that that's not enough. We really want \$100 million and get it at least as close to \$100 million as possible. Also, we're looking-- please combat older adult hunger by investing \$57 million in congregate meals at older adult centers and restoring \$100 million+ in cuts to NYC Aging's overall budget. I'm almost finished. Support community-led food insecurity by creating a Food Justice Fund, and this was outlined in the Mayor's 10-year Food Policy Plan, and restore access to healthy grocery incentives program. The Groceries to Go program was successful, so please continue to fund that, and apply food security item-- apply the food security lens to housing stability and affordable childcare. Everyone in this city knows

1                   that rent eats first and the number one reason why  
2                   most people are food insecure is because they're  
3                   trying to pay their rent and this an affordability  
4                   crisis not an emergency food-- there's plenty of  
5                   food. People just can't afford to feed themselves  
6                   and their families. So we look forward to working  
7                   with you.  
8

9                   CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

10                  KEITH CARR: And you've been a fantastic  
11                  partner.

12                  CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, thank you, and I  
13                  agree. I see the lines even around the corner from  
14                  where I live. I mean, it's just-- it gets longer and  
15                  longer, and it's been like that, you know, ever  
16                  since-- you know, past the pandemic. And we're so  
17                  many years down the line already and the fact that we  
18                  haven't seen a decrease is very alarming, and now  
19                  with the threat of federal cuts, that adds a lot more  
20                  emphasis into what we as a city could be doing and  
21                  should be doing to ensure that all families have  
22                  access to high-quality foods.

23                  KEITH CARR: When I first started at City  
24                  Harvest we were doing about 23 million pounds a year,  
25                  and now as I said, we're doing 81 million.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, yeah.

KEITH CARR: And that's good economy, bad economy. I mean, people-- it's not about-- it's not about people working or not working. It's really just can they afford the food that's in the grocery store.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, and it's really-- we've been able to improve the quality of the food, but now we're having to ration it, because we just don't have enough to keep up with the demand. So, I see it. I see it every single day. But thank you all. I know all of the great work that you're doing and couldn't have better partners in this work. Thank you.

KEITH CARR: thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Our next panel is Jade Vasquez, Reverend Terry Troia, Agnes Kim, and Juan Diaz. You may begin. Whichever corner.

TERRY TROIA: Good afternoon. My name is the Reverend Terry Troia. I'm President and CEO of Project Hospitality in Staten Island. In September of 2022, we took on two new family shelters on Staten Island, and after an initial advance of two months in each shelter, we saw no additional funding until a few months ago, more than two years. We carried



these-- almost two years. We carried these shelters and an additional family shelter for nearly two years without reimbursement. In May of 2024, New York City owed us \$16.2 million for services rendered. I met with Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom who directed us to meet ongoing with Mr. Vincent Pullo, CFO of Department of Social Services. These meetings have been ongoing weekly since May of 2024. Mr. Pullo has been incredibly gracious and his staff incredibly helpful, and nine months later we are now owed only \$4.5 million. We are grateful for the intervention of both the Deputy Mayor and Mr. Pullo. But that said, the impact of living through two years of very late payments and no payments at all, particularly for the new family shelters we opened on Staten Island have had a profound effect on our agency. We can't pay our bills. We have huge bills and our budget is about \$50 million and most of that is city contract dollars. We've taken and used \$7 million in the line of credit. We're applying now for a \$10 million line of credit. We spent \$50,000 in loan interest for 2024, and we expect to pay a minimum of \$100,000 interest by the end of June of this year. What happens when we can't pay payroll, and how much

loan money can we take out before we're denied loans, and then what happens. We need for the City Council to do a comprehensive analysis of the situation of late payments and for the City Council to implement legislation to correct the late payment situation and take on the responsibility of paying interest rates on these loans that nonprofits have to bear in order to keep our doors open. Thank you for understanding this grave situation that impacts our ability to save lives and serve homeless people in the borough of Staten Island.

AGNES KIM: Hello. My name is Agnes Kim and I'm here today on behalf of the Family Homelessness Coalition. Thank you to the Chair and the Committee for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to delivery testimony. Family Homelessness Coalition, or FHC, works to prevent family homelessness, improve the wellbeing of children and families in shelter and support the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter. In New York, the number of children experiencing homelessness has more than doubled since 2022, translating to nearly one in three of New York's homeless population being children. This

humanitarian emergency is also coming at a time when federal support to fight homelessness is under threat, making it more important than ever that this year's adopted budget urgently address this crisis with resources. The current landscape impacts both people experiencing homelessness and the organizations that work to help them, including the members of FHC. Our organizations are directly impacted by real and proposed federal funding cuts to their programs. In addition to support and resources, we call for greatly increased efforts to expedite owed payments to homeless and social service providers. If funds can be delivered expeditiously, providers can better withstand this existential threat that they're facing. FHC strongly urges the following in the upcoming budget: In order to improve eviction prevention and aftercare, we call to increase the budget for Homebase by \$37.9 million as well as establish a dedicated funding stream strictly for after care services. To expedite housing placements, we urge the City to implement the CityFHEPS expansion and reforms passed into law in 2023 and reduce barriers in CityFHEPS administration. To improve conditions in shelter, we urge the City to

1 increase the pay of shelter staff to establish parity  
2 with comparable settings, and the City should also  
3 commit to a capital needs assessment of the entire  
4 shelter portfolio. To improve education continuity,  
5 we call to stop the implementation of shelter stay  
6 limits for new-arrival families with children and to  
7 increase the percent of families that DHS places in  
8 shelter in the same borough as where their children  
9 attend school. Finally, to improve intake processes  
10 into shelter, we call to reduce the housing history  
11 requirement for intake from two years to one year,  
12 allow self-attestation after a denial, and to commit  
13 to appointment times for intake interviews. On behalf  
14 of FHC, thank you again for the opportunity to  
15 testify.

17 JADE VASQUEZ: Thank you, Deputy Speaker  
18 Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee,  
19 for the opportunity to testify today. I am Jade  
20 Vasquez, Director of Policy and Research at WIN, the  
21 largest provider of shelter and supportive housing to  
22 families with children in New York City and  
23 nationwide. We serve nearly 7,000 people nightly,  
24 including 3,800 children. As the federal government  
25 threatens significant cuts to housing and social

welfare programs, it's vital that our city allocate more resources for programs that support low-income New Yorkers such as rental assistance, Cash Assistance, and legal aid. These programs are even more critical now given the pending cuts to federal departments and benefits like HUD, Section 8 and SNAP, as well as the Trump Administration's mass deportation efforts that are already underway. In January, WIN released Project Hope which offers legislative and administrative recommendations to protect low-income homeless and immigrant New Yorkers from the draconian policies of Project 2025. Specifically, we urge the City to one, allocate an additional \$263 million to CityFHEPS to assist 10,000 households at risk of losing their Section 8 voucher. Two, invest \$10 million in direct cash transfer programs for high-risk populations, including families and youth experiencing housing instability like last year's \$1.5 million investment in the Bridge Project. And three, increase funding for immigration legal services to \$80 million supporting consultations, pro se assistance, and full representation, and direct these funds to experienced nonprofit providers. We commend the City Council for

passing CityFHEPS reforms in 2023 which if implemented would have helped 92,000 New Yorkers access to CityFHEPS voucher and saved over \$730 million annually. While we are disappointed by Mayor Adams refusal to implement these laws, we will continue to fight alongside this council to ensure homeless and housing insecure New Yorkers have the resource that they need to become financially stable and provide a better future for their families. Additionally, the City must invest \$40 million to fully implement Local Law 35 which requires clinical mental health professionals at family shelters. Mental health care is vital for families experiencing homelessness and helps to improve long-term health and employment outcomes. The budget must address payment issues for shelter providers, and although initiatives like the Backlog Initiative helped, delayed payments continue to threaten providers like WIN, making it difficult to operate effectively and negatively impacts our staff, vendors and clients. We urge the City to restore funding for DSS and MOCS staffing, to reduce contracting and reimbursement delays, and ensure timely distribution of public assistance. Finally, given the uncertainty of federal

funding, it is critical that New York City invests in our social safety net. As the wealthiest city in the world, we must ensure that low-income New Yorkers and nonprofit providers receive the resources necessary to help struggling families obtain financial stability and achieve our collective mission of ending homelessness. Thank you.

JUAN DIAZ: Thank you, Chair Ayala, for holding today's budget hearing. My name is Juan Diaz and I'm a Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens' Committee for Children, a multi-issue children's advocacy organization. CCC is a steering committee member of the Family Homelessness Coalition. A recently released Robin Hood and Columbia University report highlighted that in 2023, child poverty in New York City rose to 26 percent, the highest since 2017 which is nearly double the national poverty level. Additionally, in 2024 there were more than 12,000 residential evictions. The rising cost of living and escalating housing crisis make it even more urgent for the city to invest in services and supports for low-income children and families. CCC urges you to support the following investments: Restore \$325 million in rental assistance funding and consider

enhancing funding to support thousands of households experiencing rental arrears and housing court eviction proceedings. Additionally, support implementation of funding of CityFHEPS expansion. With the ever-increasing demand of Homebase services, we ask you to prioritize homeless services by providing additional \$37.9 million in funding to support community-based organizations who administer homelessness prevention programs. Expand Fair Fares to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and baseline \$54.2 million to ensure that all low-income families have access to public transportation. Guaranteed income is a vehicle of economic stability and poverty reduction. Therefore, we recommend additional funding to support these type of programs, including the Speaker Adams \$5 million proposal to expand the City's guaranteed income pilot program to expecting mothers. Increase funding for the Community Food Connections program to \$100 million, and baseline funding to meet the growing demand for food assistance across New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and testimony will be submitted with more details and recommendations.



CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I just have one question for the first panelist. The-- is the City compensating you in any way for the cost of the interest on those loans?

TERRY TROIA: No, not at all.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, that's something that the agency has to absorb?

TERRY TROIA: Yes. And you do that by raising money in the community, but people would prefer to give money to our food pantry program.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, that's right. That's money that could be used for actual delivery of service. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you so much for your testimony. The next panel is Judith Rosenfeld, Sabina Saleh [sp?], Annette Terrizzi, and Christina Abbattista. Do we happen to have a second Sabina [sic]? I have two. Okay. Okay, you may begin.

JUDITH ROSENFELD: Good morning. Thank you to the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Judith Rosenfeld, and I am the Vice President of Special Projects at Breaking Ground. As New York City's largest supportive housing provider, Breaking Ground

serves over 13,000 vulnerable New Yorkers each year. We operate 29 transitional and permanent residences with over 5,500 units of housing across New York City, and we have more than 2,000 units of housing in the pipeline. We also operate the Street Outreach Programs and served over 14,000 street homeless New Yorkers last year which led to 1,200 placements into housing. As of today, Breaking Ground is owed \$41 million by the Department of Homeless Services. This includes \$17 million pending repayments from invoices submitted to Passport. Other unclaimed expenses totaling \$24 million cannot be entered in the system until those invoices are cleared. During 2024, we paid \$890,000 in interest expense on our lines of credit and continue to pay \$90,000 per month in 2025, and that's not reimbursed. Our operating cash and available lines of credit will be fully-exhausted by the end of April, and at that point, we will not be able make payroll. This delay isn't just a financial setback, it's a crisis that threatens the very foundation of our work and the safety of thousands of New Yorkers. A lack of funding now also means a drastic reduction in future projects, limiting the housing solutions the city so urgently needs. I

thank you so much for listening today and the opportunity to testify.

