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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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December 6, 2021  
Start: 10:11 a.m.  
Recess: 1:30 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING - VIRTUAL ROOM 2

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin,  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Darma V. Diaz  
Vanessa L. Gibson  
Barry S. Grodenchik  
Brad S. Lander  
Antonio Reynoso  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

A P P E A R A N C E S

Starlite Harris  
Currently in shelter

Shams DaBaron  
Currently in shelter

Sarah Wilson  
Currently in shelter

Althea Matthews  
Vocal as on the Committee of the Homeless Union

Dinick Martinez  
Currently in shelter

Molly Park  
First Deputy Commissioner at the New York City  
Department of Homeless Services

Erin Drinkwater  
Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and  
Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social  
Services

Ashley Belcher  
Outreach Worker with Human. NYC

Charmel Lucas  
Outreach and Organized Specialist with Human. NYC

Karim Walker  
Outreach Organizing Specialist with Human. NYC

Selena Charl(SP?) from Vocal New York in for  
Ibrahim Ayu

Leslie Armstrong  
Assistant Vice President for NYC Emergency  
Housing and Shelter Services and Volunteers of  
America

Amy Blumsack  
Neighbors Together

Felipe Vargas  
Vice President of Programs at the DOE Fund

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Helen Strom  
Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center

Deborah Berkman  
Coordinating Attorney of the Shelter Advocacy  
Initiative at the New York Legal Assistance Group  
or NYLAG

Eric Lee  
Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless  
Services United

Jacquelyn Simone  
Policy Director at the Coalition for the Homeless

Tierra Labrada  
Senior Policy Analyst at the Supportive Housing  
Network of New York

Eric Rosenbaum  
CEO of Project Renewal

Katrina Corbell  
Formerly street homeless and shelter homeless New  
Yorker

Winston Tokuhisa  
Exited the shelter system and homelessness just  
over two weeks ago

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SERGEANT MARTINEZ: PC Recording is underway.

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SERGEANT BIONDO: Recording to Cloud is underway.

4

5

SERGEANT MARTINEZ: Good morning and welcome to today's Remote New York City Council Hearing of the Committee of General Welfare. At this time, would all panelists please turn on their video.

6

7

8

To minimize disruption, please silence your

9

electronic devices and if you wish to submit

10

testimony you may do so at the following email

11

address, [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Once again, that

12

is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

13

Please note written testimony maybe submitted

14

electronically for up to 72 hours after the hearing.

15

Thank you for your cooperation. We are ready to

16

begin. Mr. Chair, whenever you are ready. Mr.

17

Chair, we don't hear you. You might be muted.

18

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, okay, sorry.

19

SERGEANT MARTINEZ: Thank you.

20

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you very much

21

Sergeant. I am gaveling in right now [GAVEL]. Good

22

morning everybody and welcome to today's Committee

23

Hearing on the Committee on General Welfare. This is

24

my last hearing as Chair I believe and I want to just

25

thank everybody who has made this tenure I think as

1  
2 positive as possible. I greatly appreciate  
3 everybody's cooperation with me and patience with me  
4 over the years and hopefully we've made in at least  
5 ways, in small ways peoples lives better in New York  
6 City. And so, I just want to thank everybody. It's  
7 been obviously the honor of a lifetime to have been  
8 able to Chair this Committee.

9 So, I am proud of all we have accomplished in the  
10 last eight years and all of our partnerships with my  
11 colleagues and the Administration, and of course the  
12 advocates and providers and people with lived  
13 experience who have shared their stories and insights  
14 with us.

15 Our work simply could not be accomplished without  
16 their knowledge of how laws and policies impact them  
17 every day and I cannot stress how much or how  
18 appreciative I am of so many individuals taking the  
19 time out of their day in the middle of navigating  
20 bureaucracies or simply trying to keep your head  
21 afloat to come and educate my colleagues and me to  
22 ensure that our work is impactful as possible. It  
23 has always been my priority to honor the lived  
24 experiences of those close to the issues in our  
25 hearings and in legislation that we passed while

1  
2 major strides have been made, it is clear that there  
3 is much more work to be done to ensure that every New  
4 Yorker has safe, adequate and stable housing with  
5 reliable access to comprehensive services.

6       It's my hope that our hearing today can be an  
7 honest conversation about the state of street  
8 homelessness in New York City and as this Council  
9 session and mayoral administration come to a close,  
10 that we can help set up those who come after us for  
11 success by being clear about what has worked and what  
12 we need to do better.

13       The topic of today's hearing will be the single  
14 adult homelessness in New York City, with a focus on  
15 the treatment of and services provided to those who  
16 are unsheltered as well as the long lengths of stay  
17 in shelter and the inadequate ability to move people  
18 out and into stable, permanent housing.

19       Though we knew it prior, the pandemic  
20 demonstrated just how important it is for safety,  
21 stability and overall health and wellness to have a  
22 room of one zone. But of course hotel rooms during a  
23 crisis are not the whole picture and we still need to  
24 prioritize moving people out of shelter and into  
25 homes of their own.

1  
2 I'm very proud that we were able to increase the  
3 CITYFEPS Voucher amount this year and streamlined  
4 access to these vouchers for vulnerable populations  
5 for whom they were unavailable. But the next  
6 administration needs to ensure that people can  
7 actually use them. And be aggressive in its approach  
8 to moving people out and finding them quality  
9 apartments with the services and support that they  
10 deserve.

11 I want to thank all the advocates and members of  
12 the public who are joining us today. I want to thank  
13 the representatives from the Administration who are  
14 joining us and I look forward to hearing from you on  
15 these critical issues.

16 At this time, I'd like to acknowledge my  
17 colleagues who are here today. I see Council Member  
18 Darma Diaz is with us. Uhm, I expect to be joined by  
19 additional colleagues throughout the course of the  
20 hearing but right now, it's just me and Darma. But I  
21 want to also thank Jonathan Boucher my Chief of  
22 Staff, Elizabeth Adams and Nicole Hunt, my Co-  
23 Legislative Directors, Vecdry Kumar(SP?) who is  
24 legislative staff as well and Committee Staff Aminta  
25 Kilawan Senior Counsel, Crystal Pond, Senior Policy

1  
2 Analyst, Natalie Omary, Policy Analyst and Julia  
3 Haramis Financial Analyst. And I do want to take the  
4 opportunity publicly to thank all of the Committee  
5 Staff, both current Committee Staff and past  
6 Committee Staff who have put in an incredible amount  
7 of time and effort in preparing for this Committee's  
8 hearings and legislation, doing the policy research,  
9 writing comprehensive Committee reports that will  
10 uhm, be resources for future Councils. These are all  
11 - all the Committee Reports are available online and  
12 I continue to see them as a great resource. I go  
13 back to Committee Reports, past Committee Reports all  
14 the time. And the work that they have done has been  
15 extraordinary.

16 And so, I just want to thank Aminta, Crystal,  
17 Natalie and Julia today but also, all of the  
18 Committee Staff over the years, current and past who  
19 have just done amazing work. And so, I want to thank  
20 them publicly. Thank you.

21 And with that, I'll turn it over to Aminta  
22 Kilawan, our Committee Counsel to call on the first  
23 panel.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin. Good  
25 morning everyone. My name is Aminta Kilawan, Senior

1  
2 Counsel to the Committee on General Welfare at the  
3 New York City Council. I am going to be moderating  
4 today's hearing and calling panels to testify.

5 Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that  
6 you will be on mute until I call on you to testify.  
7 After you are called on, you are going to be unmuted  
8 by a member of our staff. Please note that there  
9 will be a delay of a few seconds until you are  
10 unmuted and we can hear you.

11 For public testimony, I will call individuals up  
12 in panels. Please listen for your name, I will  
13 periodically announce the next few panelists. Once I  
14 call your name, a member of our staff will unmute  
15 you. The Sergeant at Arms will set a clock and give  
16 you the go ahead to begin your testimony.

17 All public testimony will be limited to three  
18 minutes. After I call your name, please wait for the  
19 Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin  
20 before starting your testimony. For today's hearing,  
21 we're going to have a first panel will include public  
22 testimony from directly impacted individuals.

23 Again, I'd like to remind everyone that I will  
24 call you up in panels. Once your name is called, a  
25 member of our staff will unmute you and you may begin

1  
2 your testimony once the Sergeant at Arms sets the  
3 clock and gives you the queue. Again, all testimony  
4 will be limited to three minutes and please remember,  
5 if there is a few seconds delay when you are unmuted  
6 before we can hear you. Please wait for the Sergeant  
7 at Arms to announce that you may begin.

8 The first panel of public testimony in order of  
9 speaking will be Starlite Harris followed by Shams  
10 DaBaron followed by Sarah Wilson followed by Althea  
11 Matthews and finally followed by Danick Martinez.

12 We are now going to begin with testimony from  
13 Starlite Harris.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 STARLITE HARRIS: Good afternoon everyone.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning.

17 STARLITE HARRIS: I don't know where to begin  
18 other than I appreciate your time and letting me  
19 speak about this situation. I, myself am currently  
20 homeless and I have been transferred six to six  
21 different shelters since I've been in the system.  
22 I've come across all types of problems with staff  
23 members. The place that I'm located now hasn't been  
24 properly set up to have people coming in but people  
25 are steady coming in. They - DHS was here I think

1  
2 last week. They did an inspection. They have one  
3 floor that they're still renovating in the building.  
4 The area that it's in is not safe and I'm disabled  
5 and I became homeless in January. Well, no, I became  
6 homeless in 2016 because I left my spouse because of  
7 domestic violence.

8 And I've been kind of couch surfing for the last  
9 few years and because of my illness, I finally just  
10 said, I can't keep running. I can't keep doing this  
11 anymore and I went into a shelter and I've been  
12 treated horribly, just very horribly and I've seen  
13 the impact that not having a place to stay can do to  
14 people, especially single people. I see them in  
15 train stations lying on the floor and sometimes I  
16 just want to get them up and feed them and bring them  
17 but I know that's not possible.

18 And I understand that everybody that's homeless  
19 and I want you all to understand that everybody that  
20 is homeless doesn't have a mental problem or a drug  
21 problem. And I believe that DHS sometimes treats  
22 everyone as one size fits all. Like, it's a cookie  
23 cutter, if you're homeless, you're homeless because  
24 you're on drugs or you have mental problems.

1  
2 People don't consider that you know you may have  
3 been burnt out of your home, you may have been run  
4 away from your home because of domestic violence like  
5 myself or you may just be physically ill, where you  
6 are unable to work and maintain a home or a roof over  
7 your head. And the fact that I've been in congregate  
8 shelters, which are absolutely deplorable.

9 And the way they treat people, it's like animals.  
10 They go through your things. They treat it like  
11 garbage and the way they talk to you, it's like you  
12 have no rights. Like, you feel as though you're in a  
13 prison and that's how they treat you. They give you  
14 food that is basically inedible and when people are  
15 yelling and screaming, sometimes I'd listen and I'd  
16 feel really bad because I understand when people  
17 don't have a voice, they don't know what to say.  
18 They can't write and express themselves; they can't  
19 speak to express themselves without yelling. Because  
20 sometimes they are not getting what they need.

21 The place that I'm in now once again, is very  
22 unsafe. It takes me two hours to get to my medical  
23 team in Brooklyn. I'm currently at a place in  
24 Jamaica. The place is very unsafe. I'm directly  
25 across the street from garbage, so I feel like the

1  
2 Sanitation Department. So, I feel as what they are  
3 saying is like, you're garbage. Because that's where  
4 we're putting you, across the street from the  
5 Sanitation Department.

6 The way they treat people; like, we're human  
7 beings, we're not animals. But you know it's a thing  
8 where I don't appreciate the fact that someone should  
9 have to wait six years to find a home or that DHS is  
10 dictating oh, this is where you should live. This is  
11 where you should reside because this is all your  
12 worth. DHS or any other entity shouldn't have the  
13 right to tell people where they should live. It's  
14 not like they are paying our rent. Yes, they may be  
15 providing subsidy, but that still -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

17 STARLITE HARRIS: Doesn't give them the right -

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Ms.

19 Harris. Do you want to say some concluding remarks?

20 STARLITE HARRIS: Yes, I just wanted to say, just  
21 because they are providing a subsidy, whether it's  
22 Section or CITY FHEPS, does not give them the right  
23 to decide where one should live period or how one  
24 should live. It's a matter of just having the  
25 freedom to be able to have your own bathroom and your

1  
2 own space without being invasive, invaded in. Not,  
3 you know, the doors here aren't even locked. My  
4 things have been stolen, so.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Ms. Harris, can I ask, uh,  
6 how long have you been in the DHS system?

7 STARLITE HARRIS: Since uh January of this year.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: January of this year. Do you  
9 have a voucher yet?

10 STARLITE HARRIS: Yes, I do.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Or a shopping letter? You  
12 do. Uhm, have you seen any apartments?

13 STARLITE HARRIS: I've seen several and the  
14 problem - and trust me when I tell you, I found a  
15 place. I'm very close to getting it but I don't  
16 trust the staff here to follow through with what  
17 needs to be done next. I've already got the signed,  
18 a contingent lease as of Friday.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, well, that's good to  
20 know. That's good to know. Uhm, because yes -

21 STARLITE HARRIS: Because I've been out every  
22 day. Like, when I can get out and I'm not at a  
23 doctor's appointment, uhm, I'm out looking, actively  
24 looking for housing. But I also was in the hospital  
25 this year for two months having heart surgery.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Wow.

STARLITE HARRIS: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm glad you're recovery and uhm, I hopeful that uhm that you'll have your own apartment soon.

STARLITE HARRIS: So am I. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much Ms. Harris. Thank you.

STARLITE HARRIS: You're very welcome.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again Ms. Harris. I am going to now turn it over to Shams DaBaron. Council Member Diaz, I want to acknowledge, we see your hand raised. We're going to wait for questions from Council Members until after this panel is concluded. Over to Shams DaBaron.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, Shams, I think you're muted.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Chair Levin, I believe his audio is not connected.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright Shams, it seems like we are having technical difficulties and can't hear you. So, in the meanwhile, while we figure out these

1  
2 technical difficulties, we will move on to the next  
3 panelist and turn it back to you afterwards.

4 So, I'm now going to turn it over to Sarah Wilson  
5 for testimony.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

7 SARAH WILSON: Hi everyone, can you hear me okay?

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

9 SARAH WILSON: Alright, thank you. My name is  
10 Sarah Wilson, good morning. I'm very grateful to be  
11 here. I'm here representing the Safety Net Project  
12 out of the Urban Justice Center. I also do advocacy  
13 with Vocal New York, the Homeless Can't Stay Home and  
14 the Homeless Can't Wait.

15 My inspiration to be here comes from my over two  
16 years of being homeless in five different single  
17 adult homeless shelters. What I experienced, as well  
18 as what my sisters and brothers experienced and are  
19 still experiencing. This is not a me, this is a we.

20 The topic of single adult homelessness is  
21 extremely broad. While I won't say there has been no  
22 change, I will acknowledge like Council Member Levin  
23 said, City FHEPS increased in dollar amount and  
24 criteria eligibility, however, there is still a lot  
25 more that needs to be done with the specific topic of

1  
2 congregate shelter and the setting. The evidence  
3 shows congregate shelters to be both ineffective and  
4 inhumane, yet we're still using that model, while  
5 COVID shows different and we still are in a pandemic.  
6 I was part of the Excellent Teach In which Shams is  
7 also a part of with the medical community called,  
8 Flipping a Script. Doctors, social workers, medical  
9 students, nurses collectively found a  
10 counterproductive for health, hygiene, mental health  
11 and overall wellness and at \$4,000 a month per  
12 individual when it only cost \$2,000 less than per  
13 single adult housing. I can speak of the lack of  
14 kitchen and food. I developed ulcerative colitis due  
15 to the lack of nutrition and stress. There were  
16 women in the shelters on dialysis and because of  
17 these curfews, rain, snow, sleet heat, urine in the  
18 street from 9am to 5pm. Your locked out. Your  
19 locked in from 10pm to 6am and there's no staff that  
20 works there. All cops no counselors. If you missed  
21 a bed, you are bagged up and transferred to any  
22 borough if not sanctioned. The issue with this is  
23 that you have things like the other woman said going  
24 on where you need to attend certain services in

1  
2 certain boroughs. There still is no appeals process,  
3 nor is there a freeze against these transfers.

4 Then we only got a minimum amount of reporting.

5 One year later, when it is too late to fix the actual  
6 issues. Uhm, the staff you employ is extremely petty  
7 and while you have refused to create accountability,  
8 you give them the power to keep playing musical  
9 shelters because they are bored and they are  
10 miserable.

11 I point these things out because there are common  
12 issues throughout that can be corrected if there was  
13 a political will. While were not confused about what  
14 the issues are, the advocates, the medical community,  
15 the community itself is known. There are solutions  
16 but there is not the political will to do so, so I  
17 hope with the people that are coming in next, the  
18 people that have not really understood this or have  
19 chosen not to. And Council Member Levin, I know I  
20 give you a hard time but I want to thank you for the  
21 CITY FHEP stuff as well as the thing for youth aging  
22 out, so thank you. I can't always harp on the  
23 negative. However, for the remaining members -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
3 Sarah, it's okay.

4 SARAH WILSON: Thank you. I just want to say for  
5 the remaining members, whatever it's going to take  
6 for you to make these changes to improve the quality  
7 of life for the tens of thousands people that are  
8 effected. That's all, thank you so much. God Bless  
9 and hi Shams.

10 SHAMS DABARON: Hello. Can you hear me now.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Sarah.

12 SARAH WILSON: We can hear you now. Thank you  
13 everybody.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great, it sounds like Shams -  
15 thank you Sarah for your testimony. It sounds like  
16 Shams - we do hear you, so I'm going to turn it now  
17 over to Shams for testimony.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 SHAMS DABARON: Alright, so the great people I  
20 see some of my great peers here, so I know they're  
21 going to cover the issue issues and stuff and I've  
22 been doing it for so long within this short amount of  
23 time. So, I'm just going to just read a statement  
24 and go from there, if you don't mind.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course.

1  
2 SHAMS DABARON: This is my first one, so you know  
3 pardon me. First and foremost, I want to thank Steve  
4 Levin for inviting me to have a seat at this table  
5 before the City Council. Speaker Corey Johnson and  
6 all of the distinguished public servants who comprise  
7 our City Council. I'm humbled by the opportunity to  
8 come before you and provide testimony. I hope it  
9 will have a positive inspiring impact on you all.

10 My objective is to see us enter the new year  
11 proactively and address the city's issues as it  
12 pertains to housing and homelessness. I know it's a  
13 limited time, so forgive me for — I'll get straight  
14 to the point.

15 The City of New York is in a crisis. It ain't  
16 just a crisis brought on by the pandemic, we've been  
17 dealing with the crisis for quite some time and we've  
18 been able to ignore it for quite some time but the  
19 pandemic has exposed these issues in a way that is  
20 just hard to ignore. So, the data conversations are  
21 difficult. The quest for solutions are challenging  
22 but the need for our immediate attention and action  
23 is necessary. We have a mayor currently who speaks  
24 of his success but is reluctant to do a deep dive  
25 into his failings.

1  
2           This is not the way the rest of us need to go or  
3 should go. We need to face the reality of our  
4 failures. And I put myself in that because despite  
5 being homeless for many years, in and out of shelters  
6 from a family to single adult shelters. For many  
7 years, I was suffering in silence and that silence  
8 allowed for these issues to persist. I didn't  
9 understand that my voice had power but the pandemic  
10 forced me to dig deep and decide to do as much as I  
11 could to change things for the better. To be a part  
12 of the solutions rather than a part of the problem.

