

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL
WELFARE

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Wednesday, January 18, 2023
Start: 1:20 p.m.
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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Tiffany Cabán
- Crystal Hudson
- Linda Lee
- Chi A. Ossé
- Lincoln Restler
- Kevin C. Riley
- Althea V. Stevens
- Sandra Ung
- Nantasha M. Williams
- Pierina Ana Sanchez
- Shahana Hanif
- Gale A. Brewer

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

Starlight Michelle Harris
New York City Resident
CityFHEPS participant

Karim Walker
Outreach and Organizing Specialist
Safety Net Project at the
Urban Justice Center

Onyx Walker
Co-Chair Coordinator, Youth Action Board
and Peer Advocate at Sheltering Arms

Linda Hernandez
Former Youth Peer Advocate

Molly Park
First Deputy Commissioner
Department of Homeless Services

Sarah Zuiderveen
Sr. Advisor for Housing and Homelessness
Department of Homeless Services

Bruce Jordan
Chief Homelessness Prevention Officer
Human Resource Administration
Office of Homelessness Prevention
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Clare Plunkett
Program Dir., Residential Services for
Domestic Violence Emergency Shelters
Sanctuary for Families

Jamie Powlovich
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Dominique 'Dylan' Tatom
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Samantha Kahn
Policy and Advocacy Manager
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Jack Boyle
Housing Staff Attorney
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

Andy Monontay[ph] ("Mr. Andy")
Homeless Citizen of New York City

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Milton Perez
Member, VOCAL New York

Mica Baum-Tuccillo
Member, Youth Empower

Amal Kharoufi
Member, Youth Empower

Christine Joseph
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Erin Sternlieb
Affordable Housing Specialist
Civil Justice Practice at
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Annie Minguez Garcia
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Michelle Maynard
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Covenant House

Jennie Stephens-Romero
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Juan Diaz
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Citizens Committee for Children

Julia Davis
Director, Youth Justice and Child Welfare
Children's Defense Fund

Eric Lee
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Homeless Services to United

Leticia Hernandez
Housing Access Manager
Covenant House

Ethel Brown
CityFHEPS voucher recipient

Sarah Wilson
Advocate, SafetyNet Project,
Urban Justice, VOCAL New York, Shout

Natalie Maria Hogan
Bronx Resident

Scott Andrew Hutchins
CityFHEPS voucher recipient

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon. Good
3 afternoon at this time can the host please start the
4 webinar? We are about to begin.

5 Good afternoon and welcome to the New York City
6 Council hearing of the Committee on General Welfare
7 at this time, can everyone please silence your cell
8 phones? If you wish to testify today, please come up
9 to the sergeants desk to fill out a testimony slip.
10 Written testimony can be emailed to
11 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
13 cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [GAVEL] Thank you and good
15 afternoon everyone and welcome to today's hearing.
16 My name is Diana Ayala and I am the Deputy Speaker of
17 the New York City Council and the Chair of the
18 General Welfare Committee. Today our committee is
19 here to hold a hearing entitled, Oversight, the
20 CityFHEPS Rental Assistance Program.

21 According to the New York City Human Resource
22 Administration's Department of Social Services
23 website, CityFHEPS is a rental assistance supplement
24 to help individuals and families find and keep
25 housing. CityFHEPS is the latest iteration of

2 several previous programs, and according to HRA and
3 DSS have been concerned-- that according to the HRA
4 and DSS been consolidated to make it easier for
5 people to get help, easier for landlords to get
6 payments, and easier for DSS to manage cases.

7 At present, this isn't always the case.

8 While the spirit of the program may have been to
9 create a seamless support system designed to assist
10 individuals and families at risk of housing
11 insecurity, the current realities of the program for
12 many are hard to navigate, and laden with cumbersome
13 and often circuitous bureaucracy that too often
14 create barriers to receiving assistance in a timely
15 manner.

16 Simply put, we know vouchers are a proven tool to
17 combat homelessness. However, it has been reported
18 that delays in voucher processing are undermining the
19 success of the program. These delays have been
20 attributed to short staffing, administrative delays,
21 and what amounts to rampant source-of-income
22 discrimination. At today's hearing, we will also
23 hear three pre-considered bills and one resolution.

24 The first bill, which I am proud to sponsor, is a
25 local law to amend the administrative code of the

2 City of New York in relation to rental assistance
3 eligibility requirements, and would prohibit the
4 Department of Social Services from requiring an
5 individual or family to reside in shelter before
6 becoming eligible for CityFHEPS rental assistance
7 voucher.

8 The second bill is sponsored by Councilmember
9 Sanchez, and is a local law to amend the
10 administrative code of the City of New York in
11 relation to income and work requirements for rental
12 assistance.

13 The third bill, also sponsored by Councilmember
14 Sanchez, is a local law to amend the administrative
15 code of the City of New York in relation to expanding
16 eligibility for rental assistance.

17 And finally, today we are hearing a resolution
18 calling upon the New York State Legislature to enact
19 legislation that would expand eligibility for the
20 CityFHEPS program in New York City, also sponsored by
21 Councilmember Sanchez. I want to thank members of
22 the Administration who are here with us today as well
23 as the advocates and individuals who have lived
24 experience that informed and helped us shape this
25 legislation.

2 Our aim is to find solutions that will make
3 CityFHEPS work better for everyone.

4 At this time, I'd like to acknowledge my
5 colleagues who are here with us today, Councilmember
6 Riley, Councilmember Hudson, Councilmember Lee,
7 Councilmember Ossé, Councilmember Stevens, and
8 Councilmember Ung. I know there are a couple of
9 others that will be joining us shortly.

10 I would also like to thank the committee staff
11 who worked to prepare for this hearing. Aminta
12 Kilawan, Senior Legislative Counsel, David Homero,
13 Legislative Counsel, Cristy Dwyer, Senior Legislative
14 Policy Analyst, Julia Haramis, Principal Finance
15 Analyst, Rose Martinez, Assistant Deputy Director,
16 Nicholas Montalbano, Senior Data Sciences, and
17 finally my staff, Elsie Encarnacion, and Malik
18 Altomare, Director of Communications.

19 I would now like to turn it over to Council--
20 well, to Councilmember Sanchez, but she's not here,
21 so we'll forego that temporarily until she's
22 available. Is she online? Yeah? No. Okay. She
23 was running a little bit late. So we'll hear now
24 from some members of the public who were kind enough
25 to join us today and tell us about their personal

2 experiences with CityFHEPS. I'll turn it over to our
3 Committee Counsel, David Homero, to invite them up to
4 speak.

5 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. So our first panel
6 will be a hybrid panel. In person, we have Karen
7 Walker and Starlight Harris, you may please come up,
8 and online virtually, we will have-- we'll hear from
9 Onyx Walker, followed by Linden Hernandez, and then
10 Ethel Brown.

11 All testimony today will be limited to three
12 minutes.

13 MS. HARRIS: Good afternoon City Council. My
14 name is Starlight Michelle Harris, and I am a
15 recipient of the CityFHEPS voucher. And I want to
16 start by saying that one of the largest problems that
17 we have with CityFHEPS is the 90-day rule. I think
18 it should be eliminated simply because when I, myself
19 was in the shelter system, I remember I got really
20 ill, and I had only been in shelter, I think, maybe a
21 month maybe-- yeah, I think it was like a month, 45
22 days, and when I went into the hospital, I had two
23 heart surgeries. And I was in the hospital for two--
24 a little over two months. And when I came back, I

2 had to start the process all over again. So I just
3 think that that rule needs to be eliminated.

4 In addition, there's a lot of bureaucracy with
5 CityFHEPS, in the sense that there's no help, no
6 contact point. Sometimes you're transferred. In my
7 case, I was transferred eight times in less than a
8 year. And there's-- sometimes there were no housing
9 people located at the shelters, in that shelter that
10 I was put in. And then there's no one outside of the
11 shelter system that is able or willing to help you.
12 So you don't have a contact point to use the voucher
13 to get out of the shelter. So that's a huge problem.

14 I think other people, such as people that work in
15 other areas outside of the shelter should be able to--
16 - a person should be able to go if they can't-- if
17 they don't have a housing person, they-- there should
18 be contact, with maybe at Coalition for the Homeless,
19 or one of the other agencies that deals with these
20 vouchers to help people find housing and get out if
21 they don't have a contact person.

22 The other problem that I'm now encountering is
23 that they send you paperwork to-- to renew your
24 voucher. And they don't contact you. They don't
25 send an email. They don't call. They don't send

2 paperwork to let you know that, "Yes, we received
3 your documents, we are taking care of it." The
4 system is very old and it needs to be updated.
5 There's no seamless way to move through the system
6 without going through the process each and every
7 time. It's a two-to-three-hour process, every time
8 you're moved from one shelter to the next, just to do
9 an intake process. And when you're not well, that is
10 a very difficult situation.

11 And when you go into this system -- I know a lot
12 of people that have gone into the system perfectly
13 well. By the time they come out, they're not well.
14 I was in the hospital two times in the year that I
15 was in the shelter system, twice, once for heart
16 surgery, and another time because I suffered with
17 multiple sclerosis.

18 So that in and of itself is a huge problem. It
19 prolonged and delayed me getting into my apartment.
20 I found the apartment in September, I was told that I
21 had the apartment in November, I ended up not moving
22 in the apartment until February of last year.

23 So this 90-day rule needs once again to be
24 eliminated, and there needs to be other contact
25 people to help move this process along, this

2 paperwork. And maybe the system needs to be updated
3 to reflect the times in which we now live in, which
4 is 2023, not 1973. And I believe that some of the
5 people that work at DSS, HRA, and DHS need to spend
6 some time in the shelter, 10 days to see what people
7 have to go through, and the experience that you know,
8 to actually live it and just be a part of the system
9 to see how broken it really is.

10 Thank you very much. I appreciate your time
11 today.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

13 MS. HARRIS: You're welcome.

14 MR. WALKER: Ladies and gentlemen of the council.
15 Good morning. Good afternoon. My name is Karim
16 Walker, I am an Outreach and Organizing Specialist
17 with the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice
18 Center. And I want to talk about the shortcomings as
19 well as the benefits of this great program. To sum,
20 the CityFHEPS voucher, pardon me, has been nothing
21 short of a godsend. It's helped move a number of
22 people out of shelter and into the permanent stable
23 housing that they so-- are so-- desperately need to
24 need to live filling and-- fulfilling and productive
25 lives. And I speak for that-- and I can say that is

2 the case with me because I am also a recipient of a
3 CityFHEPS Yatra as well. But the voucher program
4 leaves much to be desired as well. From the 90-day
5 wait period, all the way up to the process of moving
6 someone with a voucher-- moving someone out into
7 stable housing.

8 As we all know, source of income-- one-- another
9 major problem is source-of-income discrimination.
10 And as we all know, that's something that's a serious
11 problem, and it's an it's hardly a novel problem as
12 well. From prospective tenants just seeing their
13 calls for apartments just go unanswered, to landlords
14 flat out-- flat out refusing-- landlords and brokers
15 flat out refusing to rent to tenants, prospective
16 tenants with vouchers, even though the money is
17 basically guaranteed. This can perpetuate the
18 vicious cycle of homelessness in the city, especially
19 considering the fact that we have more vacant
20 apartments in New York City than we have homeless
21 people, meaning that we can house every homeless
22 person in the city and still have leftover housing
23 stock.

24 We're-- we're calling on City Hall and the City
25 Council to crackdown on landlords who violate the law

2 in such a blatant fashion, because housing is a human
3 right, and it is a right that must be respected.

4 And another area of improvement that we're
5 looking for is the qualifications, especially the 90-
6 day wait period. We're asking the City to eliminate
7 that provision from its-- from its requirements. And
8 I believe there is-- that one of the laws-- that one
9 of the bills being presented today will address that.
10 And I'm very grateful that the City Council is taking
11 it-- taking up-- this taking this up in such a
12 meaningful fashion.

13 But I also want to put a personal touch to this,
14 because we have one of our clients, a gentleman by
15 the name of Juan, who has a CithFHEPS voucher, who
16 actually has been in the shelter system for
17 approximately three years. He also has-- he actually
18 has a lease in place. But DHS for some strange
19 season has not taken-- put together his packet to
20 help him move out into-- into his apartment. We're
21 looking-- that's a major problem with-- because
22 that's something that I've had to go-- that I had to
23 go through when I got my apartment back in 2020. I
24 had to wait approximately three and a half months

2 before the city moved me out-- was able to move me
3 into my-- into my into my apartment.

4 If for no other reason, the CityFHEPS voucher is
5 is good economic sense. Because if we're willing to
6 put-- place-- if we're willing-- if the City is
7 willing to shell out approximately \$4,000 per month
8 for a person to have a bed in a shelter, we are more
9 than capable of taking care of two or three people,
10 and giving them vouchers so they can get four walls,
11 a roof over their head, a key to their door. And
12 from there live the productive, meaningful lives that
13 they are so-- that they so deserve. Thank you for
14 your time and I'll be happy to answer any questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

16 Thank you so much for your testimony. When-- you
17 mentioned having been transferred quite a number of
18 times. Was that transferred in shelter or
19 transferred from--

20 MS. HARRIS: From shelter to shelter. Eight of
21 them.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And did you ask for--

23 MS. HARRIS: Under different programs. I did not
24 ask to be transferred. They just took it upon
25 themselves to do so.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Did they offer you a
3 reasonable accommodation that would allow you to be
4 able to continue to count your time in the hospital
5 as part of the 90 days?

6 MS. HARRIS: At some point-- no, they did not.
7 It was not reasonable. I'd given them several
8 letters of documentation from all of my medical
9 doctors stating why I needed a reasonable
10 accommodation. And when they got near the end, and
11 it was like after I literally got the news, within a
12 week of me receiving news that I've gotten the
13 apartment in November, they transferred me to fare
14 zones, and two-plus hours away from my entire medical
15 team, out in Jamaica, South Jamaica, Queens, in an
16 abandoned area with a few hotels that they were using
17 at the time as reasonable accommodations. And it was
18 really horrific. Like there was-- I, I was
19 threatened. I saw things that no one should see in
20 broad daylight. And there was no, like,
21 transportation of any sort. And every time I
22 requested anything, they were very difficult. Even
23 one of the workers there. He really, he affected me
24 in such a way-- a profound way that I couldn't even
25 stand to be in the same room with him, because it

2 felt like I was being abused. And I'm also a victim
3 of domestic violence.