SABINA SALEH: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Sabina Saleh, and I'm the Vice President of Behavioral Health for Project Renewal. For over 55 years, Project Renewal has provided shelter, housing, healthcare, and employment services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. We are grateful to the City Council for supporting our programs. As you know, the intersection of the experience of homelessness and mental health challenges impacts far too many New Yorkers and has posed significant challenges for our city. Behavioral health issues are one of the leading causes of homelessness among single adults, and lack of housing makes access to behavioral healthcare services unattainable. Diagnoses go unaddressed and stable housing drifts further out of reach. The cycle continues. Project Renewal works to disrupt the cycle by offering accessible behavioral healthcare to New Yorkers facing homelessness. We have built a network of services that seeks to bridge the gap between providers and hard-to-serve patients. We do this by

embedding behavioral health professionals throughout our facilities. Nurse practitioners, psychiatrists, and occupational therapists are on-site at our shelters, transitional housing, and supportive housing to reduce barriers to care. We also connect unhoused New Yorkers with behavioral healthcare through our Support and Connection Center, a partnership with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The programs is an alternative to arrest and detention. Police and EMS can bring a New Yorker experiencing a mental health crisis to the support and connection center for stabilization and access to other behavioral health resources. This network has only extended so far and can only serve people already in our system who are experiencing an acute crisis. It leaves out thousands of people, but with the right attention and investment, we can expand our network to meet people in need right where they are. For many of them, that means in public spaces. We have successfully provided New Yorkers primary care with our mobile medical vans. We are eager to apply this same strategy to expand access to behavioral healthcare. That is-- almost done. That is why we are requesting a \$200,000 investment from the City

1 Council to initiate the City's first-ever mobile  
2 behavioral health van. We believe this is a critical  
3 evolution in mental health intervention that'll allow  
4 people in need of services to receive care right  
5 where they are. seeing a behavioral health van  
6 parked in a strategic location, stepping right off  
7 the sidewalk, receiving a session with a mental  
8 health professional, and being prescribed treatment  
9 even including medication right on the spot, this can  
10 reach so many people who slip through the cracks of  
11 the support system and continued investment in these  
12 proven programs and supportive models that PRI offers  
13 is critical addressing the city's ongoing mental  
14 health crisis, and we're really grateful for the  
15 Council's continued partnership. I'm available to  
16 answer any questions you might have.

18 CRISTINA ABBATTISTA: Good afternoon,  
19 Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the committee.  
20 My name is Cristina Abbattista and I'm the Policy  
21 Analyst at Urban Pathways, a nonprofit homeless  
22 services and supportive housing provider serving  
23 around 2,500 single adults each year. Thank you for  
24 the opportunity to testify today. Nonprofits  
25 contracted by the City to provide essential services

to our residents most in need are not being paid on time. The fiscal year 2026 budget must take action to resolve payment issues for contracted nonprofits. The lack of normalcy with payments from the City makes it challenging to pay staff, vendors and run programs for the people we serve. Alongside procedural inefficiencies, short staffing within city agencies also contributes to delays in payment. To remedy this, the City Council must require interest be paid on late payments under city contracts with nonprofits through Introduction 514, drastically reform its procurement and payment process with additional staff, updated technology and a streamlined process that eliminates burdens and barriers, ensure the fiscal year 2026 budget include sufficient funding to restore and expand staffing at DHS, DSS and MOCS to eliminate pervasive contracting and reimbursement delays to nonprofit providers. We urge the City Council to reduce barriers in the administration of CityFHEPS to expedite placement in permanent housing. Concrete timelines and guidelines increase accountability and responsiveness and streamlined process are essential in addressing the persistent barriers within the Administration of

CityFHEPS. To combat these barriers the City Council must expedite CityFHEPS applications by committing to a 15-day maximum turnaround from finding an apartment to approval which mirrors the private sector application timeline to ensure that voucher holders can retain permanent housing prospects, and require the creation of an accessible voucher holder checklist that clearly communicates all the necessary paperwork to the recipient to decrease the chances of incomplete or incorrect applications. Thank you for your time, and there's more information in my written testimony.

ANNIE TERRIZZI: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and the members of the Committee on General Welfare. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the critical importance of homelessness prevention. My name is Annie Terrizi and I'm the Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Partnership to End Homelessness, a homelessness prevention organization nonprofit. Today, New York City faces a homelessness crisis of unprecedented scale. More than 4,000 New Yorkers are experiencing street homelessness, and nearly 85,000 people are in the municipal shelter system. Meanwhile, approximately

800,000 people, including one in five city children are in rental areas and at risk of experiencing homelessness, representing 90 percent of the City's homelessness narrative. Despite this overwhelming need, prevention receives only a small portion of public spending on homelessness. While the average rent areas per household is approximately \$3,500, the cost to shelter a family is roughly \$100,000. Addressing the rental areas citywide would cost under \$1.2 billion, a fraction of what the City has spent on emergency shelter expansion. If prevention were prioritized, thousands of New Yorkers could have stayed housed, and the shelter system would have been better equipped to respond to emergencies. Additionally, the city budget does not clearly distinguish how much is allocated specifically for rental areas assistance versus housing vouchers or shelter placements across the bucket of homelessness prevention. We recommend the Council require clearer budget definitions. To effectively address homelessness, we must invest in solutions that prevent it. We urge the Council to prioritize prevention funding in this year's budget. Prevention is the most cost-effective and humanitarian way to



address homelessness keeping more New Yorkers in their homes, strengthening communities, and improving the wellbeing of the city. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I have a question for Judith. The-- I can't even understand my own handwriting. Chicken scratch. Has the administration shared with you what the cause of the delay is in the processing of payments?

JUDITH ROSENFELD: Not that I'm aware of.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The Commissioner mentioned, you know, sometimes it's an invoice, or you know.

JUDITH ROSENFELD: Yeah, all our contracts are registered, so.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And has-- what is the longest amount of time that you've had to--

JUDITH ROSENFELD: [interposing] Some of these ones for-- been years, for like the past three years.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Oh, wow. Okay, alright.

JUDITH ROSENFELD: I'll definitely get you information.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I appreciate that. And Sabina, the Support and Connect program I know is in my district, but when-- and it took a really long time to get that one up and running, but there was supposed to be a second one, and then in former Council Member Ritchie Torres' district, that-- I think it was stalled because of the pandemic. Did it never open?

SABINA SALEH: Originally, there were two centers, one in-- I'm not sure--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Yeah, that was in the Bronx.

SABINA SALEH: Yep, the Bronx. There was one in the Bronx as well, but it actually closed, I believe, sometime last fiscal year. They're not actually under contract with PRI. It was another organization. So, we're the only supporting-- the only center within the city at the moment within your district.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, that's interesting. Okay. Thank you all for your testimony. The next panel is: Daniris Espinal, Gabriela Sandoval Requena, Nadia Swanson, Diana Ramos, Aditi

Bhattacharya, and Laruen Schuster. Yeah, you may begin.

NADIA SWANSON: Hello. Thank you, Chair Ayala, for holding this important hearing today. My name is Nadia Swanson. My pronouns are they/them. I'm the Director of TA and Advocacy at the Ali Forney Center, the world's largest and most comprehensive program serving LGBTQ unhoused youth. We serve about 2,200 youth a year. In 2024 we welcomed 351 new youth, a quarter of which came from outside of the U.S. and 20 percent did not have legal citizenship. The Mayor's plan for asylum-seekers released in March 2023 left 16 to 24-year-olds completely out and took away the critical access DYCD programs rely on within DHS. Our programs are heavily underfunded. We rely heavily on referring youth to DHS, especially Marsha's House while they wait an average of six months to be placed in our housing programs. This allows them to have the capacity to work with their care teams for permanent housing. Our wait lists have doubled in 2024, and this will only become more dire of a situation as we have a large increase of trans youth coming to New York City from other states to seek safety and services. With no additional

financial support, and now the transphobic violence of our federal government, we have the real threat of losing federal contracts. Trans youth would leave Randall's Island HERRC because they didn't feel safe, and the two new trans-specific hotel sites don't meet the full need. So they return to our 24/7 drop-in where the City doesn't allow beds. I've spoken to Marsha's House directly and they expressed being open to accepting youth seeking asylum again, but were bound by the Mayor's orders, especially because of unutilized beds that they have. Because last year I've been getting the runaround even though everyone agrees it's something that should be done. I've advocated at City Council hearings. I spoke directly to the Mayor who set up a meeting with Commissioner Parks who afterwards her team said that they could not change anything, because a HERRC provider said that they are being safe and not transphobic. The Mayor's Office of Asylum-seekers, where they sent us next, was empathetic and tried to help, but was ultimately unsuccessful. Until this directive is reversed for everyone, we need an exception to be made for LGBTQ New Yorkers, especially youth seeking asylum to have a connection to Marsha's House and the

future trans DHS shelter. Additionally, we've had issues with DHS shelters stating that they can't risk "liability." Almost done. For example, one DHS shelter denied a trans man to a men's shelter because of "liability," and another denied a trans man who uses a cane, because the shelter is not ADA compliant, even though the youth stated that they could use stairs. Thank you for our testimony. I can answer any questions.

GABRIELA SANDOVAL REQUENA: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and Council central staff. Good to see you here. Thank you for holding this important-- long and important hearing and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of New Destiny Housing. My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena and I am the Director of the Policy and Communications at New Destiny. New Destiny is the only organization in New York that is focused 100 percent on permanent housing solutions for domestic violence survivors. We implemented the first federally-funded rapid rehousing program for survivors in New York City, and we also operate the largest stock of supportive housing for domestic violence survivors in New York. We're also a co-convenor of the Family Homelessness

Coalition. We do this work because domestic violence is the number one cause of family homelessness in New York City. In fact, domestic violence which has doubled the number of families into shelter than evictions. And access to safe and affordable homes often determines whether survivors leave their abuser and stay alive. The federal government is threatening to cut federal funding for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, which provides critical programs for survivors and New Yorkers, in general. Since 2018, New Destiny has received HUD funding to help hundreds of survivors find a safe, affordable home, and in many cases we also provide temporary rental assistance to them for up to two years. But our program and hundreds of others like it in New York City are at a risk of disappearing. Additionally, funding for Section 8 is being threatened. So this year, more than ever, we need our city to step up and protect survivors. We're submitted extended testimony, so I'll summarize our two priorities. First is enhancing CityFHEPS, and second is increasing funding for the City's Flexible Funding Program for domestic violence survivors to \$6 million. This initiative was rolled

out last year as part of the existing Home Plus program, but due to underfunding, it hasn't had the impact that it should. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

DANIRIS ESPINAL: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Ayala and committee, for allowing me to speak on the Preliminary Budget. My name is Daniris Espinal, a domestic violence survivor and a proud member of New Destiny Survivor Voices Project.