13           You, members of this Council, servants of New  
14 York, are entrusted with the care of your  
15 constituents. You have a degree of power by way of  
16 your office to affect change in a way that benefits  
17 your communities and our city. Why are we declaring  
18 that racism as this city is a public health crisis?  
19 Why are we seeing the sustaining of a  
20 homeless/shelter industrial complex? Why are people  
21 not convicted of a – who are not convicted of a crime  
22 dying on Rikers Island? Why can't tourists walk the  
23 streets without being attacked by someone who  
24 apparently needs a higher level of care? Why are the  
25 streets flooded with people who say they'd rather

1  
2 sleep in the dead of winter in the freezing cold than  
3 enter one of those congregate death traps you call a  
4 shelter? Why are there over 10,000 children in  
5 shelters throughout the city? Why do victims of  
6 domestic violence encounter so many barriers to  
7 receive help, safety and security?

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

9 SHAMS DABARON: Why the children, like my own,  
10 two daughters aging out of foster care and either  
11 going into the streets or a shelter or worse? Why do  
12 you parole men and women who did their time to these  
13 unsafe and uninhabitable shelters? Why do you feed  
14 us in those death traps, like we're slaves on a  
15 plantation? And why when we enter those shelters,  
16 it's like joining a gang or an organized crime  
17 family, once you get in, you can't get out? Why have  
18 you let this happen? Why didn't you challenge this  
19 mayor and say, hell no. Housing is a human right; no  
20 New Yorker will be unhoused under our watch.

21 Well, we only got a few weeks left with this  
22 mayor, so I don't want to focus on him and his  
23 failures. I'd rather focus on the future. We are in  
24 a unique time. It's a time to be bold and  
25 courageous. It's a time to be caring and

1  
2 compassionate. We're still battling COVID and its  
3 variants and we have the eviction moratorium being  
4 lifted, which will indeed present even more  
5 challenges. Some people are so embedded in the  
6 current way of things that the idea of change is so  
7 difficult. What I'd like for you to do moving  
8 forward is embrace and then attack the reality of  
9 racism being a public health crisis. Then understand  
10 that race permeates throughout all levels of city,  
11 state and federal policy.

12       Whatever you can do to address this, you must do.  
13 Our housing and homelessness crisis is rooted in  
14 racism. Its been that way since the founding of this  
15 country. From redlining, segregation and you know  
16 all the rest. Racism is at the root of all of this  
17 and it is killing the majority of Black and Brown who  
18 are suffering due to these racist and humane  
19 policies. We got to end systemic institutional and  
20 structural systems of racism that are in our city  
21 government. We have an incoming mayor who seems to  
22 be open minded and very concerned about moving in a  
23 different direction. I don't expect nor do I want  
24 him or you to give me all that I want because there  
25 are other people with different needs and I don't

1  
2 want to see their needs unaddressed. I want to see  
3 housing for our center. We got to move away from the  
4 thinking that shelter first is a cure. More  
5 stabilization beds and low barrier safe havens are  
6 needed. Cut the process from being homeless and  
7 enter in a shelter to obtain in housing in half.  
8 Eliminate all the bureaucratic barriers that make it  
9 difficult to access housing. We did good in passing  
10 Intro. 146 but we have to make the process easier for  
11 landlords to be attractive to the program. I have a  
12 coalition of landlords working with me to provide  
13 more than 1,000 apartments online in an instant to  
14 take advantage of their vouchers but they have  
15 legitimate concerns. We have to address that.

16 I want you all to stop stigmatizing the homeless.  
17 I am of that group and I think that with this short  
18 period of time, I've shown that any one of us can  
19 rise up out of that condition to be part of the  
20 solutions. Give us a seat at the table, a voice in  
21 the discussion and a hand in the decision making.

22 And now, I'm going to leave you with a quote from  
23 the great Dr. Martin Luther King. I stood up in the  
24 challenging times during the pandemic of the Lucerne  
25 Hotel where we became the subject of controversy.

1  
2           So, let's reflect on King's words who said, "the  
3 ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in  
4 moments of comfort and convenience but where he  
5 stands at times of challenge and controversy. And  
6 I'm going to take that he and it could also be a she  
7 or whatever you identify as. Thank you. I  
8 appreciate you and please forgive me for going over  
9 the time.

10           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Shams.  
11 Thank you. Uhm -

12           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'll turn it back over to  
13 Chair.

14           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, Counsel, is this the  
15 entire - are there any more members of this  
16 Committee- I mean this panel?

17           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We have two more panelists  
18 for this panel.

19           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'll save my remarks till the  
20 end of the panel but thank you Shams.

21           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks Chair Levin. I am  
22 going to turn it now over to Althea Matthews for  
23 testimony.

24           SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.  
25

1  
2 ALTHEA MATTHEWS: Hi, good afternoon. Hard to go  
3 behind him. Thank you for allowing me to speak here.  
4 I don't have nothing written. I'm just going to go  
5 out from my head.

6 My name is Althea Matthews, I'm part of Vocal as  
7 on the Committee of the Homeless Union. I've been  
8 involved with that for a couple years before I became  
9 homeless myself. I've been homeless for over two  
10 years now. I got burned out in 2019, December 30<sup>th</sup>  
11 after moving into a new location December 1<sup>st</sup> and  
12 then shortly after that, my father passed by two  
13 weeks after and then I had to go through California  
14 and lost the first location I was put in after  
15 letting my mom being their for ten days.

16 Anyway, I had to be relocated and I had to show  
17 that I had my father's death certificate and plane  
18 ticket to be relocated to a new residence. I've been  
19 there since February the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

20 Uhm, I actually thought that Councilman Salamanca  
21 was going to be on here as well as uhm, the incoming  
22 Brad Lander. You know because with Salamanca's Bill,  
23 the Intro. 1211, that was set aside for 15 percent  
24 units for any developer who had received any funding.  
25 I need that to be more transparent to how that is

1  
2 going as well and uhm, so along with Salamanca bill  
3 1211 and I helped campaign for that bill as well and  
4 with the House Our Future New York Campaign, they had  
5 a goal of 24,000 units, to be able to help with this  
6 homeless crisis. I would like to know more about how  
7 that is going because being in a shelter for two  
8 years and other people I know been in much longer  
9 than I have. I don't see how that bill is moving  
10 forward or at least have more transparency on that.

11 And I know that Scott Stringer, the present  
12 Comptroller, I know he mentioned about it was the  
13 city have over 600 vacant lots. My concern is why we  
14 can't build on some of these city lots to help with  
15 the homeless. I see that it's an easy solution, yet  
16 the money that you all spent to house us, that money  
17 can be allocated to build homes. As well as uhm -

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 ALTHEA MATTHEWS: Oh my God.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, you can go ahead and  
21 finish. You can continue Ms. Matthews.

22 ALTHEA MATTHEWS: Okay, my concern is even with  
23 the bill that is being passed and I am so thank you  
24 for all who has supported House Our Neighbor with  
25 Dignity to house people in these commercial and uhm

1  
2 vacancy offers buildings, put money into building on  
3 these vacant lots will help eliminate the homeless  
4 crisis and I just would like to thank everybody for  
5 listening to my testimony.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Ms. Matthews.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Ms.  
8 Matthews for your testimony. I am going to turn it  
9 now over to our final panelist for this panel, Dinick  
10 Martinez.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 DINICK MARTINEZ: Good morning everybody. My  
13 name is Dinick Martinez as you know. Thank you City  
14 Council. Thank you Mr. Levin. What is the name?  
15 What's the Council that's here? I testified in front  
16 of him last time. I don't know he left.

17 But anyway, oh, Mr. Levin. And thank you Urban  
18 Justice and my peers that spoke today. Thank all of  
19 you especially. I'm going to start by saying that I  
20 agree with what Starlite says because we came from  
21 the same shelter. We were transferred from the same  
22 shelter to this shelter.

23 I personally was approved for a single room  
24 location based and they decided DHS, they don't care.  
25 Take it or leave it. We don't give a damn about you.

1  
2 They put me all the way down to JFK and like, they  
3 don't care. I mean, it's like it's ridiculous. It's  
4 like I want to talk about so many issues but I'm  
5 trying to summarize because we have so little time.  
6 The issues that we have it's like HRA, which is  
7 connected to DHS.

8 Uhm, when people want to move and they finally  
9 say they found a place, HRA takes too damn long to  
10 process the payment. But before that, sometimes the  
11 shelters - clients get the documents and they fail to  
12 submit the documents. So, there's a lot of things  
13 going on like, Mr. Shams, Mr. Shams was saying.  
14 Shams, I'm sorry, I mispronounced your name. This  
15 thing has to - this process has to be fixed.

16 Also, the other thing is like, the storage - I'm  
17 trying to say everything at once quickly. So, the  
18 storage, you have a storage unit, you take the bill  
19 to the HRA and HRA, it takes too long to process. I  
20 have heard - one of the storage managers told me once  
21 that sometimes the check comes after the staff has  
22 been thrown out of cells because of the  
23 irresponsibility and carelessness. And HRA and DHS  
24 are incompetent, irresponsible, careless, inhumane.

1  
2 Uhm, and also, when you complain at the shelter,  
3 this shelter companies like CAMBA, ICL, uhm, just to  
4 name there is a bunch of them that got so many  
5 shelters. They retaliate against the clients. They  
6 make sure they make their life miserable. And a lot  
7 of here, I'm here for many years and I don't want to  
8 disclose because it's too much. It's like, they  
9 don't care. We got so many mental illnesses and -

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 DINICK MARTINEZ: Your illnesses get worse  
12 because the way they treat you like you are a piece  
13 of trash. I don't want to say the word s-h-i-t. And  
14 I want to say this to the Mayor and to some City  
15 Council Members, like you claim Black lives matter,  
16 people of color when you're running for office but at  
17 the end of the day, you don't care. Over 60 percent  
18 of the homeless people are people of color, Black and  
19 Brown.

20 So, that's a lie. You don't care. Uhm, what  
21 else? Like I said, even White people are here. At  
22 the end of the day, all lives matter. Like I said,  
23 DHS just dictating even when you have a paper saying  
24 that you are approved, location based. They transfer

1  
2 you to a place that you are not supposed to be. This  
3 way is too far, it's too dangerous, isolated.

4 Like, for example, the lady who spoke Starlite,  
5 she has a walker and she has to walk under isolated  
6 place. Anybody can beat her or something or steal  
7 from her, especially crime is on the rise. Crime  
8 [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 36:34-36:40]. Anybody can  
9 translate that sentence.

10 So, it's a lot. It's like, late passes sometimes  
11 you have late passes for work. People got late  
12 passes. I witness people that they go to work late,  
13 when they come, the case manager failed to put the  
14 late pass, overnight pass because they had to work or  
15 for whatever reason. You think you're going to come  
16 to your home, kind of home to sleep. No, you have to  
17 go and deal with this shit or you have a late pass.  
18 [INAUDIBLE 37:09] and your card is violated and they  
19 treat you like a piece of garbage.

20 Uhm, like I said, Starlite was saying that this  
21 place is still fixing. Like, one time happened in  
22 another shelter I was transferred to from CAMBA to  
23 ICL, the place was still fixing and one day the place  
24 flooded because the pipes were uhm, I don't know it  
25 was a small pipe and then they had big pipes and they

1  
2 had to like, water in the whole building. It's a  
3 lot. It's like I said, it's not properly set up.

4 I don't have no more to say but it's like, oh,  
5 the vouchers, most people and Starlite forgot to tell  
6 you about this. Starlite herself applied to so many  
7 places, some landlords don't want to take us Mr.  
8 Shams was saying that some landlords don't want to  
9 take this voucher because they think that we're not  
10 going to pay and that -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

12 DINICK MARTINEZ: It's like, it's a risk. Thank  
13 you. And I spoke to Mr. Levin before, he knows me  
14 before, so.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you Mr.  
16 Martinez, I appreciate your testimony very much.

17 DINICK MARTINEZ: Ms. Martinez please.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Ms. Martinez, thank you.  
19 Thank you. Uhm, and I just want to thank uhm, this  
20 panel for setting an important, initial tone to this  
21 hearing. Uhm, and uhm, making sure that we are  
22 holding this city accountable, all of us. This  
23 Council accountable, uhm, this administration  
24 accountable, uhm, we, and I think if there's one  
25 thing that I can kind of in part to whoever's coming

1  
2 after me as Chair of this Committee or incoming  
3 members of this Committee, is that it's uhm, you know  
4 accountability is not something to be afraid of.  
5 Accountability is not something to run away from.

6 Uhm, uh, it is the essence of what we are here to  
7 do. Uhm, we are accountable to the people of New  
8 York. We are accountable to the people - this is the  
9 Committee on General Welfare, that means the public  
10 good. And uhm, and we are accountable to that public  
11 good. And so, I want to thank all of you for holding  
12 us accountable and I want to thank all of you for  
13 taking on leadership roles in your own personal life.  
14 And on the issues that New Yorkers are facing, who  
15 are facing housing challenges.

16 And it's been you know, you all are doing this on  
17 your own time, without any compensation. And you're  
18 doing it and you've studied the system and know the  
19 system as well as anybody else and uhm, and so, I  
20 just appreciate very much everything that you - that  
21 you bring to this and uhm, and for your willingness  
22 to come up with solutions and to present solutions  
23 and not be deterred when people tell you no and uhm,  
24 so I just want to extend my appreciation.

1  
2 Okay, uhm, I'll turn it back over to our  
3 Committee Counsel Aminta Kilawan.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin. I do  
5 want to note that Council Member Diaz did have her  
6 hand raised earlier. Council Member Diaz, I don't  
7 know if you have any questions or remarks before we  
8 move onto the next panel? I think Council Member  
9 Diaz needs to be unmuted.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Good morning, thank you for  
11 unmuting me. I'd like to begin by thanking Chair  
12 Levin for bringing this conversation and you know to  
13 fruition.

14 As many of you know I come from the shelter  
15 system and coming from the shelter system, I bring  
16 baggage and that baggage, I'm grateful to have Ms.  
17 Martinez speak of my baggage and also Sarah Wilson  
18 and Starlite Harris, who started. DHS, you're  
19 hearing it. For 12 months, I've been talking about  
20 the horrific situations that occur on a daily basis.  
21 If I'm correct, there were two organizations that  
22 were named here, ICL and CAMBA. You know I strongly  
23 suggest that before you give organizations more  
24 contracts that we review the conversations at least  
25 in our hearings. We have to stop. Enough is enough.

1  
2 This weekend, I happened to pass by a site in my  
3 community and the garbage in front of it was  
4 horrific. You know, if a garbage was outside of the  
5 building and it was obviously there for more than one  
6 day, I could already imagine what the inside looked  
7 like.

8 And unfortunately, one of the two organizations  
9 that was named today was one of them. So, it's more  
10 of a statement. We need to stop. Enough is enough.  
11 I'm also very big on separating and what I mean by  
12 separating is mental health is mental health.  
13 Physical health is physical health. The  
14 Administration has the money and the power to make  
15 that difference.

16 People are not sardines. You just don't ship us  
17 and pack us away. With all of the shelters that are  
18 being placed, dumped in communities, why are we not  
19 paying attention to the zip codes and the addresses  
20 of where we're placing people?

21 And I'm also going to ask before I finish my  
22 statement, as shelters are being closed down, could  
23 Administration pay attention to where folks came  
24 from? No one should be by JFK when they are in East  
25 New York. We have enough.

1  
2 Again, thank you for allowing me to speak my  
3 piece and for the advocates on the panel, just keep  
4 fighting. I'm listening. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member  
6 Diaz. Now going to turn over to our second panel.  
7 Our second panel for today is going to include  
8 representatives from the Department of Social  
9 Services followed by Council Member questions,  
10 followed by public testimony. I'm now going to call  
11 on Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner of the  
12 Department of Social Services and Erin Drinkwater,  
13 Deputy Commissioner of Intergovernmental and  
14 Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social  
15 Services.

16 I'm now going to administer the oath to the  
17 Administration. When you hear your name, please  
18 respond, once a member of our staff unmutes you. Do  
19 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
20 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to  
21 respond honestly to Council Member questions? First  
22 Deputy Commissioner Molly Park?

23 MOLLY PARK: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy  
25 Commissioner Drinkwater?

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ERIN DRINKWATER: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I want to note that after members of the Administration testify, I will be turning over moderating to my colleague Natalie Omary, Policy Analyst for the Committee on General Welfare.

First Deputy Commissioner Park, you may begin once the Sergeant at Arms queues you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MOLLY PARK: Good morning, I want to thank the Committee on General Welfare for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify. I am Molly Park and I am the First Deputy Commissioner at the New York City Department of Homeless Services. I am joined by Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social Services. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss single adults experiencing homelessness in New York City and the steps this Administration has taken to support our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge our DHS and contracted provider staff for their work at the frontlines. They work each day to provide shelter

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and critical services to New Yorkers in need to help them get back on their feet. As we begin our discussion today on the state of single adult homelessness in New York City, we should acknowledge that the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness in our city are sheltered indoors across our shelter system because we have a right to shelter. That stands in stark contrast with other jurisdictions around the nation, particularly on the West Coast, where the proportion of unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on the street is exponentially greater than in New York City.

To better understand this concept, it is important to understand the background that has brought us to this point and the steps that this Administration has taken to address homelessness. Over the course of the last 40 years, New York City has been under court order to provide shelter to single adults and families experiencing homelessness. Against the backdrop of this legal and moral obligation to provide shelter from the elements, New York City saw steep increases in housing instability and decreases in housing affordability, with

1  
2 homelessness increasing by 115 percent between 1994  
3 and 2014.

4 In the decade between 2005 and 2015, household  
5 rents in the city increased by 18.4 percent, while at  
6 the same time incomes failed to keep pace, only  
7 increasing by 4.8 percent. Looking at affordable  
8 housing supply, between 1994 and 2012, the city  
9 suffered a net loss of about 150,000 rent-stabilized  
10 units. As a result, by 2015, the city had only half  
11 the housing needed for about three million low-income  
12 New Yorkers.

13 These trends, along with factors such as economic  
14 inequality, domestic violence, overcrowding, housing  
15 evictions, untreated mental health challenges and  
16 inadequate discharge planning from state institutions  
17 have driven homelessness and displacement in our  
18 communities over the past several decades.

19 Now, we want to update the Committee on the  
20 progress that this Administration has made to address  
21 homelessness and address the policy failures that  
22 have exacerbated challenges for vulnerable New  
23 Yorkers. While the devastating impacts of the factors  
24 mentioned earlier, along with inaction from prior  
25 administrations, have led to the homelessness

1  
2 conditions we face today, the New York City  
3 Department of Social Services, DSS, Human Resources  
4 Administration, HRA and DHS are beginning to reverse  
5 the trend.

6 Today, the DHS census stands at approximately  
7 46,000, well below the level it was at the start of  
8 this Administration, and significantly less than the  
9 high point of more than 61,000. Without the  
10 Administration's initiatives, projections indicate  
11 there would be 71,000 people in shelter today. This  
12 reduction in the DHS shelter census is driven by a  
13 substantial reduction in the number of families  
14 experiencing homelessness and residing in shelter.  
15 The peak number of individuals across those families  
16 declined by more than 17,000 people between 2014 and  
17 today.

18 Our agency has taken aggressive action to break  
19 and reverse the trajectory of an ever-increasing DHS  
20 shelter census over the past several decades, such as  
21 restoring the city's rental assistance and rehousing  
22 programs. We have directed unprecedented resources  
23 toward a new comprehensive and holistic approach to  
24 fighting homelessness, focused on prevention,  
25 including expanded civil legal services for tenants,

1  
2 outreach and support for unsheltered New Yorkers,  
3 closing substandard shelter facilities, expanded  
4 transitional housing options, improved shelter  
5 conditions, and more robust rehousing and aftercare  
6 services.

7       In February 2017, the Mayor announced Turning the  
8 Tide on Homelessness in New York City, a neighborhood  
9 by neighborhood blueprint for transforming a shelter  
10 system that was built up in a haphazard way over four  
11 decades. This plan takes the reforms that resulted  
12 from the 90-day homeless services review in 2016 even  
13 further, finally ending the use of ineffective stop-  
14 gap measures and band-aid approaches that date back  
15 decades and replacing them with a smaller number of  
16 high-quality borough-based transitional housing  
17 facilities.