4 So in the course of me being there, I fought and
5 fought and fought, and tried to get out of there, and
6 it took them a month to transfer me again.

7 In the course of all of that the head of that
8 particular shelter told me, "Oh, well, there are more
9 men that are homeless than women." That's not her
10 job to inform me of that. Your job is to help me
11 find appropriate housing in a timely fashion. No one
12 should be in shelter for more than a year, 2, 3, 4,
13 5, 6, 10 years is absolutely ridiculous. And for
14 people who are in shelter, and that need help,
15 additional help for a variety of reasons, such as
16 mental issues, or they're struggling with drugs,
17 there needs to be an aftercare program in place as
18 well. There needs to be, you know, checks and
19 balances. Someone to check up on these people to
20 help them get situated, because they may not know how
21 to pay rent, they may not know how to go about going
22 grocery shopping and getting the things that they
23 need to take care of themselves. I am very fortunate
24 that I was able to speak up for myself, and I was
25 able to contact people, call people, send emails and

2 things of that nature, knock down doors. And I
3 wasn't being-- I wasn't letting anyone tell me no, or
4 deciding to put me where they wanted me to be. I
5 decided where I was going to live.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Last question.

7 Regarding the-- the application process. Where did
8 you apply for the CityFHEPS? Was that done directly
9 at a shelter site, or did you have to leave and
10 apply?

11 MS. HARRIS: It was when I was in shelter, and
12 like I said, I was in shelter, and they offered it to
13 me but only after I came out of the hospital and had
14 to do the 90 days--

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

16 MS. HARRIS: --to get it.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But once they offered it to
18 you, you were interacting-- you were interfacing with
19 a staff at the shelter, not at an office at DSS, not
20 at Homebase?

21 MS. HARRIS: No. Because when I tried to call
22 those people, no one was-- no one was giving me help.
23 And like I said when I was-- initially, when I got
24 the voucher, shortly after I was given the voucher
25 and the amount went up, that's when they transferred

2 me to a location in Jamaica, where they did not have
3 someone-- they did not have a housing specialist
4 there. So no one to really help me.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. Thank you.
6 Councilmember Ossé? Oh, I'm sorry. We've also been
7 joined by Councilmembers Sanchez, Hudson, and
8 Restler. Councilmember Ossé?

9 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you Chair. What's
10 your name again, miss. I'm so sorry.

11 MS. HARRIS: Starlight Harris.

12 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Miss Harris. Thank you--
13 Harris?

14 MS. HARRIS: Yes.

15 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much for-- for
16 being here. I mean, so insightful to hear from--
17 from your experience what you think the city should
18 do--

19 MS. HARRIS: Yes.

20 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: --to change this process. I
21 guess a question that I'm curious about is, When you
22 were undergoing, I guess, the CityFHEPS process, and
23 you were calling DSS, or-- is it calling DSS that--
24 that-- are they helping you through this process, or

2 are you going into the shelter system and speaking to
3 representatives at the shelter?

4 MS. HARRIS: I was in the shelter, so there was
5 supposed to be a point person that helped me, but
6 most of the time the person wasn't available, or they
7 didn't have one at the shelter. So then I went about
8 the business of reaching out to other people to help
9 me.

10 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: And who were those
11 individuals that you were reaching out to? Were they
12 outside of government, or--

13 MS. HARRIS: I-- well, this one person in
14 particular, her name is Miss Bogat[ph]. She worked
15 at DHS. She managed to get my paperwork in her
16 hands. And she said, "Don't worry about it. I will
17 take care of everything from here." At that point, I
18 had been transferred to shelter number eight, which
19 was the final shelter. And when they transferred me
20 from the-- from that last shelter-- well to the last
21 shelter from the shelter that I was in before, that's
22 when I ended up in the hospital the second time. And
23 when Miss Bogat[ph] received my paperwork, she said,
24 "Don't worry about it. I'm taking care of it." You
25 know, and I was in contact with her via email, on--

2 on the phone during my tenure in the hospital at the
3 end of the year.

4 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: And approximately how many
5 people from DSS, or from any city agencies did you
6 speak to before getting to Miss Bogat?

7 MS. HARRIS: About maybe six.

8 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: So a lack of consistency in
9 terms of those that were aware of your case and your
10 situation?

11 MS. HARRIS: Yes, exactly.

12 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: And you would say that that,
13 you know, was a deterrent in terms of you getting to
14 where you are right now, correct?

15 MS. HARRIS: Yes it is. Absolutely.

16 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: I mean, I can't thank you
17 enough for, I mean, some of the things that you've
18 raised today in terms of where there needs to be
19 tweaks within, you know, this entire process. I
20 definitely want to ask the agency when they do
21 testify. And I'll ask you, just in case you do know:
22 Do you know if there's a specific -- and correct me
23 if I'm wrong -- you know, office within DSS that
24 works specifically on CityFHEPS cases? Or is it a
25 catchall?

2 MS. HARRIS: No. There-- there's supposed to be
3 a housing specialist located at-- on site, and they
4 work with any voucher that you have once it is
5 received. But if there's no one there...

6 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: And how many times was-- I
7 mean, how often were--

8 MS. HARRIS: At least three times out of the six
9 times-- I mean, before I got to Miss Bogad, I had to
10 see six people or more. And some of the people
11 weren't helping me, because every single time I would
12 get prepared to do one thing or the other, they were
13 like, "Oh, you're being transferred."

14 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Mm-hmm.

15 MS. HARRIS: "You're being transferred." I said,
16 "For what? Why? Where am I going?" And this was
17 consistent.

18 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Well, from the bottom--

19 MS. HARRIS: Well, I guess because I was-- I was
20 not-- I was making waves in a sense that, when I
21 wasn't getting what I felt I deserved, and what I
22 wanted and needed at that particular time, I said,
23 "Okay, well, I'll just go to the news, or I'll reach
24 out to the Senator, and the Governor, and the Mayor."
25 And I think they saw me as a problem. And so they

2 would just [stage whisper] "we've got to get rid of
3 her," and they would transfer me.

4 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Well, again, from the bottom
5 of my heart, thank you so much for being here. I
6 mean, last thing I'll say is: So many people
7 complain about those that are without a home or in
8 the shelter system, or unhoused. And then, you know,
9 we hear stories from you, as individuals that work in
10 government and see that the-- one of the biggest
11 flaws is that government isn't working to help people
12 get out of the situations that there in.

13 MS. HARRIS: But it doesn't seem like that.

14 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: No absolutely.

15 MS. HARRIS: It seems seem like there's money--
16 there's money to be made, because it's a business for
17 them. So it pays to keep people in shelter as
18 opposed to putting people in their own homes. And
19 then people are -- like myself, and probably Karim --
20 can tell you that when you're ready to recertify with
21 them, you still don't get notifications, so there's a
22 remote possibility that I could lose my housing
23 because I'm not being recertified or being told that
24 yes, you-- you-- we've-- we're taken care of it. And
25 then I don't know anything. And the next thing I

2 know, "boop", I'm being evicted. And then back in
3 the shelter to start this process all over again.
4 And I'm not doing that.

5 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: One more-- one more point,
6 Chair. I'm so sorry.

7 Um, so what I wrote down is that if we eliminated
8 the 90-day, you know, expiration for CityFHEPS,
9 required DSS workers to be in the shelter system or
10 at least see how the shelter system works physically
11 for some time, as well as -- give me one second, I
12 took note of some of the things that you-- you listed
13 -- or possibly creating an office of individuals
14 that solely worked on-- on CityFHEPS work--

15 MS. HARRIS: Or just-- or just anyone. Like, you
16 have different agencies and different activists who
17 have been out on the streets pounding the pavements
18 and doing this work for a long time. And if they had
19 additional training, and if-- they could help, you
20 know. VOCAL could help. Coalition for the Homeless
21 could help. City-- different agencies that have been
22 working to get this program up and running, you could
23 say, if they had the proper training, if someone's
24 not in shelter, or someone's in shelter and they're
25 not getting the proper help in the proper timeframe,

2 there's someone else that they can reach out to and
3 say, "Oh, Miss So-And-So over at Coalition for the
4 Homeless or VOCAL or, you know, Safety Net activists,
5 or Neighbors Together. If they had some type of
6 training, someone could call them. If, for instance,
7 someone is not in shelter. If there's no homeless--
8 housing specialist in shelter, there are other
9 additional entities that can step in and say, "Okay.
10 Let me help you get your packet together and get it
11 to the proper people." But see, that's-- once again,
12 there's a lot of people, you have a lot of chiefs,
13 and not enough Indians, unfortunately, and everyone's
14 walking around and talking out at the side of their
15 necks about what needs to be done and what they're
16 going to do, and nothing ever gets done. Nothing
17 ever gets done. You have all these warehouse
18 departments. You have all these homeless people,
19 people that are coming in, refugees, you know, things
20 of that nature, asylum seekers, and we're-- and
21 everyone's saying, "Oh, we don't have the money. We
22 have we don't have the funds." Obviously you do
23 because you're paying these different people under
24 the umbrella of DSS and DHS \$5,000 a month, per head

2 per bed. So someone has the money somewhere in this
3 state that we live in.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

5 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Ms. Harris.

6 MS. HARRIS: You're welcome.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Any other
8 questions for this panel? No? We've been also
9 joined by Councilmember Hanif.

10 So we're going to hear from the virtual panel,
11 and then we'll hear from Councilmember Sanchez.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNSEL HOMERO: First up will be Onyx Walker,
14 followed by Linda Hernandez.

15 MR. WALKER: Good afternoon, everyone. My name
16 is Onyx Walker. I'm 25 years old. I am a Co-Chair
17 coordinator for the Youth Action Board, or YAB for
18 short, as well as a youth peer advocate at Sheltering
19 Arms as part of their rapid rehousing program. I
20 want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the General
21 Welfare Committee for creating space for folks like
22 myself to testify.

23 Just to be frank, I'm not happy today. There are
24 some uncomfortable truths that we must face, but we
25 need to in order to progress. I faced homelessness

2 for over a year, and it was a struggle for me to say
3 the least. I avoided shelters most of the time
4 because of the hectic and unsafe nature of those
5 environments. Ironically, I preferred the streets.
6 However, I can say for certain that after learning
7 more about homelessness and the resources that are
8 available, and also that housing vouchers provide,
9 they would have undoubtedly come in handy. I would
10 have had a place to call my own and be under less
11 stress in attempting to navigate this world as a
12 young adult.

13 Two years ago, youth advocates worked in tandem
14 with stakeholders to create legislation that would
15 provide access to CityFHEPS vouchers for youth
16 exiting foster care systems and homeless youth. To
17 make the process smoother, less stressful, and
18 overall less difficult, the legislation was supposed
19 to make it so that the aforementioned individuals
20 would no longer have to enter DHS shelter system
21 first, as it creates an unnecessary barrier to
22 adequate housing.

23 It turns out that DSS is not fond of this idea
24 and looks to ignore the diligent efforts youth and
25 advocates have put in. When DYCD and ACS CityFHEPS

2 pilot vouchers, as well as one-time allocation of EHV
3 are inevitably exhausted, youth and young people will
4 still have to enter DHS shelters first in order to
5 get those same vouchers, a direct opposition of the
6 previously mentioned context, recreating an
7 exclusivity issue when the priority should be
8 accessibility.

9 If we truly wish to support those facing
10 homelessness, then there is work to do, and I believe
11 that this is direction-- this is the direction we
12 should go in. The Department of Social Services has
13 a duty to the young people that claims to want to
14 help. They can start by upholding Laws 170 and 157
15 of 2022, grant young people who are experiencing
16 homelessness and the DYCD funded RHY programs and
17 youth coming out of ACS care, access to HRA-funded
18 CityFHEPS vouchers without the oversight of entering
19 a DHS shelter. The resistance we face quite
20 literally goes against the work young people and
21 advocates have put into this endeavor. It's
22 saddening to hear that when progress was thought to
23 be made, and we were finally moved _____ housing,
24 we're moving back to square one.

2 I would also like to point out that in BHS
3 shelters, they receive access to vouchers, but youth
4 in DYCD don't, despite them also being homeless. So
5 that's a disparity there.

6 Young people are the ones being affected by this.
7 And so I urge you all to take this under serious
8 consideration. We can't say we support young people
9 and that-- and that they are the future, if we're
10 creating hoops to jump through and unnecessary
11 obstacles to prevent housing stability for them.
12 Thank you for your time.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

14 MS. HERNANDEZ: Good morning. My name is Linda
15 Hernandez. I'm 25 years old. I'm a former Youth
16 Peer Advocate. I'm a father. I'm currently one of
17 the two New York City Youth Fashion Board Co-Chair
18 coordinators representing RHY youth aged, 16 to 24.
19 Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and the rest of the
20 General Welfare Committee for holding this hearing
21 regarding CityFHEPS vouchers, and allowing me the
22 opportunity to testify here today.

23 In 2021, youth advocates helped pass legislation
24 that we believe will finally give homeless youth and
25 the Department of Youth and Community Development,

2 Runaway and Homeless Youth System, as well as youth
3 exiting foster care, access to CityFHEPS vouchers
4 without forcing them to enter the DHS shelter system
5 first. It was brought to my attention, and I have
6 recently learned that DSS is not going to allow this,
7 and that after the DYCD and ECS CityFHEPS pilot
8 vouchers, and one-time allocation of EHV vouchers are
9 exhausted, youth will be forced to enter DHS shelters
10 before they can get access to vouchers, which is
11 unfair and what you fought so hard to make sure would
12 not happen.

13 I recommend that the Department of Social
14 Services needs to uphold Local Laws 157 and 170 of
15 2022, as the young people, the provider community,
16 and the council intended, and grant youth
17 experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded RHY
18 programs, as well as youth transitioning out of ACS
19 care, who are otherwise eligible to access HRA funded
20 CityFHEPS vouchers without forcing them to enter a
21 DHS shelter.