Domestic violence affects countless individuals and one of the most significant barriers to escaping these abusive situations is financial insecurity.

Survivors experience psychological warfare through isolation, fears, and threats. They often grapple with the terrifying prospect of homelessness and

wondering what if the shelters are full? Where would

I go? The shame of lacking resources, navigating a language barrier or facing immigration issues can

paralyze a person who desperately needs to flee an

abusive relationship. Alarming, 75 percent of

domestic violence-related homicides occur upon

separation, making the moment a survivor chooses to

leave their abuser the most perilous time of fall.

Last year the Michael [sic] Grant program received a

mere \$1.2 million funding when it should be allocated \$6 million to truly meet the needs of survivors.

This essential program has provided life-changing services such as housing assistance, case management, safety planning and counseling. It covers critical living expenses including rent, food and children's needs. However, the current funding levels fall short of supporting dedicated program staff, leading to high turnover rates and diminishing the quality of care provided. This instability detrimentally impacts both the implementation of services and the number of survivors that we can assist. The flex funding is designed to be a low barrier for those who have faced unimaginable challenges. Increasing this funding could genuinely save lives, offering hope and security to those striving to break the cycle of abuse. Let us prioritize the resources necessary to empower survivors and foster their healing journey. Thank you.

DIANA RAMOS: Hi, my name is Diana Ramos. I'm with Safety Net Activists, part of the Safety Net Project, and I'm here to talk about my personal experiences, but also say how important it is that we fully fund CityFHEPS, including funding that-- for



the expansion laws that we're fighting to get implemented, because we know these cuts are going to be horrible. The-- whether or not they're as bad as we think they are, they're still going to impact all of us, impact people on Section 8 and benefits, and people are going to lose their housing. They're going to lose whatever little safety net that they have managed to encompass which is going to increase evictions and homelessness, and we need obviously a lot of funding for CityFHEPS. I can't give you numbers. Everybody else did. But also we need to make sure DSS is hiring the staff and training them properly to absolutely cover all these increases in applications that will happen. Not if it happens. It will happen. Not to mention, those of us like myself who are currently getting CityFHEPS and SNAP benefits. We-- I've had issues. I've been here before, and I've talked to you about how I was-- for some reason my SNAP benefits, whatever, wasn't renewed because it was sitting on a supervisor's desk. Not cool. I'm a diabetic. That's not cool. So, obviously, we need more staffing to not only take care of these influx of applications, but those of us who are renewing, we are not getting answers. I know

DSS likes to live in the delulu [sic] land and think that they're calling in is lessened. It hasn't. I called in two and a half months ago to ask about my CityFHEPS, and I waited five hours and got hung up on. So, they need to start staffing that better. But thank you for giving me a chance to testify.

ADITI BHATTACHARYA: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and the members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Aditi Bhattacharya. I use she and her pronouns. I am the Director of Client Services at the New York City Anti-Violence Project, AVP. For 44 years AVP has served LGBTQ and HIV-affected adult survivors of violence citywide with counseling, advocacy and legal support. Alongside we have organized and rallied the voices of allies, including City Council Members such as yourselves, to end all forms of violence against all LGBTQ New Yorkers. I'm here today to ask that the General welfare Committee prioritize the needs of queer and trans LGBTQ New Yorkers as a whole, as a uniquely and multiply [sic] marginalized population in desperate need of support, especially now to keep afloat and to feel safe. LGBTQ New Yorkers are poorer than their cisgendered peers. Transgender and bisexual New

Yorkers, especially folks of color face exponentially higher levels of sexualized violence, pernicious [sic] hate violence than their cisgendered heterosexual peers. LGBTQ New Yorkers are disproportionately dependent on industries that do not promise either income security or health security. They have little to survive on. Many have no family that they can feel safe with. They are alone, and now their identities are open game to be reviled, canceled and rendered invisible by federal order. AVP's hotline calls have spiked by 20 percent just in January and February alone compared to last year. Our clients need identity-affirming therapy, safe and affordable housing, support with benefits navigation with minimal risk of mis-gendering, confusion or other forms of erasure, what my colleague next to me actually spoke in example. They need to feel trust in reporting their experiences of hate and stalking without their experience being minimized or ignored. They need to feel safe talking about how they cope with poverty and grief without the terror of being forcefully institutionalized. My team, our counselors and advocates and our legal colleagues in AVP offer exactly this kind of support.

I'll be done soon. We are the only state recognized LGBTQ-specific rape crisis center that delivers these services effectively and expansively. We are the only queer-specific agency funded by the HRA since 2003 to offer non-rest [sic] supports to LGBTQ New Yorkers. There is literally nobody else like us in New York City that shepherd our community through crisis upon crisis just to be safe and actually to stay alive. I have personally walked a caller last week contacting the hotline. I walked them off the ledge of suicidality because they are afraid to step out and walk their little dog, because they get homophobic epithets at them from a neighbor upstairs. It makes their dog bark, and when their dog barks, then the neighbor threatens not only to hurt them, but to kill their dog. They have reported this to the police, and the police have effectively said that they need more identifiable hate violence before they can step in and take any kind of action. These stories are getting worse, and we at AVP are doing everything we can valiantly to protect our survivor siblings in the LGBTQ community, but we need dedicated and dependable city support to sustain our work. I respectfully ask you at the committee to work

with us and to promote HRA to support our life-saving work. Thank you so much for your time.

LAUREN SCHUSTER: Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Ayala, members of the committee, and staff of the General Welfare Committee for what has become a very, very long day. I am Lauren Schuster, the Vice President of Government Affairs at Urban Resource Institute. I will submit more detailed testimony later on. URI is the largest provider of domestic violence shelter services in the country and a leading provider of temporary housing for families experiencing homelessness. We've recently begun work on our first permanent supportive housing development to help maintain an unbroken continuum of care for our residents and participants. We are grateful for the Council's ongoing support of our sector, our residents, and our participants. Given the uncertainty and the challenges presented by the current political moment, we hope to work together with the Council to ensure that FY26 city budget addresses the following issues. Our contracts must be paid on time. URI is currently owed more than \$20 million from the City of New York for shelter services dating back as far as FY23. We have made

some incredible progress working closely with DSS, and as you heard Commissioner Park talk about the complexity of the funding issues that we face, but increased funding from MOCS and DSS will help us to achieve this goal. Direct Cash Assistance for gender-based violence survivors with no strings attached has had a transformative impact on survivor safety. We are grateful for the flexible funding and advocate to increase it to \$6 million. While nearly every category of major violent crime had decreased, domestic violence, homicides, and felony assaults have increased or remained stubbornly flat, particularly in the Bronx and parts of Brooklyn with a disproportionate impact on Black and Hispanic women. We request the Council support in securing additional funding for youth and community-based violence prevention and healthy relationship education, investment in programs that help survivors address economic abuse, and for accountability programming for people who have caused harm to help interrupt the cycles of generational violence that continue to fuel community-based violence. We thank you for your leadership and partnership and look

forward to working with you moving forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And I just-- you know, I want to just say thank you for coming to lend voice to, you know, the injustices that we're seeing being committed on everyday New Yorker. And for the survivors, I often tell my story about-- I tell about-- I tell everything, you know. I'm an open book, but when I first ran for office it was very difficult for me to do that, because I felt like I was kind of exposing myself a little bit, and I-- you know, it's a very jarring kind of experience. But I remember standing at the train station, and a young woman just randomly running up to me. She was going on the train. She was like, "Oh, my God, it's you." And I guess she had recognized me from one of the pamphlets, and she says, you know, "I just wanted to thank you because I'm also a domestic violence survivor, and you know, I was really touched by your story, and I'm so happy that, you know, you're sharing that publicly." And I think we underestimate how many lives we touch when we share these stories because we've been conditioned since we were little, right, that these things are every private

1 and they stay in the household, but what that does is  
2 that-- it creates a pocket where people were just  
3 kind of like, you know, evaporated into, and they're  
4 not allowed that freedom of choice. They're not  
5 supported. And so I really want-- hope that you know  
6 how impactful just being here and giving testimony is  
7 and how many people, you know, citywide-- you know,  
8 and all of the work that you all are doing, are  
9 listening and are happy to have somebody come and  
10 speak truth to, you know, to the reality that we're  
11 living today. So, thank you very much for your  
12 service and thank you for coming in to testify. The  
13 next panel is Lisa Rivera, Munonyedi Clifford,  
14 Shervon Small, Tiffany Liston, and Mary Fox. You may  
15 begin. Make sure the mic is on. I think it's off.  
16 Thank you. Yeah, there you go.

18 LISA RIVERA: That helps, right? Okay.  
19 Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker, Council Members, and  
20 staff. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.  
21 My name is Lisa Rivera. I'm President and CEO of the  
22 New York Legal Assistance Group also known as NYLAG.  
23 Last year we worked with approximately 130,000  
24 individuals in pursuit of justice, and as you know,  
25 the need in our communities is only growing both in



1 volume and in urgency. While this hearing is an  
2 important opportunity to speak about NYLAG's work  
3 regarding the agencies in your purview today, we must  
4 also acknowledge the broad web of intersecting  
5 budgetary funding needs we see form all aspects of  
6 our organization, including but not limited to,  
7 getting paid on time. None of the work that we do  
8 with New Yorkers exist in a silo, whether around  
9 shelter and benefits or healthcare and housing  
10 access. Our client's interaction with any of the  
11 agencies in your purview that we've heard from today  
12 depend on countless other aspects of their lives and  
13 legal needs. For this reason, our testimony is going  
14 to include a broader view of our asks to serve New  
15 Yorkers in need of our services. On the access to  
16 benefit front, we unfortunately have seen little to  
17 no progress for our clients applying for public  
18 assistance or SNAP benefits. They still encounter  
19 problems completing their applications and  
20 recertifications because the system is either failing  
21 to function or being altogether inaccessible. And  
22 processing delays and more frequent wrongful denials  
23 still persist. It is a common theme year after year.  
24 The staffing and training needs at HRA and DSS alike  
25

remain at a crisis point, and New Yorkers already struggling to get by are the ones that pay the price for this. This is a challenging landscape to navigate even with New Yorkers who have the benefit of a legal advocate in their corner. The purpose and goal of our partnership is to ensure they don't have to fight dysfunctional systems alone to get what they need to live a dignified life. It's not hard to imagine how much more challenging this becomes when someone's also contending with the stress and instability of intimate partner violence, ongoing immigration matters, or low wages. So in addition to drastically improving experiences in New York City's general welfare agencies, we're also imploring you to support our related request for FY26 which include increased funding for legal services for no-income New Yorkers, legal services for veterans, the Immigrant Health Initiative, Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, low-wage worker support, and legal services for low-income immigrants. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to our continued work together. Thank you.