18       The Turning the Tide plan consists of four core  
19 pillars: One, preventing homelessness whenever we  
20 can. Two, rehousing families and individuals so they  
21 can move out of shelter or avoid homelessness  
22 altogether. Three, addressing unsheltered  
23 homelessness and four, transforming the haphazard  
24 approach to providing shelter and services that has  
25 built up over the last four decades.

1  
2 Our strategies have taken hold and are headed in  
3 the right direction. To highlight this, we have the  
4 made the following progress under each pillar.

5 Pillar One, Preventing Homelessness Whenever We Can.

6 This Administration has aggressively expanded free  
7 legal assistance for New Yorkers in danger of illegal  
8 eviction, increasing funding for legal services for  
9 tenants more than 25-fold, from roughly \$6 million in  
10 2013 to \$166 million in FY22, which is the largest  
11 annual investment ever by a Mayoral Administration in  
12 legal services for tenants.

13 Evictions then dropped by 41 percent pre-pandemic  
14 and thousands of New Yorkers were able to stay in  
15 their homes from 2014 through 2019 because of reduced  
16 evictions. Moreover, we have dramatically expanded  
17 legal representation for tenants. By 2020, 100  
18 percent of tenants with calendared eviction cases had  
19 access to legal services, and 71 percent of tenants  
20 who appeared in Housing Court had full representation  
21 by an attorney. Nearly double the pre-pandemic rate  
22 of 38 percent, and an exponential increase over the  
23 one percent of tenants who had lawyers in 2013.

24 Overall, more than 500,000 New Yorkers have received  
25 free legal representation, advice, or assistance in

1  
2 eviction and other housing-related matters since  
3 2014.

4 Amid the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, DSS's  
5 right-to-counsel program has continued to be a vital  
6 tool for protecting New Yorkers during this crisis  
7 and helping them keep their homes. Since the outset  
8 of the pandemic, DSS has worked closely with our  
9 dedicated legal services provider-partners on a range  
10 of immediate, comprehensive steps to ensure New  
11 Yorkers can access this vital resource. Furthermore,  
12 during the pandemic and as now codified in local law,  
13 legal services offered to New Yorkers via the right-  
14 to-counsel program are now available citywide,  
15 regardless of zip code, with eviction defense legal  
16 services available to all tenants in the city facing  
17 eviction in Housing Court, as well as NYCHA residents  
18 in termination of tenancy proceedings.

19 Pillar Two, Progress Rehousing Families and  
20 Individuals: Immediately upon taking office, the de  
21 Blasio Administration stepped in to fill the gap left  
22 by the City and State's cancellation of the Advantage  
23 rental assistance program in 2011 by creating and  
24 implementing new rental assistance programs as well  
25 as reinstating rehousing programs. Through September

1  
2 2021, these initiatives have helped more than 175,000  
3 children and adults remain in or secure permanent  
4 housing, the vast majority, more than 145,000 moving  
5 out of shelter into housing.

6 As a result of these rehousing initiatives and  
7 the pre-pandemic efforts to reduce evictions by 41  
8 percent, the number of people residing in DHS shelter  
9 is now well below where it was when this  
10 Administration began. Move outs to permanent housing  
11 have continued during the pandemic, thanks to the  
12 incredible work of our essential staff and not-for-  
13 profit provider partners who reported for duty every  
14 day throughout this crisis and did extraordinary  
15 work, going above and beyond in unprecedented and  
16 challenging circumstances.

17 Pillar Three Progress, Addressing Unsheltered  
18 Homelessness: Since the start of HOME-STAT, the most  
19 comprehensive outreach program in the nation,  
20 outreach teams have helped more than 4,200 New  
21 Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the  
22 streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new  
23 investments and expanding the size of those teams.  
24 As part of the city's 24/7/365 outreach efforts,  
25 hundreds of highly-trained not-for-profit outreach

1  
2 staff, including licensed social workers and nurses,  
3 canvass the streets proactively engaging New Yorkers  
4 experiencing homelessness. These dedicated outreach  
5 teams offer services and assistance, working to gain  
6 individuals' trust with the goal of addressing the  
7 underlying issues that may have caused or contributed  
8 to their homelessness, all to ultimately help these  
9 individuals transition off the streets.

10 Since 2014, the city has redoubled outreach  
11 efforts, dedicating unprecedented new resources to  
12 outreach programs and providers. This Administration  
13 has tripled the number of outreach staff engaging New  
14 Yorkers on the streets since 2014, from fewer than  
15 200 to more than 600. Those dedicated staff canvas  
16 the streets every day, building relationships over  
17 weeks and months through regular contact and  
18 concerted engagement with New Yorkers experiencing  
19 homelessness, focused on encouraging them to accept  
20 services and transition off the streets.

21 The city has more than quintupled the number of  
22 emergency safe haven and stabilization beds dedicated  
23 to serving unsheltered New Yorkers citywide since  
24 taking office. Thousands of these specialized beds  
25 have opened during this Administration, bringing the

1  
2 total up from 600 in 2014 to more than 3,000 open  
3 today, with hundreds more planned. Moreover, we have  
4 increased the joint outreach operations to engage  
5 more New Yorkers and offer more support, including  
6 expanding joint outreach operations with partner  
7 agencies such as New York City Department of Health  
8 and Mental Hygiene, the Parks Department, Department  
9 of Sanitation, and the Metropolitan Transportation  
10 Authority to address conditions as they occur and  
11 provide alternative pathways to permanence.

12 Pillar Four Progress, Transforming the Shelter  
13 System: The Administration has prioritized  
14 transforming and improving the shelter system, and  
15 these efforts are reflected by our closing of more  
16 than 290 shelter sites that did not meet our  
17 standards. Out of 647 sites reported in the Turning  
18 the Tide plan, thus decreasing the New York City's  
19 shelter footprint by 45 percent.

20 We have also recently completely phased out the  
21 city's use of cluster units, ending the 21-year-old,  
22 Giuliani-era program that at its high point included  
23 more than 3,600 units through innovative strategies,  
24 such as converting cluster units to permanent  
25

1  
2 affordable housing and outright closure of other  
3 units.

4       We continue to address decades of disinvestment  
5 and restore our infrastructure through aggressive  
6 repairs, renovations, and funding. Over the past  
7 several years since the 2016 launch of the Shelter  
8 Repair Squad and the subsequent release of the  
9 Turning the Tide plan, the Mayor's Interagency  
10 Shelter Repair Squad Task Force has conducted more  
11 than 63,000 shelter inspections, driving down  
12 violations in shelter that went unaddressed for many  
13 years by more than 94 percent to an all-time low. We  
14 have also allocated millions of dollars to address  
15 remaining violations.

16       While this Administration continues to address  
17 homelessness and improve conditions for vulnerable  
18 New Yorkers, it is important to understand the fiscal  
19 landscape affecting funding for our services. New  
20 York City has continued to increase investment to  
21 prevent and alleviate homelessness, while the state  
22 has continued a multi-year trend of disinvesting in  
23 services to address homelessness and walking away  
24 from its responsibility to support New Yorkers  
25

1  
2 experiencing homelessness, resulting in significant  
3 cost shifts to city programs and services.

4 At the city level, we will continue to invest in  
5 the proven-successful programs this Administration  
6 created from the ground up, which will help even more  
7 individuals and families avert shelter entry and/or  
8 find available apartments that work for them.

9 For example, the Council and the Administration  
10 have taken action this year to set the rent levels  
11 for the 100 percent city-funded City FHEPS program at  
12 the same levels as the NYCHA Section 8 payment  
13 standard; and our agency implemented the increase  
14 ahead of schedule and with reforms to address the  
15 "income cliff" affecting continuing eligibility for  
16 families and individuals with increased employment  
17 income.

18 State legislation to do the same for the rent  
19 levels for the state FHEPS program has passed the  
20 Assembly and the Senate. We hope the State will step  
21 up in kind, to ensure State vouchers remain  
22 competitive, protect state voucher-holders from being  
23 left behind, and join us in this mission, which can  
24 only be resolved by collaborating across all levels  
25 of government.

1  
2 As we testified at this year's Council budget  
3 hearings, the state has steadily disinvested in  
4 efforts to address homelessness in New York City over  
5 the past decades, which historically was an  
6 obligation evenly shared by both levels of  
7 government. Independent experts who have analyzed  
8 this dynamic for years have identified this pattern  
9 of state disinvestment.

10 For example, the New York City Independent Budget  
11 Office reported<sup>1</sup> that: "changes implemented in Albany  
12 have reduced the state's contribution to fund  
13 shelters for single adults, leaving the city to fund  
14 the increased costs associated with the rising adult  
15 shelter population."

16 Likewise, in a report measuring state  
17 disinvestment in homelessness services, the IBO  
18 highlighted that, as the city invests in an improved  
19 shelter infrastructure and a more holistic approach  
20 to homeless services, the state's contribution  
21 dropped pre-pandemic to a 9 percent share of homeless  
22 services in New York City. The State's diminishing  
23 support for these critical services is dire, and we  
24 have continued to call for a fair share of funding to  
25

1  
2 help New Yorkers experiencing homelessness get back  
3 on their feet.

4 Looking further back, beginning in the 1990s, New  
5 York State capped the funding it provides to New York  
6 City for sheltering single adults. Not only has the  
7 state failed to proportionally increase that funding  
8 as homelessness increased over the past several  
9 decades, but it has progressively cut the cap, and  
10 with inflation the value of the state share has  
11 eroded even more.

12 Before the implementation of the cap in the  
13 1990's, the State reimbursed 50 percent of the cost  
14 of sheltering single adults. During the Giuliani and  
15 Bloomberg Administrations, as shelter and street  
16 populations continued increasing, the state continued  
17 cutting funding, which meant that by 2005, the state  
18 contribution had shrunk to 35 percent of costs.

19 Today, funding provided by the state has dropped  
20 to just 9 percent of spending on single adult shelter  
21 services, with costs and responsibility shifting  
22 significantly to the city. New York City continues  
23 to shoulder the associated increases every year,  
24 despite the fact that the court ordered right to  
25 shelter across New York State is based on the New

1  
2 York State Constitution that applies to both the  
3 state and the city. This has led to substantial cost  
4 shifts of millions of dollars over many years from  
5 the city to the state, requiring the city to take on  
6 more and more fiscal responsibility that has impacted  
7 the city's resources to deliver support to New  
8 Yorkers in need.

9       It is also worth noting the state set public  
10 assistance rent allowance for a single adult is \$215  
11 per month, a grossly inadequate amount for rent  
12 payments in New York City that has not increased in  
13 several decades and fails to keep up with the  
14 increasing rent costs. The \$215 state-set rent  
15 allowance for single adults is a major driver of  
16 single adult homelessness in New York City and across  
17 the State.

18       We have repeatedly called on the state to support  
19 services to address homelessness by restoring the  
20 state's traditional 50/50 cost split for shelter and  
21 other services to address homelessness for single  
22 adults in New York City, outreach workers, safe  
23 havens, stabilization beds, and the cost of homeless  
24 services for the overnight MTA initiative.

1  
2           Nevertheless, despite the fact that a Consent  
3 Decree enforcing the State Constitution obligates  
4 both the state and the city to provide shelter to  
5 single adults experiencing homelessness, the state  
6 has steadily reduced its support to address single  
7 adult homelessness in New York City from 50/50 to a  
8 mere nine percent. Moreover, the state provides zero  
9 dollars to support the more than 600 outreach workers  
10 who help unsheltered New Yorkers and the more than  
11 3,000 safe haven and stabilization beds that the city  
12 has funded that have enabled more than 4,200 people  
13 to come off the streets and subways and remain off  
14 since 2016.

15           To summarize this simply, the state must return  
16 to paying its fair share for life-saving services for  
17 single adults experiencing homelessness. Even as the  
18 overall DHS shelter census and the number of children  
19 and adults in family shelters have been reduced  
20 significantly, there are record numbers of people in  
21 DHS single adult shelters, and state support is  
22 critically needed.

23           I'm going to pivot now to talk about state  
24 parolees in shelter. New York City DSS-DHS has  
25 invested more than a quarter-billion dollars annually

1  
2 in our not-for-profit social service provider  
3 partners who operate shelters to enhance the services  
4 they provide to New Yorkers in need, including  
5 increased investments for mental health services. As  
6 I mentioned earlier, in our city, all people  
7 experiencing homelessness have a right to shelter,  
8 and we are committed to providing shelter to any New  
9 Yorker experiencing homelessness who needs it,  
10 regardless of their background, including criminal  
11 justice involvement.

12       Along with the affordable housing crisis,  
13 including the \$215 state-set monthly public  
14 assistance rent allowance for single adults, a driver  
15 of the single adult DHS census growth is the state's  
16 failure to invest in reentry services to prevent  
17 discharges from state prisons to DHS shelters.

18       Tragically, history is repeating itself. Just as  
19 state deinstitutionalization from state mental health  
20 facilities without sufficient community mental health  
21 services has contributed to modern day mass  
22 homelessness for single adults, now state  
23 decarceration without sufficient community reentry  
24 services is resulting in a state prison to shelter  
25 pipeline.

1  
2 As a result, at any given time, there are  
3 approximately 1,500 state parolees residing in DHS  
4 shelters. The state sends these individuals directly  
5 to DHS shelter, even when they have housing options  
6 available to them. Instead of discharging parolees  
7 directly from state prisons to shelter, the state  
8 needs to invest in a real re-entry program, so  
9 individuals don't need to go straight from state  
10 prison to a City shelter. The state should work  
11 directly with parolees as part of the release process  
12 to assist them in reintegrating into society,  
13 including identifying suitable housing where they may  
14 be supported. The fact is, this sequence of events  
15 is preventable with better discharge planning and  
16 reentry services by the state, which provides little  
17 oversight on whether discharged individuals have  
18 viable housing options to help them get back on their  
19 feet.

20 Now, I'd like to shift to updating the Committee  
21 on our services for New Yorkers experiencing  
22 unsheltered homelessness. Since the start of HOME-  
23 STAT, the most comprehensive outreach program in the  
24 nation, outreach teams have helped more than 4,200  
25 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off

1  
2 the streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new  
3 investments and more than tripling the staffing of  
4 those teams. As you know, as part of the city's  
5 24/7/365 outreach efforts, hundreds of highly-trained  
6 not-for-profit outreach staff, including licensed  
7 social workers, canvas the streets, proactively  
8 engaging New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered  
9 homelessness, offering services and assistance,  
10 working to gain their trust with the goal of  
11 addressing the underlying issues that may have caused  
12 or contributed to their homelessness in order to  
13 ultimately help these individuals transition off the  
14 street.

15 Since 2014, the city has redoubled outreach  
16 efforts, dedicating unprecedented new resources to  
17 outreach programs and providers, including actions  
18 such as more than tripling the number of outreach  
19 staff canvassing the streets engaging New Yorkers  
20 24/7/365, from fewer than 200 to more than 600, as  
21 mentioned earlier. More than quintupling the number  
22 of emergency safe haven and stabilization beds  
23 dedicated to serving unsheltered New Yorkers citywide  
24 from 600 to more than 3,000; expanding the  
25 availability of drop-in centers for New Yorkers

1  
2 experiencing unsheltered homelessness, with six city-  
3 funded drop-in centers in operation 24/7, including  
4 one in each of the five boroughs, with two additional  
5 drop-in centers planned to open in Manhattan; and  
6 lastly, increasing the joint interagency street  
7 outreach operations to engage more New Yorkers and  
8 offer more supports.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today  
10 and provide updates on our efforts to support New  
11 Yorkers experiencing homelessness. I welcome any  
12 questions you may have.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to the  
14 Administration for your testimony. My name is  
15 Natalie Omary, I am a Policy Analyst to the Committee  
16 on General Welfare and I'm going to be taking over  
17 moderating for the remainder of the hearing.

18 Before I turn to Chair Levin for questions, I  
19 just want to remind the Council Members to use the  
20 raise hand function in Zoom to indicate that they  
21 have a question for the panel. Please remember to  
22 keep your questions and answers to five minutes and  
23 panelists from the Administration if you are able to  
24 stay unmuted for the duration of Q&A. I will now  
25

1  
2 turn it over to Chair Levin for any questions he has  
3 for the Administration, Chair Levin.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Moderator  
5 Omary, I appreciate it and thank you Deputy  
6 Commissioner for your testimony. I'll start off by  
7 agreeing with you that the state disinvestment in  
8 homeless services over the past ten years has been  
9 uhm, disgraceful. Uhm, and now that the Cuomo era is  
10 officially over, I think that we can say  
11 conclusively, that the legacy of the Cuomo  
12 Administration at the state level when it comes to  
13 homeless services, has been a record disinvestment.  
14 I can't frankly think of a single positive thing that  
15 they contributed in the sphere of homeless services  
16 at all in New York City at least.

17 And uhm, and they did a tremendous amount of  
18 damage. And I think that you know, history will  
19 confirm that but you know I think that you're  
20 absolutely right to point that out and to insist on  
21 making sure that that is clear. I mean going back to  
22 Governor Cuomo's very first budget in 2011, when the  
23 first thing he did was cut the state share of  
24 advantage from I think it was something like \$100  
25 million to zero. Maybe even more, maybe like 120 to

1  
2 zero and putting that entire burden on the city and  
3 we all know what happened after that.

4 So, I acknowledge all of that. Uhm, with that  
5 said, I want to ask some questions about the  
6 Administrations – what's happened during this  
7 administration when it comes to single adult  
8 homelessness? And so, the first question is just,  
9 you know looking at the population of in shelter for  
10 single adults. When this Administration took over,  
11 it was roughly 11.5 thousand single adults in  
12 shelter.

13 That increased to a high of 20,822, which would  
14 have been February of 2021, was the high point of  
15 that census. That has since decreased by about 2,00  
16 or 2,500 but if you could explain why that size – I  
17 mean that's an increase of almost 100 percent. Why  
18 do you think that is?

19 MOLLY PARK: Sure, I think there is a couple of  
20 reasons for that. Uhm, I think some of which I  
21 touched on in my testimony that there are breakdowns  
22 in discharge at planning with the criminal justice  
23 system over the last I think year and a half, about  
24 28 percent of the growth in the single adult shelter  
25 population has been with criminally justice involved

1  
2 individuals. There's a lot of positives to the trend  
3 towards reducing incarceration but it needs to be  
4 done in a thoughtful way. So, I think there's as I  
5 say, trends on who is coming into the shelter system  
6 but I also think that there are real structural  
7 mismatches in the housing stock, just for across all  
8 income levels like everything is always more  
9 pronounced when you're talking about the need for  
10 deeply affordable housing. The numbers are something  
11 like 65 percent of households in New York City are  
12 one and two people and about one-third of the housing  
13 stock in New York City is studio and one bedrooms.  
14 So, you have - that is again, across the board. That  
15 doesn't distinguish between you know what is  
16 affordable housing and not affordable housing but on  
17 the most macrolevel, it's very difficult for a single  
18 person to find housing and when you compound that  
19 with the need to find affordable housing, that is  
20 just a tremendous challenge and I think that has a  
21 lot to do with what your seeing.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just want to ask about so,  
23 and you spoke about this in your testimony, the  
24 state's responsibility for discharge planning on  
25 parole but was there a policy change that occurred in

1  
2 you know the early 2010's that was different. That  
3 somehow changed that trajectory because the rapid  
4 increase over the last eight years you know, there  
5 has to be a policy that that is connected to.

6 MOLLY PARK: Well, I should be clear that I'm not  
7 attributing the entire growth in the single adult  
8 shelter system to criminal justice policies. I do  
9 think overall there has been a move towards reduced  
10 incarceration. Again, I think there's many good  
11 reasons for that but without -

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But that's parole. I mean,  
13 that's not a parole thing, that's the reduced  
14 incarceration meaning we're not having people  
15 detained at Rikers as much as we used to and that  
16 doesn't, that's not a discharge. In that instance,  
17 there's no state touchpoint at all, right? I mean,  
18 like then the Department of Parole is not responsible  
19 for that.

