

**Government Operations and Civil Service and Labor Committee Hearing:  
Optimizing the City Civil Service Exam System**

**Introduction**

Good afternoon, Speaker Adams, Chair De La Rosa, Chair Ung, and members of the Committees on Civil Service and Labor and Governmental Operations. I am Barbara Dannenberg, Deputy Commissioner for Human Capital at the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS.) I am joined today by my colleagues, Silvia Montalban, DCAS Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer, Kadian Outar, DCAS Executive Director of Citywide Equity and Inclusion, and Francis Torres, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Programs and Community Partnerships at the Department of Correction (DOC).

I am grateful for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the work we are doing to strengthen our civil service process and ensure it is equitable and accessible to all New Yorkers.

With more than two decades in city government, I understand firsthand that civil service is a pathway to a rewarding career. My own journey has afforded me an opportunity to proudly serve millions of New Yorkers while aligning my passion for public service with my expertise. I am a proud civil servant, and I'm made even prouder each time we open the door for someone else to support their family, work for their city, and dedicate their careers to serving others. Civil service is an invaluable avenue to success and fulfillment.

After years of diligent effort, and with support from our agency and labor partners, we are proud to say that we are in compliance with the state laws that govern the civil service process regarding provisional service. It marks a time in our journey where we are best suited to implement programs and initiatives that can bolster outreach to the most vulnerable and underserved populations. We serve and support more than 80 agencies and we continue to be nimble and tailor our civil service exam offerings to meet the hiring needs of each agency and create a qualified pool of applicants to draw from.

I remember a time when exam takers met at public high schools and took the tests using paper and pencil. Today, candidates can register for the exam online via the Online Application System or visit one of our five citywide Computer-based Testing and Application Centers where they can schedule an appointment to receive assistance with the application process. We seek to remove barriers and have been actively working to modernize the process and provide information and resources that outline the steps interested candidates need to take. Leaning on technological advancements is among the many ways we're working to cast a wider net and reflects our commitment to fair and equitable access to the civil service process.

I will now take a moment to explain more about the civil service process, and programs and initiatives DCAS has in place to make the process more accessible and transparent for all New Yorkers.

## **Civil Service Process**

Central to the life of the City's municipal workforce are the career opportunities afforded through civil service hiring. As the largest local government employer in the country, we provide a wealth of career opportunities in numerous professions, a clear path for growth, and great benefits. Over 80% of civil service positions with the City are designated as competitive class. These roles require an exam to qualify, and range from law enforcement, emergency services, administration, technical positions, and more.

Civil service, a system based on merit and fitness for the job, serves as the foundation on which the City identifies qualified employees. Through the civil service system, applicants are afforded opportunities to prove their suitability based on an objective assessment of their demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities for entry level and senior level roles at our City agencies.

Civil service also serves as a pathway to the middle class for underserved and underrepresented communities. That is why it is important that we operate the civil service system fairly, equitably, and expeditiously. DCAS continues to work diligently to introduce system improvements, strengthen collaborative partnerships, and reduce the provisional workforce as required by law. DCAS also integrates innovative approaches to recruit new, quality talent through Civil Service 101 information sessions and other outreach events. Between April 2020 and August 2022, our Office of Citywide Recruitment participated in over 480 events, reaching over 23,500 participants.

Civil Service 101 is a comprehensive information session tailored to prospective employees and job seekers who want to learn more about the civil service process and make it easier to understand. The goal is to demystify the civil service process and disassociate it with being slow and arduous. By reframing the civil service process, we hope to attract the best candidates to work for our city.

It is important to note that while civil service exams establish a viable candidate pool for City jobs, the civil service process is distinct from the hiring process. The hiring process occurs at the agency level, with agencies working in close collaboration with our colleagues at OMB. Ultimately, the hiring process hinges upon vacancy availability and funding.

## **Exam Administration**

DCAS utilizes exams to equitably identify candidates who demonstrate the necessary knowledge, qualifications, and skills to excel in specific roles. The three types of examinations are:

- **Open-competitive exams**, which are available to anyone who meets the minimum qualifications.
- **Promotion exams**, which are available only to permanent employees or employees with disabilities who qualify under our 55-a program.

- **Qualified-incumbent exams**, which are available to those who already work for the City as a provisional employee in certain job titles, after two or more years of service.

DCAS has worked to improve the cycle time of the examination process and to break down barriers to careers in civil service. On average over the last five years (Fiscal Year 2018 - Fiscal Year 2022), DCAS administered 180 exams per year to more than 103,000 candidates and established over 150 lists for agencies to hire from. Paramount to DCAS's vision of ensuring equitable access to civil service and city government, DCAS has proudly created a community-based footprint for civil service application and examinations through the opening of one Computer-based Testing and Application Center (CTAC) in each of the five boroughs.