MUNONYEDI CLIFFORD: Good afternoon,  
Chair Ayala and members of the General Welfare

Committee. My name is Munonyedi Clifford and I'm the Attorney-in-Charge of the Citywide Housing Practice at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here with you today. In addition to my remarks, we will be submitting written testimony on behalf of Legal Aid covering the points I discuss. I will also note that the legal services providers, many of whom are seated here, submitted joint testimony covering our concerns about the contracting issues with the City, as well as concerns about the Right to Counsel Program. The Legal Aid Society is the largest and oldest provider of free legal services in New York City offering civil, criminal, and juvenile rights representation to low-income New Yorkers. Our work spans housing, immigration, workers' rights, family law, public benefits and more, ensuring that vulnerable communities receive the legal protection that they need. We have been a provider in New York City's Right to Counsel Program since its inception in 2017. This program has been critical in preventing evictions and keeping New Yorkers in their homes. Yet currently, funding only covers 40 percent of the eligible cases, leaving thousands of vulnerable

tenants without legal representation in eviction proceedings. This gap undermines the very purpose of the Right to Counsel Law. Preserving essential legal-- we thank the Council for its longstanding support of civil legal services and criminal defense programs. The Legal Aid Society is on the front lines of defending New Yorker's rights. Without sustained funding, thousands could go without representation. This is an especially terrible time for immigrants, many of whom are facing increased legal vulnerabilities, housing instability, and systemic barriers to justice. Cutting funding now would only worsen the crisis for immigrant families and other marginalized communities. We urge the City Council to support parity funding to ensure sustainability of our programs. Reforms-- we urge the City Council to support reforms to the contract registration process and payment processes to avoid delays that hinder our ability to serve our clients. We will continue to update the Council throughout the budget process to ensure funding meets the urgent needs of the communities we serve. We ask that your leadership in preserving-- we ask for your leadership in preserving and strengthening the access to justice

for all New Yorkers. Finally, we appreciate your time and commitment to ensuring that New York City's most vulnerable residents including tenants and immigrants continue to have legal protection and advocacy. Thank you.

TIFFANY LISTON: Good afternoon. Hello? Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and the Committee on General Welfare. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Tiffany Liston and I'm the Executive Director of Mobilization for Justice. For over 60 years, Mobilization for Justice has provided free civil legal services to New Yorkers who are low-income, disenfranchised or have disabilities. We also conduct community education, advocate for policy and bring impact litigation. Every year we handle approximately 14,000 cases from across the city, across every borough in the broad areas of housing, disability and aging rights, economic justice, and children's rights. Through our services we prevent homelessness, help seniors and people with disabilities live independently, stabilize families, support immigrants and children with mental health disabilities, and address racial disparities. We're speaking here today in the midst of several crises.

Surging homelessness, skyrocketing cost of living, marginalization of the vulnerable, and the city struggling to meet the needs of its existing residents, let alone those of our newest neighbors who come here seeking safety, stability, and opportunity. And we're tackling these issues in the face of the federal administration's openly hostile--who is openly hostile to our ideals of public service and the public good. So the nonprofit community in New York City also is facing severe delays in contract payments, which you've already heard, and also hiring obstacles amidst the challenges of parity pay for public service work. It has been a tough year, especially for our clients. No one wants to find themselves embroiled in a complex system that requires a lawyer they simply cannot afford, yet far too many do. At Mobilization for Justice we seek to be their advocate and their ally and often this work is life-saving, but doing so requires resources and I'm here to strongly urge the Council to build and budget those resources. Just quickly, I'm here asking you to support the initiatives of legal services for the working poor, which you'll hear my colleague speak about, family advocacy and

guardianship support, Immigrant Opportunity Initiative, legal services for low-income immigrants, low-wage worker support, and the new Protect New York City Families Initiative. Thank you very much. We appreciate your continued support and working with you.

SHERVON SMALL: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and members of the Committee. My name is Shervon Small and I serve as the Executive Director of Legal Services NYC. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the important work that LSNY does every day in keeping families housed, combatting poverty, ensuring financial and community stability and assisting New Yorkers in securing the necessities of life. Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the country. Without our services and the services my colleagues on the podium here today, poverty deepens, homelessness rises, and New York City becomes a more unstable place for everyone. New York City stands at a crossroads and we need to choose to stand up for civil society and for our friends and neighbors in need. LSNY and our partner organizations provide essential services to people in need by, for example,

reducing homelessness and increasing the economic security. We save this city enormous amounts of money, money that will be all the more necessary should federal funding be threatened more broadly. Consider this, LSNY eviction defense and public benefits practice saved the City over \$300 million last year by preventing evictions and keeping families out of shelters and by ensuring access to benefits that stabilize households. For every dollar spent on civil legal services, New York City sees a return of nearly ten to one in reduce shelter costs, preserved housing, and increased economic participation. Funding is crucial here, but so is a smooth and functioning contract process. as you've heard many times today, and everybody's well aware, the City remains extremely delayed in paying nonprofits who have provided contracted and crucial services to low-income New Yorkers, requiring nonprofits including LSNY to regularly borrow just to remain afloat when city agencies fall sometimes 10 months or more behind in processing fees. No nonprofit can survive under these circumstances. Our staff deserve to be paid and deserve to be paid on time for the work that they do for this city. These



delays also weaken the safety net and put vital services at risk. The consequences for a failing nonprofit sector would be devastating. As the City Council considers budget and policy decisions, I urge this committee to continue investing in civil legal services. Think of us not just as an expense, but as a crucial tool for keeping New Yorkers housed, employed, and safe. Thank you for your time.

MARY FOX: Thank you, Chair Ayala, Committee on General Welfare and to the City Council for the longstanding support for Legal Services Working Poor Coalition. My name is Mary Fox and I'm the Associate Director of Housing Conservation Coordinators, one of five members of the Legal Services Working Poor Coalition that also includes CAMBA Legal Services, Mobilization for Justice, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp, and Take Root Justice. The Coalition was created with the support of Council nearly 20 years ago to address civil legal needs of working poor whose income is slightly higher than the poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering them ineligible for free legal services from many organizations. Working poor services are critical in allowing worker New Yorkers to maintain financial

independence and preserving economic stability in communities across the City. In fiscal 25, the initiative was funded at \$3.45 million which each of the five coalition members receiving \$455,000. In fiscal year 26, Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition is respectfully requesting \$600,000 allocation which would include a full restoration of the \$455 allocated in 25. This support will allow us to provide critical legal services and allow providers to deepen their impact in the practice areas of immigration, worker's rights, benefits, and economic justice. Additionally, the impacts of cuts and actions on the federal level significantly threaten the social safety net for the working poor. We continue to see working poor who can barely eat, make ends meet, thus have no disposable income to pay for an attorney, and they face catastrophic consequences as a result of their civil legal problems. Common problems include not being paid for their work, freezing of a bank account because of a collection lawsuit they didn't know about, being denied public benefits which they are entitled. Consequences of these legal issues can lead to other problems including increased risk of an eviction.

1                                   COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE                                   235  
2       These working New Yorkers can end up spiraling  
3       downward into the ranks of the poor, as they do not  
4       have access to lawyers to assist them. We represent  
5       New Yorkers in all five boroughs, and we respectfully  
6       request funding during these critical times. Thank  
7       you.

8                                   CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you  
9       all for your service. I'm very familiar with all of  
10      the different organizations, and you guys do really  
11      fantastic work. Thank you for your testimony.

12                                  UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

13                                  CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Our next panel is  
14      Keriann Parks-- Pauls, Bill Bryan, Dan Alvarez [sp?],  
15      and Jack Boyle. You may begin.

16                                  JACK BOYLE: My name is Jack Boyle and I  
17      work as a Staff Attorney at the Neighborhood Defender  
18      Service of Harlem at our Right to Counsel Housing  
19      Practice. I'm testifying today on behalf of the NDS  
20      staff union. We have two basic asks for the City  
21      Council today. First, tell HRA to stop threatening  
22      to fire Right to Counsel attorneys and staff, and  
23      second, ensure that we're paid at parity with City  
24      and State employees. HRA recently moved all  
25      providers onto a contract system where we're

1 threatened with significant budget cuts unless we  
2 take on more cases every single month than we ever  
3 have since Right to Counsel began. HRA now does not  
4 give us any credit for the many complicated year's  
5 long rollover cases that our attorneys have to  
6 litigate to fully protect tenants, and HRA does not  
7 account for the substantial advocacy work that is  
8 required to get the public benefits that are  
9 necessary to resolve a case. And HRA did not provide  
10 additional funding to hire more staff to process the  
11 higher case load. Instead, HRA produced a flat  
12 demand for a set number of cases that we have to take  
13 on every single month, no matter what. As a result,  
14 case loads for our attorneys have exploded over the  
15 last year. Many are carrying 30 percent or more  
16 cases than they have in previous years and we do not  
17 have 30 percent more free time during the work day to  
18 complete these assignments. Due in part to the  
19 significant delays at HRA with issuing benefits like  
20 CityFHEPS, cases today actually take substantially  
21 longer to resolve than they have in the past. HRA  
22 has directly threatened several offices with budget  
23 cuts, and it was only through extensive advocacy that  
24 those cuts were in the end reversed. We understand  
25

1 that we're at risk again of these cuts in June, and  
2 as staff who would be affected by these cuts, we  
3 implore the council to advocate with HRA to stop  
4 these threats so that we can actually focus on our  
5 job which is defending affordable housing in the  
6 community. Second, we're asking that the Council  
7 ensure pay parity between legal services workers and  
8 City and State employees. Currently, some of our  
9 members are so severely underpaid as to income  
10 qualify and require our services in Housing Court to  
11 protect their homes. It is psychologically  
12 overwhelming for our staff to show up every day to  
13 stop evictions when the funders of our work are  
14 placing those same staff at direct risk of eviction  
15 themselves by failing to pay a living wage. We're  
16 paid substantially less and receive fewer benefits  
17 than our counterparts who work directly in the City  
18 and State governments. There's simply no  
19 justification for this gap, and the Council should  
20 advocate for it to end. Thank you.

22 BILL BRYAN: Hi, my name's Bill Bryan.  
23 I'm the Director of the Civil Justice Practice at  
24 Brooklyn Defender Services. Thank you to the  
25 committee and Chair Ayala for the opportunity to

testify today and for your continued support of legal services programs like ours. BDS represents more than 23,000 people each year whose lives are impacted by the criminal, family and immigration legal systems. Our civil practice works to minimize the consequences of this system involvement and provides legal and social work support to ensure our clients keep their jobs, stay in their homes, and acquire essential benefits and services. In these hearings we often focus on impactful individual stories highlighting the extreme challenges our clients face and the complex litigation our staff engage in to resolve them, but I also want to focus on examples where brief advice or early intervention can resolve or avoid a legal issue, as it's here that the Council funding we rely on truly has an impact, allowing us to intervene when answering today's legal questions can avoid tomorrow's legal problems. For example, working with clients at our family practice, we routinely avoid public benefits issues and nonpayment proceedings where families with children are temporarily removed from their care. By ensuring rental assistance, housing voucher budgets remain unaffected by changes in household size. Without

intervention children are often removed from budgets resulting in rent not being paid and eventually nonpayment proceedings being filed often before the family is even aware that there's an issue. So in one version of this story we have a best case scenario of being connected with a housing attorney through a Right to Counsel Program who can hopefully identify the cause of the reduction, work with DSS to get arrears paid, and discontinue the case to avoid eviction. In another, we can preemptively avoid a need for housing representation by ensuring the family is aware of their right to keep their children on their budget, and advocating with HRA to resolve erroneous reductions. So we're grateful to Speaker Adams and the Council for the Speaker's Initiative funding that allows us the flexibility to provide this type of preventive legal assistance, and we ask that this funding be renewed. The written testimony that I'll submit will provide further details on the program initiative and discretionary funding requests that we're making to ensure we can continue to do this work. So we thank the committee for the opportunity today and for your continued support of

our clients, their families and the communities we all represent.