20 MOLLY PARK: Well, but this is true. I think  
21 it's true across multiple levels of the criminal  
22 justice system. Again, I'm not criticizing the  
23 overarching policy but I'm talking about the extent  
24 to which it was done in a thoughtful and planned  
25 measure. But it's not the only factor right? There

1  
2 are uhm, you know I talked early on in my testimony  
3 right about growth in income relative to growth in  
4 rents, right? That is harder to absorb. Those are  
5 global factors but it is harder to absorb if you are  
6 an individual than if you are a family because you  
7 qualify for fewer income supports there right? Many  
8 of the systems that we have whether it is you know  
9 different forms of cash assistance; various rental  
10 subsidies right are really oriented towards families.

11 So, you have a population that has been impacted  
12 by all of the national economic forces of growing  
13 income inequality. The local factors of reduction in  
14 rent stabilized housing, uhm, and yet they qualify  
15 for fewer resources. You know, the shelter allowance  
16 isn't adequate for any - the state shelter allowance  
17 is inadequate for any family size but the \$215  
18 dollars for single is particularly remarkable.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, okay. I mean, I'm going  
20 to- the other data point that I think is important to  
21 point out here is the average length of stay and how  
22 that has gone over the last eight years. So, I'll  
23 read that off here.

24 This is for single adults. I think it was in  
25 2013 or 2014, it was 305 days average length of stay

1  
2 in the single adult system. 329, 355, this is year  
3 over year. This is from the AMMR, 305, 329, 355,  
4 383, 401, 414, 431, 476. So, it went from 305 to  
5 476, you know an increase of about – what is that?  
6 It's about 60 percent maybe in just in length of  
7 stay. But so, you know I look at length of stay as a  
8 really important indicator because that directly  
9 affects your census. You know if you have longer  
10 stays, you're going to have a greater population in  
11 shelter because you're not having exits. And you  
12 know frankly I got to say, you know we did this – you  
13 know you mentioned that the supports are not there  
14 necessarily for you know vouchers, you know for  
15 single individuals.

16 I mean, I had a hearing in this Committee about  
17 the level of rent that the City FHEPS voucher at the  
18 time and it was the length vouchers but the level of  
19 rent that it met in the percentage of FMR, and I mean  
20 frankly, this Administration like fought me on that  
21 for years. Like, it's not like Intro. 146 was like  
22 an easy bill to pass.

23 I didn't have you know a lot of support from this  
24 Administration and I had a hearing in 2017 about it.  
25 Uhm, I recently found some of the information, you

1  
2 know some of the paperwork from that hearing. So, we  
3 were talking about this from 2017 to 2021 and it took  
4 that amount of time. Now, I realize, like, I get it.  
5 It's frustrating that the state was not contributing.  
6 I get that but when we're seeing the average length  
7 of stay go up from 305 to 476, you have to do  
8 something.

9 And so, my frustration is that you know it took  
10 that long and so we then have this average length of  
11 stay that goes from 305 to 476 and a population that  
12 goes from 11,000 to 20,000 and it took all of that  
13 time to just increase to fair market rent, so that we  
14 can have a viable exit program.

15 MOLLY PARK: So, Council Member, I don't disagree  
16 with you. The length of stay is longer than we would  
17 like it to be. It's just something I'm not going to  
18 argue on that point. I think there is a lot of work  
19 that we have done over the years. We move out and  
20 you know this goes back a long time, right? 200  
21 households a week every week into subsidized housing,  
22 right? We've done out of the shelter system about  
23 145,000 individuals since the start of this  
24 Administration right?  
25

1  
2       So, moving out to permanent housing is an ongoing  
3 priority and something that we work hard at. We  
4 appreciate the work that you have done with Intro.  
5 146 and I think the way that we you know showed that  
6 appreciation was that we started the capita process  
7 as soon as the bill was passed. Had some really  
8 positive dialogue back and forth with many including  
9 yourself on ways that we could make the rule process  
10 better. So, one of the really important changes that  
11 we made during that capita process was to change  
12 ongoing eligibility for people whose income goes up  
13 while they are receiving City FHEPS and we  
14 implemented it before the date required in the bill.

15       There are – one of the other things that we did  
16 in that bill – or sorry, in the capita process that I  
17 am personally excited and really proud about is that  
18 we created a project based version of City FHEPs, so  
19 that – that allows the City FHEPS dollars to be used  
20 to leverage development funding for ongoing permanent  
21 housing. The way that project based Section 8 could  
22 be used. You know, it's in its early days. We're  
23 working with the affordable housing community to  
24 actually put this into place but I think this has an  
25 opportunity to be a game changer to leverage social

1  
2 service dollars to create permanent housing. Because  
3 I cannot argue with you, this has been the guiding  
4 force of my career that what this city needs is more  
5 affordable housing.

6 Uhm, and just one last point that I want to make  
7 in response to your questions. I wasn't at DHS in  
8 2017 when those conversations but I was at HPD, and  
9 one of the things that we heard from Council Members  
10 from communities over and over again is we would  
11 bring new projects to you know, potential projects to  
12 communities, was that they wanted more family units  
13 and fewer small units. That was always the push and  
14 I think it really gets back to this mismatch that I  
15 was talking about earlier. We need more units of  
16 lots of different types for singles and for couples  
17 or small families. I shouldn't necessarily say  
18 couples, there's a lot of configurations there.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hmm, hmm.

20 MOLLY PARK: But we all need to work together as  
21 a city to make sure that we are developing those -  
22 the units that conserve you know people other than  
23 your traditional you know mom, dad and two kids  
24 because that's not necessarily reflective of New York  
25

1  
2 City. Uhm, again I'm really excited for the  
3 opportunity project-based City FHEPS to do that.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, absolutely, I agree with  
5 that. I think what we don't need in terms of  
6 affordable housing are a lot of single units at 80  
7 percent of AMI. You know, or 100 percent of AMI or  
8 130 percent of AMI. Uhm, you know we need single  
9 units for 40 percent of AMI and 30 percent of AMI and  
10 50 percent of AMI but we don't need it at those  
11 higher income levels. Because that's not, that's not  
12 helping people coming out of shelter. I mean,  
13 eventually we would hope that somebody is making 80  
14 percent of AMI but that's actually now the rule.  
15 When City FHEPS phases out is at 80 percent. When  
16 you're making 80 percent of AMI, you're doing  
17 alright. It's about \$60,000, \$65,000 a year as a  
18 single adult.

19 So, I think that that is you know what we need  
20 and I think that what I'm curious about actually is  
21 do we know exactly what - how many - do we have clear  
22 reporting about the number of exits out of the  
23 shelter system into subsidized units? Like in HPD  
24 units? Is that reported out in a detailed way?  
25

1  
2 MOLLY PARK: We can get that information for you.  
3 I don't have it right at my fingertips but we can  
4 follow up.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, actually I wanted to ask  
6 uhm because in September, uhm, we had a hearing on  
7 Intro. 149 and Intro. 1642. 149 is kind of a  
8 reporting of all of the shelter systems you know in a  
9 single place. So, that we get a comprehensive  
10 picture of the people that are unstably housed in the  
11 city. Uhm, and are in city, some form of city  
12 shelter, an HPD shelter, DHS shelter, DYCD shelter,  
13 HRA shelter. Uhm, and so that's one bill. The other  
14 bill is around you know comprehensive reporting of  
15 exits out of the city shelter systems.

16 Uhm, as you probably know, the final aging  
17 deadline - so in the hearing in September, you guys  
18 testified that you wanted to work with me on these  
19 bills. And said, you know we want to make sure that  
20 they are not redundant and you know that there's -  
21 you know that the reporting is you know for stuff  
22 that you have access to, so you're not forced to  
23 report on stuff you don't have access to. Uhm, and  
24 uhm, you know and that it's not doing stuff that I  
25 guess is already done elsewhere, although I don't

1  
2 know if that's necessarily a problem because you  
3 could get the information then. You know I don't  
4 mind duplicate information. That's like not, it's  
5 not like my biggest worry in world is having too much  
6 information.

7 So, I have like 36 hours now between now and the  
8 final aging deadline for legislation in my entire  
9 tenure in the New York City Council, all 12 years.  
10 Uhm, can I get a commitment from you guys now that  
11 you will work with me over the next 36 hours on  
12 language on these two bills, so that they can be aged  
13 to be passed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December?

14 MOLLY PARK: I'm going to ask Erin to chime in  
15 since she is the one who would personally be actually  
16 doing that work.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just want to remind you of  
18 the testimony in September which was that you would  
19 work with me on it.

20 ERIN DRINKWATER: Absolutely. No and that stands  
21 to be the case. We had not heard from your office on  
22 any deadlines but if you want to work with us, we're  
23 happy to do that. I understand the time constraints  
24 here. We did testify in September that we wanted to  
25 make sure that it was duplicative.

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One of the challenges from the way we see it in terms of duplicative reports is you know it is more work for staff when we might be able to streamline the additional metrics into a single report. Local Law 37 of 2011 established a streamline reporting process for the multiagency report. The additional requirements in 1642, didn't add any burden to operations in terms of reporting. Uhm, and in regards to uh, 149, again, we just want to make sure that that data is reported in such a way that it's useful to the public, it's useful to the Committee, uhm and the Council as a whole and then certainly reflective of the agencies work.

So, we look forward to talking to you more about these.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so if I get them to you like this afternoon we can? Because this is it. This is all - after tomorrow night, you know I can't pass anymore bills. And so, you know I got to get this - like I said, we have to have an agreement by tomorrow night. Is that fair?

ERIN DRINKWATER: Understood, we can work with the city leg as we always do.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, alright because I but  
3 so, I just want to be clear that we have a commitment  
4 that we're going to do this. So, is that a yes?

5 ERIN DRINKWATER: We are actually happy to  
6 collaborate on this.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, alright, we'll get  
8 something over, I'll get you redlines today, like in  
9 the next couple hours. You should have it by you  
10 know within a half an hour after this hearing is  
11 over.

12 Uhm, okay, I want to acknowledge Council Member  
13 Salamanca is with us. He sponsored the legislation  
14 on having set asides in HPD projects. Council Member  
15 Salamanca, do you have any questions you want to ask  
16 the Administration? We also have a spare Land Use  
17 Chair.

18 Alright, I don't see any from Council Member  
19 Salamanca. So, Commissioner Park, I just want to go  
20 back to just asking about the length of stay. Why do  
21 you think, so the length of stay is not going to be  
22 driven by people exiting state facilities and  
23 parolees. What do you think is driving - because  
24 that's an ever increasing number uhm and it's been a  
25 pretty kind of consistent trajectory in terms of that

1  
2 increase in length of stay. What do you think is  
3 driving like, you know, when you guys are examining  
4 this from a policy shot and from a data shot, what  
5 conclusions are you drawing from that data?

6 MOLLY PARK: So, let me give you my analysis. I  
7 will preface this by saying you know this is my  
8 analysis as somebody who works in this space but it's  
9 not likely the only interpretation that one could put  
10 on these data.

11 The way length of stay is calculated, it is the  
12 average length of stay for the people who are in the  
13 system that at a given point and time right, as  
14 opposed to uhm the average length of stay for the  
15 number of people who move through the system. And  
16 I'm not sure if that's totally clear but if you have  
17 you know a number of people who come through and  
18 cycle through the system relatively quickly, uhm, and  
19 then you have a few people who stay in shelter for a  
20 very long period of time. The length of stay figure  
21 is really driven by those people who are staying for  
22 a longer period of time. So, my interpretation here  
23 and again, I think this is something that we could  
24 discuss further but is that we have a lot of - we  
25 have tools that are helping people with - that are

1  
2 helping people who can move relatively quickly. We  
3 have some tools that are helping them to move  
4 relatively quickly.

5 But that there's also a universe of individuals  
6 with for a whole slew of reasons, more significant  
7 barriers to moving out of shelter, right? And that  
8 can be, you know there were some illusions to uhm,  
9 you know landlords reactions to taking particular  
10 rent subsidies or landlords reactions to people with  
11 different kinds of backgrounds. There is absolutely  
12 fair housing concerns that come into this. It is  
13 particularly hard for us to help individuals who  
14 don't have a full documentation access permit a  
15 housing right.

16 So, you have a universe of people for a  
17 constellation of reasons. It is harder for them to  
18 move to permanent housing and they are staying longer  
19 and given the way that this particular metric is  
20 calculated, sort of their increasing length of stay  
21 in the system - excuse the whole metric. Even when  
22 you have people who might - still a reasonable number  
23 of people who are moving relatively quickly right.  
24 What you have is not necessarily all the people in  
25 the system staying the 400 plus days. You have a

1  
2 large number of people staying a short period of time  
3 and then, unfortunately a universe of people staying  
4 much longer.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What I don't understand is  
6 okay, so but why would it be ever increasing? Like,  
7 it's not plateauing. It's not like it's - like  
8 something has to be - something has to continue to  
9 drive that number higher. Like, it's not like it  
10 went from 300 days to 400 days then just stayed at  
11 400 days. It continued to climb to 476. It's ever  
12 increasing. And so, something is driving - something  
13 has to be different today than it was two years ago  
14 and something two years ago has to be different than  
15 it was four years ago, right?

16 MOLLY PARK: So, if you have a lot of people who  
17 are - and this is a hypothetical example here but if  
18 you have a lot of people who are staying 200 days, it  
19 is going to - you're going to have an average and a  
20 median that look more like one another right? If  
21 what you have is many people who are moving fairly  
22 quickly and many people at the tail end, staying  
23 longer right? If you've flattened out that curve  
24 somewhat so that you, then the weight carried by the  
25

1  
2 people at the longer end of that length of stay curve  
3 is one that carries more weight.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if you were going to do a  
5 median, you anticipate that the median would be much  
6 lower than the 476? Statistically, significantly  
7 lower?

8 MOLLY PARK: I would anticipate that. I think  
9 this this something that I'm happy to take back to  
10 the folks on our team who do research. I realize  
11 that given your timeframe, that's probably not a very  
12 satisfying answer but I think this is something that  
13 we can certainly dig back into.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm just - what I would have  
15 hoped is that this would have you know, you guys  
16 would have seen this yourselves and been like, what  
17 is going on here? You know this is your public  
18 indicator on the MMR. It's like you know you can't  
19 get any kind of more cursory than that. It's not  
20 like you know, this isn't like detailed stuff and you  
21 know it's just like that is, that's a huge - I mean  
22 that is a huge, that is the reason why I called this  
23 hearing. That is the reason why I called this  
24 hearing is because I want to know why that number of  
25 the length of stay combined with the length that the

1  
2 overall increase where we've seen the family census.  
3 I mean, let's put a pen in the 18 months okay.

4       Because it's like that's not indicative. There's  
5 been an eviction moratorium, so that's you know maybe  
6 we can – it can maybe help to be a great reset if we  
7 can really flood the zone with prevention measures  
8 when the moratorium is lifted. I mean keep everybody  
9 in their home and we can take advantage of what the  
10 moratorium did to keep the census lower. Like, that  
11 would be, but that is an extraordinary tool that has  
12 never been and never will be likely outside of a  
13 pandemic available – another pandemic, available to  
14 us again. It's like an entire eviction moratorium,  
15 so you don't have evictions happening in the City of  
16 New York for two years.

17       You know, so, I think that what we would really  
18 want to look at in terms of policy is to what was  
19 happening up until February of 2020. Uhm, so that's  
20 I mean, I don't know, I mean I don't think that  
21 there's going to be a real answer before I leave the  
22 Council but it is something that I would hope there  
23 would be like a huge amount of urgency around what is  
24 going on here because it is not leveling out.

1  
2           MOLLY PARK: So, there is a lot there for me to  
3 respond to. Let' me try, the family and children  
4 system, I mean you did see leveling off and  
5 reductions even prepandemic. We continue to invest  
6 in housing and this is both for families and children  
7 and for single adults right. Investing in the  
8 housing resources, making sure that City FHEPS is  
9 widely available and again, we are greatly  
10 appreciative of the higher rent numbers that you  
11 spearheaded.

12           We are with families in addition to City FHEPS,  
13 we connect people to NYCHA units. We connect people  
14 to HPD units. Uhm, we are these days pushing very  
15 hard on the emergency housing vouchers that were  
16 created through the American Rescue Act. A lot of  
17 those same tools apply to single, the NYCHA housing  
18 but certainly EHV supportive housing. It is an  
19 incredibly important tool for single adults. We are  
20 connecting them there.

21           We try very hard to be creative and to look for  
22 housing opportunities and I think that's why you know  
23 I keep coming back to it but I'm really excited about  
24 this opportunity to use social service dollars to  
25 actually create permanent housing and create

1  
2 affordable housing opportunities because I do think  
3 that that is you know creating more opportunities is  
4 the end goal. You mentioned at one point the  
5 difference in incomes that are in some of those  
6 single units that might get created that are  
7 affordable but affordable at the higher end of the  
8 spectrum.

9 We've worked with HPD on what we call our  
10 enhanced City FHEPS where we are able to use City  
11 FHEPS to put - help clients access units that were  
12 financed that do have an HPD regulatory agreement but  
13 at the higher end of the spectrum. And we're placing  
14 clients directly from our system into those units.

15 So, we are looking at every opportunity. We have  
16 been collaborating with our housing partners and  
17 really working hard to make sure that there is as  
18 many opportunities to move out of the shelter system  
19 as possible.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uhm, if someone's  
21 experiencing street homelessness, uhm, can they have  
22 access to safe haven you know without having to do  
23 the nine months being seen three different times  
24 requirement that we have been hearing about for all  
25 these years?

1  
2 MOLLY PARK: Yeah, the safe havens, while they  
3 are emphasized serving clients experiencing chronic  
4 street homelessness, if an outreach provider  
5 identifies a client that they think is a particularly  
6 good fit for a safe haven, we can work with them and  
7 get that client into that particular unit, that bed,  
8 and then the state beds are much more flexible as  
9 well. So, there are array of these lower barrier  
10 units that are serving the full spectrum of clients  
11 experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you see uhm, I mean and  
13 this is within the context of COVID and also not the  
14 context of COVID, do you see reluctance to go into  
15 congregate shelter as a major barrier for people  
16 getting off the street?

17 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, no, I don't think it is the  
18 major barrier, right. I mean -

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: A major barrier?

20 MOLLY PARK: I think it is a barrier. I think  
21 there are uhm, many - there are people who have  
22 perceptions of what the shelter system that maybe,  
23 that are their own perceptions for a variety of  
24 reasons.

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Likely lived experience.  
3 Likely lived experience.

4 MOLLY PARK: It can be lived experience. It may  
5 or may not have been you know current lived  
6 experience but could very well be lived experience.  
7 The intake process can be daunting. One of the  
8 things that we did as part of the uhm, when the  
9 subway system shutdown last year and we had - we  
10 significantly increased our presence at the end of  
11 line stations. Uhm, was that we set up a remote  
12 intake process so that, that clients who were on the  
13 subways who wanted to come into the shelter system  
14 could bypass intake, bypass the 30<sup>th</sup> Street site.

15 You know, that is something that operationally is  
16 challenging to do on a large scale. Like there are  
17 real reasons to do intake. One of the very basic  
18 ones these days, we are doing COVID testing at the  
19 intake sites and have caught hundreds of cases of  
20 COVID at intake before they get into the shelter  
21 system.

22 So, there's real reasons to have intake but we  
23 also understand that you know it can be daunting.  
24 So, we have set up some work around. So, we actually  
25 see many clients coming from the street into the

1  
2 traditional shelter system but for other people it is  
3 not the right fit. We are very conscious that we do  
4 not run a one size fits all system. So for other  
5 safe havens and stabilization beds are the right  
6 option.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you think that and this  
8 could be in the context of COVID and not in the  
9 context of COVID. Do you think that congregate  
10 shelters are a safe place to be?