In addition to establishing a community-based presence, DCAS has moved forward with the digitization of our work and utilized automation to provide faster service. This is evidenced through our computerized testing system and our education and experience exam systems which provide instant tentative results as soon as the candidate completes these exams. For candidates who disagree with the rating received by DCAS, we allow them to initiate, transmit, and track appeals of their ratings within their Online Application System dashboard.

To cast a wider net and provide more opportunities for interested candidates to work for the City, DCAS launched a pilot program in Fiscal Year '22 called the NYC Bridge Exam. Through this pilot, DCAS departed from our traditional testing process in which we offer one exam for one title. The NYC Bridge Exam allows candidates to apply for one exam, pay one application fee, and take a single test that can be used for up to 10 civil service titles. DCAS received over 4,000 applications for the first NYC Bridge Exam, and later this month the multiple-choice test will be held for these candidates. This new test format allows DCAS to offer a greater quantity of exams annually without increasing the need for staffing resources. For the Fiscal Year '23 exam schedule, additional titles are being reviewed for inclusion in the next NYC Bridge Exam.

### **DCAS Office of Citywide Recruitment**

DCAS's Office of Citywide Recruitment, known as OCR, promotes the vision that the City of New York is an employer of choice with a growing, talented, and diverse workforce. The work done through OCR is integral to our targeted recruitment efforts. OCR conducts extensive outreach to educate the public and current employees on civil service career opportunities and manages the City's 55-a Program that affords qualified persons with disabilities an entry into city government without taking civil service exams. Since its inception in 2015, OCR has participated in more than 1,700 events and has reached over 83,000 participants. Of these 1,700 events, approximately 1,034 were Civil Service 101 Information Sessions.

Prior to the pandemic, OCR also participated in recruitment events at various correctional facilities, including Rikers Island. On average, we participate in roughly 20 events per month targeting different communities across each borough. Due to the limited staff within OCR and the increased demand for these sessions, we developed a volunteer program where current employees across DCAS are trained on how to conduct the Civil Service 101 Information Sessions. OCR is now working on expanding that program to include employees working at different City agencies and will be conducting train-the-trainer

sessions for agency recruitment staff so that they are able to effectively communicate with their job seekers about the civil service process. We also plan on conducting train-the-trainer sessions for career services professionals at educational institutions and community-based organizations so that they can share information about the civil service process with their students and constituents. We anticipate kicking off these new initiatives by the end of the calendar year. These activities fully support the objectives of Introduction 658.

In response to the pandemic, in April 2020, OCR switched to virtual events, allowing for more flexibility for participants. As I mentioned before, over 23,500 participants joined over 480 events between April 2020 and August 2022; OCR is now back in the field and participating in both virtual and in-person events. As part of these events, OCR partners with sister agencies to host agency spotlight sessions to highlight their hard-to-fill recruitment needs for each respective agency. This includes partnership with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), Emergency Management, the Fire Department, and others.

To attract prospective employees, DCAS also hosts CityTalk panel discussions to spotlight employees across various agencies. These events serve as opportunities to promote City careers, the many different City agencies, and the work employees perform across these agencies. We also issue a monthly newsletter to job seekers and career services partners across educational institutions, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, and others, that highlights current exams that are open for filing and open job opportunities across different agencies.

### **Fellowships and Internships**

DCAS partners with the Department of Education (DOE) to expose students, including those in career and technical education programs, to City jobs and internships in their field of interest. Additionally, in response to Local Law 173 of 2018, DCAS provides the DOE with the list of upcoming civil service exams that are open to high school graduates.

Similar to our partnership with DOE, we have also established other pipelines for those interested in joining city service through fellowships and internships. As the City's public university system, the City University of New York (CUNY) helps funnel talented, college educated candidates into government through our collaborative Civil Service Pathway Fellowship (CSPF). This initiative connects recent graduates with full-time careers in civil service, including competitive pay and benefits. Candidates selected to participate receive professional development, build networking and mentorship relationships, and receive specialized training.

In addition to the Civil Service Pathways Fellowship program, each year our Urban Fellows program recruits nationally for a nine-month fellowship program that provides participants with a unique opportunity to work with current City agency decision-makers and assist in the implementation of public policy. Each cohort consists of 25 talented recent graduates who were selected from a pool of hundreds of applicants from across the nation. It serves as an entry point into city government and public service.

DCAS also facilitates an annual Summer Internship Program, collecting and posting internship opportunities across the City and providing learning opportunities to all interns. This year, three courses were conducted: Civil Service 101; Unconscious Bias: Why it Matters to You; and, Interviewing and Networking. DCAS also assisted agencies in

providing mandated training, such as sexual harassment prevention training, to their summer interns.