KERIANN PAULS: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Keriann Pauls and I'm the Interim Executive Director at TakeRoot Justice. I just like to say thank you so much, Deputy Speaker Ayala. It's incredible to be here and to really feel heard and witness how you are listening to all of the folks from the nonprofit sector here testifying before you. So it's really a pleasure. I appreciate it. TakeRoot provides legal participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups to dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression. We're proud members of the LEAP Coalition, the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition, the CILEC IOI Coalition and many others across the City, and we are experiencing the same contracting delays as others, and I really want to amplify all that's been said here today around those. I'm also here to raise before the Council issues that we'd like to bring up to meet this moment and build on our partnerships to serve members, especially immigrant New Yorkers across the City. first, the Council initiatives administered by



DSS/HRA such as Legal Services for the Working Poor like my colleague just spoke of and low-wage worker support need to be enhanced both to meet the increased need for services and to address the ever-rising cost of living and cost of operations for nonprofits. Both initiatives fund essential legal services work for immigrant New Yorkers and communities most at risk during these times of increased oppression coming from the federal administration. I'm also here to ask for continued oversight and partnership to push the administration as it proceeds with a request for proposals for the baselined Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, also administered through DSS/HRA. In its current draft, the RFP fails to recognize the real needs of immigrant communities, and I'll be attaching our formal request for proposal protest letter with my written testimony that details a full list of the issues, but today I'd like to highlight a few of our major concerns. First, the total proposed baseline IOI funding and resulting case rate are woefully insufficient to meet the need of services. It has-- it's been flattened. It hasn't increased, and in fact the way the RFP is structured, decreases the

case rate for providers. Additionally, the IOI RFP scope of services has been cut, eliminating crucial components of the program such as trainings and outreach, brief services and the flexibility for providers to provide holistic services. All of these terms have been incredibly important in the past and are increasingly important today, and the Administration needs to completely reform the way it structured the IOI RFP. And so anyway, thank you so much again for your oversight. Thank you much for hearing us and your attention to these pressing matters.

DANIEL ALVAREZ: Good afternoon Council. My name is Daniel Alvarez. I am a Black trans 20-year-old youth advocate at Youth Represent. I've come to share my personal experience that I'm still going through in the homeless youth community, as well as speak about the lack of funding in the city budget for homeless youth. I've been in the shelter system for two years, and some of the consistent rising problems is housing, are not having enough help in a system that could provide much more with support and resources to the youth living in it. Throughout the time I've been in the shelter system,

I've seen a lot of young people not be able to receive proper assistance for medical care. I've seen young people that don't get proper wholesome meals, including myself, because there's not enough money given from the City to do more than stretch out cans of spaghetti and meatballs or ramen. Unfortunately, a lot of young people don't receive public assistance and it's like a never-ending rollercoaster with the improper care from people that work in the facilities we the youth get placed into. There's a few things I think the City's budget should go to and it's all to help the youth that are living in these environments. Often times, we're overlooked and it's time someone speaks up. We need mental healthcare. We need more spaces for queer youth like the Ali Forney Center. We need better food options and three full meals a day. We need good hygiene products. We need job readiness programs. We need programs where youth can explore outlets and network on various career paths. We need places that offer free clothes for those who don't have any. We need people to come into these environments that work here to be properly trained in caring and providing for youth with resources. Lastly, we need a city who cares, not just about

crime, but also about the youth as it is a known fact that the NYPD gets more money funded towards their budget than the youth who are incarcerated, homeless, and of the LGBTQ community. This year, I'm looking forward to continuing to advocate for the Youth Justice and Opportunities Act and the Right to Remain Silent Act. As I close this out, I'd like to give a shout out to programs like Youth Represent, Exalt, and Freedom Agenda for giving me the space to become a youth advocate and express myself freely. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That was so nice. You did so good. Were you nervous? You didn't come off as being nervous. It was really good. It was really good, and again, as I've said before, I really love when young people come to testify. I love when people share their, you know, personal experiences, because you are expressing something that is impacting so many people that look like you, that sounds like you, that are going through the same thing, and I'm so happy that you came today to testify. If you need anything, yeah, we're here. Thank you to this panel and thank you for the work that you do. We will be fighting, you know, for

restorations and enhancements where possible.

Specifically, the Right to Counsel program, you know, is one that, you know, this body has championed throughout the years. It's-- this is a tremendously important tool to keep folks housed, especially, you know, in light of the fact that we are now seeing the biggest, you know, housing crisis of our generation. And so thank you all for coming. We'll continue to talk. The next panel is Hillary Wilson, Omarax Rosa, Marlene Polanco, Chanya Holness. Hold on, I think we're missing somebody, just want to make sure. Hillary? Hillary Wilson? Omarax? Marlene and Chanya, okay, alright. Marcus Jackson? Come on up. The price is right for you today. You may begin, whichever corner.

MARLENE POLANCO: Thank you, Chair Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Marlene Polanco and I am the Infant Toddler Specialist at the Chinese-American Planning Council, the nation's largest Asian-American social service organization. CPC offers six early childhood centers through contracts with the New York City Department of Education, serving over 310 children ages zero to

four. These families rely on services like ours to ensure that children receive the developmental support they need while allowing parents to work and provide for their family's basic needs. This is a sentiment shared by many in our community. It is crucial that we address the issues surrounding the accessibility, affordability, and the flexibility of childcare. As someone who works with childcare providers and families and as a mother myself, I understand the struggles of securing high-quality childcare. I've witnessed firsthand how expensive childcare can be, stretching the budgets of working-class families. High-quality daycare centers are also often located far from where families need them the most, and many reputable centers have long waiting lists, making it even harder for parents to find a spot. It doesn't have to be this way. Our city has the power to make the necessary investments to ensure that all families regardless of class or immigration status have access to the care they deserve. We urge the city to pass Universal Childcare so that every child can access quality comprehensive care. Thank you for your time and for the

opportunity to speak on issues that deeply impact our community.

MARCUS JACKSON: Good afternoon. My name is Marcus Jackson and I'm testifying on behalf of Encore Community Services. I would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to testify today about the urgent need for increased funding to support our city's older adults. Encore provides more than 750,000 meals to New Yorker annually through our home delivered meals system and our older adult centers. However, the City's current funding only supports a single meal per day. This forces older adults to ration out their one meals to try to make it stretch as long as possible until they receive the next meal the following day. This is even more imperative over the weekend when that one meal has to last now two to three days, which is just a serious issue. We urge the City Council to increase meal funding to provide three meals daily for elderly people in need. Furthermore, the City's reimbursement rates must reflect the actual cost of food in operations, particularly for the weekends. In addition, we have - to chronic underfunding. The City's delayed payments to nonprofit providers like Encore are

jeopardizing our ability to serve older New Yorkers effectively. The prolonged reimbursement process forces us to make difficult financial decisions, including exploring expansive lines of credit to bridge loans to cover basic operating costs.

Outstanding payments to Encore alone total in the millions of dollars, and as you heard earlier today, there are a plethora of other organizations that are also facing similar issues with delayed payment and reimbursement. We strongly urge the Council to take action. Accelerating these payments will allow us to focus on our core mission and direct more resources toward direct services, as opposed to trying to compensate for the lack that we have. New York City's older adult centers are aging alongside with their members. At Encore we struggle with outstanding infrastructure, including malfunctioning elevators and deteriorating HVAC systems, which leaves us with unacceptable conditions for facilities that serve as emergency cooling centers for older adults in times of extreme heat waves and etcetera. In conclusion, I would just like to add that the older adults that we serve have built this city and they deserve to age with dignity and security. Increased meal funding,



timely city payments, capital investments, and expand case management programs are essential to ensuring their wellbeing. I wanted to thank the Council today for your time and allowing us to share these issue and concerns with you today.

CHANYA HOLNESS: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Chanya Holness and I am the Senior Coordinator of Policy and Advocacy at Children's Health Fund. Today, I will speaking about the importance of continued and increased funding for programming that critically supports schools and parents and ensuring that students are well-positioned to thrive in schools, like our New York City Council-funded program, Healthy and Ready to Learn, or HRL. HRL was developed by Children's Health Fund in 2014 as part of our mission of supporting kids so they can thrive. The program is designed to help schools identify and address health barriers rooted in social, racial and economic inequities that impact student learning. When students have their health needs met, meaning when they can see the board, hear their teacher, focus on school work and so on, they're more likely

to learn and succeed in school, ultimately translating into a greater likelihood of a productive and happy life. HRL started with a strong focus on screening and responding to these health barriers to learning, and while we continue to address these health barriers, we have evolved to include trauma-sensitive school and home environments to better address the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and surrounding social issues like racism and violence. Through our current model we leverage findings from our flagship school, PS49 in the Bronx in Councilwoman Diana Ayala's district, to inform materials and trainings that we conduct with educators, administrators and parents citywide, and through our Resource and Training Center, RTC. Launched in 2017, RTC is an online platform that enables Children's Health Fund to scale our impact to reach students throughout New York City through an online library of infographics, fact sheets, learning-- interactive learning images and others. Regarding our impact, since 2017, nearly 52,000 users have accessed our RTC, and in fiscal year 2024 the RTC had nearly 8,000 users and we've reached nearly 2,000 individuals through our workshops and

1 trainings. Our impact is clear and the demand for  
2 our programming continues to increase. To meet the  
3 growing need in our most vulnerable communities, our  
4 FY26 goals include expanding to more workshops,  
5 enhancing early childhood programming and developing  
6 tailored support for immigrant families. To end,  
7 I'll say that for these reasons Children's Health  
8 fund urges the New York City Council and the Mayor to  
9 include funding to secure critical investments for  
10 early childhood learning, mental health program and  
11 our Healthy and Ready to Learn initiative. These  
12 actions will expand access for thousands more  
13 students throughout the City, giving them the best  
14 chance in succeeding in school and life. Thank you.