11 MOLLY PARK: Yes. I think again, it is not a one  
12 size fits all option. There are people for whom a  
13 congregate space is not the right option for a  
14 variety of different reasons. And we do have a  
15 system with a lot of diversity affects right. While  
16 we have about 5,000 single adult clients in  
17 commercial hotels right now. Uhm, of that, sorry  
18 looking at my notes. About 1,500 of those are COVID  
19 right. A little small piece of that is isolation and  
20 quarantine but the majority of those 1,500 beds are  
21 clients who have reasonable accommodations. Uhm,  
22 because they have underlying conditions that put them  
23 at greater risk for COVID. And you know, which can  
24 be something as basic as age. We have offered all  
25

1  
2 our seniors single or double rooms depending on age  
3 but it could also be an underlying medical condition.

4 So, we do not run a one size fits all system  
5 right. We have to have a diversity of options within  
6 that system but there are – but there is a real place  
7 for congregate shelter. It needs to be done in a way  
8 that is thoughtful, where we are prioritizing safety.  
9 I think we have a lot of providers who have a great  
10 track record doing that and we anticipate the  
11 congregate shelter will continue to be an ongoing  
12 part of our portfolio.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uhm, I can tell you, you know  
14 pretty conclusively at this point after chairing this  
15 Committee for eight years that uhm, no client is  
16 going to prefer a congregate shelter over a more  
17 private setting, a safe haven or a stabilization bed.

18 Uhm, and you know, that's a consistent thing I've  
19 heard. I can't think of a single person that would  
20 tell me that a congregate is more suitable to them.  
21 This is before COVID, let alone after COVID where I  
22 still don't think it's wise to have you know people  
23 in an open air setting, sleeping. You can't sleep  
24 with a mask on, especially with omicron happening.  
25 Same case with Delta, I'm not going to rehash that or

1  
2 relitigate that but I think that - I mean, you guys  
3 are proposing a safe haven in my district of 140 beds  
4 on Apollo Street and Greenpoint. I wholeheartedly  
5 support that and I'm doing everything I can to make  
6 sure that that is far enough along before I leave  
7 office because I you know, and I had you know - I had  
8 a pretty stressful, Erin was with me there, pretty  
9 stressful meeting with the neighbors in the late  
10 summer. But it is I think very important to do.

11 I just - think that we should be aiming towards  
12 long term getting out of congregate shelter entirely  
13 and giving people that dignity that goes along with a  
14 safe haven or a stabilization setting that is so much  
15 more beneficial to their lives and I think that you  
16 would hear this from - I see that Eric Rosenbaum is  
17 on, is here and I think he could probably speak to  
18 that from Project Renewals perspective. But in any  
19 event, I think that it's uhm, I think that you know  
20 as my kind of parting thoughts to this  
21 administration, if you guys are going to continue in  
22 the next administration or the next people in your  
23 roles, uhm, you know that that is, the more we invest  
24 in quick exits from shelter, rapid rehousing as much  
25 as possible, reducing that length of stay and

1  
2 providing the shelter that we do have within the  
3 system in a way that really emphasizes and stresses  
4 peoples dignity I think is where I think the shelter  
5 system ought to go.

6 MOLLY PARK: We are very grateful for your  
7 support on the Apollo site. Thank you for that and  
8 you know I will say, there are for many people, there  
9 are benefits to some of the smaller, the less dense  
10 settings. We've also systemwide seen an increase in  
11 overdoses, right. So, there are downsides. I think  
12 what I take away from this is we cannot have a one  
13 size fits all system to the extent that we want to  
14 pivot it more towards lower density settings. We  
15 would be more than happy to work with your successors  
16 and the rest of the Council's successors on the  
17 increased numbers of shelter siting's that we would  
18 need to do to be able to do that. I think it's  
19 something that we would be happy to have further  
20 conversations with the larger Council about.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, on overdoses and I  
22 really haven't seen the latest data on the last you  
23 know since the COVID hotels have been in place. Uhm,  
24 so I just would note that you know the number  
25 overdoses in New York City has increased dramatically

1  
2 in the last two or three years across the city. I  
3 mean we're over 2,000 overdoses deaths a year now.  
4 We were you know a little over a 1,000 a couple years  
5 ago and actually, there's some data that says that  
6 there was a decrease in overdoses in the hotels. But  
7 we can get that data. I haven't seen that data but I  
8 can tell you that across the city, I mean this is  
9 related fentanyl, it's not, I don't think it's  
10 related to people - it shouldn't be the rationale for  
11 a congregate shelter shouldn't be that it's as an  
12 overdose prevention strategy. I don't think that  
13 that's like a reason to do [INAUDIBLE 1:52:03] but  
14 we'll leave that there.

15 Uhm, you know just one last thing. Just you  
16 know, I mean I could tell you I've been working with  
17 a guy for the last couple of months at Wards Island.  
18 This is a guy who has an income that actually puts  
19 him a little bit over I think, qualifying for a City  
20 FHEPS voucher to begin with. So, he's making in the  
21 30's and he's been in the single adult shelter system  
22 at Wards Island at Clark Thomas for five years.

23 And so, you know when we're talking about who is  
24 skewing that number, who's weighing that average.  
25 You know, it's not just people that have like - the

1  
2 man is blind. Okay, he's blind I mean, you know he's  
3 still - he's making a decent, you know it's not great  
4 you know. He's making like it's over 200 percent of  
5 the federal poverty line and yet, somehow you know I  
6 happen to like meet him and I was like, what's going  
7 on with you? And he's like, I've been here for five  
8 years and I'm trying to find something with HPD or  
9 something.

10 It shouldn't be that a guy making 30 some  
11 thousand dollars a year should be in shelter for five  
12 years. And that's just like you know pretty obvious.

13 MOLLY PARK: I agree with you. Uhm, I think the  
14 households that are just above the income level for  
15 one subsidy but still not well off by New York City  
16 standards falls in my category of a particularly  
17 challenging universe. But that is uhm, without  
18 getting into the specifics of the case, uhm, happy to  
19 work on that, individual with you and agree.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, uhm, okay, so I'll let  
21 you guys - oh sorry, I want to acknowledge Council  
22 Member Gibson has joined us and do any of my  
23 colleagues have any questions? Is there anyone that  
24 wants to ask anything? Vanessa, do you have  
25

1  
2 anything? Okay, oh, Vanessa, do you have a question?

3 No, okay, okay.

4 Uhm, okay, the last thing I'll leave you both  
5 with is I got 36 hours left to come up with language  
6 that we can agree on 149 and 1642 and my expectation  
7 after our exchange is that we are going to work  
8 together over the next 36 hours to agree on language  
9 that we can agree. Is that correct?

10 MOLLY PARK: Correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Affirmative, okay, okay.

12 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, and I will just say, it's been  
13 a pleasure working with you. Thank you for your  
14 collaboration over the last couple of years.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
16 Commissioner and thank you Deputy Commissioner  
17 Drinkwater as well, who I've known for longer than  
18 our working relationship here in the Committee and in  
19 the Administration and it's been a great pleasure  
20 working with her as well. She is also you know a  
21 neighbor in my neighborhood, so we'll be making sure,  
22 I imagine that we'll both be supporting the safe  
23 haven on Apollo Street on into the future. So, I  
24 appreciate it and thank you for all of your  
25 collaboration as well Erin, thank you.

1  
2           Okay, I'll turn it back over to our Moderator  
3 Natalie Omary.

4           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin. We  
5 have now concluded the Administration's testimony and  
6 we'll turn to additional public testimony. First,  
7 I'd like to remind everyone that I will call up  
8 individuals in panels. Once your name is called, a  
9 member of our staff will unmute you and you may begin  
10 your testimony once the Sergeant at Arms sets the  
11 clock and gives you the queue. All testimony will be  
12 limited to three minutes. Remember that there is a  
13 few second delay before we can hear you once you are  
14 unmuted and please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to  
15 announce that you may begin before you start.

16           Uhm, Chair, I just want to acknowledge that we  
17 have some members from our first panel of public  
18 testimony who have their hands raised, if you would  
19 like to revisit some questions for them before we  
20 continue with our panels of public testimony.

21           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh, sure, that's fine with  
22 me, yup.

23           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, uhm, I believe in order  
24 of hands raised, we will go back to Sarah Wilson from  
25 our first panel.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

SARAH WILSON: Thank you so much. For the woman who was just speaking, I have two questions. One is about services and the other is about length of stay. They keep mentioning getting people "off the street," I wanted to know if those numbers include people that have been housed or does that include persons that have passed away, been sent to prison, or gone back to congregate shelter? I know that we're all familiar with the picture of Bellevue Shelter when the street sweeps that you mentioned at the end of the line rounded up a bunch of people and brought them over to Bellevue. They were forced to sleep in a lobby on the floor in a stairway like a can of sardines and I'm just wondering about those numbers. And also services, as a person who is dual diagnosed both mental health and substance abuse and is also disabled, I've been in five congregate shelters and never once have I ever been provided a service but I have been prevented from attending my own based on location and curfew, so I'm curious to know what those services are.

And then also in terms of length of stay, like I said, I'm dual diagnosed, highly functioning but I am

1  
2 too poor for low income housing but I was eligible  
3 for the 2010e and the City FHEPS. I was forced to  
4 stay 740 consecutive days and nights and I came in  
5 with paperwork in hand. Part of that reason is  
6 because you make people wait four months before you  
7 start their paperwork process. In those four months,  
8 that's \$16,000 that was made with no work provided.  
9 During those four months, people go backwards in  
10 their mental health and their substance. They  
11 deteriorate in their effectiveness.

12 So, I just want to know in regards to length of  
13 stay, a persons like me who come in on a fixed income  
14 and need a fixed rent and have all their paperwork in  
15 hand, is there anyway to waive that four months to  
16 start doing their paperwork? And then also, you  
17 mentioned persons coming home from prison, an x of  
18 mine just came home and he was given a benefit card  
19 but it was not connected. Is there any way to not  
20 make those people wait 45 days to connect their  
21 benefits and also send them home with a voucher, so  
22 they can start their process as well and not keep  
23 people in these congregate settings which are  
24 ineffective, inhumane and do not prevent overdose.  
25 Uhm, as a person who is in recovery from active

1  
2 addition, I wholeheartedly know that keeping me in a  
3 room with other active users and people who are  
4 selling substances does not prevent me from using.  
5 It actually forces me to more distressed than I need  
6 to be. So, those are my two/three questions and I  
7 just want to know length of stay, can we fix it for  
8 the people coming in on fixed incomes? Can we get  
9 rid of that four month waiting period? Uhm, people  
10 coming home from prison and then what are the  
11 specific services everyone keeps talking about  
12 because I've never seen them. And if we're rounding  
13 people up and offering them services, we need to give  
14 them an accurate description of what's going on.

15 So, I hope I made some sense and thank you so  
16 much.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, no Sarah I appreciate  
18 that. I think unfortunately just in terms of the  
19 hearing process, we can't have like witnesses asking  
20 other witnesses questions but uhm, but those are all  
21 I mean, those are all important things that we can  
22 follow up I think in writing to the Administration to  
23 get answers on those questions.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I believe the other members  
25 of the public who had questions were - oh, I'm sorry,

1  
2 I misunderstood. Uhm, okay, so we're going to  
3 proceed with our original list of public panelists  
4 and if there are members of the public who have their  
5 hands raised at this time and would like to ask  
6 additional questions or make additional testimony  
7 later, we will get back to them. But for now, we  
8 need to proceed with the additional members of the  
9 public who had previously signed on to testify.

10 So, in order, uhm, we will go in order of public  
11 panels and for now we will proceed with the group  
12 from Human. NYC, which in order will be Ashley  
13 Belcher, Charmel Lucas and Karim Walker. So, again,  
14 wait for the Sergeant to prompt you and Ashley  
15 Walker, you may begin your testimony once the  
16 Sergeant prompts you.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 ASHLEY BELCHER: Good afternoon and thank you to  
19 Council Member Levin and members of the General  
20 Welfare Committee. My name is Ashley Belcher and I  
21 am an Outreach Worker with Human. NYC. A grassroots  
22 advocacy organization focused on street and subway  
23 homelessness. Today, I would like to discuss  
24 concerns with the way homeless outreach is conducted  
25 and my recommendations for improvement.

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In my personal experience, I know that homeless outreach teams do not provide enough information and intimidate people when they come with police. First, most of the time, they do not tell you their names. Let alone have a badge on to let you know they are indeed an outreach worker. Also, homeless outreach teams such as BRC come with a police officer and talk to people and ask them if they want to go to a shelter or if they need a stabilization bed.

When I was homeless myself, I did not appreciate this approach with the police. They made me very uneasy and I wanted to run away. I also never was told about the voucher process while I was on the ground like I was later on when I met a woman named Helen Strong from Safety Net Project.

Now, during my time as an outreach worker with Human. NYC, I've seen my experience shared still by those on the street specifically people that I have spoken to including people that I've known since I was in that position and are still currently homeless. People have told me that it's not getting any better. It's only getting worse. People are telling me that they barely see any outreach teams.

1  
2 And if they do see outreach teams, they are really no  
3 help to them whatsoever.

4 One issue is that these homeless folks have no  
5 way to get in touch with people they just met to help  
6 them. Yes, they can call 311 off of the link NYC  
7 kiosk but that's not the same person that they just  
8 met with and saw who asked them if they wanted help.

9 I believe there should be some type of way for  
10 homeless people to reach out to outreach teams on a  
11 personal level, so that they can get help if they  
12 want and need it. In addition, almost every time I  
13 go to work, I see a street sweep notice. And not  
14 just one notice, at least three or four. I have also  
15 seen how the city and businesses are specifically  
16 making it more uncomfortable for unsheltered homeless  
17 individuals.

18 They have taken out a lot of benches in the  
19 subway. People living outside can't use bathrooms in  
20 most of the areas because of the pandemic. And they  
21 have nowhere to get food at night. I believe the  
22 Outreach team should bring people food and water when  
23 they go to wake them. As someone who used to be  
24 outside for years, I find it very discouraging and I  
25 know what it feels like to have people who are

1  
2 asking, do you need help and have nothing to offer  
3 them.

4 I know how it feels being woken up like you're  
5 about to be prosecuted because there's a police  
6 officer by the outreach team. It's unbearable for  
7 someone who is institutionalized. There has to be a  
8 better solution. Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner  
9 Banks fell short of delivering what homeless New  
10 Yorkers -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 ASHLEY BELCHER: Yup, so that's it.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
14 Ashley, it's okay.

15 ASHLEY BELCHER: Okay, uhm, our team hopes that  
16 the next Administration can do better by our homeless  
17 neighbors. Specifically, we're calling the next  
18 Administration to ensure that outreach teams provide  
19 basic needs items to street homeless individuals. I  
20 ask outreach teams, please start bringing backpacks  
21 or food before you wake up a homeless person outside.  
22 Or in the area or on a train or in the station and  
23 please state your name as an Outreach Worker. I feel  
24 like you may be able to assist them with something  
25 they need done. Making one on one relationships with

1  
2 the person maybe a better job instead of making it  
3 seem like nobody wants to do this position. Thank  
4 you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you Ashley and  
6 thank you for your work and your testimony.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony  
8 Ashley. We will now hear from Charmel Lucas.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 CHARMEL LUCAS: Good afternoon. Thank you  
11 Council Member Levin and the members of the General  
12 Welfare Committee. My name is Charmel Lucas, I'm an  
13 Outreach and Organized Specialist with Human. NYC. A  
14 grassroots advocacy organization focused on street  
15 and subway homelessness. Today, I would like to  
16 discuss the intersection of health, mental health and  
17 housing. Without a home, there is no way of healing.  
18 I speak from my personal experience being a homeless  
19 organizer and speak with street homeless individuals  
20 for seven years. And from my current position with  
21 Human NYC, a main concern of mine is people's health.  
22 Homelessness is a huge impact on health, especially  
23 street homeless.

24 One main issue related to this are the street  
25 sweeps. Okay, the streets sweeps are throwing away -

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2 they are throwing away street homeless peoples  
3 belongings including things like medication. People  
4 living unsheltered have many types of medical  
5 conditions including cancer, diabetes, and gangrene.  
6 Others take medication for their mental health. The  
7 way I see it that New York City Department of  
8 Homeless Services is adding to sickness, poor mental  
9 health and death, when they continue to sweep people  
10 and throw away their belongings.

11 Many people on the street tells us that they're  
12 offered shelter but not housing. When - excuse me.  
13 When they talk to the Outreach teams, understandably,  
14 they do not want to go to shelters, especially during  
15 the ongoing pandemic. The solution we really need is  
16 permanent housing. That is what people willing to  
17 uh, excuse me.

18 That is what helped with people's health excuse  
19 me. These shortcomings of DHS not putting up help in  
20 place or no, this has been going on for years. So  
21 many organizations have come up with ideas and  
22 solutions just to be ignored. We speak to the  
23 people, we know them. We give them our names.  
24 People living in unsheltered trust us. We have a  
25 relationship with them. We excuse me, based on our

1  
2 conversations with people, does not happen with DHS  
3 contracted outreach teams.

4 A huge mistrust is a big problem that with DHS  
5 saying, excuse me. A huge of the trust problems is  
6 what DHS says is different from what NYPD say. Why  
7 do outreach workers tell people to stay in the same  
8 spot but the police make them move. Here again,  
9 they're not getting the help they need. When  
10 outreach workers come with nothing, no food, no  
11 blankets, no names, cards with numbers on it that no  
12 one answers, then the NYPD -

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can keep on going.

15 CHARMELE LUCAS: Okay, thank you. The NYPD and  
16 Sanitation come to sweep, throw away people's phones  
17 away. That means no communication. Our teams hope  
18 that the next Administration can do better by our  
19 homeless neighbors. Specifically we're calling for  
20 the next Administration to do the following: First,  
21 stop sweeping people's belongings. Their health and  
22 wellbeing depends on it. Second, hire people that  
23 were formerly homeless that have the experience to  
24 understand the situation. Last, make sure your  
25 outreach workers provide to people they talk to. I

1  
2 would like to see including dates, time, outreach  
3 organization, individuals that will provide  
4 information including the date, the time, outreach  
5 workers name, location and they should be expecting  
6 outreach teams to come back.

7 Outreach teams could give 800 numbers for those  
8 that don't have phones because of sweeps. And last  
9 but not least, the next administration to ensure that  
10 all people have access to permanent housing and  
11 important steps to create better health. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Charmel.

13 CHARMELE LUCAS: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony  
15 Charmel. We will now hear from Karim Walker. Karim  
16 you may begin when the Sergeant prompts you.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time. Sorry,  
18 starting time.

19 KARIM WALKER: Good afternoon Councilman Levin  
20 and members of the General Welfare Committee. My  
21 name is Karim Walker and I'm an Outreach Organizing  
22 Specialist with Human. NYC. An advocacy group for  
23 street and subway homeless New Yorkers. In addition,  
24 I'm also a formerly homeless New York resident.

1  
2 I want to talk about the impact street sweeps  
3 have had on the homelessness. At best, the sweeps  
4 are a misguided attempt and a waste of resources by  
5 the city as a mere bandage on the much bigger boom  
6 that is homelessness in New York City. They shift  
7 the blame of being unhoused from the city to the  
8 individuals, a move that adds insult to injury.

9 The sweeps, often last minute and not often well  
10 coordinated, shatter the trust between homeless New  
11 Yorkers and the homeless outreach organizations that  
12 people may need – uh, working to secure housing  
13 excuse me.

14 In addition, the sweeps end up destroying vital  
15 resources that many homeless people may depend on  
16 such as medication, identification and in some cases  
17 feminine hygiene products. Which may be difficult,  
18 if not impossible to replace. It's no secret that  
19 the sweeps was recorded by DSNY as well as the NYPD  
20 have been ordered by the mayors office but a late  
21 November encounter ruled that outreach worker from  
22 DHS at Tomkins Square Park confirmed this directly to  
23 me.