22 As a formerly homeless youth who has been
23 impacted by the DHS and DYCD system, I understand the
24 importance of providing access to housing for young
25 people by any means necessary with limited barriers,

2 because I have been impacted by the system myself.
3 It is unfair, unjust, and unseen for youth between
4 the ages of 16 to 24 to be putting themselves at risk
5 by having to enter the adult shelter system just to
6 be provided access to one voucher that should be
7 universal to all populations, not just those in the
8 DHS system.

9 When the Youth Fashion Board and others fought
10 for the passing of legislation to finally give youth
11 access to vouchers, it was our understanding based on
12 conversations with DSS that youth would be able to
13 access CityFHEPS without entering into DHS systems.
14 This was again confirmed by DSS during the New York
15 City homelessness demonstration program.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 MS. HERNANDEZ: Is it okay if I ask for more time
18 Counsel?

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you-- can you try to
20 wrap? Thanks.

21 MS. HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Planning process. But now
22 we are being told this is now what legislation will
23 do. I think it's unacceptable. I just encourage the
24 Administration to right the wrongs and do what's
25 right. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL HOMERO: For the record, I just want to
3 clarify that the four individuals we just heard from,
4 two in person and two on Zoom, were the first panel.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We will not hear from
6 Councilmember-- well, sorry. Before I get ahead of
7 myself. Did anybody have any questions for the last
8 two panelists? No? Seeing none-- We also want to
9 recognize we've been joined by Councilmember Gail
10 Brewer. Councilmember Sanchez?

11 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you, Madam Deputy.
12 I'm grateful for this hearing. And I will be
13 speaking to three bills that I have being heard today
14 that seeks to remove bureaucratic barriers and expand
15 eligibility for potential recipients of CityFHEPS
16 vouchers.

17 I'll just start with what we know. Our city is
18 in a deep housing crisis, and it is not one that is
19 felt equally by all New Yorkers. The most recent
20 housing vacancy survey shows a vacancy rate of 15.6%
21 for apartments that rent over \$2,300. There's not a
22 shortage of those apartments. There's a shortage for
23 low-cost apartments. That shortage is at
24 functionally zero. And it's clear what we need to do
25 about that, which is stabilize our lowest income New

2 Yorkers and CityFHEPS eligibility expansion can do
3 that.

4 Importantly, our children, the school districts
5 that I share with Councilmember Althea Stevens, see
6 the highest rates of unhoused schoolchildren in the
7 city of New York, exacerbating the COVID achievement
8 gap and creating a pipeline of life difficulties for
9 our young people. And yet the city's housing shelter
10 is pushing 55,000.

11 Today's bills would relieve program requirements
12 that essentially require homelessness, as you've
13 heard from folks with lived experience, as a
14 precondition to voucher eligibility, like undoing the
15 90-day rule via Pre-considered 2062.

16 Instead, we seek to make CityFHEPS more
17 accessible as an upstream prevention tool to keep
18 families in their homes and out of shelters to begin
19 with. An individual with \$46,000 in income, or a
20 household of three people earning \$60,000. That's
21 not a rich household. And yet, you wouldn't know
22 that from CityFHEPS requirements, because those
23 individuals are precluded at this time from applying.
24 So Pre-considered 2863 is going to increase, it's

2 almost going to double the eligibility of max of
3 income.

4 It also-- Intro-- sorry, Pre-considered 2063 also
5 seeks to rationalize requirements like removing rigid
6 work requirements that creates double punishment.
7 Right now, if you don't have a job, and it causes you
8 to fall behind on rent and become homeless. Then
9 when you become homeless you need to have a job to
10 get an apartment. That doesn't make sense. It's a
11 double punishment and 2863 seeks to undo that. Pre-
12 considered 2064 simplifies the conditions needed to
13 qualify for a voucher. So instead of requiring two
14 or three conditions to be met, if you can prove that
15 you're facing eviction, you have-- your back-- backed
16 up on rent and got a rent demand letter, you would be
17 eligible for a CityFHEPS voucher.

18 And lastly, Pre-considered 2865 is a resolution
19 that caused calls on the State to pass Senate Bill
20 1631 by Senator Kavanaugh, which would expand
21 eligibility regardless of immigration status. Even
22 before the migrant crisis, we had a long-- we had
23 longtime New York City residents who are immigrant
24 New Yorkers waiting in our shelter systems,
25 ineligible for CityFHEPS. That's not fair. We need

2 to remove barriers to access in order to move more
3 and more folks into permanent situations. I look
4 forward to the Administration's testimony and public
5 testimony. And I hope that my colleagues will join
6 me in supporting this legislation.

7 Thank you, Madam Deputy.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We've also been
9 joined by Councilmember Williams.

10 I will now turn it over to our Committee Counsel
11 David Homero to administer the oath to the
12 Administration. Thank you to the panelists.

13 COUNSEL HOMERO: We will now going to call on
14 members the Administration. We have Molly Park,
15 First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of
16 Homeless Services, Sarah Zuiderveen, Senior Advisor
17 for Housing and Homelessness in the Department of
18 Homeless Services, and Bruce Jordan, Chief
19 Homelessness Prevention Officer, Human Resource
20 Administration Office of Homelessness Prevention
21 Administration.

22 Will you please raise your right hand?

23 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
24 and nothing but the truth before this committee and
25 to respond honestly to Councilmember questions?

2 ALL: I do.

3 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you, you may begin when
4 ready.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Good afternoon. I
6 want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the members of
7 the General Welfare Committee for holding today's
8 hearing and for the opportunity to testify about the
9 New York City Families Homelessness and Eviction
10 Prevention Services Program, known as CityFHEPS.

11 CityFHEPS is a rental assistance supplement to
12 help individuals and families find and keep housing.
13 It is administered by the Department of Social
14 Services, which includes both the Department of
15 Homeless Services and the Human Resources
16 Administration. My name is Molly Park and I'm the
17 first deputy commissioner at DHS. I'm joined by
18 Bruce Jordan, Chief Homelessness Prevention Officer
19 at HRA and Sarah Zuiderveen, Senior Advisor for
20 Housing and Homelessness at DSS.

21 I would like to begin my testimony by thanking
22 our Commissioner, Gary P. Jenkins; DSS, HRA and DHS
23 frontline staff members and providers who work
24 tirelessly every day to uphold the critical mission

2 of providing services to New Yorkers who need them
3 the most.

4 Over the last decades, New York City has seen
5 significant decreases in rent stabilized housing and
6 in turn has become less and less affordable for the
7 average New Yorker. In the 10 years between 2005 and
8 2015, household rents in the city increased by 18.4%,
9 while at the same time incomes failed to keep pace,
10 increasing by only 4.8%. Looking at housing supply
11 between 1994 and 2012, the city suffered a net loss
12 of about 150,000 rent-stabilized units. As a result
13 by 2015, the city of insufficient housing for
14 millions of low-income New Yorkers. Our frontline
15 staff, case managers, and housing specialists are
16 focused on helping vulnerable New Yorkers achieve
17 long term stability. Recognizing that there is no
18 one-size-fits-all solution, our staff work closely
19 with each client on a case-by-case basis to help
20 address barriers specific to their circumstances, and
21 connect them to suitable rental assistance and
22 housing solutions. HRA's Rental Assistance Programs
23 are a critical component of the Administration's
24 overall strategy to connect individuals experiencing
25 homelessness or housing instability to permanency.

2 In 2018, HRA streamlined city-funded Rental
3 Assistance Programs for households in or at risk of
4 homelessness, or at risk of going into shelter.
5 Seven unique programs were consolidated into
6 CityFHEPS making it easier for landlords and clients
7 alike. To be eligible for CityFHEPS in the community
8 households must have a gross income at or below 200%
9 of the federal poverty level and have a household
10 member who is a veteran, receives pathway home, and
11 meets the shelter eligibility criteria, or was
12 referred by CityFHEPS qualifying program.

13 Additionally, households facing eviction or who
14 were evicted in the past year and include someone who
15 lived in DHS shelter, has an active adult protective
16 services case, or seeking to preserve tenancy in a
17 rent-controlled apartment using CityFHEPS may also be
18 eligible in the community.

19 Many families and individuals in shelter are also
20 eligible for CityFHEPS. Households must be under
21 200% of federal poverty level, receive cash
22 assistance if eligible, and be working or senior or
23 disabled.

24 In addition, veterans and those living in a
25 shelter which is slated to close can also qualify.

2 There are detailed fact sheets on the HRA website
3 that lay out eligibility in much greater detail.

4 The streamlining of Rental Assistance Programs
5 has resulted in more landlords and brokers opening
6 doors for our neighbors in need. Since CityFHEPS was
7 created in the fall of 2018, over 26,000 households
8 have enrolled in the program. The mission of DSS and
9 DHS continues to be to prevent homelessness wherever
10 possible, address street homelessness, provide safe
11 temporary shelter, and connect New Yorkers
12 experiencing homelessness to suitable permanent
13 housing. This mission is carried out with care and
14 compassion for each client and their circumstances.

15 Our staff and providers employ many innovative
16 strategies including CityFHEPS to help individuals
17 who are in temporary shelter to successfully
18 transition to permanency, but we're always looking
19 for ways to improve the program.

20 Recently, Mayor Adams announced in the city's
21 housing plan, "Housing Our Neighbors A Blueprint for
22 Housing and Homelessness" that the city has trimmed
23 transformed its approach to housing New Yorkers. In
24 alignment with this transformative approach, DSS/HRA
25 held a public hearing on January 10, 2023, to propose

2 changes to the CityFHEPS rules to expand the
3 eligibility criteria for rental subsidies and to
4 reduce administrative burdens.

5 Specifically, the proposed rule would make single
6 adults eligible even when they're-- eligible when
7 they are earning minimum wage and working full time
8 even if their income is slightly higher than 200% of
9 the federal poverty level; reduce the monthly
10 contribution by CityFHEPS tenants who move into
11 single room occupancy units from 30% of their income
12 to a maximum of \$50 per month; reduce the number of
13 hours that families are required to work to become
14 eligible for CityFHEPS from 30 to 14 hours per week;
15 create an option for CityFHEPS voucher holders who
16 choose to secure an apartment that rents above the
17 CityFHEPS maximum, to use voucher by paying up to 40%
18 of their income; expand SSI eligibility for CityFHEPS
19 families from only an adult in the household to any
20 household member including a child; and, finally to
21 change the maximum room rental rate so it can be set
22 at the discretion of the commissioner in consultation
23 with OMB.

24 DSS is deeply committed to supporting New Yorkers
25 in need. When an eligible family or individual

2 enters shelter, DHS provider staff start on day one
3 to work with them to identify a permanent housing
4 plan, including CityFHEPS, but also emergency housing
5 vouchers or other housing options. DHS encourages
6 households to apply for every resource for which they
7 are eligible and housing specialists work with
8 clients to assemble documents and search for
9 apartments. Households may be pursuing multiple
10 housing options and subsidies at one time, and the
11 time it takes an individual or family may vary.

12 Because we believe that there is always room for
13 improvement DSS continues to work diligently to
14 improve processes, tackle barriers, and to streamline
15 the move-out process for everyone.

16 Thanks to the robust array of subsidies available
17 and the dedicated work of housing specialists,
18 DSS/DHS moves more than 200 households each week into
19 subsidized placements.

20 As of September 22, more than 26,000 households
21 comprised of 55,000 New Yorkers were able to secure
22 housing via CityFHEPS, and the city continues to
23 invest city dollars, most recently by increasing
24 rents to the federal fair market value to further
25 level the playing field for vulnerable New Yorkers.

2 In closing, since its creation, CityFHEPS has been an
3 important instrument to streamline the voucher
4 process and help those in need achieve housing
5 security. To date, 26,000 households have benefited
6 from CityFHEPS, and with the new improvements
7 championed by this administration, we seek to reduce
8 administrative burdens and increase eligibility for
9 CityFHEPS. But we believe that this can only have a
10 positive effect increasing and speeding up shelter
11 move outs. We look forward to working with the
12 council to support New Yorkers' need for more
13 affordable housing and housing security.

14 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify
15 today about the work DSS, HRA, DHS, and our providers
16 are doing to support New Yorkers to stay in or secure
17 housing, we look forward to answering any questions
18 you may have.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you for
20 your testimony today. I think that, you know, this
21 is a very important hearing. And we've-- I think
22 it's very-- you know, it's long overdue. Part of the
23 reason for having this -- [ASIDE TO COUNSEL] I'm
24 sorry, can you add Councilmember Stevens? -- was
25 because of the-- the large number of individuals that

2 contact, or come in contact with our offices,
3 complaining about the process. So-- so that I better
4 understand it, could you explain what-- where the
5 office of-- the CityFHEPS office is, where we're
6 holding all of this information, and where an
7 individual who qualifies or has a voucher can
8 physically visit if they have a question or a
9 concern?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Let me start
11 describing the process, and I will encourage my
12 colleagues to chime in as well. So I'm going to
13 answer at the moment specifically for households that
14 are in shelter. The process is slightly different
15 for-- for clients in the community. So we can come
16 back there. So for a client who was in shelter, if
17 they meet the baseline eligibility criteria, right?,
18 so they are at the right income threshold, they're
19 working the appropriate number of hours, right?, some
20 of the other criteria that I mentioned in my
21 testimony, they will get what's known as a shopping
22 letter, which essentially says, like, you appear to
23 qualify for CityFHEPS please go out and-- and-- and
24 look for an apartment.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: This is after they meet the
3 90-day rule.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: After the 90-day.
5 Correct.

6 The-- there-- in virtually all of our sites,
7 there are housing specialists on site who are working
8 with the-- with that client on their housing search
9 process. They will also work with that client not
10 only with to get their CityFHEPS shopping letter, but
11 also to qualify for any other housing subsidy for
12 which they might be eligible, right?, to get on the
13 public housing waitlist, to apply for HPD housing,
14 and so on because we want to make sure that-- that
15 people have as many options as possible. So the
16 housing specialist is doing that in the-- there are
17 very few shelters that aren't funded for housing
18 specialists, but in those few shelters, the
19 caseworker should be doing it. I will note, you
20 know, it has been a challenging labor market for our
21 providers as well as for everybody else over the last
22 you know, year or so. So we are aware that there
23 have been some vacancies. It's something we are
24 working with our providers on. But-- so the-- the

2 on-the-ground work is happening in the shelter with
3 the-- with the provider staff and the client.