16 OMARAX ROSA: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala  
17 and esteemed members of the Committee on General  
18 Welfare. My name is Omarax Rosa and I serve as a  
19 Director of Housing Justice at the Harlem Community  
20 Justice Center initiative of the Center for Justice  
21 Innovation. Thank you for your-- the opportunity to  
22 testify. At the Center for Justice Innovation we  
23 recognize the array of factors that contribute to  
24 community safety from mental health issues,  
25 addiction, lack of economic opportunity or more. Our

programs seek to address these issues. Housing plays a critical role in this. If you want to build safe, healthy communities and a very humane justice center, we need to fight for housing justice. We thank this council for their partnership thus far and look forward to continue progress in the upcoming fiscal year. The Center operates two housing resource centers, one in Harlem and the other one in Red Hook. Our housing resource centers help tenants, supporting them and documenting and tracking their repair needs, as well as assessing and navigating the court system when needed to hold NYCHA and other landlords accountable. Over the last year, our client volume has increased significantly. Even just being open three days a week last year, we had 3,151 clients' visits, including working with 181 households on one-shot deals and many more on SNAP and other HRA benefit issues. So many of the people we work with come in in wheelchairs, walkers, and really cannot make the trip downtown to 111 Center Street. We've actually done over 500 virtual court filings and answers through VCAN, our virtual court access network, in response to that need, and have even been getting accommodations granted for virtual

appearances in our space. ACJC is slowly returning to the one-stop-shop it once was, and our great partner HRA would be a huge piece of the picture to restore it to that critical support. They have historically been and continue to be a great partner that has helped with the goal of providing community members with safe, stable housing and addiction prevention. One mission at the center that we have is to build community safety. Partnerships with government and other community-based organizations and community members is community safety. Economic justice is community safety. Housing justice is community safety. We have to look at the challenges our communities face in a holistic way. It is impossible to build safety or reduce the use of jail without housing justice. We need to prioritize fundamental needs. We cannot achieve [inaudible] ideals such as equity, freedom, healthy, resilient, and thriving communities. Our justice system plays an important role in this, and as the center's role to make sure that this system is accessible, equitable and understandable. We look forward to continuing to fight for housing justice in the upcoming fiscal

year, and appreciate the Council's partnership in this effort. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Omarax, do you anticipate that the site is going to become, like, operational five days a week anytime soon? Your mic.

OMARAX ROSA: That's something that we are hoping and that we're fighting for, and we're working together with OCA and also with our partner agencies as well.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. What is the hold up?

OMARAX ROSA: There's repair issues that have to be done.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, alright, yes. I'll follow up on some of those, because I think we fund it. Thank you so much. Thank you guys. Our final in-person panel is Jeremiah Sedona [sp?], Danna Dennis, Brian-- I don't know-- I can't-- yeah. Thank you. Thank you for that. And Sharon Brown. You may begin.

DANNA DENNIS: Actually did the opposite. Okay, good afternoon everyone. I know, long day. Thank you, Council Chair Ayala and also esteemed

committee members. So my name is Danna Dennis. I am a senior organizer at the Rider's Alliance. We're a grassroots group made up of subway and bus riders from all across New York City, and I am sitting before you today to advocate for the expansion of the Fair Fares program. This is something that I come before you year after year to discuss. The program itself is vital for the wellbeing of countless New Yorkers, right, who rely on our city's transit system. It's something that I personally have been working on for a decade. It is the most important thing I probably have ever worked on in my life. Fair Fares is a program that I can tangibly see impact my community. I see it across the city. I see it go into the hands of riders, and it changes lives. Being able to have the discount, being able to have access to programs, appointments, schools, being able to search for work, it is something that folks feel. And especially when you're living and facing what it feels like in the survival mode, right, and poverty which unfortunately way too many New Yorkers are facing. We pride ourselves on, you know, being the richest city in the world, but we also need to know that there are many New Yorkers who don't feel that

1 impact. A lot of us are just working two and three  
2 jobs. We have two and three roommates, and we're  
3 barely being able to keep a roof over our heads. So  
4 I'm representing those New Yorkers today as I speak  
5 to you. It is pivotal, right? Every year we come to  
6 talk about Fair Fares, and it really isn't a program  
7 that we have found that the Council struggles to  
8 support. Often Council Members come out and support  
9 Fair Fares. Actually, it was in your first year,  
10 Council Member Ayala, as a Council Member that you  
11 were immediately a champion, and we have seen that  
12 with many folks, including the Speaker herself,  
13 right, Speaker Adams. But we want to encourage  
14 everyone-- sorry, I'll wrap it up-- one more time to  
15 just come out on behalf of this program. We're at  
16 145 percent the ask this year as it has been for the  
17 last couple of years. It's really to get us to that  
18 200,000 mark. My other colleagues here aware going to  
19 speak to that, but we're talking about having  
20 currently up to 400,000 riders enrolled and that 200  
21 percent would get us another 400,000 riders.  
22 Everyone in this room knows someone who's making  
23 \$29,000 who's struggling, but if you increase Fair  
24 Fares to 200 percent of the federal poverty line,



that's what it's going to be, a single individual at \$29,000 who can then get it. So imagine what it feels like to make less than \$29,000 and still be trying to get a discount for your transit fare. Thank you.

JEREMIAH GONZALEZ: Can you hear me?

Alright. Esteemed members of the City Council, good afternoon. My name is Jeremiah Gonzalez. I live in the Bronx. I was born in the Bronx. I lived in this city my entire life. I obtained the subway countless times to get to where I need to go, and it was the subway that got me here today. Now, I-- in my 20 years I've grown to love the transit system. The subway, the transit system, it's a lifeblood of our city. How can New York City access without it? I took the subway to get here as I said, but there are many-- and millions-- millions even who take the subway to get to work and to school. There are many more who travel our subway to say to medical appointments. Hey, some of them are trying to get to a job [inaudible] for example. And listen, I am unemployed. I'm currently looking for a job. As you may know, sometimes if a job makes you offer, you have to go to another part of the city to show off

1 your skills. A job interview is already nerve-  
2 racking, a make or break moment for your future  
3 career, so sometimes unfortunately people who get a  
4 job interview can't make it. Some of them may not  
5 have enough money, \$5.80 to spend on a trip there and  
6 trip back home. As a person looking for work, I  
7 don't want that fear to be in my mind. So, I'm glad  
8 to know that Fair Fares exists, and I really have  
9 Fair Fares, I told you. This is my Fair Fares  
10 [inaudible] cards, right? And I live in the Bronx.  
11 I have to take the bus to get the subway. I imagine  
12 you've seen some scenes of people who are skipping  
13 the turnstiles, who are walking through the other  
14 doors, not paying their fair share. Some of them  
15 might not bother paying the fare, and some of them--  
16 well, some of them can't pay, because they don't have  
17 enough money. They might not know about Fair Fares  
18 or maybe they're not even eligible, and that's why  
19 I'm here with my fellow colleagues to urge the City  
20 Council to-- instead of providing Fair Fares in the  
21 future [inaudible] 145 percent of the federal poverty  
22 limit, increase it to 200 percent of the FPL, right?  
23 Now, fare evasion is a major problem that plagues the  
24 MTA. I'm sure you've seen the news about that lately,  
25

1 but it don't solve a problem by cutting off a snake's  
2 head, you solve a problem from the roots, and I think  
3 the root of the problem is that they won't pay  
4 because they can't. I think that Fair Fares is an  
5 excellent way to help reduce that fair evasion, and  
6 hope that you folk will agree with me and with the  
7 rest of us on that point. Thank you, esteemed  
8 Council Members.

10 BRIAN FRITSCH: Good afternoon. I'm  
11 Brian Fritsch, Associate Director of the Permanent  
12 Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. I want  
13 to start by sincerely thanking the Council, you  
14 Deputy Speaker, Speaker Adams, for your steadfast  
15 commitment to the Fair Fares program. the expansion  
16 of Fair Fares to 145 percent of the federal poverty  
17 level was an important step in the right direction,  
18 as was the recent expansion to Omni, but we share  
19 your frustration with the slow pace of implementation  
20 over this past year. You know, we also believe that  
21 at its current level it's just not enough. The  
22 working poor, the backbone of our city, deserve more  
23 support for us. PCAC analysis found that expanding  
24 Fair Fares to 200 percent of FPL would expand  
25 eligibility to over 415,000 more residents who are

currently struggling. This includes 160,000 regular commuters, including fulltime minimum wage employees who are incredibly likely to be transit-dependent, but currently earn too much to qualify for Fair Fares. Deputy Speaker, you asked earlier about the cost of the program. Our colleagues at the Community Service Society estimate that the expansion would cost between \$36 and \$40 million annually. But you know, at its current rate, New York City is still the least generous of the major U.S. cities offering public transit discounts for low-income residents despite having one of the highest costs of living and highest poverty rates. Nearly all other cities used 200 percent as their income limit, and most also offer discounts on their commuter rail systems, which New York City currently does not do. It's time we change that, too, so people who live in subway deserts, but are close to the Long Island Railroad or Metro North can use Fair Fares benefits on whichever system is most convenient to them. We want to thank Senator Comrie for leading the charge on this in the Senate. It was recently included in the Senate One House Budget last week. They've been great advocates for this as well. You know, transit is the lifeblood

of our city and equitable access to affordable transportation equals economic mobility and opportunity. Thank you for continuing to champion Fair Fares.

SHARON LESLIE BROWN: Hello. My name is Sharon Brown. Before I begin, remember Israel. Defend Israel. Release the hostages. Let Yahweh's people go. Okay. I agree with the Fair Fares, but I believe that we also need to go further than just giving people things that sometimes are considered handouts. Although they need it, we also want to get people into doing things for themselves. We want to fund home ownership. We want people to go from the street directly into houses, not into shelters where they're in there and it's come to a crisis point. So we have a crisis right now in California, New York, everywhere. We see over the years it has come to a critical point. What has been done has not been working. We need to do something different. If you tell people they are sick-- mental health tells people you are ill. The Bible says you are well. The people who follow the Bible direction do well. The people you tell they can't do something, they don't do it. Fund home ownership. Fund vehicles

ownership. Fund businesses for the homeless, not programs telling them they're messed up, but programs that engage their talents and skills. If we want things to get better and not just sit and complain about what's going wrong. Tell people what are your skills, let's find out those, and let's make it a business. Let's fund business ownership training. If the person has the talent, the skill, but doesn't know how to handle the business side, they can get training for that. We can get them directly on the business training instead of just on-the-job training. We need to do something new on business or in business training. And fund buying business clubs and fund buying stocks and bonds, and get for-- the last thing I'll say, fund the veterans and military housing. They should not be homeless. Pay them as if they were on-duty when they were on the street. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much, Sharon. It's nice to see you. Thank you all for your testimony today. If we have inadvertently missed someone that had the intentions of testifying who we did not get to, you have an opportunity to go to the Sergeant at Arms and fill out a form. Seeing

none, then we will move to the online portion of this hearing. Thank you.

SHARON LESLIE BROWN: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright. Our next panel consists of-- I'll just call it out and then we'll start with the first. Stephen Grimaldi, Joel Berg, Jennifer Hinojosa, Jimmy Meagher, Natalie Interiano, Lily Shapiro, and Adaeze Okoli in that order. Stephen Grimaldi?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin, please.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Hold on, Steve, you're muted.