24 This is especially troubling as Mayor de Blasio  
25 had eight years to address the problem and refused to

1  
2 do so with any meaningful fashion. During my time in  
3 Homeless Outreach at organization with Human. NYC, it  
4 had become increasingly clear that a lot of homeless  
5 people feel the same way that I do regarding the  
6 sweeps.

7 A recent encounter with one, a homeless resident  
8 at Tompkins Square Park named Tony, who has had items  
9 seized in prior sweeps including his birth  
10 certificate confirmed the callous and dehumanizing  
11 nature of these sweeps and the lack of efficacy in  
12 them. Sweeps are not designed to provide outreach;  
13 they are designed to break spirits and bend wills.  
14 In addition, earlier about a month ago, there was a  
15 sweep at Tompkins Square Park which saw several tents  
16 get swept up and one that was participated by both  
17 DSNY as well as the NYPD. We see these notices every  
18 time we come out there. So, it's not something -  
19 it's not a one all, it's seldom a one off.

20 Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Banks fell far  
21 short of delivering what homeless New Yorkers want  
22 and need to live wholesome, productive and healthy  
23 lives. From underfunding housing vouchers and  
24 allowing people - that allow people leaving the  
25 shelter system to enter substandard housing of

1  
2 questionable legality, which on top gets best saved  
3 for other hearings, to harass the homeless New  
4 Yorkers and pretending they don't exist. The current  
5 Administration has shown that it was never serious  
6 about looking after the most -

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 KARIM WALKER: And disempowered of us. The  
9 street sweep program was nothing more than an effort  
10 to get the homeless out of site as the city attempts  
11 to recover from a pandemic, rivaled by that only by  
12 HIV.

13 Our team hopes the incoming Administration can  
14 and will do better by our homeless residents uh,  
15 neighbors. In particular, we are calling on it to do  
16 the following: End the Street Sweeps Program and  
17 institute a more humane approach that addresses  
18 street and subway homelessness on the terms of the  
19 homeless and not on the terms of the homeless service  
20 providers. It's your homeless New Yorkers that are  
21 eligible for fully and adequately funded housing  
22 vouchers and have supported housing options available  
23 for all who need it. Thank you. Thank you again for  
24 your time.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Karim and  
3 Natalie, is this the entire panel?

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, this is our first panel.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much to this  
6 panel. I just want to thank you all and in  
7 particularly, I just want to thank Human. NYC for  
8 your you know really incredible advocacy over the  
9 years. It's been a very meaningful partnership for  
10 me uhm, to work with you all. I can tell you that a  
11 few years ago, you know I even made sure to try to  
12 get a meeting with Human. NYC and DHS leadership  
13 around the issue of uhm, you know reducing the  
14 barriers to getting into the safe havens. You know  
15 and reducing that requirement for you know meeting a  
16 somewhat arbitrary chronic chronically homeless  
17 definition.

18 Uhm, and I think that through largely through  
19 your advocacy, I think we've made progress there and  
20 you've I think greatly impacted the discourse in  
21 positive ways and I just want to offer my  
22 appreciation. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin. I  
24 would now like to remind any Council Members who may  
25 like to ask questions of this panel to use the raise

1  
2 hand function in Zoom to indicate that they have a  
3 question.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We've also been joined by  
5 Council Member Grodenchik.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Any Council Members who would  
7 like to ask a question? Okay, seeing none, we will  
8 proceed with our public testimony. The next panel in  
9 order of speaking will be Ibrahim Ayu, Leslie  
10 Armstrong, Amy Blumsack, and Felipe Vargas. Ibrahim  
11 Ayu, you may begin once you're prompted by the  
12 Sergeant.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 SELENA CHARL: Greetings everybody, I just want  
15 to make clear that this is Selena Charl(SP?) from  
16 Vocal New York. Unfortunately, Ibrahim Ayu, our  
17 Vocal Leader does not have the luxury of consistent  
18 internet access in his shelter facility, so I have  
19 jumped in to read his testimony on his behalf. So,  
20 please excuse any background noise; I will begin.

21 Uhm, Dear New York City Council, I am a current  
22 New York City resident who doesn't live in permanent  
23 housing. In my former career, I was a licensed  
24 attorney in the city's court system until mental  
25 illness caused me to have a severe breakdown, which

1  
2 led approximately to a year long bid in jail. Upon  
3 my release from incarceration, I found myself without  
4 a place to live, so I entered the shelter system in  
5 Brooklyn where I am today.

6 The conditions for people, particularly men in  
7 the Renaissance Shelter, is deplorable. The typical  
8 person participating in this would not let their  
9 relatives or anyone they love in this shelter. The  
10 smell of K2 synthetic marijuana is overpowering the  
11 hallways and bathrooms because there are no real  
12 services within the shelters for those who are  
13 suffering through opioid addictions or dependencies.

14 The bathrooms are not cleaned and are in third  
15 world conditions. And the worst part of it all,  
16 people employed to help you through this challenging  
17 period of homelessness, are usually not helpful at  
18 all and we are often treated with disdain and  
19 disrespect. Often the police are called for trivial  
20 matters to instill fear in you if you dare challenge  
21 their authority. Many of us are in shelter, are due  
22 to return to incarceration.

23 To avoid this inhumane treatment, I have slept on  
24 the subways at various drop-in centers and even in  
25 emergency rooms and hospitals like Kings County and

1  
2 Wyckoff due to my mental health issues, as well as my  
3 diagnosed hypertension and diabetes. Needless to  
4 say, it is extremely traumatic to be a homeless  
5 single adult in this city.

6 That is a summary of the bad side. However, you  
7 have a chance to make it right. Pass homeless  
8 shelter and outreach reform and put yourself and your  
9 family members in our shoes and legislate  
10 accordingly. How you do this by providing access to  
11 much needed housing vouchers and then once that has  
12 been accomplished, make it so that people with these  
13 vouchers are not discriminated against in their  
14 housing search. I know few people who have had  
15 housing vouchers for months but cannot leave the  
16 shelter because no one will rent to them. This has  
17 to end now. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much. Thank you  
19 for your testimony.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your  
21 testimony. We will now turn to Leslie Armstrong.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 LESLIE ARMSTRONG: Good afternoon. My name is  
24 Leslie Armstrong and I am the Assistant Vice  
25 President for NYC Emergency Housing and Shelter

1  
2 Services and Volunteers of America, Greater New York.  
3 The local affiliate of the national organization  
4 volunteers of American INC DOA.

5 I would like to thank the Chair of the City  
6 Council Committee on General Welfare Stephen Levin  
7 for the opportunity to submit my testimony. DOE  
8 Greater New York is an anti-poverty organization that  
9 aims to end homelessness in the greater New York area  
10 by 2050.

11 As one of the largest providers of services to  
12 families and individuals experiencing homelessness in  
13 the greater New York area, we deliver services to  
14 more than 11,000 adults and children annually through  
15 66 programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey and  
16 Westchester. We specialize in providing housing and  
17 services to seniors, veterans, survivors of domestic  
18 violence, person's living with HIV and AIDS and  
19 persons with behavioral health and substance abuse  
20 disorders. VOAGNY has provided housing for single  
21 adults since 1984. We now operate four such  
22 shelters, providing transitional housing services to  
23 556 individuals daily. Fiscal Year 2021 VOA single  
24 adult shelters serve a total of 5,079 individuals.  
25 Many of our sites are owned by the City of New York

1  
2 and receive funding from New York City Department of  
3 Homeless Services for which we are very grateful.

4 VOA operates approximately nine single room  
5 occupancy programs in New York City funded by the  
6 Department of Homeless Services and the Department of  
7 Mental Health and Hygiene. Each of our SRO programs  
8 provide permanent and affordable housing to residents  
9 with onsite services, such as case management, daily  
10 living skills, training, addiction support,  
11 counseling and recreation. Residents pay rent, full  
12 leases and are afforded the same rights as any other  
13 tenant of other residential buildings.

14 The goal of our programs for single adults is to  
15 stabilize them and prevent them from returning to  
16 homelessness. On site services are designed to help  
17 improve independent living skills, physical and  
18 behavioral health outcomes. For those who wish to  
19 become more independent or require a higher level of  
20 care, case managers can assist them with relocation.

21 COVID has intensified client needs for housing  
22 and other services while creating obstacles to  
23 meeting them that can only be met with additional  
24 resources, including additional hours from highly  
25 qualified staff. Our rigorous adherence to health

1  
2 and safety protocol has doubled the work that goes  
3 into virtually every aspect of our onboarding process  
4 and programming. Worse yet, the slow downs in every  
5 aspect of getting homeless single adults to shelters  
6 means that our clients continue living in rougher  
7 conditions for longer and then arrive needing far more  
8 care than we estimated or planned for. VOAGNY has  
9 met these tendencies, which mandate more staff  
10 intensive interventions with increased services with  
11 the same or fewer number of staff.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 LESLIE ARMSTRONG: Even as our staff has dealt  
14 with health concerns and childcare issues of their  
15 own. We appreciate the legislative and financial  
16 support we receive from the City of New York and  
17 we're going to continue to need it going forward. On  
18 behalf of VOA Greater New York, I would like to thank  
19 the Chair of the City Council Committee on General  
20 Welfare Stephen Levin for providing us with the  
21 platform to discuss the needs of single adults in  
22 shelters. We are grateful for your leadership and  
23 look forward to continuing to partnering with the  
24 City Council as we work together to end homelessness  
25 in New York City. Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Ms.  
3 Armstrong. Thank you for your good work you do.

4 LESLIE ARMSTRONG: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Leslie for your  
6 testimony. I just want to remind everyone that  
7 written testimony can be submitted up to 72 hours of  
8 the conclusion of this hearing to  
9 [tesimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:tesimony@council.nyc.gov) for any additional comments  
10 that you have and all that testimony will be reviewed  
11 in full by Committee Staff.

12 We will now turn to Amy Blumsack. Amy, you may  
13 begin once prompted by the Sergeant.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 AMY BLUMSACK: Hi, good afternoon, my name is Amy  
16 Blumsack. I represent Neighbors Together. We are a  
17 community-based organization. We do hot meals;  
18 individual stabilizing services and we organize  
19 homeless New Yorkers who are fighting for solutions  
20 to the problems they experience daily. I work with  
21 homeless New Yorkers in the Community Action program  
22 and we have been fighting for change for a long time  
23 and I'm very grateful to you Council Member Levin.  
24 And to the Committee for holding this hearing today  
25 on this really critical issue. Excuse the background

1  
2 noise. I also want to thank your staff and the  
3 Committee Staff for all of your hard work over the  
4 years and I really want to thank all of the homeless  
5 individuals who have been fighting tirelessly despite  
6 an ending trauma. And really, really, like  
7 unbelievably difficult daily experiences. So, thank  
8 you for the resiliency and perseverance.

9       Quickly before I get into my testimony, I want to  
10 say something really struck me about what First  
11 Deputy Commissioner Parks said and uhm, oh I can't -  
12 she said something like, you know we're the only  
13 locality that has a mandate or like it requires the  
14 right to shelter. And that's great and it's  
15 important. It's critical and it's obviously  
16 extremely hard work and I think like, that's not  
17 enough to excuse that we can do better and should do  
18 better you know? We need to be continually setting  
19 the bar higher and just because other people aren't  
20 doing it, doesn't mean that we can say we're doing  
21 enough and I think that we need to remember that and  
22 hold that first and foremost.

23       So, I think everyone here knows that homelessness  
24 and housing were in major crisis before COVID hit and  
25 COVID really laid bear and exposed those massive

1  
2 problems that people who are already in the system  
3 had known about for many, many years and I really  
4 want to highlight that this has been an incredibly  
5 difficult year, year and a half, two years for people  
6 who are homeless.

7       You know, there has been an incredible amount of  
8 violence and trauma, more than the baseline amount  
9 for people who are in the homelessness system.

10 COVID, you know gained suddenly force back from the  
11 dedensification hotels, back to congregate shelters  
12 with a really disorganized stressful process.

13 Massive police sweeps and targeting of homeless New  
14 Yorkers, harassment. As many other directly impacted  
15 people said, you know the transfers, having not  
16 enough notice, being far flung, losing all of your  
17 things, having your stuff in storage thrown away with  
18 no notice. It's very hard.

19       And so, I think that we can do better and we  
20 should do better and I'm calling on DHS and the  
21 future administration to work to the best of their  
22 ability to do that. I think there are - despite our  
23 really incredible wins with City FHEPS this year,  
24 there are still some remaining problems. The initial  
25 eligibility is challenging right. For our members

1  
2 who are at 200 percent of the federal poverty level,  
3 which is the eligibility criteria. If they want to  
4 get a part-time job or start working, then they lose  
5 their ability to get a City FHEPS voucher.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead.

8 AMY BLUMSACK: And so, we need to make sure that  
9 people can get the voucher and then hold on to it  
10 without penalizing them for wanting to improve their  
11 lives and I'm glad that the income cliff was  
12 addressed but we need that threshold for entry to be  
13 larger. And so, people with a shopping letter should  
14 also be allowed to increase their income.

15 I just want to quickly say that we need to pass  
16 some other really critical bills to address the  
17 holistic system of homelessness. We need to pass  
18 Intro. 2047, the Fairer Chance for Housing Act,  
19 right? People need to be able to get into housing  
20 and avoid discrimination. We need to pass supportive  
21 housing bills Intro. 147 and 2176 and we also need to  
22 make sure that we have a holistic way of addressing  
23 the homelessness and housing crisis, including  
24 addressing source of income discrimination, building  
25 more affordable housing for very low income New

1  
2 Yorkers and also, that the city and the incoming  
3 administration really needs to be doing advocacy at  
4 the state level for a lot of policies there, which  
5 will help people who are homeless in New York City.  
6 Like the housing voucher program, more funding for  
7 the Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act,  
8 Supporting the Good Cause Eviction Bill and passing  
9 the Council Resolution in support of Good Cause  
10 Eviction, ending 420A and increasing State FHEPS.

11 So, I thank you for your time and attention and  
12 I'll include more detail in my written testimony.  
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Amy and I just want  
15 express my appreciation for all the partnership with  
16 Neighbors Together, which has been incredibly  
17 important to work with this Committee. I appreciate  
18 everything you do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Amy for your  
20 testimony. We will now turn to Felipe Vargas.  
21 Felipe, you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 FELIPE VARGAS: Good afternoon. Thank you for  
24 the opportunity to testify. My name is Felipe Vargas  
25 and I am VP of Programs at the DOE Fund. Our

1  
2 program, ready, willing and able, has extended far  
3 beyond just addressing homelessness. Our evidence  
4 based, cost effective, reputable model reduces  
5 recidivism by 62 percent, advances racial and  
6 economic justice, improves public safety and creates  
7 jobs through social enterprise. Paying more than  
8 eight million directly into the pockets of our  
9 program trainees who were formally homeless. And  
10 alleviates poverty by supporting workforce and  
11 economic development.

12 As New York City recovers, the DOE Fund and  
13 ready, willing and able should be seen as a resource  
14 and a partner. There are two immediate ways that we  
15 add value. First, by linking people experiencing  
16 homeless to mainstream employment. And two, by  
17 linking low-income New Yorkers to housing to creative  
18 housing models. The City of New York understands  
19 that the homeless population is not a monolith. It  
20 is our belief that the shelter system achieves the  
21 highest outcomes where providers are able to provide  
22 the service in which they have a particular  
23 competency to populations they know will benefit from  
24 them.

1  
2 In the case of the DOE Fund, we have value of two  
3 ways. First, work, RW is a conduit between people  
4 experiencing homelessness and reentering post-  
5 incarceration. We connect them with jobs. We are a  
6 stepping stone between prison cells and park benches  
7 to jobs, dignity and a better future.

8 Our core commitment is to provide a first job  
9 with immediate pay in our Community Improvement  
10 Project. You've seen them in the community I'm sure  
11 as the men in blue. We have other social enterprises  
12 as well. We invest in human potential and we achieve  
13 market based results. This July we were selected by  
14 the Mayor's office to play a key role as a founding  
15 member of the City Cleanup Corp. An ambitious effort  
16 to create 10,000 for New Yorkers while beautifying  
17 the city. Our unique experience is supplemental  
18 sanitation graffiti removal and deployment of crews  
19 citywide has been integral to realizing the goals of  
20 the program. We were able to offer our program to  
21 people residing at other nonprofit shelters.

22 To date, we have been able to transition and  
23 employ 243 people through the program. With  
24 industries emerging such as green jobs, trades in  
25 desperate need of talents such as carpentry and

1  
2 welding, and the recent recognition of the role that  
3 economic justice plays in achieving racial justice,  
4 we at the DOE fund are expanding our portfolio of job  
5 opportunities. We seek to partner with New York City  
6 and the next administration, not only to bring our  
7 transition to employment programs to neighborhoods  
8 throughout the five boroughs but to develop training  
9 for more skilled based jobs.

10 Because of the population we serve, working  
11 people most who are not eligible for housing  
12 vouchers, a permanent supportive housing. We are  
13 actively working with landlords to mass the lease  
14 vacant units and previously occupy properties and  
15 hotels to provide housing for this population. The  
16 DOE Fund is seeking to expand eligibility -

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
19 Mr. Vargas.

20 FELIPE VARGAS: City FHEP vouchers that leverage  
21 the HRA Master Lease Program, which relies on City  
22 FHEPS funding to convert vacant hotels into housing.  
23 We believe this effort to create deeply affordable  
24 housing in the form of hotels for low income working  
25 people who reside in shelters will demonstrate

1  
2 mutually beneficial outcomes for people experiencing  
3 homelessness and the city overall.

4 In 2015, it took an average of 56 days, eight  
5 weeks for one of our residents with a mainstream job  
6 to find permanent housing. Currently, housing search  
7 time has increased three-fold to 175 days, almost six  
8 months. This is due to the dwindling number of units  
9 affordable to low income working people, as well as  
10 the decrease eligibility of low-income working people  
11 to qualify for subsidies. Shelter stay for employed  
12 residents have increased from 56 days in 2015 to 175  
13 days in 2001.

14 If we could reduce each day by 119 days, to what  
15 it was back to in 2015, than we would save  
16 approximately \$11,305 in emergency shelter costs for  
17 each single shelter resident. Who could lose the  
18 permanent housing more expeditiously. If at any  
19 given time an estimated 95 percent of – sorry, 95  
20 residents in one of our shelters have jobs and only  
21 30 percent of them currently qualify for housing  
22 rental assistance City FHEPS then more efforts should  
23 be made to increase this figure to 100 percent.

24 Qualifying these individuals for assistance will  
25 lead to a significant aggregate reduction in bed

1  
2 stays and costs. This of course could be applied  
3 across New York City shelter system for even more  
4 impact. Thank you for giving the DOE Fund the chance  
5 to weigh in on these critical issues. Look to us as  
6 a partner and a resource as New York City pursues  
7 recovery that includes all of the citizens. This is  
8 going to take work and that is what our organization  
9 is about, working together with the city to solve  
10 homelessness. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you sir.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to Felipe and this  
13 entire panel for your testimony. I just want to  
14 remind any Council Members who would like to ask a  
15 question, to please use the raised hand function in  
16 Zoom and to please keep your questions to five  
17 minutes.

18 Okay, seeing none, we will move to our next  
19 public panel. In order of speaking, we will have  
20 Helen Strom, Deborah Berkman, Eric Lee and Jacquelyn  
21 Simone. Helen, you may begin your testimony once  
22 prompted by the Sergeant.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 HELEN STROM: Good afternoon everyone. My name  
25 is Helen Strom and I work at the Safety Net Project

1  
2 at the Urban Justice Center. Thanks so much for the  
3 opportunity to testify today. Uhm, and thanks for  
4 holding this hearing and to everyone who spoke out  
5 earlier, especially everyone with experience to  
6 homelessness to talk about what is going on in  
7 homelessness in New York City.