## **Legislation**

As we review the proposed legislation, we want to affirm our commitment to working with the City Council to create more opportunities for New Yorkers to access careers in civil service.

With regards to Introduction 658, requiring DCAS to develop a civil service ambassador program, we believe that our existing Office of Citywide Recruitment is well-positioned to implement this new program. We are proud that we already provide similar services and are happy to work with the Council on how to advance this work.

We also support Intro 698, in relation to establishing a public service corps program. For more than 50 years, we have successfully managed our own Public Service Corps program, and we are committed to working with the City Council to fine tune this bill and introduce a new generation of New Yorkers to careers in civil service.

Regarding Intro 645, on proctoring civil service exams in DOC facilities, we stand in agreement with the Council's intent to increase access to civil service exams to all populations, including those who are presently incarcerated. Opportunity is synonymous with the spirit of New York City, and opportunity should be provided to those within the criminal justice system. There are several programmatic and operational hurdles that we would need to address with DOC, and we would likely need additional resources to make system improvements to support this program. We look forward to working with the City Council to identify the best way to create civil service opportunities for incarcerated individuals.

We look forward to continued engagement with you on these pieces of legislation.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for your time today and for your commitment to strengthening civil service. Today is just the beginning of a longer dialogue that we would like to have with the City Council about our efforts to improve programs and services. This includes working with the City Council to advance our legislative agenda in Albany. We are working on several proposals that aim to create greater efficiencies and allow us to continue our efforts to innovative in our approach to reforming the civil service process.

I am happy to answer any questions.

**TESTIMONY OF  
THE FORTUNE SOCIETY**

**THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS  
And THE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL SERVICE AND LABOR**

250 Broadway,  
New York, NY

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Optimizing the Civil Service Exam System

**PURPOSE:** To support passage of Int. 0645-2022 and Res. 311

Presented by

**Andre Ward**

Associate Vice President,  
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Good afternoon, Council Committee Chairs De La Rosa and Ung, and Members of the Committees on Governmental Operations and Civil Service and Labor:

My name is Andre Ward. I am the Associate Vice President of The David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at The Fortune Society. The Fortune Society is a 55-year-old organization that supports successful reentry from incarceration and promotes alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities. We do this by believing in the power of people to change; building lives through service programs shaped by the experiences of our participants; and changing minds through education and advocacy to promote the creation of a fair, humane, and truly rehabilitative justice system.

At the Fortune Society, one of the first things participants say to us is, “I need a job. Can you please help me find a job?” This is the constant plea we hear whether the participant has just come home from prison, has been mandated to participate in our Alternative to Incarceration Program, or has come to us voluntarily to begin or resume engaging in our services. We work with them to obtain the hard and soft skills necessary to find a job in the field of their choice. This includes counseling them on how to talk about gaps on their resumes due to incarceration and other periods of instability. It includes making sure they have professional attire which we provide, thanks to clothing donations we receive year-round. Sometimes it means encouraging people to continue their education first, perhaps while working in entry-level positions. For many, it also means trying to get up to speed on the advances in technology that occurred while they were incarcerated. However, in far too many instances, even though these issues have been addressed, individuals are well-prepared, and they otherwise meet job criteria, they still face an uphill battle simply because of their criminal legal system involvement.

It is well-documented that people with criminal legal system histories face barriers to obtaining employment. An analysis of over 5 million formerly incarcerated people revealed that their unemployment rate was a shocking 27%, a level higher than the total United States unemployment rate during any period of time.<sup>1</sup> That rate is also almost five times higher than it is for the general population.<sup>2</sup> These findings are particularly distressing when placed in context of the great efforts that formerly incarcerated people make to find work and to support themselves and their families. As the same study noted, over 93% of formerly incarcerated people aged 25-44 were either working or actively seeking work – more than the 83% of people of the same age across the total population.<sup>3</sup> This analysis is borne out in the halls, classrooms, and computer rooms of The Fortune Society everyday: people who have been incarcerated want to work, and they are trying to work.

Research also shows that people who have been involved in the criminal legal system face substantial barriers to obtaining meaningful, full-time, well-paid employment that offers a career pathway. As noted in one recent scholarly article:

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<sup>1</sup> Couloute, Lucius & Daniel Kopf. (2018, July). “Out of prison & out of work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people.” *Prison Policy Initiative*. 1-14, at 1. Retrieved from <https://www.ywboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Out-of-Prison-Out-of-Work--Prison-Policy-Initiative.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

(C)ontact with the criminal justice system is associated with significantly poorer employment outcomes. Arrest, conviction, and incarceration reduce the odds of searching for ... and, contingent on a search, of getting a job....When employed, individuals who have had criminal justice contact struggle with job stability, annually working many fewer weeks and earning significantly lower wages. This is in part because for many individuals, employment typically amounts to day labor with no real prospects of further employment, let alone benefits.<sup>4</sup>