4 When a client has identified an apartment,
5 there's an inspection, a clearance process where
6 we're looking at violations, we're looking to make
7 sure that the person who purports to own the building
8 actually does own the building, right? We-- there
9 are process steps that we have in place here that are
10 really designed to protect both the tenant moving
11 into the unit, and also making sure that we're using
12 city dollars responsibly, right? So we go through
13 that preclearance process. There is a walkthrough to
14 make sure that there's not obvious physical problems
15 with the-- with the unit, right?, it has all the
16 appliances, the appliances work, there isn't peeling
17 paint, there isn't-- there are window guards, if it's
18 for a child, and so on. The shelter staff completes
19 the CityFHEPS package, right? So assembling data on-
20 - on income, you know, completing that-- that
21 application, and then that gets sent to DHS. At-- at
22 DHS, we have a team known as the Rehousing Team that
23 reviews that package. If they, you know, see any
24 discrepancies, need additional information, they'll
25 circle back with the-- with the shelter. We go

2 through a process to make sure that that is complete.
3 It is then sent over to HRA for review, and then
4 ultimately for-- for processing and check cutting.

5 So that's sort of the 30,000-foot view of the
6 process there. We do-- the bulk of the on-the-ground
7 work is happening between the shelter provider staff
8 and-- and the client.

9 You know, just responding a bit, though, to some
10 of the earlier testimony, one thing that I would like
11 to point out. This is new. We're very pleased that
12 OMB funded us to create a customer service team
13 within that DHS Rehousing Unit. So there will be a
14 phone number that both clients and landlords can call
15 to get updates on their packages. That's something
16 we are in the process of standing up. But we-- we
17 think that that will help make the process a little
18 bit more transparent for everybody involved.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How have you gotten by
20 without a unit? I-- I have no-- I don't understand
21 that.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: As-- as I mentioned,
23 in my testimony, we have more than 26,000 households
24 that are using CityFHEPS. We process, you know,
25 thousands of these every year. You know, we are

2 absolutely aware that there are cases that take too
3 long, where there are challenges, but the majority of
4 cases move through relatively smoothly.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How long-- how long does a
6 person have to identify a unit once they're given the
7 shopping letter?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: There is an expiration
9 on that, but we generally renew it if they aren't
10 able to do it. [background voice] It's 120 days,
11 but it is renewable.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Does DHS help identify
13 units, or is the-- is that on the individual to, you
14 know...

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: DHS identifies units,
16 the shelter is working to identify units, and the
17 public engagement unit, which is the mayoral office
18 that is funded through HRA is also identifying units.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And you mentioned that
20 not every shelter has a housing specialist, because
21 obviously we have a workforce problem citywide. But
22 if there is no specialist, then there should be a
23 social worker who should be able to handle the
24 process of applicant-- applying.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So the vast majority
3 of shelters do have housing specialists. There are a
4 handful that do not, and then the caseworkers would--
5 would work with clients on that housing search
6 process.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But every single shelter has
8 somebody?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can you explain what
11 the length of time is from shopping letter to moving?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So the-- well, the
13 average length of time from the point where we
14 receive a -- just let me look a minute -- through--
15 from the point that we receive the package to when
16 somebody moves out, on average is 17 to 21 days,
17 again, acknowledging that there are absolute
18 outliers. The-- from the point at which they get the
19 shopping letter to where they find the apartment is
20 going to vary quite a lot, depending on an
21 individual's circumstances, right? Somebody who
22 needs an accessible unit is likely going to take a
23 longer time than somebody who-- who doesn't, right?,
24 because there are-- there is less of that housing
25 stock.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But does the voucher expire
3 as well? Does-- is there like a timeline on the
4 voucher as well?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So that-- it's-- the--
6 it's all renewable. So if somebody needs-- needs
7 more time, we will work with them on the more time,
8 right? Somebody who is willing to look at all five
9 boroughs is probably going to go faster than somebody
10 who has very specific geographic restrictions. It's
11 actually harder for smaller families. There's an
12 absolute shortage of studio and one bedroom
13 apartments in New York City.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: There's a shortage of studios
15 and one bedrooms?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: There's-- I mean,
17 there's an absolute shortage of affordable housing
18 period, but across all affordability levels, there is
19 there are fewer studios in one bedrooms relative to
20 the number of single one-- one and two person
21 households, then there are, there is more housing
22 available. That's, you know, two and three bedrooms.
23 So for those very small families, it's even-- it's
24 harder even than for the large families. So that's

2 why it's very difficult for me to say, like from
3 point of shopping letters--

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But, yeah-- let me-- let me
5 rephrase that then. I got my shopping letter. I
6 went shopping. I found a unit. I'm so happy. I
7 bring it back to my caseworker. How long from that
8 moment to the time that I have the keys in my hand
9 and I can move in?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: The average is 17 to
11 21 days, but we are aware that there are certainly
12 outliers.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, we're hearing four
14 to-- anywhere between four and six months.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I think-- I-- again, I
16 don't want to purport that the CityFHEPS program or
17 processes perfect. We are aware that there are
18 outliers. I think what you hear is the outliers.
19 When somebody-- when it goes well, you know, they
20 don't call us, they don't call you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Understood. I think that's--
22 that's fair to say. But I think that that there are
23 issues, right? The fact that there was-- you know,
24 that this is an existing program that's been around
25 for a couple of years, and there is no dedicated

2 units specific-- you know, specific to it for
3 processing and, you know, any hiccups that may arise
4 in the-- in the process where an individual may need
5 that-- that extra layer of-- of support didn't exist,
6 the fact that people are-- some people, I mean, I
7 just was-- my office was just working with a
8 gentleman that was living at Ward's Island for a
9 number of years. He identified a unit. He was found
10 eligible, found a unit, and months went by and now he
11 was in the process of being transferred from that
12 site to another because that shelter was closing.
13 But he already had an apartment and all he needed
14 was, you know, for that-- for-- for whoever it is
15 that finalizes the process via DSS or DHS to do that
16 for him. And it took even my staff a little bit to
17 kind of get _____.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: If I could just
19 clarify because I think maybe it wasn't clear. We
20 have a team that is dedicated to processing CityFHEPS
21 vouchers. It's about-- it's a little over 100
22 people. Their job is to receive those packages, make
23 sure they are clean, and if they aren't clean, go
24 back to the shelter.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We are all those people?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It's a the Rehousing
3 Team. It's in DHS reporting up to me.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: DHS. Okay.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: What we have-- what we
6 are adding and what I what I mentioned, that was just
7 funded was within that team. We are adding a
8 dedicated group of people whose job it is is to
9 answer phone calls, answer emails, and to
10 troubleshoot specific packages, right? So they don't
11 have a normal caseload of "I am processing X number
12 of packages." Their job is simply to answer
13 questions from both clients and from landlords.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It just seems-- it seems to
15 me personally, like there's this rule, like "we'll
16 call you, you can't call us" at, you know, at the
17 agency, and this is consistent with DSS as well. And
18 we-- you know, I think that a more transparent
19 process where people feel like they can engage,
20 right?, It's-- it's fruitful for everyone involved.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. So we agree
22 with you, which is why we're creating this team.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. No, I-- I appreciate
24 that. I have a couple of questions and then I want
25 to go to my colleagues, because I know that they have

2 a bunch. Do you know-- do we have any idea when DSS
3 is going to move the Rent Reasonableness Assessment
4 to the beginning of the CityFHEPS review process
5 instead of having it at the end of the process?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So Rent Reasonableness
7 has been on hold for quite some time. So we are
8 actually not implementing it right now, and haven't
9 been for-- for months. We-- we really need that
10 process to align as closely as possible to the way
11 it's done for Section 8, which has been-- has worked
12 relatively well for decades. So we are in the
13 process of revamping it, and it should align very
14 closely to Section 8.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you-- can you explain
16 what-- in those cases where there is a delay, a
17 significant delay, what the cause of the delay is?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: How long do we have?
19 There's a lot of different-- there's a lot of
20 different reasons why there can be some delays.
21 There are-- there's a lot of players in this process
22 who need-- who need to do something, right? We need
23 landlords to do something. I mentioned earlier that
24 we ask landlords for proof that they in fact, own the
25 building, right?, which sounds silly, except we have

2 certainly had cases where people have tried to
3 defraud the city, right?, and claim CityFHEPS for
4 buildings that they were not entitled to rent. We're
5 doing the inspection, right? If the-- so if we don't
6 get access for an inspection, right?, or it fails
7 inspection, and we need-- we need the landlord to fix
8 something before we can move-- can move somebody in,
9 right? That can be a point of delay. We, we need
10 income documentation from clients, right? So
11 sometimes there's, you know, one pay stub that's
12 missing, something like that, where we need-- we need
13 to go back and collect that information.

14 We are-- we are working with a diffuse network
15 of-- of providers, right? We have 75 providers
16 across 400-plus sites. So, you know, I certainly
17 acknowledge that there are instances where we send
18 something back and say, "Hey, can you get us this,
19 this piece of information?" and-- and we don't get a
20 response as quickly as we need to. That is a place
21 that we are working on, really trying to look at how
22 we can use data so that we're making sure that we
23 are, you know, following up with things as quickly as
24 possible. So, you know, those-- I think there's
25 multiple different points along the process, where

2 delays can happen. And then there's, you know, a
3 slew of just really unique circumstances where, you
4 know, people-- somebody's family composition changes,
5 right? So the size of the voucher that they-- and
6 the-- that they're qualified for, the-- and that the
7 apartment that they need changes or, you know, it's
8 a, it's a sublet situation, right?, really
9 complicated ownership, right? There's a whole
10 variety of things where-- so we're really trying, and
11 we're always going through a process to look at what
12 kind of information that we're collecting, to make
13 sure that we are striking the right balance between
14 moving people as quickly as possible, but still
15 making sure that we are accountable, and that people--
16 - that public dollars are being used in a way that's--
17 - that's responsible on connecting people to safe
18 sustainable housing.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, it seems like a lot
20 of work. So would it make sense-- would-- would
21 eliminating the 90-day rule, make it easier if you're
22 able to start 90 days sooner?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So-- So we certainly
24 don't wait for 90 days, right? 90 days is when you
25 become eligible for-- for a shopping letter, but the

2 engagement on what housing stability looks like
3 starts much earlier in the process. And actually, we
4 try to start it even before somebody comes into
5 shelter, right? So we have-- our primary goal, our
6 first goal is to prevent homelessness wherever
7 possible. So a client who comes into a home-based
8 office right can be eligible for a variety of
9 different forms of assistance that can include a
10 CityFHEPS voucher. It could include in some
11 circumstances StateFHEPS. It can include emergency
12 arrears through cash assistance, right? So our goal
13 there is to prevent-- when somebody comes into one--
14 when-- when they've not gone to Homebase, but they
15 come to a DHS intake site, all of our intake sites
16 focus on-- on diversion as well as intake. So
17 looking, is there something that we-- some form of
18 assistance that we can offer that will help you avoid
19 shelter. And in many cases that can include a
20 CityFHEPS voucher, right? So this is not a "we want
21 you to be in shelter for 90 days." This is "we want
22 to try and get your assistance as quickly as possible
23 and hopefully avoid shelter." Once-- once you're in
24 the-- in shelter, the process of engaging, working on
25 an independent living plan, thinking about what

2 permanent housing looks like starts, you know, almost
3 right away. That again is not something that needs
4 to wait for 90 days. But one of the things that
5 we're really trying to do is to make sure that we are
6 connecting people to a housing option that is-- is
7 the right one for them. A performance metric that
8 we're really proud of is the return rate to shelter
9 for people who-- who leave with a subsidy. For
10 families with children it's under 1%. And it's not
11 much higher for single adults either. And part of
12 the reason that we-- that-- that we're able to be so
13 successful there, that people don't come back to
14 shelter once they have a housing subsidy, is because
15 we're able to work with them and find a housing
16 option that works. So we're using that 90 days to
17 work with the-- work with households, while also
18 making sure that we're targeting scarce housing
19 resources to those who really need it.

20 Um, the last thing that I just-- point that I
21 just want to make on the on the 90-day rule is that I
22 certainly hear where people are coming from. I
23 think, you know, from-- from our perspective and
24 looking at the, you know, thousands of people who
25 move out every year, the biggest limitation is really

2 housing supply, right? There are, unfortunately,
3 households in the shelter system who have held a
4 housing voucher, a shopping letter for more than 90
5 days, right? The-- the timing isn't the issue. It
6 is the ability to find housing where you can use the
7 CityFHEPS voucher. So I certainly hear-- hear the
8 feedback. But we think there's-- there's-- the time
9 is being used really productively.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, there was-- there was
11 an article just a couple of-- maybe a little over a
12 month ago that cited that there were over 30,000, was
13 it?, rent-stabilized units that had been registered
14 as vacant? Is there-- has there been any attempt to
15 work with the state to try to identify those
16 landlords and maybe offer some sort of incentive to
17 rent those units?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So I believe that may
19 be something that HPD is looking at. I can't speak
20 to that. You know, I also can't speak to what
21 quality those units are in, right? If they're being
22 warehoused and off the market, are they units that
23 will pass our apartment review, where we're looking
24 for-- for housing of reasonable quality? And then
25 just frankly, you know, yes, we absolutely should be

2 looking for ways that we can get more units available
3 for our clients, and it's something that we spend a
4 lot of time on every day. But at the end of the day,
5 we are working in a largely private sector
6 environment. So we do need landlords to be able to
7 put those on the market.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Understood. But I think that
9 the Rehousing Unit also has a responsibility to
10 create interagency relationships so that we're
11 working in unison and not against each other, right?
12 And I think that that's kind of what's missing to me.
13 I think this is a system that is far too large, and
14 too many hands are involved, and we need to kind of--
15 we need to look at ways that we could eliminate what
16 would become barriers to not only, you know,
17 hindrance to getting a voucher, but to also
18 identifying, you know, an apartment in a suitable
19 amount of time. We have families and shelter, you
20 know, for two and three years now. That was unheard
21 of, you know. I-- and I-- and I say that as a person
22 who has been, you know, in shelter twice. I just,
23 you know, it becomes very difficult to comprehend why
24 we're not using all of the tools in our toolbox,
25 right? And how sometimes those tools are not within

2 our box, but they're in an adjacent, right?, agency
3 that we should be partnering with. And I really-- I
4 saw that and I thought, what if the service-- if we
5 have over 30,000 units in the universe, and we're
6 saying that-- we're not saying-- we are smack in the
7 middle of a humanitarian crisis, with the largest
8 number of unhoused, unsheltered individuals in
9 history in New York City, and yet we're not
10 maximizing our relationships to, you know, to look
11 into that as an alternative, to me is insane.