STEPHEN GRIMALDI: Okay, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

STEPHEN GRIMALDI: Great. Good afternoon everyone. Good afternoon, Chair Ayala. Nice to see you and all of your esteemed peers. My name is Stephen Grimaldi, as was mentioned. I'm the Executive Director of the New York Common Pantry. I'm here today to discuss the critical issue of food insecurity in New York City like my peers spoke earlier about some of the core issues with relate-- as it relates to CFC and federal cuts. The statistics in our city speak for themselves. 1.3

1 million households, nearly 3 million people in New  
2 York City are struggling to make ends meet across--  
3 according to the True Cost of Living Report. Three  
4 out of four New York City residents say the cost of  
5 food is rising faster than their income, and the  
6 Robin Hood Report just released a report that said  
7 one in three New Yorkers has used a food pantry in  
8 the past three years. Last year, the New York Common  
9 Pantry served more than 11 million years-- meals,  
10 excuse me. We assisted nearly 730,000 guests and we  
11 expanded our mobile programs. We now have 350  
12 partners across the city. Of those, over 280 are food  
13 distribution sites. We and organizations like us and  
14 those in the Roundtable battle daily to feed the  
15 millions of New Yorkers who are food insecure and  
16 struggling, but we cannot do it alone. We are  
17 grateful for the City Council. It has funded crucial  
18 food security initiatives in the past, but now you're  
19 expanded support is more urgent than before. Just in  
20 the last two weeks with the recent Department of  
21 Agriculture termination of the Local Food Purchase  
22 Assistant Cooperative Agreement, the end of the EFSP  
23 which is a program we have been funding for over 20  
24 years, has taken away over \$2 million in support in  
25



the coming year for the New York Common Pantry alone. Potential cuts to the Farm Bill appropriations that cover safety net programs such as SNAP, WIC, and CFSP-- City Council must fill the funding gap to support the organizations feeding food insecure New York City residents.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has expired.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can wrap up.

STEPHEN GRIMALDI: This begins with providing food pantries with direct support to provide healthy, nutritious food with proper staffing and operations. Proposed 2026 funding for the Community Food Connection is \$20.9 million. This is woefully inadequate to feed the high volume of hungry neighbors in need. For example, if CSFP gets cut, 36,000 seniors who now receive food through this program will need to come to food pantries, increasing their burden. We respectfully request that the baseline funding for CFC be increased to \$100 million. Finally, we appeal to the Mayor and the City Council to provide this much-needed funding that will allow us to continue meeting this

intractable and growing need throughout the City.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Joel Berg?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JOEL BERG: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's late in the day, so I'll be brief about three points. One, first of all, thanks for your incredible leadership continued on these issues, but I hope we don't normalize just how crazy the testimony's been over and over and over again about payments that have been late years, millions of dollars owed to struggling nonprofits. The federal government, as evil as it's been lately, when you're in their system, they pay the next day. You electronically bill. let's not normalize this bunch of Mayor's [sic] promise to fix the budget [sic] of comptrollers have threatened-- you promise to fix this. Can we just make people pay as government employees contingent upon them paying nonprofits? They wouldn't go two or three years without being paid. We shouldn't. So let's not normalize this. Two, I hope everyone understands that the safety net is still by far the most important thing in terms of

1 fighting hunger. Food bank, City Harvest, the  
2 pantries and kitchens do incredible work filling in  
3 the gaps, but I hope we understand that the federal  
4 safety net programs equals 17 times the dollar among  
5 of food distributed by every charity in New York in  
6 America. So number one, it's good that HRA's had  
7 some progress on on-time delivery of benefits, but it  
8 should be 100 percent. The 30-day requirement for  
9 processing benefits goes back to 1977, before email,  
10 before web. It is just insane that we continue not to  
11 give people benefits within the 30 days required by  
12 federal law. Lastly, I hope the Council continues to  
13 fund the New York City Benefits Initiative and the  
14 request from Hunger Free America and others to fund  
15 SNAP and WIC and summer EBT outreach. Every dollar  
16 we spend of city funds helps fill \$60 worth of  
17 groceries into grocery carts. So it continues to be  
18 the single-most cost-effective way the Council can  
19 help us fight hunger. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Jennifer  
22 Hinojosa?

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

24 JENNIFER HINOJOSA: Thank you,  
25 Chairperson Ayala and to all the members of the

General Welfare Committee, for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. My name is Jennifer Hinojosa. I'm a Policy Analyst at the Community Service Society, a long-time nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of low-income New Yorkers through research, advocacy and direct services. I would like to present very quickly some highlights from our 2024 Housing and Economic Security Survey which was conducted in the fall of 2024 related to barriers to accessing public benefits. We found that nearly three out of five benefit recipients, which is about 57 percent, face significant challenges when applying for and receiving benefits. The most commonly cited obstacles included the application process was too slow or the processing times were too long, confusion about eligibility and paperwork requirements, difficulty accessing physical office locations, and lastly, challenges navigating digital applications and online forms. I'd also like to note that accessing of physical location was a major challenge for our seniors, and while households that were unable to afford high-speed internet more likely struggle with online portions of the process. I'm going to skip our benefits clip. We do have that in

my testimony, the written testimony section. And I would like to go straight to the role of food pantries. We know that food pantries are a critical lifeline for New Yorkers facing food insecurity. The preliminary fiscal year 26 budget includes concerning reductions to essential food security programs such as the Community Food Connection and Groceries to Go. So, we strongly urge the Council to please increase funding to \$100 million for the Community Food Connection, restore fiscal year 25 City Council initiatives that remain unfunded in the preliminary fiscal year 26 budget such as the \$8.26 million for food pantries, \$2.13 million for access to health food and nutritional--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Thank you. Your time has expired.

JENNIFER HINOJOSA: Can I have a few seconds?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes, you can wrap.

JENNIFER HINOJOSA: \$1.5 for the food access and benefits initiatives HRA. And in conclusion, the city budget comes at an inflection point. You can choose to invest heavily in our safety net programs such as expanding benefits, improving

1 delivery experience and increasing access to  
2 assistance for all, or we can ignore the urgency of  
3 the moment and stand by helplessly as billions of  
4 dollars in federal spending cuts inflict unimaginable  
5 suffering to our fellow residents. Thank you so much  
6 for this opportunity to share our findings, and thank  
7 you.  
8

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Jimmy  
10 Meagher?

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 JIMMY MEAGHER: Good afternoon and happy  
13 Saint Patrick's Day. My name is Jimmy Meagher. My  
14 pronouns are he/him/his, and I'm Senior Policy  
15 Director for Safe Horizon, the nation's largest  
16 nonprofit victim assistance organization. Each year  
17 we help 250,000 New Yorkers who have experienced  
18 violence and abuse. I've submitted my full written  
19 testimony, so we'll focus on a few points. First, as  
20 you've heard, nonprofits continue to face late  
21 contracting issues which have detrimental effects on  
22 the communities that you all serve. The city must  
23 hold each agency accountable to pay invoices on time.  
24 Additionally, MOCS needs to be adequately funded.  
25 Given the mounting concerns emanating from

Washington, we must get the City's house in order. Second, we urge the Council to restore and expand initiative and discretionary funding that organizations like Safe Horizon rely on each year. Specifically, we are asking the Council to invest in the Dove Initiative, the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, Save Initiative, and other initiatives contracted through HRA/DSS. Currently 180 organizations use Dove funding to address domestic violence in the community, and Safe Horizon oversees and administers this entire project. Dove directs funds to the organizations rooted in community that provide necessary and life-saving supports to survivors. This is especially critical for survivors who are undocumented and are LGBTQI+ who may fear seeking help from government systems under this current administration. Third, funding for immigration legal services and wraparound services. The mayor has prioritized assisting migrants with completing asylum applications, but nonprofit civil legal providers with expertise in complex immigration cases have not seen equitable investments in our services, mainly more comprehensive legal screening and long-term representation assistance. This work

1 is especially vital as violent anti-immigrant  
2 policies are issued by the federal government. When  
3 we don't invest in programming, we leave immigrant  
4 New Yorkers vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation  
5 and violence which leaves [inaudible]. We urge the  
6 Council to enhance funding for immigration civil  
7 legal providers. And additionally, Safe Horizon is  
8 seeking new Speaker's Initiative Funding for our  
9 Street Work Project, our Runaway Homeless Youth  
10 program since we have experienced an increase in the  
11 number of undocumented young people seeking our  
12 support and assistance. Lastly, we sit on the  
13 steering committee of the Family Homelessness  
14 Coalition, or FHC. We encourage the Council and the  
15 administration to work together to implement FHC's  
16 recommendations. Given the current federal  
17 landscape, we urge the City to do everything to  
18 empower organizations and programs working to end  
19 homelessness, poverty and violence. Thank you.

20  
21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Natalie  
22 Interiano.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

24 NATALIE INTERIANO: Good afternoon. My  
25 name is Natalie Interiano. I'm the Director of



Policy and Advocacy at Care for the Homeless. I'd like to thank the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. Care for the Homeless has 40 years of experience providing mental and behavioral healthcare services [inaudible] many people experiencing homelessness in New York City. We operate 23 FQHCs in all five boroughs. We also provide shelter services and operate two shelters for single adult women, two shelters for single adult men, one Safe Haven, and there's one more Safe Haven that's going to be opening up in the next few months. All of our shelters have on-site health centers for the residents in the community. At any point in time we serve about 860 residents in our shelters. We're currently contracted with DHS to perform the previously mentioned residential services. As of today, March 17<sup>th</sup>, Care for the Homeless is owed \$5 million in city contracts dating back to FY22. The amount owed is about 10 percent of our total residential services budget for the year. This backlog payment is a significant ongoing issue that we've been dealing with for several years. The fiscal year 26 budget must take decisive action to rectify payment issues for shelter providers. We

relieved by some of the actions the City took to address overdue payments like the recent backlog initiative. While these efforts do provide some temporary relief, we have years of catch-up that prohibits us from being reimbursed for services that have already been performed. The lack of stability when it comes to payments puts organizations like ours at risk and makes it very difficult to pay staff, pay vendors and to run our programs, and to expand our programs. Alongside the procedural issues, short staffing with city agencies also contributed to delays in payment and also with supportive services. Both DHS and HRA have decreased significantly in staffing since 2019, and they've not been able to recruit and retain staff at a rate that meets the demand that we're currently needing at the moment. We urge City Council to make sure that the fiscal year 26 budget includes sufficient staff funding to restore and expand headcount at DHS, DSS, and MOCS to eliminate these pervasive issues. We also urge the City Council to work with direct service providers to make street outreach a more effective tool to reduce homelessness. Our written testimony will include some detailed recommendations so that we can enhance

collaboration and data integration, expansions in housing and shelter options, improvements to supportive housing, and a better coordinated mental health emergency response system. Lastly, we urge the City Council to reduce barriers in voucher administration to expedite placement in permanent housing, including streamlining and processes for qualifying for utilizing the CityFHEPS vouchers. Our written testimony will also include some more details about that. Thank you so much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you so much. Lily Shapiro?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