It is critical to note that people of color who have been incarcerated face even greater hurdles to obtaining employment.<sup>5</sup> This difficulty is compounded for women of color: Black women have a 6.4% unemployment rate in general, while those who were incarcerated have an unemployment rate of nearly 44%, compared to that of formerly incarcerated white men, at 18%.<sup>6</sup> This difficulty in obtaining employment creates significant future earning losses and produces a profound racial disparity between entire communities.<sup>7</sup>

Opening doors to employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated people is thus a matter of racial justice and the moral thing to do. It is also the smart thing to do in terms of public safety. Numerous studies have shown that people are more likely to desist from crime if they are employed.<sup>8</sup> Higher-quality employment, with access to benefits and the potential for upward employment mobility, are even more likely to play a role in desistance.<sup>9</sup> There are many theories about the connection between employment and desistance, such as the relief it provides from economic pressures and the benefits of engaging in a highly structured routine.<sup>10</sup> Notably, research also shows that it changes one's sense of self to be meaningfully employed, providing a sense of connection and purpose, and of true engagement in the social fabric of our broader community.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, Sandra Susan & Jonathan Simon. (2020). "Exclusion and Extraction: Criminal Justice Contact and the Reallocation of Labor." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 6(1), 1-2. Retrieved from <https://www.rsfsjournal.org/content/rsfjss/6/1/1.full.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Couloute at 3-4. See also Smith and Simon at 8 ("Regardless of race, then, having a criminal record has a substantial and negative effect on making it through the hiring process, but those odds are far worse for blacks than for their white justice involved counterparts."); Pager, Devah, Bruce Western & Bart Bonikowski. (2009, Oct. 1). Discrimination in a low-wage labor market: A field experiment. *American sociological review*, 74(5), 777-799. [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2915472/?source=post\\_page](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2915472/?source=post_page).

<sup>6</sup> Couloute at 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Craigie, Terry-Ann, Ames Grawert, & Cameron Kimble. (2020, September 15). "Conviction, imprisonment, and lost earnings: How involvement with the criminal justice system deepens inequality." *Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law*. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/conviction-imprisonment-and-lost-earnings-how-involvement-criminal>.

<sup>8</sup> LaBriola, Joe. (2020). "Post-prison employment quality and future criminal justice contact." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 6(1), 154-172 at 156 (citing multiple studies). Retrieved from <https://www.rsfsjournal.org/content/rsfjss/6/1/154.full.pdf>. See also Duwe, Grant. (2017, June). "The use and impact of correctional programming for inmates on pre-and post-release outcomes." 8. *US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice*. Retrieved from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250476.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> LaBriola at 156.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 156, 170.

When people experience these tangible and intangible benefits of meaningful employment, we are all safer and better off.

Civil service in particular allows people to give back to their communities through their employment and offers career advancement. Intro. 645 and Resolution 311 would provide pathways to the kind of stability and opportunity that too-often eludes people despite their best efforts when they come home from prison and jail. Finally, offering access to information sessions about civil service exams, and the exams themselves, to people while they are held in our city jails also sends a clear message to them: this is a moment in your life. You have potential despite any hurdles, and we want to see you make something of yourself. That kind of message is invaluable.

For all of these reasons, The Fortune Society is pleased to support the bill and resolution before the Committees that would expand access to civil service exams for people involved in the criminal legal system, even while held in city jails or state prisons. We also trust that these Committees and the broader City Council will monitor the implementation of Intro. 645. Successful implementation will depend on the ability of people in custody having access to the related programming, and their ability to take the exams; their ability will depend on DOC staff ensuring they have such access. As has been the subject of many hearings before the Council, the New York City Department of Correction has had challenges ensuring that uniformed staff are at their assigned posts. In addition to the indisputable fact that this has produced dangerous and even deadly conditions in the city jails, when staff are not at their posts, people in their custody cannot be transported to programming, and program providers cannot access people in their housing units. Therefore, we are hopeful that these Committees will provide the necessary oversight to ensure successful implementation should this bill become law.

We thank the Speaker for introducing this important bill, and you, Chair De La Rosa for your support for it and for Resolution 311, as well as to you and Chair Ung for holding this hearing.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Francis Torres

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Department of Correction

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kadian Oular

Address: 1 Centre Street

I represent: DCAS

Address: 1 Centre Street

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/26/2007

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SILVIA MONTALBAN

Address: DCAS

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 10-26-2022

Name: Andre Ward (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 29-76 Northern Blvd

I represent: The Fortune Society

Address: 29-76 Northern Blvd. LIC Queens NY

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 10/26/22

Name: Barbara Dannenberg (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: DCAS

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