12 And so, for us, I think, you know, speaking for
13 myself, you know, this committee is looking to
14 streamline these processes, so that they're more
15 user-friendly, and help really, you know, reduce the
16 census count at the shelter facilities. We're, you
17 know, at the highest we've ever been, and when-- and
18 the rates of move out are really low in comparison to
19 the number of people that are coming in. And that's
20 for a lot of reasons. You know, we were here to the
21 Advantage Voucher, we understood, right?, how
22 horrible that voucher system was and how it
23 contributed to where we are today, right? The
24 dismantling of that program really contributed
25 heavily, and I think that, you know, we-- that has to

2 be factored into-- into the conversation. But
3 however, it doesn't mean that-- that, you know, DSS
4 or DHS is, you know, doing everything that they can,
5 right?, within your power to really make the change
6 that we need to start reducing that census count.

7 Now, can you tell us how many-- what is the
8 current census right now, excluding asylum seekers,
9 is what?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Um, excluding asylum
11 seekers is going to be 47,000 approximately. I have
12 it--

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How much? I'm sorry.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Approximately 47,000.
15 But we look at our numbers-- the reports I get every
16 day are in the aggregate. So I would need to-- we
17 can get back to you with--

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you disaggregate that by--
19 can you, by families versus singles?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: These are very rough
21 numbers because--

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. Okay.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: --the-- of that 47, I
24 would say probably 15,000 or so are-- are families
25 with children, very approximately, you know, 4000 or

2 so-- 3000-- about 3000 adult families, and the
3 remainder are single adults. But again, because the
4 reports that I look at every day are in the
5 aggregate, they don't separate out asylum seekers.

6 I'm doing some, you know, in my head math we can
7 get back to you with-- with more specifics.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. No, I mean, I--
9 because we're running out of space, right? I mean, I
10 hear that every day. "We're running out of space,
11 we're running out of space, we don't have any
12 anywhere else to put people." I think that it we
13 focused a little bit, you know, more on what we're
14 doing wrong, right?, in terms of assisting families
15 in the move-out process a little bit faster than you
16 know...

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We are absolutely
18 always looking for ways to improve. One of the
19 things that we did this summer was a four-day
20 training. We trained more than 600 housing
21 specialists and other shelter staff on a slew of
22 different subsidies, CityFHEPS, but also a range of
23 other-- other housing subsidies, we gave them source-
24 of-income discrimination training. It was really--
25 it was quite broad, and we saw a nice-- have seen a

2 nice uptick in-- in move outs and subsidy utilization
3 since then. I'm sure the statisticians would say I
4 shouldn't be causal about it, but-- but we are always
5 looking for ways that we can improve and-- and are
6 certainly open to suggestion.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. And I-- and we did
8 invite CCHR to come in and also share information on
9 the income discrimination part of this. Because I
10 think, you know, and we're like we're, you know, this
11 body has been a willing participant in trying to
12 figure this out with the Administration, with this
13 administration, with the prior administration. We've
14 increased the-- the value of the voucher. We've, you
15 know, we've helped create the Office of Income
16 Discrimination. Like we've done everything on our
17 end. But if those tools are not being used the way
18 that they were intended, for whatever reason. I get,
19 we could have a workforce issue, but I need to see a
20 plan that says, "Okay, we have a workforce issue.
21 This is what we're doing to remediate that." I think
22 that I keep hearing, like, we have a workforce issue.
23 But yeah, we have a workforce issue. There is no
24 plan moving forward. And that's where you know,
25 where it becomes problematic for me, because, you

2 know, I think that these are very difficult jobs,
3 very stressful. You need exceptional customer
4 service, you know, skills, and the pay rate is really
5 low. So it doesn't really encourage the-- the
6 attention that that we would want in order to attract
7 and retain, right?, a workforce that we desperately
8 need.

9 So I would love to see a little bit more of that.
10 But I'll come around. Again, I have a couple of more
11 questions, but Councilmember Sanchez, followed by
12 Councilmember Ossé, Brewer, and then Stevens.

13 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you,
14 Madam Speaker. So first, I just wanted to take a
15 moment to hear if the Administration is supporting
16 any of-- any or all of the bills that are being heard
17 today. So the Pre-considered 23, 24-- sorry, 2864,
18 63, 65, and 62.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So we received them
20 late on Friday night, so we're still in the process
21 of review.

22 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Okay, so then I have
23 some-- some data questions. And Deputy Commissioner,
24 good to see you. Good to see you all.

2 How many-- this is continuing some of the
3 questions that Madam Deputy just asked, but how many
4 CityFHEPS move outs occurred each month, between
5 January 2022 and December? Do you have that
6 disaggregated by household size and borough?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So I don't have it. I
8 have it broken out by borough, not by month. In
9 calendar year 22 through September -- because we're
10 still doing some reconciliation of the last quarter's
11 data -- there were about 4800 CityFHEPS moves. Of
12 that total, about 42% of the households moved to the
13 Bronx, 29% moved to Brooklyn, 10% to Manhattan 16%,
14 to Queens, and 3% of Staten Island.

15 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: What was Staten Island?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sorry?

17 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Staten Island?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: 3%.

19 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Okay. What is the
20 average amount of time-- so trying to try to
21 distinguish between getting-- getting the voucher and
22 then identifying the apartment, but then identifying
23 the apartment and actually moving in. So how many--
24 sorry. What is the average amount of time that it
25 currently took DHS to process apartment from the

2 moment that the client reports that they've secured
3 the apartment to you checking it out?

4 So the processing time from when we're getting it
5 until a client's able to move out averages 17 to 21
6 days. Again, acknowledging that there are absolutely
7 outliers there.

8 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Great. And then how many
9 CityFHEPS packages were submitted for final review by
10 DSS from January last year, from January '22, to
11 December '22, and how many rejected, how many
12 approved?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So we're in the
14 process of transitioning from one system to another
15 for packet-- for processing those CityFHEPS. So
16 during most of calendar year 22, we had some in one
17 system and some in another. So it's-- until we're
18 fully in the new system and the reporting is built
19 out, I'm not going to be able to give that exact
20 answer. But I will-- with respect to the rejected,
21 we try not to leave anything in the rejected
22 category, right? If there is a problem with the
23 package, we go back and try and get it over the
24 finish line, working with the with the shelter, with

2 the client, with the landlord, whatever we need to do
3 to get it ready to go.

4 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much. And I
5 just want to also take a moment to recognize that
6 there were changes, you know, that you mentioned in
7 your testimony that the Administration made that were
8 reflected in Housing New York, but to also thank
9 advocates who are pushing us to go further, right?
10 So I want to thank Legal Aid Society, Make the Road,
11 VOCAL New York, and others who've come to us at the
12 council and pushed us to take that step further to
13 remove the 90-day rule, to remove the work
14 requirement entirely, to increase eligibility based
15 on income. There's-- there's a lot that we can still
16 do together. And I hope that when you do have a
17 chance to review the bills, that the Administration
18 will be supportive and work with us to move these
19 bills. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Councilmember
21 Ossé?

22 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair Ayala, and
23 good afternoon. The first question I want to ask is
24 that my constituents often come to the district
25 office with a number of questions regarding

2 CityFHEPS. And for my constituents who receive their
3 voucher through non-shelter sources, they often have
4 trouble finding out who their provider is, and who
5 they should report to. So I wanted to ask how you
6 all as an agency can help my constituents or all of
7 our constituents clearly know who their CBO provider
8 is for their voucher.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. So in the
10 community, the people get their vouchers either
11 through Homebase, or if they have an APS active case,
12 APS will process their vouchers.

13 So in order to know what Homebase you go to, you
14 can call 311. They can-- they have various places
15 online, if you Google it, that you can put in your
16 zip code. And it's all zip code based in their
17 catchment area. And also the Homebases do have some
18 flexibility. So if somebody goes into one that maybe
19 not where their zip code is, they also can have some
20 flexibility to enroll those people.

21 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: All right. Thank you. And
22 additionally, I'm aware that there are severe
23 staffing issues within the Commission on Human
24 Rights, and that the agency is working on staffing.
25 However, are there any other enforcement or

2 accountability measures that the city can make-- can
3 take to ensure that people are not being denied based
4 off of their vouchers. That's definitely something
5 that we hear often in our office, you know, from
6 those that come in and are having their vouchers
7 denied. Sometimes, you know, I'm not sure who to
8 call on to investigate these situations and, you
9 know, get creates these uncomfortable situations
10 where folks have been in and out of the shelter
11 system, and are doing everything right, and have jobs
12 and have these vouchers, but no one's accepting them.
13 So I would love to know what accountability measures
14 are being taken through the agency.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So the Commission on
16 Human Rights is the lead agency on-- on source-of-
17 income discrimination, but we are always happy to
18 work on a particular case and see if we can
19 troubleshoot. You know, we're not necessarily going
20 to be prosecuting a landlord for income
21 discrimination, but we will work with the client and
22 try and find a pathway to stable housing for that
23 individual. So...

24 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Councilmember Brewer.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I
3 know you're working hard. So in the Oversight and
4 Investigations, we got a call from Senator Gillibrand
5 who wanted to know about her federal money for
6 housing.

7 And it turns out no surprise to you, that a lot
8 of it, to your credit is going to the-- I would say
9 the federal program for vouchers. But not a lot of
10 them have been used. So I just was wondering what
11 the percentage of FHEPS -- I don't know if it's
12 endless; the feds are not endless -- so I want to
13 know what percentage of FHEPS are being used, or
14 maybe every single one. And then how does it
15 complement, supplement, not work at all with the--
16 with the Feds?

17 Now obviously if you're case worker, you want
18 somebody to get, you know, Section 8, FHEBS, state,
19 federal, anything, NYCHA. You could-- the list goes
20 on. But how do they work together? Do they not work
21 together? I just want to understand the difference,
22 because I think it's around 26% of people who have
23 the federal voucher are walking around because that's
24 all that's been used and the money's tied up in the
25

2 cloud somewhere because nobody can find an apartment.
3 So if you could explain that to me.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. Just a quick
5 data point of the vouchers. The emergency housing
6 vouchers that have been utilized-- assigned to-- to
7 DSS, right?, so different programs within DSS, but
8 we're at 37% moved in so far. And-- and that's going
9 up every day, right? There was a big push to get
10 people vouchered, and now the vouchers are
11 translating into move outs.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: And yet still HPD's got
13 their hoard, and NYCHA, I don't think, HPD's got
14 their hoard too.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So these are through
16 HPD and NYCHA. We weren't-- we weren't issued our
17 own allocation, but then the City assigned it--

18 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So these are through--

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: --assigned the-- the
20 HPD and NYCHA vouchers to different recipient
21 agencies of the--

22 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Correct.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: --of the universe that
24 were assigned to DSS.

25 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So 37%. Okay.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: About 37%.

3 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Well, that leaves quite a
4 few people who are wandering around with one who
5 can't use it.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: And it's going up
7 steadily. As I said, the sort of push in the initial
8 part of the program was really to get people
9 vouchered. And now that-- that now that we've--
10 we've got all the vouchers issued, we're really
11 focusing on this.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Owners like them, because
13 the Feds pay, they feel, quickly on time. I know
14 you're trying to do the same thing with the
15 CityFHEPS. But the owners that I talk to seem to
16 like them because they pay faster. Or they don't
17 worry, put it that way.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It's-- depending on
19 who you talk to, you get -- and really people
20 shouldn't have opinions at all about which subsidy
21 they would prefer--

22 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: They do. They do.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: --but certainly they
24 do. It varies. The inspection process on the
25 federal vouchers tends to be a bit more involved in

2 the inspection process on the-- on the city side of
3 things. So actually, the city side does tend to move
4 more quickly to get to--

5 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. So when you get
6 that move out number that includes everything?
7 Section 8, NYCHA, CityFHEPS. So when you say the,
8 you know, the 4800--

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: That was-- that was
10 CityFHEPS.

11 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: That's just CityFHEPS.
12 That does not include all these other programs.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct. So let me
14 let me take a step back and answer your question
15 about-- try and answer your question about how they
16 all work together.

17 So when a client is working with their housing
18 specialist, they should be getting them on-- in the
19 queue for or-- or qualifying them for any subsidy for
20 which they might be eligible, right?

21 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Correct.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So they should be
23 working on-- on getting that CityFHEPS shopping
24 letter. At this point, the EHV vouchers are largely
25 allocated, but they were getting people EHV. They--

2 our clients can go on the NYCHA public housing
3 waitlist. They can apply for HPD housing, right?
4 There's sort of a slew-- they might be applying for
5 supportive housing.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Correct.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: And the idea is
8 anything that is applicable, that is of interest to
9 the client, we want to have all of those in the mix,
10 right?, because some of them are going to, you know,
11 maybe-- maybe you really want, you know, the-- maybe
12 CityFHEPS is going to materialize faster, or maybe
13 you really want supportive housing, right? But you
14 want to have all of those-- as many options as
15 possible.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Yes.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Because most people
18 are qualified for multiple things, what-- it doesn't--
19 - you can't necessarily say how many people had a
20 CityFHEPS shopping letter and then-- at leased up and
21 have that be a meaningful number. What we've done
22 instead is to go back and look, of-- of the people
23 who had-- households that had a CityFHEPS shopping
24 letter, what percentage of them are able to exit with
25 a subsidy? And that number is well over 80%, right?

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay.