LILY SHAPIRO: Thank you. Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker and members of the Committee. My name is Lilly Shapiro and I am Policy Counsel at the Fortune Society's David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony and testify today about the need for greater investments and in access to supportive housing through the passage of Intro 1100, increase funding for the justice-involved supportive housing program. Fortune serves over 13,000 individuals annually, and every night we house over 800 people in

our emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing, and we've seen firsthand how comprehensive community-based interventions change lives, break cycles of incarceration, and create safer communities, and we all know that supportive housing is a proven solution to homelessness, mental health challenges, and justice system involvement. The thousands of New Yorkers who are on Rikers for lack of housing, leaving Rikers and returning home from prison each year are blocked from accessing the City's largest supportive housing program NYC 1515 due to restrictive eligibility requirements. It unnecessarily follows the federal definition of chronic homelessness which disqualifies people who have been incarcerated for more than 90 days by resetting their homelessness status, and we must do better, because 33 percent of people entering our jails are unhoused at the time of admission. Twenty-one percent have a serious mental health diagnosis and remain on Rikers twice as long as the overall average length of stay, well over 90 days. Anyone serving a prison sentence upstate has been incarcerated for at least one year, and every year since 2015, 41 to 54 percent of people coming back to

the city from prison have been discharged directly into our city shelters. Intro 1100 offers a clear solution by expanding eligibility for city-funded supportive housing to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, had justice system involvement in the past 12 months and have a diagnosed SMI or SUD, and we know that expanded supportive housing eligibility to this group will have a tremendous impact on the people served and also enhance collective public safety and reduce burden on our shelters. It's also crucial that the City fulfil its commitment to bring online 380 more units of JISH [sic] housing with sufficient service rate funding. In FY25, for which we're grateful, the Council provided \$6.4 million in discretionary funds to increase service rates for the 120 operational units of which Fortune operates half, but this doesn't solve the problem of bringing online the additional 380 units to reach the promised number of 500 in the points of agreement. Therefore, we're requesting \$4.8 million annually be allocated to DOHMH's budget in a line item to reissue the 2019 RFP with higher service rate funding. For the City to fulfil its legal and moral obligation to close Rikers by 2027,

1 it must invest in solutions like JISH that promote  
2 desistence and stability, and we must pass Intro 1100  
3 to open up more access to supportive housing to more  
4 New Yorkers. Thank you so much for the opportunity  
5 to testify today, for your leadership and commitment  
6 to making our city a place where all New Yorkers,  
7 regardless of their past, can build a stable future.  
8 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Adaeze  
11 Okoli?

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

13 ADAEZE OKOLI: Hi everyone. My name is  
14 Adaeze Okoli. I am representing Rethink Food.  
15 Deputy Speaker Ayala, members of the New York City  
16 Council, thank you so much for the opportunity to  
17 testify today. Since our inception in 2017, Rethink  
18 Food has been dedicated to transforming our food  
19 system into one that is fair and more sustainable.  
20 Our goal is simple, yet very profound, ensure that  
21 every New Yorker has access to dignified nutritious  
22 meals that reflect our cultural backgrounds. Despite  
23 there being enough food available, it often fails to  
24 reach those who need it most. In Rethink, we step in  
25 to bridge this gap using every philanthropic dollar

that we receive to build sustainable programs that make everyday life more affordable. Through our network of restaurants and our sustainable community kitchen, Rethink food has already delivered more than 30 million high-quality meals that celebrate diversity and the various cultures of our city. We've also injected over \$135 million into local economies, supported \$230 community-based organizations and partnered with over 145 local restaurants. Our approach hinges on partnerships, not just between nonprofits and restaurants, but also between the New York City Council, Mayoral Administration, and agencies. I applaud the Council's advocacy efforts to secure funding and support city agency budgets crucial in meeting the rising food demands in shelters. I urge further enhancement of initiatives like food pantries funding and access to healthy food programs which expands SNAP benefits usage and nutritional education. Commissioner Parks' leadership at DHS in particular has been instrumental. Thanks to our collaboration with City Hall, Rethink Food has provided nearly 18 million meals to migrant shelters and is expanding to include programs like Women In Need, WIN, New York

1 City. As federal funding faces potential cuts, I  
2 implore Council and administration to safeguard DHS  
3 and HRA funding for SNAP and essential food  
4 assistance programs. Let's continue to invest in  
5 innovative programs, technology and staffing to  
6 enrich [inaudible] for shelter guests. Thank you so  
7 much for your time and attention to this critical  
8 issue, and together we can create a more equitable  
9 and nourishing future for all New Yorkers. Thank  
10 you.  
11

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

13 Christopher Leon Johnson?

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

15 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, hello,  
16 Chair Ayala. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson.  
17 I'm currently right now in [inaudible] I'm in your  
18 boss's district, Adrienne's district, doing business  
19 in the district. [inaudible] expressway but around  
20 here [inaudible] put it back. I know [inaudible] like  
21 that. Around here there be a lot of good migrants in  
22 the City of New York. They selling fruits, mangoes,  
23 and all stuff like that in the City, and they need to  
24 be protected under this Trump Administration, and I  
25 know the City Council is doing their best to protect



1 these guys and gals. They selling stuff on the  
2 [inaudible] Expressway, but it's cold out right now  
3 so they're not out here, but they be out here a lot,  
4 especially in the summer time. So, the City Council  
5 need to start protecting them. At the same time,  
6 since we're-- this is the General Welfare, Center for  
7 Welfare and Social Services, I'm calling on the City  
8 Council to protect the funding for the Street Vendor-  
9 - protect the funding for the Street Vendor Project  
10 and make sure that these guys and gals get the  
11 services that they need while the speaker is running  
12 for Mayor, and at the same time we need to make sure  
13 that the deliveristas get protected too with the  
14 Worker Justice Project. Their funding need to be  
15 protected, too. At the same time, the City Council  
16 need to put money into these two nonprofits to make  
17 sure that these guys and gals who are good migrants  
18 try to survive in this city, try to do the right  
19 thing in the city. They're not committing crimes. Of  
20 course, riding the e-bike on the street is crime--  
21 could be seen as-- on a sidewalk could be seen as a  
22 crime or selling mangoes in a plaza be seen as a  
23 crime, but it's not a violent crime. Let's make that  
24 clear. The City Council need to make sure that  
25

they're funded and be protected in this City Council budget for FY26, these two nonprofits, because I have a big feeling that the Speaker of the City Council is weaponizing the Finance Chair to threaten those two nonprofits to support her for mayor, and if they don't support her, then they're going to be defunded in the City Council. Like I said, I make sure-- I make sure in the ethics-- in the oversight hearing--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Thank you. Your time has expired.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: if she lowers the funding, I will go to DOI and report Adrienne [inaudible] for lowering their funding, because she--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: weaponized the City Council to threaten those nonprofits.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: thanks.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: So, thank you so much, and enjoy your day. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Christopher. Emma Bassire? Basire?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Jeanette Estima?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JEANETTE ESTIMA: Thank you. Deputy Speaker Ayala, thanks for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jeanette Estima and I'm the Director of Policy and Advocacy for Citymeals on Wheels. We're grateful to the Council for its support of our emergency meals program which provides food to homebound older New Yorkers during local and citywide emergencies. In FY24 with your support Citymeals delivered nearly 273,000 emergency meals across all five boroughs, but there is an underlying persistent emergency experienced by home-delivered meals recipients, 60 percent of whom are food insecure, despite the one meal they receive. It is simply not enough, and their access to food is very limited due to mobility challenges and financial barriers with 65 percent of them living on \$15,000 a year or less. The City's home-delivered meals program is a critical part of its anti-hunger infrastructure, but it's not enough to truly address food insecurity. This will require expanding the program and the creation of new programs that bring food directly to homebound older adults, and that's why Citymeals has piloted several new programs that provide more food in new ways. The Breakfast Box is essentially a

second meal program currently serving 2,000 people across the City which we hope to double next year. And our Mobile Grocery program brings monthly bags of food directly to homebound older adults. You mentioned earlier the lack of food pantries in the Bronx and the lack of a food infrastructure in that area, and you know, this is one of the reasons why these pilot programs are so critical as they are able to do what currently the infrastructure is not there to do. So, we respectfully request renewal of the \$500,000 that we receive for emergency meals last year, and we ask for an additional \$200,000 to support these innovative pilot programs. And finally, we urge the Council to pass Intro 770 which would require the City's home-delivered meals program to provide one meal 365 days a year, estimated to cost about \$20.7 million. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Jason Cianciotto?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JASON CIANCIOTTO: Hello, Deputy Speaker Ayala and Committee Members. Thank you so much for sticking with us on this long day. I'm Jason Cianciotto, VP of Policy from GMHC, Gay Men's Health

Crisis, founded in 1982 as the world's first HIV and AIDS services organization. It's been a long day so I'll get straight to the two points that I have. The first is not something that is directly under the City Council's control, but nonetheless is something I think is critically important for you all to know, because it will effect folks who are receiving HASA housing subsidies. For quite some time, GMHC has heard from clients who have receives 30-day notices that their HASA housing subsidy was going to come to an end because a social security insurance cost of living adjustment, COLA increase, caused their income to rise above the income ceiling. This has been happening more frequently because of the increases in SSI COLAs that came due to higher inflation. We have been working with the Ending the Epidemic Coalition to advocate for Albany to include in the forthcoming budget HIV housing for New York which would not only expand the 30 percent rent cap to people living with HIV outside of New York City, but would also address this core problem by raising the income ceiling to receive HASA housing subsidies to 200 percent of the FPL. GMHC individually actually thinks it should be 250 percent of the FPL. Unfortunately, the HIV

Housing for New York policy only made it into the Senate One House bill and we have significant concerns that it will yet again not end up in the final budget which means we will have even more clients who lose their housing subsidy and subsequently their housing. Anything that the Council can do to help advocate that the HIV Housing for New York policy be included in the final New York State budget we certainly would appreciate. The second is related to the threats from the federal government. I just want to share that the 400 or so supportive housing units that GMHC provides are all paid for through HOPA [sic] pass-through funds, through HUD COC in New York City. So, should HUD be cut and HOPA be cut, many of our clients in housing could potentially lose that housing. And of course, you've heard already about the proposed cuts to SNAP benefits which would also be devastating to our clients. We look forward to continuing working with you to address these issues and welcome any questions you may have. Thanks again so much for your support.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much.

We are making one final call for Zoom registrants who have not yet spoken, Amy Blumsack?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alex Stein?

Debipriya Chatterjee? Matthew Jozwiak? Brent  
Gallenberger? Alexina Cather? Okay. If we have  
inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify  
virtually, please use the raise hand function in Zoom  
and I will call on you in the order of hands raised.  
Okay, seeing no one else, I would like to know that  
written testimony which will be reviewed in full by  
committee staff may be submitted to the record up to  
72 hours after the close of the hearing by emailing  
it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). And with that, this  
hearing is concluded.

[gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE



C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 8, 2025