8 So, I wanted to speak on a few things. There's a  
9 lot to talk about here but uhm, I'd like to highlight  
10 some of the humanity, the indifference, the cruelty,  
11 and the violence that we see on a regular basis that  
12 homeless people endure and have endured during this  
13 administration and offer a few recommendations on  
14 what could be changed as this Administration wraps up  
15 and we look to a new one.

16 First off, I want to speak about sweeps. So,  
17 under this administration, we watched as New York  
18 City transformed its DHS outreach teams which  
19 continue to be chronically under resourced in terms  
20 of being able to provide actual assistance with  
21 housing into a piece of the broken window strategy of  
22 policing.

23 So, the sheer quantity of sweep to homeless New  
24 Yorkers should shock all of our consciences. The  
25 Department of Social Services coordinated more than

1  
2 6,000 sweeps over the past five years. None of those  
3 helped people on the street get housed even though  
4 virtually every one agrees that there's a crisis of  
5 street homelessness in New York City. In fact, the  
6 sweeps did the opposite, resulting in the destruction  
7 of peoples possessions, their paperwork and  
8 destroying any possibility of a positive relationship  
9 between people who are homeless and homeless  
10 outreach.

11 Through the implementation, these policies you  
12 would say that this administration in fact has  
13 overseen one of the most systematic efforts to  
14 disappear homeless people from the street in the  
15 history of modern homelessness.

16 So, our recommendation for the next  
17 administration seeing as this one seems to have no  
18 intention of changing course, is to immediately stop  
19 all sweeps of homeless people and focus all efforts  
20 on offering immediate assistance and permanent  
21 housing for people who are on the streets.

22 I would also like to speak briefly about the  
23 shelter system. The use of hotels during COVID I  
24 think just reenforced what homeless people have been  
25 saying for decades and I think we all know at some

1  
2 basic level that congregate shelters are not a  
3 dignified place for people to live and that people  
4 need privacy.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry Helen, can you hold on  
6 one second. Oh, never mind, never mind. He's on  
7 mute now.

8 HELEN STROM: Okay, sure. Uhm, and decent living  
9 conditions. So, we call on the next administration  
10 to move away from the congregate shelter model,  
11 instead focus on dignified private rooms. The gaps  
12 as to permanent housing. This summer, we watched as  
13 peoples belongings were thrown onto the street as  
14 people returned to the street after over a year of  
15 stability in hotels. And we watched people endure  
16 intense violence and trauma at the hands of the City  
17 of New York. It was a huge mistake. Uhm, to end the  
18 hotel program, we call on the next administration to  
19 immediately reverse that.

20 Finally, we just want to touch on -

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 HELEN STROM: I guess just the last -

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
24 on.

1  
2 HELEN STROM: Yeah, I guess just a couple of  
3 things before I finish. If there is a couple things  
4 before this administration finishes up that they can  
5 do, to use the housing resources that they would  
6 already have in their hands right now, that would  
7 make a tremendous difference.

8 One, is processing of City FHEPS vouchers. We  
9 have seen ridiculous bureaucratic delays for people  
10 who have actually managed to find apartments. Who  
11 then lose them because the city cannot process their  
12 paperwork fast enough and the shelters are not  
13 processing their paperwork fast enough. We call on  
14 the city to immediately invest resources and to  
15 processing peoples vouchers as quickly as possible.  
16 It's ridiculous that like someone who has found an  
17 apartment and signed a lease is losing apartments  
18 because the City of New York can't bureaucratically  
19 process their paperwork. So, that's number one.

20 Number Two, uhm, just calling to see to expedite  
21 the issuance of all of the emergency housing, Section  
22 8 vouchers. When I checked this morning, only 821 of  
23 5,738 vouchers that are supposed to go to homeless  
24 New Yorkers have actually made it to them and the  
25 city has had these vouchers for six months now.

1  
2 That is completely inexcusable in the midst of  
3 our homelessness crisis.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Helen, can you repeat that,  
5 that number?

6 HELEN STROM: 821 out of the 5,738 Section 8  
7 vouchers that we received from the federal government  
8 have actually been distributed. That is completely  
9 unacceptable. When we got these vouchers six months  
10 ago and people are in really unsafe living conditions  
11 in congregate shelters on the street, as we all know.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Where did you get that data  
13 from?

14 HELEN STROM: The HUD - HUD's website on the VHV  
15 distribution.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, thank you.

17 HELEN STROM: Yup.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you for -

19 HELEN STROM: And uhm, yup, I'll finish there.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, no, no, no, you can  
21 finish your testimony, that's fine.

22 HELEN STROM: That was the last point. That like  
23 one thing this administration could do before it  
24 leaves is make sure that housing resources that they  
25 have in their -

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The other 4,200 vouchers that  
3 they have.

4 HELEN STROM: Yeah, I think like it's been six  
5 months already that if 4,000 people who are homeless  
6 in the city got their vouchers before the new year,  
7 before the holidays, that would make a significant  
8 difference and it should not be this difficult to get  
9 Section 8 vouchers in peoples hands when they are  
10 paid for by the federal government.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you Helen. Thank  
12 you and thank you so much for all of your partnership  
13 over the years. I really appreciate it.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Helen for your  
15 testimony. We will now hear from Deborah Berkman.  
16 Deborah, you may begin once prompted by the Sergeant.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Chair Levin, Council Members  
19 and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the  
20 opportunity to speak today. My name is Deborah  
21 Berkman and I'm the Coordinating Attorney of the  
22 Shelter Advocacy Initiative at the New York Legal  
23 Assistance Group or NYLAG.

24 Most of the clients that I serve are single  
25 adults experiencing either street or sheltered

1  
2 homelessness and most of my clients who are  
3 experiencing street homelessness have stayed in the  
4 DHS congregate adult shelters. But they haven't been  
5 able to remain there due to assault and trauma they  
6 endured by other residents while staying there.  
7 Quite simply, they are too scared to go back.

8       There are other barriers to my clients remaining  
9 in single adult shelter and those include clients  
10 losing their bed due to missing curfew. Clients  
11 being prohibited from bringing outside food into the  
12 shelter. The intense policing of shelter and the  
13 aggression that shelter staff and security display  
14 towards my clients.

15       In fact, many of my clients have reported to me  
16 that they've been beaten by DHS police. And even  
17 reportedly accessible shelters are in fact  
18 inaccessible for clients with disabilities. Clients  
19 who use wheelchairs or other assisting devices often  
20 report broken elevators and facilities that are  
21 impossible to navigate in a wheelchair. And clients  
22 with mental health disabilities report that they are  
23 rarely, if ever accommodated.

24       Thus, many of my clients are forced into street  
25 homelessness. While sleeping outside, my clients are

1  
2 regularly robbed, assaulted and raped. One of my  
3 clients witnessed one of the other men he slept  
4 outside with have lighter fluid poured on his foot  
5 and set on fire. My clients are broken and harassed  
6 by police officers and they are often arrested for  
7 trespass and other trivial offenses that especially  
8 criminalize homelessness.

9       They are food insecure; they are malnourished,  
10 they are in chronic pain because they sleep on the  
11 ground. They suffer from skin conditions, based on  
12 their exposure to the elements. And if these clients  
13 didn't suffer from mental illness prior to becoming  
14 street homeless, the trauma of sleeping outside and  
15 being constantly on alert is causing most of them to  
16 have severe anxiety. No one would choose this life  
17 if they were offered a safe alternative. And 99  
18 percent of clients who are experiencing street  
19 homelessness would come inside if they were offered a  
20 safe haven or a stabilization placement.

21       But DHS has erected many barriers to entering  
22 into the safe haven system and most clients describe  
23 getting a safe haven placement as an impossible feat.  
24 And we presume this is because of limited capacity.  
25 DHS must significantly increase the safe haven and

1  
2 stabilization bed capacity to meet the needs of those  
3 experiencing street homelessness.

4 Another major barrier to my clients coming inside  
5 are the intake procedures to enter DHS shelter.

6 Intake can take up to two days with most of that time  
7 spent waiting in crowded waiting rooms. Clients are  
8 told if they leave even briefly at any point between  
9 multiple appointments, they will need to start the  
10 process over.

11 Often my clients are fed and they are not able to  
12 take their essential medications. Clients often  
13 report staff at intake centers that are verbally  
14 abusive and demeaning towards shelter applicants.

15 Clients with disabilities are often not accommodated  
16 particularly those with mental health disabilities.

17 And many of my clients report that DHS police at  
18 intake centers specifically are physically  
19 aggressive. So, I have clients experiencing street  
20 homelessness who would be willing to go into shelter  
21 but cannot get through the intake process and to cure  
22 this, we need to make sure that every -

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish.  
25

1  
2           DEBORAH BERKMAN: Thank you. To cure this, we  
3 want to make sure that every member of DHS intake  
4 staff treats every intake applicant with respect. To  
5 that end, all intake staff should be trained in  
6 trauma informed practices and de-escalation and to  
7 ensure clients don't have to wait for hours in the  
8 intake centers, that clients should have timed  
9 appointments that allow them to leave the center if  
10 necessary. Clients who self-identify as having  
11 disabilities should always be awarded immediate  
12 provisional accommodations, even if they don't have  
13 the requisite medical documentation, so that they can  
14 actually get through the intake process. Clients  
15 should be offered food and drink when they have to  
16 stay in the intake centers for a long period of time.

17           Finally, the telephone intake that Ms. Park  
18 talked about earlier must be offered. A couple of  
19 additional recommendations for the adult shelter  
20 system include that transfers between shelters should  
21 be permitted when a client can stay in one shelter.  
22 DHS should make it easier to reenter shelter once a  
23 client has been away. Animal companions must be  
24 allowed in shelter and DHS should not transfer  
25 clients without cause.

1  
2 We thank the Committee on General Welfare for the  
3 work that it has done and particularly want to thank  
4 Chair Levin for all the work you've done over the  
5 last eight years. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Deborah.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony  
8 Deborah. We will now go to Eric Lee. Eric, you can  
9 begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 ERIC LEE: Hi, good morning. My name is Eric  
12 Lee, I'm Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless  
13 Services United. Thank you for the opportunity to  
14 testify today.

15 HSU is grateful to Chair Levin, Speaker Johnson  
16 and members of the General Welfare Committee for your  
17 steadfast leadership on behalf of New Yorkers  
18 experiencing homelessness and housing instability.  
19 Thank you for your leadership passing Intro. 146 to  
20 raise City FHEPS rent levels. It is nothing short of  
21 monumental. Thank you also for approving Intro.'s  
22 148 and 2405 to make time spent in foster care and  
23 runaway and homeless youth programs count towards  
24 City FHEPS eligibility. And we hope the Mayor will  
25 quickly sign them into law. With the passage of

1  
2 these bills, there's still more work to be done to  
3 ensure City FHEPS can be used as well as possible.  
4 This includes as mentioned, the need for the  
5 application and lease process to only take one month.  
6 Given that there is no longer signing bonuses for  
7 landlords. So, they won't be losing money and less  
8 interested. The next administration should also  
9 consider changing initial eligibility income from 200  
10 percent federal poverty limit to 50 percent AMI in  
11 line with Section 8. We also would like to see the  
12 removal of the lawsuit requirement and shelter  
13 history eligibility requirement for in community City  
14 FHEPS.

15 Providers are focusing on helping households  
16 apply for over 8,000 emergency housing vouchers. As  
17 Helen noted, far too few leases have actually been  
18 signed. As far as I know it was 83 in six months.  
19 Uhm, and this is due to under investment in the  
20 administration of the vouchers and lack of  
21 communication with the providers helping people apply  
22 for them. We've made the following recommendations  
23 to the current and incoming administration to  
24 expedite hiring of NYCHA staff to process the EHB  
25 applications. NYCHA must give providers real time

1  
2 live support as they're trying to help people apply.  
3 Uhm, providers need a flow turning timeline for the  
4 turnaround process for the application to understand  
5 what's the entire overall process.

6 To eliminate duplicate documentation requests in  
7 the application and the city should also ask for HUD  
8 waivers for upfront income verification and unit  
9 inspections. NYCHA staff should keep providers in  
10 the loop on applications all the way through the  
11 process up to lease up. And monthly meetings should  
12 be held with the continuum of care as well as  
13 coalition, provider coalitions to be able to flag and  
14 identify things and disperse information to  
15 providers.

16 With the closure of ERAP, we ask that the Council  
17 join us in asking Governor Hochul and OTDA to remove  
18 the recruitment requirement for one shot deals from  
19 state statute as well as urging the Governor to sign  
20 8009 S6573 into law, which would raise the state  
21 FHEPS.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
24 Eric.

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ERIC LEE: Thank you. HSU is grateful for the administrations investments to expand stabilization and safe haven and bed capacity for street homeless individuals. Uhm, for increased funding for street medicine for DHS outreach providers, which will expand access to doctors as well as medically assisted treatment for opioid addiction. We're extremely proud of New York City for opening the first two official safe consumption sites in the nation.

To your question earlier, Chair Levin around overdose deaths. The latest CDC report showed over 20 percent increase in the last year from April 2020 to 2021 in New York City. And that's in under reporting because they don't have the full data yet for those months.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But for people in shelter or people or overall?

ERIC LEE: Citywide.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Citywide.

ERIC LEE: It's just, it's just overdose deaths in general. Just showing the greater need for medically assisted treatment and other options to try

1  
2 to get people off of opioids as well as how safe  
3 injection sites can help immediately lower deaths.

4 Public and private hospital emergency departments  
5 must stop refusing to admit street homeless  
6 individuals that are suffering acute psychiatric  
7 episodes. The city should fund hospitals to provide  
8 more psych beds to be able to meet that need.

9 Hospitals should also call DHS outreach when street  
10 homeless individuals are being treated in the ER.

11 The city should consider funding providers to  
12 embed staff in health and hospital emergency rooms to  
13 immediately meet with clients there. As was done  
14 through district funding. Uhm, the Department of  
15 Health should expand the intensive mobile treatment  
16 teams to expand capacity. We'd also like to see  
17 additional medical respite beds for individuals that  
18 are bouncing between the street and ER's because they  
19 are too sick to enter shelter but not sick enough for  
20 long term hospitalization.

21 Uhm, with regards to street sweeps, which we've  
22 heard a lot on this morning, they should never be  
23 used as punitive measures. DHS, DSNY, and NYPD must  
24 prioritize the needs of the effected street homeless  
25 individuals and they should only be held after

1  
2 multiple thoughtful engagements by DHS outreach  
3 providers. DSNY and NYPD must allow people to take  
4 their belongings and DSS must help with paying for  
5 storage as needed.

6 DHS outreach providers would like to see DHS  
7 create a formalized process to directly place clients  
8 in shelter. Given the things we've heard about  
9 challenges trying to get through to intake process.  
10 We applaud the Council for passage of Intro. 150 to  
11 create a multiagency transportation taskforce for  
12 students in temporary housing. We'd like to see this  
13 collaborative thinking being carried forward to  
14 address the homeless crisis large scale.

15 Including aligning the city's affordable housing  
16 and homeless plans, cross owner and time with  
17 different systems for eligibility for rental  
18 assistance, improving healthcare integration with DHS  
19 programs. As First Deputy Park testified, we need to  
20 stem the flow of feeder systems in the DHS, including  
21 the New York State Department of Community  
22 Corrections.

23 With regards to shelters, the Council and the  
24 next administration must push back against nimbyism  
25 to allow DHS to site and create new shelters as

1  
2 needed for populations that need them. That includes  
3 expanding shelter services for the aging shelter  
4 population and creating expanded access to  
5 specialized shelters for young people aging out of  
6 RHY shelters as well as members of the LGBTQI  
7 community.

8 And finally, we would like to see uh,  
9 comprehensive contract reform. Not just for homeless  
10 services but for all human service contracts,  
11 including creating comprehensive wage schedule and  
12 wage later for nonprofit funded government staff. Or  
13 nonprofit government funded staff as well as lifting  
14 the gap on fringe costs.

15 Thank you for the opportunity and thank you Chair  
16 Levin for the eight years of leadership you have done  
17 helping homeless New Yorkers.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Eric. Uhm, and  
19 obviously, you know, I could tell you that you know  
20 when I first took over as Chair, my predecessors  
21 Chief of Staff told me, you know the first people you  
22 have to sit down with are Homeless Services United to  
23 understand all of the issues, all the challenges that  
24 we as a city are facing. And I think that your  
25 testimony just now you know illustrated why that was

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the case, which is that HSU provides a really comprehensive perspective and has uhm, you know consistently put forward policy recommendations that are very helpful or very needed and very necessary and you do so in a very consistent, thoughtful way. And so, you know I hope – I notice that your Executive Director Catherine Trapani is on the transition organization for the incoming administration. I'm hopeful that your testimony that you just read is going directly into the hands of the incoming mayor and his administration. So that they know the issues that they can start to get work on, working on right away.

So, greatly appreciate it and I greatly appreciate the partnership all along. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Eric for your testimony. We will now go to Jacquelyn Simone. Jacquelyn, you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

JACQUELYN SIMONE: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and thank you to the people with lived experience who have shared their powerful words today. My name is Jacquelyn Simone,

1  
2 my pronouns are she, her and I am the Policy Director  
3 at the Coalition for the Homeless.

4 I have submitted longer joint testimony with the  
5 Legal Aid Society but I wanted to highlight a few  
6 areas today. New York continues to see near record  
7 levels of single adult homelessness. There are more  
8 than 18,000 single adults sleeping in DHS shelters  
9 each night. A staggering 97 percent more than a  
10 decade ago. Due to systemic racism, people of color  
11 are over represented among the homeless. 86 percent  
12 of single adults in DHS shelters are Black or Latinx.  
13 And thousands of additional homeless adults reside in  
14 shelters overseen by other agencies. They bed down  
15 in the streets or they are doubled up or couch  
16 surfing.

17 As the Independent Monitor of the DHS shelter  
18 system, coalition staff regularly observe and here  
19 reports of issues in shelters ranging from inadequate  
20 maintenance and extreme temperatures to complaints  
21 about the quality and quantity of food and conflicts  
22 with security staff. The pandemic exacerbated many  
23 of these issues bringing staffing challenges and the  
24 threat of contracting an airborne virus in congregate  
25 dorms.

1  
2 DHS moved thousands of single adults out of  
3 congregate facilities and into hotel rooms in 2020 to  
4 better protect them from the virus but Mayor de  
5 Blasio prematurely decided to return the majority of  
6 single adults to congregate shelters this summer.  
7 Despite litigation and continued advocacy, the mass  
8 shelter transfers over the summer were traumatic and  
9 disruptive for homeless single adults. Some of whom  
10 have left the shelter system entirely and now reside  
11 on the streets.

12 The city should redesign the shelter system to  
13 reduce the reliance on large congregate facilities  
14 and shift the creation of new capacity towards single  
15 occupancy accommodations with full accessibility  
16 features for those with disabilities as well as  
17 smaller, low threshold shelters, such as safe havens.

18 In addition to the adults in shelters, thousands  
19 of others bed down in the streets, subway systems,  
20 and other public places. Unfortunately, rather than  
21 adopting a harm reduction approach, Mayor de Blasio  
22 directed his agencies to dramatically increase street  
23 sweeps, ignoring CDC guidance during the pandemic.  
24 The city must seize all activities that criminalize  
25 the unsheltered homelessness while meeting the

1  
2 immediate needs of homeless New Yorkers and providing  
3 them with access to stable, permanent, affordable and  
4 supportive housing options.

5 Housing is the answer to homelessness and we  
6 applaud the City Council for taking bold action this  
7 year to raise the value of City FHEPS vouchers and to  
8 expand eligibility. We urge the Council to build  
9 upon this progress by passing three pieces of pending  
10 legislation. Intro. 2047, Intro. 147, and Intro.  
11 2176. The Fair Chance for Housing Act, Intro. 2047  
12 would help thousands of New Yorkers, including many  
13 who are homeless. Access stable housing by  
14 prohibiting housing discrimination based on  
15 conviction history.

16 Intro. 147 would identify barriers to accessing  
17 supportive housing and Intro. 2176 would –

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
20 Jackie. Of course, yeah.