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It just might not be
4 CityFHEPS, right? Maybe they chose to go to NYCHA,
5 maybe they went to supportive housing or something
6 like that. So we think the overall universe of
7 housing subsidies for those who qualify is very
8 successful, even if not everybody is using CityFHEPS.
9 We think that client choice is a good thing.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay, I mean, it sounds
11 good. The trouble is, I guess there's not enough on
12 the housing ends, and still there's just so many
13 challenges that it's-- it's slow. And I-- you know,
14 I wish we could-- I know you got personnel issues.
15 Everybody has them. If the mayor would decide to do
16 some hybrid, that would be nice. I'm going to say it
17 over and over again, you'd be able to hire people.

18 And then the other issue of course, is that-- how
19 is it other-- I should know this but the-- I was in
20 the room when the Advantage Program ended. How was
21 that different? Why does everybody love Advantage
22 even though it-- was it because it was matched? What
23 was the advantage to Advantage? How about that?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: My colleagues may
25 chime in. There's a lot of historical memory to

2 this. I actually don't know that there was any
3 advantage to Advantage.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It was a shorter term
6 program. It was only two years.

7 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: I would also say that we started
8 that--

9 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So it just between the
10 mayor and the governor is what that was all about.
11 But anyway, go ahead.

12 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: We started it just before the
13 financial crisis, and there was a lot of people
14 buying homes then that wanted to fill them
15 immediately with people in our programs. And then,
16 you know, when that crash happened, the demand did go
17 down after that. So that was also part of it.

18 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: And then just finally, so
19 then whatever the FHEPS amount is, and whatever the
20 federal amount is, it the same now?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

22 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. So we can't play
23 one against the other.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Exactly.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Is it enough? It's never
3 enough. But is it-- it's better, but what are we
4 still missing in terms of the reimbursement or the
5 amount needed? I mean, Manhattan is almost, you
6 know, you're paying \$4,000 a month. So.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So we're-- we're
8 aligned with-- with NYCHA's payments standards. So I
9 think we're actually at this point 110% of fair
10 market rent, right?

11 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Fair market rent by--
13 by definition is the 40th percentile for the region
14 as defined by HUD.

15 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Yeah. Yeah.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So, you know, it's--
17 there's certainly room to talk about whether or not
18 that is the right level, but we are aligned. I think
19 it's really important that we are aligned with-- with
20 the Section 8 program so that you no longer have--
21 have one subsidy cannibalizing another.

22 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. And do you hear
23 back from owners that state this? Is that a big
24 challenge to find an apartment, but it's not the

2 right rent? Is that-- do you keep track of that? IN
3 other words, is the owner stating, "Sorry--"

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Is the owner stating
5 what?

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: "I won't take your--
7 because it's not enough rent for my apartment."

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I mean--

9 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I mean, do you keep of
10 that, or that's just something that happens,
11 anecdotally?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I mean, typically, you
13 know, an apartment is marketed at a certain level.
14 And if somebody knows that they have a CityFHEPS
15 voucher that is, you know, dramatically less than
16 that, they won't go see the apartment. So it's--
17 it's less of an issue. I mean, one of the things
18 that we did hear a lot from clients and from
19 advocates was that the apartments that were, you
20 know, \$10 too much, right?, and that the way
21 CityFHEPS has worked, that was a hard cliff, right?
22 The rule change-- one of the things that we're doing--
23 - this is another place where we are aligning with
24 Section 8, if you so choose, you may now pay up to
25 40%--

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: 40%. I saw that in your
3 testimony.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: --of your income in
5 rent, right? So that-- that is intended to deal with
6 the situations where the rent is a little bit too
7 high and the landlord won't negotiate.

8 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank you,
9 Madam Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Councilmember
11 Stevens?

12 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Hello, good afternoon,
13 everyone. So City Council passed legislation Intro
14 2405-A that would allow youth in DYCD, runaway youth
15 programs eligible for CityFHEPS by counting anytime
16 they spent in runaway youth shelters towards their 90
17 -day requirement. And then in April Local Law 170
18 went into effect. And then City Council passed a
19 similar law for foster children, foster care youth as
20 well, aging out of foster care. However, there's
21 been a lot of issues around that where young people
22 who are spending their time in the shelters and
23 spending more than 90 days in the shelter, but then
24 being forced into DHS shelters. Why is this
25 happening? It's not really making sense that we're

2 making-- an extending time for homeless runaway
3 youth, especially when we're trying to eradicate
4 homelessness and putting them in a system that's
5 already strained. So can you talk to me about what
6 that looks like? And from what we are-- what I'm
7 hearing is that this is an interpretation of how you
8 guys are interpreting the law.

9 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: So right now ACS and DYCD are in
10 the process of the apartment search, leasing up
11 units, and moving clients with the emergency housing
12 vouchers. So for the past year or so they-- they had
13 allotments of EHV vouchers and were really able to
14 focus their housing efforts on using those. And they
15 also do have allotment of 50 CityFHEPS vouchers each
16 that they're using and--

17 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Just 50?

18 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: Hmm?

19 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: You said 50?

20 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: 50 each, allotments that they're
21 using, and we are-- the Administration is looking at
22 how they're using them and-- and using that to assess
23 any future pilots and plans.

24

25

2 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Do you not think that's a
3 very low number, of having just a number of 50
4 vouchers? And how much is DSH getting in comparison?

5 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: Well, the 50 vouchers were put
6 into place to pilot, and then the EHV vouchers
7 happened, and so we haven't really had a chance to
8 see how quickly they can use them and what their
9 capacity is, and-- and so that's what we're looking
10 at now that they're finishing using their EHV
11 vouchers.

12 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: But also why are we
13 making young people leave a runaway youth shelter to
14 go into an adult shelter to start the 90-day over?
15 Like that's-- I'm not understanding what the purpose
16 of that is.

17 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: Well, if people do go-- if they
18 just do go into a DHS shelter, then we do take that
19 time into account currently. They don't have to--

20 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: That's not what's
21 happening, and that's not the experience that I'm
22 hearing from advocates and young people. I'm hearing
23 that they're spending their time in the runaway
24 homeless youth shelters, and then they are half--

2 being forced to go to DHS and starting over, and
3 having to do the 90 days before they can be eligible.

4 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: Maybe we can follow up offline
5 and get a couple of specific client names. And we
6 can-- we can do some follow up there.

7 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Okay, we can definitely
8 speak more about it. But this is one of the issues
9 that they've been talking a lot about, and from the
10 information, ACS and DYCD are interpreting the laws
11 as if the time in the runaway homeless youth shelters
12 should be counted towards 90 days, but then are
13 getting pushback from your agency saying that, "No,
14 that's-- they're not eligible. And so they have to
15 go into DHS shelters." And so I think this is
16 something that we do need to be looking at and
17 examining, because homeless runaway youth are also
18 homeless folks. And so we should be looking at them,
19 and they should be having the same criteria as well.
20 And not continue this cycle of traumatization,

21 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: We're certainly happy to follow
22 up with-- and dig into that.

23 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Councilmember Hanif followed
25 by Councilmember Williams.

2 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Thank you. Thank you for
3 being here. And I first just want to thank
4 Commissioner Jenkins and his team for being proactive
5 with me and my office. We were just sighted two
6 emergency shelters and are welcoming asylum seekers
7 into the 39th district, and are looking forward to
8 continued collaboration and partnership.

9 So I'm interested to know a little bit more about
10 the 4800 CityFHEPS moves. Is that an increase from
11 the year before, and the year before? Are you able
12 to share that data with us?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't actually have
14 the year over year. I can tell you if we look at--
15 at fiscal year 22 to where we are in the first
16 quarter or so of fiscal year 23, we are absolutely
17 tracking on an increase. So we are on an upward--
18 upward trend, yes.

19 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And what's the number that
20 is ideal?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: That's-- that is a
22 challenging question to answer. You know, I would--
23 as many as possible sounds flip, and I don't-- I
24 don't mean to be flip. But the reason that it is
25 challenging to answer is because there are so many

2 nuances around who is in the shelter system and their
3 eligibility. I think a big piece of it, and what's
4 frankly going to be an increasingly large piece of--
5 of that equation is immigration status. Federal law
6 right now does not allow us to provide ongoing
7 assistance to a household that is undocumented, even
8 if it is city assistance. That is prohibited under
9 federal law.

10 Last year, there was state legislation that would
11 have-- that created a-- appropriated funds for a
12 rental supplement program that was specifically--
13 specifically called out those who are undocumented.
14 And then which, we were thrilled about until the
15 state turned around, and specifically for New York
16 City, said we had to use the funds to increase
17 StateFHEPS. So it clawed back a lot of that money
18 from that undocumented population. But, right, you
19 know, I can't-- for me to say I want you know, X
20 percentage of families to move, out or singles to
21 move out every year with CityFHEPS I can't say that
22 without also balancing against who is in the system,
23 because they may or may not be eligible.

24 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: I understand that. But I
25 think we also want to challenge that, because we do

2 want to make sure that there's an expeditious process
3 from shelter to permanent housing. And I bring this
4 up in my Chair of Immigration Committee hat, because
5 we saw that the discourse was that there was a
6 shortage of beds, and the shortage of beds then
7 equated with the creation of the outdoor tent HERRC,
8 which was the-- later demobilized as a result of our--
9 - of our advocacy. And I'm afraid that if we don't
10 have a number that we are striving towards and
11 meeting those goals, then we may end up creating an
12 outdoor shelter which, we learned from my hearing and
13 forthcoming hearings that the-- that HERRC system and
14 the DHS shelter system are not necessarily following
15 the same protocols around housing, and that really
16 creates anxiety for me and many, many advocates and
17 people who are navigating these both systems. So I'd
18 like to know, How many vacant beds are currently
19 within the DHS systems?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: For families with
21 children and adult families, we are running-- our
22 vacancy rate is about 0.5% as of today. The vacancy
23 rates for singles are a little bit stronger, but it's
24 a-- that is a more nuanced number because the single
25 system is broken up into a variety of different

2 program shelters, right? We have employment sites
3 and mental health sites, and you know, seniors and
4 things like that. So the number-- the vacancy rate
5 in the general population beds, which are, you know,
6 any old, you know, sort of no specific special needs,
7 it's-- it's very low, I think the last number I saw
8 was something like an absolute number of like, 60
9 beds from-- for men. It's-- it's a-- it's a bit
10 higher for women. We have not seen the same number
11 of asylum seekers who are single women.

12 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And then what's the current
13 average length of stay for families, and then for
14 single adults?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: They're both over a
16 year. I want to say about 18 months for families and
17 a little bit less for singles. But we can get back
18 to with the specific numbers.

19 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Thank you. And then what's
20 the average length of time it takes for someone from
21 starting the CityFHEPS application process to
22 receiving the voucher? I know, you mentioned the 17
23 to 21 days. What's the average length of time it
24 takes for-- for someone receiving the voucher to then
25 moving into permanent housing?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So the-- from the
3 point of shopping letter to finding an apartment is
4 just-- it's very difficult to put an average on that
5 one, because there's-- there's, it varies
6 tremendously based on the individual's circumstances.
7 So what a household needs from that unit, if it, you
8 know, needs to be accessible, if it needs to be in a
9 specific location because of school, or doctors or
10 things like that, if it-- what size unit you're
11 looking for varies a lot. It's frankly, much harder
12 to find a one bedroom--

13 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: I understand. Does that
14 mean that there's-- even if you're unable to put an
15 average, like what's the highest? Like, is it like
16 three years, five years? Like, I'd like to just get
17 an assessment of like, "the quickest was this many
18 days" and then like, "the longest took this many
19 years." Hopefully not.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm going to-- I'm
21 going to say that we'll get back to you on that,
22 because I you know, I have various anecdotal ideas,
23 but I'd like to get back to you with better
24 information.

2 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: I appreciate that. I mean,
3 we hear from countless families and advocates that
4 they'd like to get out. And it shouldn't take years
5 upon years to be out of the system.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. Certainly
7 there are families who spent, you know, more than a
8 year in shelter. The families who spend multiple
9 years, very often there is a particular challenge.
10 Some of those challenges were-- we're trying to
11 tackle. You know, a disabled child, for example, one
12 of the changes that we've made in the CityFHEPS rules
13 is that anybody on SSI qualifies you for CityFHEPS
14 rather than just the adult. So, you know, family--
15 if a family can't meet the work requirements, because
16 they're caring for a disabled child, they can now
17 still qualify for CityFHEPS.

18 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And then just I'll wrap up
19 with one more question. I was really grateful to
20 hear your enthusiasm at one of our hearings about the
21 state passing this legislation to expand the voucher
22 program to undocumented and asylum seekers in New
23 York City. What steps are you all currently taking
24 with our Albany colleagues to ensure that this bill
25 is enacted? I know you've mentioned some challenges,

2 but is there continued engagement happening,
3 conversations regularly? And then if it does pass,
4 and I'd like to say when it passes, how many New York
5 City residents would gain eligibility to CityFHEPS
6 that currently lack it?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So absolutely, we're
8 engaged with our Albany colleagues. I think one of
9 the things that we're really focused on is trying to
10 reverse that -- what I keep calling a clawback in the
11 in the RSP program, right?, that diverted the funds
12 that were intended to go from-- for undocumented
13 households and move that over to the StateFHEPS side
14 of the ledger. I think -- [ASIDE TO MS. ZUIDERVEEN],
15 do you have the number, how many we could serve if
16 that was reversed?

17 MS. ZUIDERVEEN: [ASIDE TO DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
18 PARK] No, I just know right now it's 1800.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. We can get back
20 to you on-- on-- if the clawback was fully reversed,
21 what that would mean for the number of households.

22 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Councilmember
24 Williams?

2 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: I wanted to follow up on
3 a question around the average time. How do you
4 collect that data? Like how do you determine that
5 that's in fact the average?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So, you know, we do
7 have a system that we use for processing right now.
8 As I mentioned, it's-- we're in the process of-- of
9 replacing and upgrading that, but-- but we do have a
10 system that we're using for tracking now.

11 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Are you able to share
12 with us, like, the system that you use to track?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Do a demo, you mean?

14 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm. Or like, just
15 share, like, the methodology? Like, how is the
16 information calculated? How do you then, like,
17 analyze that to provide the data you provided today?
18 Because I think there is a misconception around,
19 like, the length of time. So it would be good to
20 understand, like, okay, how is this data collected?
21 And then how do you assess it to say, okay, the
22 average time is 17 to 20 days?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure, I'm going to
24 need to pull in my IT Folks, but we can get back to
25 you on that.

2 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, cool. And the
3 other question I have is about the budget.

4 So we all know about the mayor's letter, OMB's
5 letter. And so does this requirement also apply?
6 It's not clear whether or not some of the positions
7 in the HRA Benefits Administration staff will be
8 excluded from the mandate. So I know in a previous
9 hearing, you guys said that you would be, but I just
10 wanted to make sure, to get on the record, if HRA is
11 eligible for any special inclusions under this
12 mandate? If so, please, detail. I think last time
13 we were talking about another issue within your
14 agency, so I'm not sure about this particular unit.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Right. So on a macro
16 level, both HRA and DHS were subjected to the to the
17 PEG and the loss of vacancy hires. We've worked with
18 OMB and are working internally to make sure that
19 particular areas are-- are protected. You know, I
20 wouldn't say that there is any area that is-- is--
21 where it's easy to lose vacancies, but we certainly
22 understand focus on things like move outs and are
23 really trying to protect that to the extent possible.

24 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. I guess that
25 leads to my next question. Are you able to tell us

2 how many of HRA's City-funded vacant positions relate
3 to the Administration of rental assistance? So I
4 guess the unit that you just told us about that
5 focuses on the CityFHEPS program.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: So we have-- we have
7 teams at DHS and teams at HRA. I can answer for DHS,
8 and then I'll pass it off to my colleague. So the--
9 the DHS team is-- it's about 115 positions of which I
10 have, I think about 16 vacancies there. But that
11 includes this new group that was customer service
12 team that was funded. So that sounds-- sounds like a
13 slightly higher vacancy rate than it is, because
14 we're actually doing some expansion there, which is a
15 good place to be, particularly in this climate.

16 MR. JORDAN: So on the HRA side, we have about 70
17 staff dedicated to processing move outs in support of
18 DHS, and also doing moves from the community from
19 Homebase, and doing renewals once you're on the
20 program. And we have maybe a handful of vacancies,
21 but we're in the process of backfilling those.

22 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: And now I have another
23 question, because how does that coordination work
24 between HRA and DSS? So if you are like handing out
25

2 the letters, are you doing more so of like the on the
3 ground logistics of the move?

4 MR. JORDAN: So as First Deputy Commissioner Park
5 indicated in her testimony earlier, all the front-end
6 support to the client and the shelter provider along
7 with PEU trying to find apartments on behalf of a
8 client moving out, that's done at the DHS level along
9 with the shelter provider. And then the final
10 approval of that package, in order to put it into
11 systems that generate money, both to move in and a
12 recurring grant, that has to be sent to HRA, the way
13 the program rules, and it's designed. And we're in
14 constant communication to streamline things. We
15 share spreadsheets. We share the same system that
16 the first deputy commissioner mentioned. She has to
17 bring ITS in to maybe give you a demo on. We're
18 constantly war-rooming cases, we're constantly
19 bringing up any type of case that might have an
20 issue, like the first deputy commissioner testified
21 earlier. We don't want to leave anything in the
22 rejection box, right? If things get fixed, and the
23 apartment is still available, then we'll pull out of
24 a turn and then go back to chronological.

2 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. Yeah, and I
3 know it, like, might sound like a weird question, but
4 you know, I'm an expert. And so, for me, I like to
5 understand the inner workings so that I can ask
6 better questions or find better solutions. So that's
7 why we just wanted to know like, well, what is what
8 does the backend look like? And like, how is this
9 database and collected? And how are you all
10 coordinating with each other to sort of expedite
11 these rental assistance programs? Okay, I think I
12 had another question, but I'm good. Thank you.

13 No, I think maybe it was like, you know, as I
14 like to-- we like to say like statements. So I think
15 my-- my statement was: I think sometimes it's a
16 misconception, and I speak for myself, that you know,
17 there's endless money and we can do all of these
18 things. And I don't feel that way. You know, where
19 there are vacancies and it's not needed, that's fine.
20 If you can streamline and cut red tape, because I do
21 think overall government is bloated. So where we can
22 do that, that's great. But I guess the concern here
23 is just making sure that you continue to have the
24 resources you need to address current issues and
25 issues to come. So thank you.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I just want to say
3 something positive, because we do have problems with
4 FHEPS. I have the list here. But Mr. Charles
5 Kenneth, whoever he is at HRA, has solved them all.
6 So whomever he is, just be sure that he gets the
7 credit. There's a long list here. At the end, "We
8 love Charles Kenneth." From my staff, just-- I don't
9 know if you know him, but just saying-- Kenneth
10 Charles. Kenneth Charles. Thank you. Just so you
11 know, pass it on. Thank you.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: That's the-- that's
13 important for you to help-- to help lift the morale.
14 And-- and again, this is not an issue of questioning
15 the-- the efficiency of the staff, but rather the
16 efficiency of the system, right?, and how we fix it
17 and tweak it so that it works to an individual's
18 advantage.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I have a couple of just quick
20 questions. Does DHS currently report cases of
21 possible income discrimination to CCHR?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. There-- I don't
23 believe there's a formal intake process. But if
24 there-- if we see something that we think we can

2 document, and it would rise to that level, we will
3 absolutely make sure that it gets escalated.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So do you track it? Or do
5 you track that information currently?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: No. We don't have
7 tracking.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Is there a way to do
9 that? Because I think that, right?, those two,
10 those-- those two things come hand in hand, because
11 one of the biggest complaints that we get, from, you
12 know, at our district offices from voucher holders is
13 that they have this voucher, and nobody will accept
14 it, right? And so, I, you know, we-- I pass
15 legislation that included language on what income
16 discrimination was on the actual voucher, but not
17 everybody has, you know, the time, right? People are
18 stressed out, you know, out there trying to just
19 survive. I may not may not see that. I-- and you
20 mentioned in your testimony that that's part of the
21 work that, you know, DHS does is to educate voucher
22 holders on what income discrimination looks like.
23 But I think that if we were able to kind of track
24 what those numbers are, as opposed to the number of

2 cases that may or may not be brought up for-- for
3 some sort of-- of action, that that would be helpful.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you tell us what-- do you
6 know what the percentage of shelter residents who are
7 currently in your system is, that qualifies for the
8 voucher to date?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It is just a
10 challenging thing to talk about right now, just
11 because our system doesn't look anything like what it
12 looked like eight months ago, right? We have, you
13 know, a full third of the families with children in
14 our system are asylum seekers who are not going to--
15 largely not going to qualify. So the numbers are
16 around somewhere in the third quarter to a third have
17 shopping letters. But again, I would take that
18 number with a grain of salt. It's very much skewed
19 by the changes in population recently.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Yeah, I'm looking
21 specifically for those New Yorkers that do qualify.
22 I'm trying to disaggregate the asylum seeker
23 population, only because I know that you know, that's
24 a little bit more complicated. I'm trying to better
25 understand like, what...

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We can talk to our
3 data team and see if that is something that we can
4 analyze.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I appreciate that. And
6 can you tell us in regards to the-- to priority for
7 housing, do NYCHA residents currently have first
8 priority for NYCHA apartments?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Shelter clients? They
10 are one of the top priority populations. They're not
11 the only high priority. But-- But yes, you know,
12 although the general NYCHA waitlist is closed, we can
13 still access NYCHA apartments for our clients.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. But are they
15 classified on Number Eight or Number One? Because I
16 think you know that that's important. It used to be
17 back in my day, and now I can't believe I'm saying
18 that but...

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: They are. NYCHA also
20 needs to take care of their internal relocations,
21 right? If they need to move, because the family size
22 has changed, or because there is a physical issue in
23 the apartment. So I think that is a priority as well
24 as some safety, you know, physical safety transfers,
25 but otherwise, yes, I think we are at the top.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I ask because the
3 question is relevant. If we have families that are
4 unhoused right now, that need a subsidy, right? The
5 City, you know, we're trying-- we're building units
6 that would help fill in the space that all of the
7 rent-stabilized units that were destabilized, right?,
8 once held. But that doesn't make those units
9 affordable to most families. So when we bring up,
10 right?, we're building affordable housing, you know.
11 I know in my district, people who are like
12 immediately, the response to that is, "Affordable to
13 whom?" And it's because there's a clear distinction
14 between affordable housing and subsidized housing,
15 right? And, unfortunately, a great percentage of
16 individuals in my district, and I'm sure within your
17 system, need and depend on some sort of subsidy
18 program.

19 Under the Bloomberg administration, you know, I
20 know that that was the policy decision that he made
21 that removed that first priority, because there was a
22 sentiment that people were somehow purposely making
23 themselves homeless so that they could benefit from
24 that, which was outrageous. But my understanding was

2 that under the de Blasio administration, there was an
3 attempt to kind of go back.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. I'd say we're
5 still there. We work really closely with NYCHA.
6 There is a steady pipeline of placements, you know,
7 every week from our shelter system into NYCHA public
8 housing, simply because NYCHA public housing is, you
9 know, people don't leave it easily, right? It's--
10 it's a, it's a valuable resource for those that have
11 it, right? We-- we need to look beyond NYCHA. But
12 it is a really important piece of our total, total
13 affordable housing package. And I, you know,
14 certainly understand the range of subsidy-- of rent
15 levels in HPD units, but just to, you know, shout out
16 my colleagues there, we have been working really,
17 really closely with them. And this is-- I think this
18 is the third year-- 2022 is the third year in a row
19 where we've broken records in the number of
20 placements of DHS clients into-- into HPD units.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's great. In regards to
22 the-- the program itself, the voucher itself, is
23 CityFHEPS permanent?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: No. It's a five year
25 subsidy, renewable.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Now, this is the
3 problem that I had with-- with the Advantage Program,
4 I think kind of like where we got stuck. So you
5 know, this is a little educational, so for people
6 that are watching, we used to have a program that was
7 called the Advantage Program, and it was a voucher
8 program. It was not the best program. Families were
9 being placed in apartments that weren't-- were not
10 necessarily being inspected. So there were reports
11 of like broken windows and rats, and a whole bunch of
12 stuff that was happening. Families that were larger
13 that will put into units that were significantly
14 smaller than what the family called for. And so when
15 Governor Cuomo came into office, he said, this
16 program sucks, I'm not funding it, and it was
17 partially paid by the state. It was split half and
18 half. And it left the City kind of in a bind,
19 because then the City had to come up with 100% of the
20 funding for the Advantage Program. I believe that
21 you know, then Governor Cuomo was correct in his
22 assessment. I think that the manner in which he
23 exited the program without a contingency plan created
24 a domino effect that we're seeing today. That
25 coupled with the changes in policy that the Bloomberg

2 administration put in at the time, you know, didn't
3 help.

4 So you know, this-- this-- there is a lot of you
5 know, of history here, but the Advantage Program was
6 only supposed to be for five years. So if I'm on a
7 fixed income, and I'm qualifying because I'm on a
8 fixed income, or I have a disability, or whatever
9 that may be, and now I'm in I'm in an apartment in
10 five years, my situation is not changing.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Can I just set it
12 slightly? So it's five years in general but if you
13 are a senior or if you are disabled, it's ongoing.
14 And then also for--

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So it's permanent for people
16 with--

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Permanent, yeah. And
18 then for everybody else, once they hit the five
19 years, we do have a good-cause process where they can
20 apply to continue their renewals. So it is-- it is
21 more flexible than Advantage.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But it may be renewed. But
23 we do know yet how many times?

24

25

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Some people have
3 stayed continuously on the program for-- for many
4 years after five years.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. Because my concern is
6 that, then we stabilize them and then pull the rug
7 from under them, right?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, definitely.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And now they cannot afford
10 this apartment that, you know, they struggled to get
11 to begin with.

12 And then I think my last question is really
13 around payment. Because I think that was-- that was
14 also again, and is relevant to what happened then, is
15 that in the removal of the Advantage Program, what
16 ended up happening with, you know, a significant
17 number of landlords that were not paid, and that
18 obviously did not leave a really good taste in their
19 mouths. And I, you know, completely understand that.
20 And so it eroded that trust, right?, between the city
21 and the landlord to a degree that we're now seeing
22 landlords, you know, very clearly let you know,
23 telling folks that they're not accepting the vouchers
24 program, which we know is a source-of-income
25 discrimination. And that-- so I'm concerned about

2 the late payments of the voucher once an individual
3 is already in housing and wondering if there's any
4 attempt or any way to, you know, to rectify that.

5 MR. JORDAN: Sure. Thank you for that question,
6 Deputy Speaker. Once someone's already in, I think
7 there's a little bit of a misconception here. We
8 strive to really do the payments timely, because once
9 you're on, you're on a recurring schedule. And we
10 send that out. I think some of the confusion is, if
11 someone-- their 30% is based on being on active cash
12 assistance, they're getting shelter allowance twice a
13 month on one schedule, they're getting CityFHEPS,
14 once a month on another schedule. Sometimes
15 landlords-- our payments might go out, but then the
16 client didn't pay their 30% Share. But overall,
17 we're very sensitive to this issue. When landlords
18 call us we look into it, we try to rectify the
19 situation. And you know, a lot of times it's due to
20 a myriad of issues. And as we move on to-- to
21 different systems, new systems that we've talked
22 about earlier in this testimony, we think it's going
23 to give a little more transparency. One of the
24 systems we're going to move on to that's going to do

2 the payments in the future, the landlords will be
3 able to sign up for Direct Deposits instead of mail.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Great. Great.

5 MR. JORDAN: Yes. They'll be able to do-- but
6 the good thing about it is they'll be able to take
7 the initiative and do it themselves. They'll be able
8 to go into a portal and sign up. They'll also be
9 able to manage their account of whatever they're
10 receiving by looking in instead of just calling all
11 over the agency, waiting for someone to do the
12 forensics and tell them what's going on and not going
13 on. They'll be able to see all the accounts, whether
14 or not they're getting CA shelter allowance, whether
15 or not they're getting FHEPS, whether or not they're
16 getting CityFHEPS payments.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And how soon do you
18 anticipate the system to be...?