21 JACQUELYN SIMONE: I'm almost done, I swear.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course, no, no, no,  
23 please.

24 JACQUELYN SIMONE: Intro. 2176 would equip  
25 supportive housing tenants with a bill of rights.

1  
2 The city must continue to invest in new supportive  
3 housing, but it must also simultaneously implement  
4 these safeguards. Thank you for the opportunity to  
5 testify and for the Council's dedication to helping  
6 homeless New Yorkers.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Jackie and uh, you  
8 know, just the collaboration with Legal Aid and  
9 Coalition and uhm, and this Committee, I'm sure is  
10 something that will continue long into the future but  
11 it has been absolutely essential in us doing our work  
12 and you know I just can't tell you how I appreciate  
13 everything that you and your predecessors Jazeel and  
14 Patrick and everybody have been. And I greatly  
15 appreciate everything you guys have done. Thank you.  
16 And the same goes for Legal Aid too.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel for  
18 your testimony. We will now go to our next panel  
19 seeing no Council Members with questions. Uhm, our  
20 next panel will consist of Tierra Labrada, Eric  
21 Rosenbaum, Towaki Komatsu, Katrina Corbell and  
22 Winston Tokuhisa.

23 We will begin with Tierra once the Sergeant  
24 prompts you.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

1  
2           TIERRA LABRADA: Oh, hi, hi everybody. Good  
3 afternoon Chair Levin and everyone on the General  
4 Welfare Committee. My name is Tierra Labrada and I  
5 am I the Senior Policy Analyst at the Supportive  
6 Housing Network of New York. Thank you for the  
7 opportunity to testify here today.

8           There are over 18,000 single adults sleeping in  
9 DHS shelters each night in September 2021. 97  
10 percent more than a decade ago and almost 4,000  
11 unsheltered adults as of the last point and time.  
12 Because of centuries of institutional racism and  
13 economic injustices, people living without housing  
14 are disproportionately Black and Latinx. 86 percent  
15 of single adults in DHS identify as such.

16           Additionally, an estimated 68 percent have a  
17 disability. Multiple studies have documented the  
18 impact of homelessness on health and mortality. We  
19 have included an appendix listing 346 names of New  
20 Yorkers who died in 2020, who were honored at the  
21 annual Homeless Persons Memorial Day.

22           COVID has also increased mental health needs  
23 related to anxiety, depression and suicide ideation  
24 as well as alcohol and substance use and worsen  
25 chronic health conditions. However, we do have some

1  
2 solutions. Supportive housing is uniquely positioned  
3 to address these crisis. While it is not the only  
4 solution for single adult homelessness, it is an  
5 important piece of the puzzle.

6 I will present a brief overview of our  
7 recommendations with added detail in our written  
8 testimony.

9 A recent survey conducted by the network suggests  
10 that the vacancy rate in existing supportive housing  
11 is around ten percent. We must reduce as many  
12 bureaucratic requirements as possible and invest in  
13 our coordinated assessment and placement system. Any  
14 hiring freeze still in place over a city agency  
15 position related to moving someone from homelessness  
16 into housing must be lifted immediately.

17 While highly successful, the New York City 1515  
18 program could benefit from adjustments including  
19 reallocating the 50/50 split between congregate and  
20 scattered site to a 75/25 split. Increasing  
21 scattered site contract rates to align each year with  
22 the fair market rent and increasing service dollars  
23 to match those of congregate housing and prioritizing  
24 nonprofit development.

1  
2 We must preserve and create an additional 1,000  
3 units per year. We must preserve existing congregate  
4 and scattered site supportive housing, which could be  
5 lost due to low contract rates that make programs  
6 very hard to operate. New units should also be  
7 created for people who are excluded from NYC 1515  
8 eligibility because stays in jails, prisons and  
9 hospitals do not count toward the definition of  
10 chronic homelessness.

11 The city needs a broad mandate to allocate  
12 suitable land for supportive housing development  
13 beyond HPD and DHS sites. Additional ideas to speed  
14 and coordinate development approvals and modify  
15 zoning can be found in our written testimony and  
16 thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Tierra. I just  
18 want to acknowledge the great work that she does day  
19 in and day out and your collaboration with us just  
20 over the last couple of weeks and months on Intro.  
21 2176, which I think you personally probably spent you  
22 know 20 hours plus on easily and then I appreciate  
23 everything you did on that and continue to do. Thank  
24 you.

1  
2 TIERRA LABRADA: It's been a pleasure working  
3 with you Council Member and you know farewell and we  
4 look forward to seeing what you do next.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Me too. Thank you Tierra.  
6 Thank you for everything.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
8 We will now turn to Eric Rosenbaum. Eric, you may  
9 begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 ERIC ROSENBAUM: Thanks, I'm Eric Rosenbaum, I'm  
12 the CEO of Project Renewal. A New York City homeless  
13 services nonprofit agency. I'm grateful to Speaker  
14 Johnson, Chair Levin and the entire City Council for  
15 your support during our – for our programs. For over  
16 a half century, Project Renewals provided shelter,  
17 housing, healthcare and employment services to  
18 thousands of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness  
19 with special focus on those who are effected by  
20 mental illness, substance abuse and criminal justice  
21 involvement.

22 I'm going to try not to repeat a lot of what's  
23 been said before but I want to add one point. In the  
24 30 years from 1990 to 2020, New York City added a  
25 million and a half people. That's – and at the same

1  
2 time as you've heard, we've lost 150,000 rent  
3 regulated apartments.

4 So, that means that for every ten new people that  
5 New York accommodated, we lost a rent regulated  
6 apartment. And that is the big picture that's  
7 driving homelessness. It's a key reason why in the  
8 past ten years prepandemic, the single adult shelter  
9 was rising by 1,000 people a year. And 1,000 people  
10 a year would mean five new 200 bed shelters every  
11 year just to keep pace with the growth in need for  
12 shelter without doing anything to actually reduce it.

13 And over ten years, that's 50, 200 bed shelters.  
14 That's a ginormous number. Uhm, and if we now intend  
15 to close Rikers Island and reduce incarceration,  
16 we'll still need even more housing with supportive  
17 services.

18 So, it's great that we're increasing the value of  
19 housing vouchers, but unless we're also increasing  
20 the actual supply of housing, in which those vouchers  
21 can be used, all we're really doing is increasing the  
22 amount of subsidy we're paying to landlords without  
23 actually reducing homelessness.

24 So, as we illustrated in a project renewal policy  
25 paper, hotel conversions could provide thousands of

1  
2 safe, affordable and supportive housing units at a  
3 much lower cost than new construction and really  
4 crucially do it in a fraction of the time. Using the  
5 ATV master lease would fund this with almost no  
6 increase in capital funding. Simply put, this lease  
7 guarantees the rental subsidies from the city  
8 vouchers and that becomes collateral that would allow  
9 nonprofits to secure debt financing outside the  
10 existing capital appropriation process.

11 But any new capital at the city or state or even  
12 the federal government commits for new construction.  
13 That's going to take five years before a single  
14 homeless person is actually living in one of those  
15 apartments. So, these hotel -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can keep going Eric, go  
18 ahead.

19 ERIC ROSENBAUM: Thanks. So, these hotel  
20 conversions are literally almost the only opportunity  
21 to actually reduce the need for shelter in the four  
22 years of the next administration. Friday's New York  
23 Times article made clear both the scope of this  
24 opportunity and the challenges we face in achieving  
25 it.

1  
2 Now, doing anything this scale is hard in our  
3 city but the status quo almost certainly means  
4 building more and more shelter. It means more and  
5 more angry neighborhood residents showing up at town  
6 halls and community board meetings, fighting those  
7 shelters and huge DHS budget increases to fund them.

8 So, if we've got to fight these kind of battles,  
9 I'd rather be fighting for more housing than more  
10 shelter.

11 Earlier this year, the city claimed that  
12 converting a hotel to residential use requires a  
13 different type of certificate of occupancy. That  
14 doesn't exist in a hotel. But the Times article made  
15 clear that view isn't consistent with precedent and  
16 sadly, the very hotels that the city claims can't be  
17 made into housing, are almost certainly going to  
18 become shelter.

19 So, I urge the city to reconsider these very  
20 narrow legal interpretations and if they don't, then  
21 the Council can pass legislation creating a new  
22 housing classification in the building code allowing  
23 nonprofits to buy hotels and convert them into  
24 supportive and affordable housing.  
25

1  
2           The city could also help by modifying the real  
3 estate tax system that privileges single family homes  
4 over affordable apartment buildings and by  
5 legislating zoning requirements at every neighborhood  
6 that would increase housing affordability, so that  
7 nimby pressure can't stop it. And minimizing the  
8 kind of land speculation that only makes  
9 affordability harder to achieve.

10           And finally, and I'm glad someone else mentioned  
11 this. Bureaucratic challenges including staffing  
12 shortages in city agencies, are making it hard to  
13 fill the vacancies in the 1,000 supported housing  
14 units that project renewal operates.

15           As one example, it takes three to six months to  
16 get the medical examiners office to clear an  
17 apartment in which someone died. Getting approval  
18 for a housing package takes months. If we could  
19 self-certify clients in our own shelter programs for  
20 vacancies in our housing, we could relieve some of  
21 the bureaucratic burden and reduce those delays.  
22 That wouldn't cost any body anything.

23           I know none of this is easy but the alternative,  
24 which is more and more shelter and more and more  
25 people on the streets can't be acceptable. Thank you

1  
2 for this opportunity to testify and I welcome any  
3 questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Eric and I think a  
5 lot of this obviously is going to up to the next  
6 administration and Council and it's my hope that they  
7 take advantage of the market for these hotels you  
8 know now. As the Time article this week or last  
9 week, mentioned you know there's a level of urgency  
10 uhm and this opportunity will have passed us by if we  
11 don't act quickly.

12 So, I appreciate the urgency with which you  
13 delivered that testimony. Thanks.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Eric for your  
15 testimony. We will now hear from Katrina Corbell.  
16 Katrina, you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 KATRINA CORBELL: Hi, my name is Katrina Corbell.  
19 I am a formerly street homeless and shelter homeless  
20 New Yorker. Uhm, arguably remaining at risk of  
21 having to reenter the shelter system working with  
22 nonprofits to try and prevent that.

23 I am currently a member of the Supportive Housing  
24 Organized United Tenants Rise and Raise Us and  
25 Coalitions Client Advisory Group. Uhm, I arrived in

1  
2 New York City ten years ago. I was a college  
3 graduate student and I was also an SSI recipient but  
4 both HRA and SSI said that I was not their problem.  
5 HRA said that I was a federal recipient, so to go to  
6 SSI. SSI said that they didn't do housing, so go to  
7 HRA. So, I literally was on \$700 in change and told  
8 to go find an apartment in New York City. Literally  
9 on \$700.

10 And at the time, I was told - I think Bloomberg  
11 was still mayor and I was told if I went into the  
12 city shelter system, I was going to have to pay 30  
13 percent of my \$700 to live with somewhere between 16  
14 and 60 people and pay 30 percent of my \$700 to live  
15 with those many people.

16 Uhm, so that's why I chose street homeless. I  
17 was with my Occupy Wallstreet friends. We were still  
18 doing protests on the streets. Younger people were  
19 assessed for street homeless and received vouchers,  
20 but adults were like ignored.

21 Uhm, I worked with different agencies. BRC never  
22 recognized me as homeless. I wasn't smelly enough,  
23 tall enough, old enough, man enough, so BRC was  
24 always just ignoring me. I worked with - I tried  
25 working with uhm Cindy, Baily House, CNCS, Urban

1  
2 Outreach, We Care, Bud Cap, Project Renewal. I was  
3 too positive, too happy uhm, I was told I was  
4 supposed to be eligible for supportive housing  
5 because of my physical disabilities but it led  
6 nowhere.

7 Uhm, no one was able to figure out how to get me  
8 into supportive housing, again in 2013. Uhm, after a  
9 work injury, I was sent back to like I was sent back  
10 to Bed Cap We Care and it's a long story that I'll  
11 have in the written testimony but uhm, I had to go  
12 back to basic shelter for general population because  
13 by then I had an emotional support animal and she and  
14 I could not handle the streets and the subway.

15 Uhm, every time she needed to use the sandbox, I  
16 would get off the subway, make up her sandbox and  
17 that was just too much stress on me. So, we went to  
18 Franklin, Franklin Shelter kicked us out immediately.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 KATRINA CORBELL: Uhm.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
22 Katrina.

23 KATRINA CORBELL: Okay, uhm, we had to - we tried  
24 to do the street homeless uhm, outreach with Goddard  
25 Riverside. Goddard Riverside had to witness us on

1  
2 the street, similar to what Chair Levin had  
3 mentioned, where you had to be seen a number of times  
4 within a number of weeks. Instead, I was seen by  
5 somebody who tried to sexually assault me. I was  
6 able to call the police, the police were trying to  
7 not report it. Luckily, one police officer was able  
8 to help get that reported and documented and get that  
9 guy off the streets.

10 Uhm, I was then able to work with Coalition for  
11 the Homeless to get the proper documentation to make  
12 the Department of Homeless Services accept me and my  
13 emotional support animal to get into the shelter. It  
14 then took 14 months or 420 days to get out of the  
15 shelter and that was through the 2010E program.

16 Uhm, but that was through a number scattered site  
17 housing saying that they did not have to take  
18 emotional support animals despite their housing law.  
19 Some of the supporting housing programs were offering  
20 to have me trade in my emotional support animal for a  
21 fish. They literally did not want me to come in with  
22 a cat or a dog and they wanted me to just - I don't  
23 know where you would trade in another animal for a  
24 fish but I don't know if that sounded as ridiculous  
25 to them as it did to the rest of us.

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Uhm, and so, I just think that like there needs to be more of an outreach. One of the ideas I am trying to suggest to people is to work with other formerly homeless people. Like, there are some programs like community access that will work with formerly homeless people or peers that have been through the system and can help suggest things. To like how to be more successful or how to just relate to the people.

One of my housing advisors didn't want to stay in the system. Like, she was intending to be cook and so, she had no interest in actually staying and working with us. She was just like there because she needed a paycheck to not become homeless. And so, I just think that there needs to be more, like more respect and more consideration shown towards the people that they are working with, instead of just like laughing at us or making fun of us, and like not respecting us.

A lot of people that are working towards helping the people in the homeless shelters are not respecting the people that they are working for. The people that are in the homeless shelters are

1  
2 providing their paychecks arguably and are not being  
3 shown any respect at all.

4 So, uhm, thank you for your time. Thank you for  
5 the past few years and for all that you are doing  
6 with us and I'll leave it at that.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Katrina and I  
8 really appreciate you telling your story and  
9 providing your testimony and I wish you all the  
10 success in the future.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Katrina for your  
12 testimony. We will now hear from Winston Tokuhisa.  
13 Winston, you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 WINSTON TOKUHISA: I first exited the shelter  
16 system and homelessness just over two weeks ago. I  
17 was excited but quickly I found that excitement gave  
18 way to anxiety. I trust the staff at Department of  
19 Homeless Services and the Human Resource  
20 Administration, [INAUDIBLE 3:14:47] agencies perform  
21 their duty to the letter, more should have been done  
22 to ease my transition. For example, a couple days  
23 before my move out, furniture money was deposited  
24 onto my electronic benefit transfer card. Some  
25 people prefer a benefit card as a permanent credit

1  
2 card but regrettably it is not. In order to be able  
3 to use the funds, I committed to Chase Bank to avoid  
4 withdrawal fee. I was only able to withdrawal out of  
5 over \$1,000, I was charged \$7.55 anyway.

6 No matter who you are, moving is messy and  
7 inconvenient. So, what should be help to those in  
8 need is made a hinderance by hoops and hurdles. If  
9 the entire move out process takes about a month from  
10 start to finish, why not make a portion of the funds  
11 available sooner.

12 Better yet, why don't disburse the funds in such  
13 a way that makes them really accessible in entirety.  
14 Like an electronic fund transfer or prepaid debit  
15 card. Or another example, I had the misfortune of my  
16 public assistance case closed without my knowledge  
17 just a few days before the time I leave.  
18 Unfortunately I reapplied and was awarded food stamps  
19 the same day. Unfortunately, I was also expected to  
20 make one months last for two months. A tall order  
21 made taller of the harmful food offerings at my  
22 shelter. If it was not for food pantries and  
23 furniture money, I don't know how I would have made  
24 it through November.  
25

1  
2 I remember when my housing specialist much else  
3 that was previously a core services group at one  
4 shelter, mentioned scheduling move out to compatible  
5 pick up dates. As someone who has not moved out, I  
6 have a new found appreciation for this wisdom and  
7 cannot help but ask, [INAUDIBLE 3:16:31]. The only  
8 thing better would be to provide upcoming benefits in  
9 advance and sent to a new date or better still,  
10 provide additional pickup as one time bonus. Which  
11 leads me to my final example.

12 I just received my benefits for the month and I  
13 only see the partially 2250 and I honestly have no  
14 idea what the federal agency expects me to do with  
15 that. One of the first things I did after moving  
16 into my apartment was apply for the emergency  
17 broadband benefit program, the Spectrum. Even after  
18 applying for the \$50 discount, I'm already on the  
19 hook for a Wi-Fi Router and a requisite landline at a  
20 total of about \$17 a month. Fortunately, I have a  
21 little bit of furniture money left but it will only  
22 go so far.

23 I remember when I first learned of all the mental  
24 gymnastics that goes into not paying poor people,  
25 which does nothing to resolve poverty. If we can

1  
2 increase food stamps on account of the pandemic, how  
3 can we not give cash a chance?

4 With the emergence of COVID-19, after the  
5 unprecedented crisis, it also creates an unparalleled  
6 opportunity.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can go ahead and finish  
9 Winston.

10 WINSTON TOKUKISA: Okay, thank you. To rectify  
11 long term historical deficits, I'm confident that  
12 beginning with the end in mind by increasing access  
13 to move out funds, make sure individuals have ample  
14 food stamps, and increase levels of cash assistance  
15 available upon move out, are instruments to ensuring  
16 permanence and stability. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Winston.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to Winston and this  
19 entire panel for your testimony. We've now heard  
20 from everybody who has signed up to testify and we  
21 appreciate everyone's time, presence and testimony.  
22 We would like to make sure that we haven't  
23 inadvertently missed anyone who wants to testify, so  
24 anyone who that applies to, please use the raise hand

1  
2 function in Zoom and we will call on you in the order  
3 of hands raised.

4 Okay, I'm not seeing any additional panelists.

5 So, I would like to note again that written testimony  
6 will be reviewed in full by Committee Staff and it  
7 can be submitted to the record up to 72 hours after  
8 the close of this hearing by emailing it to

9 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Chair Levin, we have

10 concluded public testimony for this hearing, so back  
11 over to you for closing.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh, thank you so much  
13 Natalie. Uhm, again, I want to thank Committee Staff  
14 Natalie, Crystal, Aminta and my staff and our  
15 Sergeants at Arms for conducting the hearing, as well  
16 as all the Council Staff that get these hearings up  
17 and running remotely.

18 Uhm, and I want to thank everybody that just  
19 delivered testimony. It's as I said before, it's  
20 been really an honor of a lifetime to be able to have  
21 had this opportunity to Chair this Committee and I am  
22 hopeful and confident that with the level of  
23 engagement and advocacy from people with lived  
24 experience, uhm, people who are currently facing  
25 challenges within the DHS system or HRA system or ACS

1  
2 system, uhm, and with the wisdom and perspective that  
3 they bring to the conversation. As well as providers  
4 and uhm, and people who want to make our city a  
5 better place and a fairer place and a more  
6 compassionate city. I'm confident that we'll  
7 continue to make strides. There is still a lot more  
8 to do and I hope that the next Council and the next  
9 Administration take on these challenges with the  
10 urgency that they really demand.

11 And with that, thank you all. It's been a  
12 wonderful experience and I'll see you all soon.  
13 Thanks. This hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL].

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date January 22, 2022