19 MR. JORDAN: We're-- we're currently
20 experimenting with it at certain stages and in
21 certain type of cases and certain type of functions,
22 and we're doing improvements, you know, every so--
23 few months as we learn things, and we're hoping to
24 have it really fully operational by either the end of
25 this year or the beginning of 2024.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I think that that's
3 going to be a game changer. You guys, you have the
4 most outdated payment processing system, I think city
5 wide. Yeah. I might be wrong. I might be wrong.
6 But definitely, I think that it'll-- it'll help
7 expedite, you know, payments and offer the
8 transparency that we're-- that we're looking for.

9 Do we have any other questions? No.

10 Well, I want to thank you all so much for-- for
11 coming today and testifying. And again, you know, we
12 are here as a resource. We are looking, you know--
13 we're always looking to partner with the
14 Administration to make these processes as seamless as
15 possible. It's-- this is very personal for many of
16 us, and we're trying to be helpful. We're not
17 obstructionists. So if there's any way that you
18 know, that you-- you feel that there can be
19 collaboration, you know, we're here. Our doors are
20 open, and you know, we're always available. But
21 thank you all so much for the work that you do. I
22 know that-- that it isn't easy. It's-- but you know,
23 the aim is-- the goal is to get you know, to a place
24 where it's a lot easier. So thank you so much.

25 ALL: Thank you.

2 COUNSEL HOMERO: I will now be calling up members
3 of the public to testify in panels. Reminder that
4 all testimony will be limited to three minutes. I
5 would also like to note that written testimony, which
6 will be reviewed in full by committee staff, may be
7 submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the
8 close of this hearing by emailing it to
9 testimony@council.NYC.gov. The first panel will be
10 an in-person panel, and it will consist of Clare
11 Plunkett, Henry Love, Jamie Powlovich, and Robert
12 Desir.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin. Please make
14 sure that your microphone is on. It's okay. It
15 doesn't matter which side starts first. Do you want
16 to start first? Okay.

17 MS. PLUNKETT: Good afternoon. My name is Clare
18 Plunkett. I'm the Program Director of Residential
19 Services for Domestic Violence Emergency Shelters at
20 Sanctuary for Families, New York State's largest
21 provider of comprehensive services exclusively for
22 abuse survivors and their children. We're so
23 grateful for the opportunity to testify today on the
24 critical topic of the CityFHEPS Rental Assistance
25 Program. Our special thanks to Diana Ayala, Chair of

2 the Committee for confronting head-on the crisis of
3 homelessness and affordable housing in our city, and
4 for your advocacy on behalf of abuse survivors.

5 In recent years, as violent crime has declined
6 sharply, rates of domestic violence have risen
7 dramatically, and it has taken center stage as the
8 single largest driver of family homelessness in New
9 York City. According to a 2019 New York City
10 Comptroller's report, domestic violence accounts for
11 over 40% of families entering DHS shelters, a sharp
12 rise over the previous five years. This statistic
13 does not include over 2500 annual residents in HRA
14 domestic violence shelters, the largest DV shelter
15 system in the nation.

16 For almost 30 years Sanctuary has run a large 58-
17 family domestic violence transitional shelter and
18 four small crisis shelters that together provide,
19 safe confidential residence for 350 to 400 adults and
20 children annually including over 200 children last
21 year. We also provide eviction prevention, legal
22 services, case management, job training, and direct
23 rental assistance. Over the past two years, our HUD-
24 funded Continuum of Care Rapid Rehousing Program has
25 become an additional valuable rental assistance

2 resource for shelter residents ineligible for
3 vouchers, but this funding only covers a small number
4 of families.

5 The single greatest obstacle our shelter clients
6 face in their transition to long-term stability is
7 the challenging housing subsidy system, including
8 CityFHEPS. There's no question that the introduction
9 of CityFHEPS has made a positive impact, with
10 increased incentives for landlords to rent to voucher
11 holders, and the increase in September 2021 up to
12 federal Section 8 fair market rent levels. But
13 certain program rules still make it difficult for low
14 income survivors we serve to participate. Apartment
15 size requirements based on family size and
16 composition can force families to search for
17 unnecessarily large apartments that are over the
18 voucher limit. Too often shelter residents on a path
19 to economic stability and independence find that
20 working to support their families actually results in
21 exclusion or removal from voucher programs because
22 their income is too high, a formula triggered at
23 levels far below comfortable living wages.

24 Also, as we've spoken out today, a number of HRA
25 emergency intervention services staff vacancies,

2 including many due to retirement are not being
3 filled, leaving in the HRA DV shelter system only one
4 or two people responsible for processing vouchers and
5 other public assistance. And that's for the whole DV
6 shelter system.

7 With such limited staffing capacity, there are
8 long delays in voucher processing for shelter
9 residents.

10 Another major challenge for survivors is actually
11 using the voucher once it is approved, sanctuary
12 clients still struggle to find suitable apartments
13 within the maximum. [BELL RINGS]

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can wrap up.

15 MS. PLUNKETT: Okay, thanks. I guess I just
16 wanted to add anecdotally, in our transitional
17 shelter, we have over three families that have had
18 packages submitted since November that haven't moved
19 at all. So that means they secured an apartment, and
20 they're still in our shelter with us because of that
21 wait time. So with respect to the 17 to 21 day
22 average that was cited previously, we don't see that
23 within our agency.

24

25

2 And, yeah, we-- this will be reviewed, I know
3 later, but thank you for the opportunity for us to
4 testify today.

5 Good afternoon, my name is Jamie Powlovich, and I
6 use she her pronouns. I'm the Executive Director of
7 the Coalition for Homeless Youth. Thank you Deputy
8 Ayala and the rest of the Committee for holding
9 today's hearing and allowing me the opportunity to
10 testify. I'll be submitting longer written
11 testimony, but I'd like to use my time today to echo
12 the issue that my colleagues at the Youth Action
13 Board have already outlined regarding voucher access
14 for homeless young people in the DYCD system as well
15 as young people transitioning out of ACS.

16 Specifically for runaway and homeless youth in
17 DYCD, they were initially promised then link vouchers
18 eight years ago by former Mayor de Blasio, and
19 despite a yearly promises that they were going to get
20 access, it never happened.

21 Fast forward to November 2021, when City Council
22 and then specifically Councilman Steve Levin passed
23 two pieces of legislation, Intro 2405-A and 145-B, we
24 thought we were finally going to get young people
25 access to vouchers. The intent of those legislation

2 and the laws that were then passed was to allow time
3 spent in ACS and DYCD towards the 90-day eligibility
4 requirement, and then for vouchers to be administered
5 to young people that otherwise were eligible while
6 they were still in those systems, preventing them
7 from having to exit those systems to go into DHS to
8 be able to access housing vouchers.

9 I'd like to comment specifically regarding some
10 of the remarks that were made by the Administration.
11 We do acknowledge that right now, young people do
12 have access to vouchers both through the one-time
13 allocation of emergency housing vouchers that were
14 issued to the city, which DYCD young people do have
15 access to as well as ACS, and also the 50 voucher
16 pilot, CityFHEPS pilot that they also referenced that
17 both DYCD and ACS young people have access to.

18 But after both of those are exhausted, minus DSS
19 interpreting the legislation as we intended, young
20 people will not have access to vouchers in those
21 current systems and will, as the YAB spoke to, be
22 forced to go into DHS to get access to vouchers.

23 Regarding other remarks that were made, we don't
24 believe that young people are a pilot, right? Young
25 people are deserving of vouchers. And for ACS young

2 people, access to vouchers is prevention, which DSS
3 testified to is one of their primary goals. For
4 young people in the DYCD system, they are homeless.
5 DYCD operates a homeless shelter system, and they
6 should be given access to the same vouchers that
7 homeless individuals get access to. It shouldn't
8 matter what acronym you attach services-- your
9 services to, you should get vouchers based on the
10 fact that you are homeless. Regarding the
11 discrepancy between the interpretation-- [BELL RINGS]
12 Is it okay if I finish my comment? Regarding the
13 discrepancy-- regarding the interpretation of the
14 language in the laws, there's two main issues. One:
15 DSS does not interpret the legislation to allow young
16 people to get vouchers from-- while they're still in
17 the DYCD or ACS system, although they do believe that
18 the laws will allow time in those systems to count
19 towards the 90-day requirement.

20 The second issue with the laws is just what we
21 were explained was a boilerplate phrase that was put
22 into the final version that says "subject to
23 appropriation." Our understanding during the aging
24 process for those bills was that that phrase, again,
25 was just standard language to mean that as long as

2 CityFHEPS was maintained as a funded program in New
3 York City, that young people would get access through
4 the legislation, but that if the program was ever
5 defunded for the city, that it wouldn't hold the city
6 liable to maintain it just for ACS and DYCD. Now,
7 we're being told that that language, in fact does not
8 do that, and it means that for young people in ACS or
9 DYCD to ever get access to vouchers that both ACS and
10 DYCD would have to negotiate with OMB separate
11 funding to administer vouchers within their
12 respective systems.

13 Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions
14 you may have.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

16 DR. LOVE: Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Ayala
17 and members of the General Welfare Committee. My
18 name is Dr. Henry Love. I'm the Vice President of
19 Policy and Planning at Win. Win is the nation's
20 largest family homelessness provider. We serve over
21 6600 people per night in our supportive housing and
22 in our transitional shelters, and we held about 14%
23 of the total family homelessness population in the
24 city of New York.

2 In 2022, we moved out about 840 families from
3 shelter into permanent housing, and much of this was
4 thankful to the CityFHEPS program, particularly
5 thanks to Intro 146, which increased the amount of
6 CityFHEPS voucher values.

7 And so five months after that voucher amount was
8 increased, Win CityFHEPS placements were 79% higher
9 compared to the month before, and 40% than the
10 previous year. We're delighted to support additional
11 legislation to improve the system today. The
12 proposed legislation the resolution will move
13 CityFHEPS closer to becoming the city solution to
14 homelessness. Principally we are doing I'd like to
15 see the bill to end the 90-day rule. So thank you
16 Chair Ayala, Councilmember Sanchez, Bottcher, Won,
17 and Hanif, and the Public Advocate for introducing
18 that.

19 And I want to be really clear on something that
20 was stated earlier by the Administration: That the
21 90-day-- doing away with the 90-day rule, we see it
22 as just one of the many tools in our toolkit to
23 address family homelessness. And so yes, we know
24 that there's a lack of affordable housing in New York
25 City. But it doesn't make sense to have people wait

1 additional three months to look for housing. We've
2 seen it as an additional three months that we could
3 have for people looking for housing. And so we also
4 estimate that the cost is more than \$10,500 per
5 family during this period. And additionally, this
6 requirement puts pressure on an already strained
7 system. And so earlier as mentioned by the
8 Administration on the family side, we're at about
9 0.5% vacancy rate.
10

11 And so what that means in Win is that we have
12 less than 10 units at any given moment that families
13 can move into.

14 And to further address the migrant crisis in
15 shelter, Win supports the intent of resolution from
16 Councilmembers Sanchez and Hanif, which will call on
17 state legislators to enact legislation that will
18 provide New York City with an authority to expand
19 CityFHEPS to migrant families regardless of their
20 immigration status. More than 26,000 migrants are
21 living in the city right now in our shelters. Even
22 more migrants are expected to come in the future.
23 And at Win, we really believe that this is going to
24 be the new normal for our city. And although we
25 agree that the state must do more, we believe that

2 the city has the authority to act unilaterally and
3 should expand CityFHEPS eligibility to migrant
4 families regardless of their status. In addition,
5 removing the work requirement for CityFHEPS
6 eligibility will open up the voucher to many more
7 people and help parents, particularly those who are
8 unable to work.

9 Widespread investment in program and additional
10 modernization efforts, as earlier mentioned, are also
11 something-- also things that we are very excited
12 about. DSS should increase staff to review
13 CityFHEPS, provider-facing portals should be used,
14 and as earlier mentioned, making the payment process
15 more applicable to 2023 is absolutely needed.

16 And just on a final note, the city should commit
17 to CityFHEPS applications turnaround time taking a
18 maximum of 30 days including the preclearance,
19 inspection packet preparation, packet approval and
20 insurance payments. As it stands in the past fiscal
21 years earlier was mentioned, the average length of
22 stay for families is 534 days before moving out. For
23 every week that a voucher eligible family member
24 remains in shelter as opposed to moving into an
25 apartment with CityFHEPS, it cost the city \$814

2 equaling \$42,328 per year. Ultimately optimizing the
3 CityFHEPS voucher program is both just and
4 economical.

5 MR. DESIR: Good afternoon. Thank you Chair for
6 having this hearing. And thank you to the committee
7 for allowing me to testify before you. I'm Robert
8 Desir. I'm a staff attorney with the Legal Aid
9 Society. We have written comments that we'll be
10 submitting in due time in conjunction with the
11 Coalition for the Homeless.

12 We've repeatedly encouraged the City and State to
13 address the root cause of homelessness, which is the
14 lack of affordable housing through proven effective
15 policies, including housing vouchers and subsidies.

16 I'll go through our recommendations because I
17 know that the time is short. There are a number of
18 different pieces that play a part in making CityFHEPS
19 effective and useful and helpful towards keeping
20 families in their homes and also removing-- moving
21 people out of shelter.

22 First, we urge that CityFHEPS be extended to all
23 noncitizens regardless of immigration status. We
24 welcome the state assistance that sought with the
25 resolution. But we still maintain that the city is

2 within its authority to extend CityFHEPS to this
3 population. These families are often in greatest
4 need of assistance, and they're amongst the longest
5 stays in shelter. With regard to the utility
6 allowance, we would agree with Intro 229 and its
7 attempt to prevent the utility allowance from
8 limiting the maximum rent a tenant can seek. We
9 support Intro 229 but suggest the following
10 additions: Tenants whose rental portion is
11 calculated at less than the utility allowance and
12 those whose sole source of income is public
13 assistance should receive a utility assistance
14 payment like the Section 8 program does. There's
15 been a lot of talk about creating parity with Section
16 8 and amongst the different-- different subsidy
17 programs. This is one way that will go a long way
18 towards that.

19 In addition, we also urge that those with a zero
20 share, or whose share is below the shelter allowance,
21 should be given a utility credit. With respect to
22 tenants who are at risk of eviction. We urge
23 expansion to these rent-burdened elderly and disabled
24 tenants. 2017 housing vacancy survey data shows that
25 there are close to 10,000 rent-regulated households

2 headed by an elderly person that are severely rent
3 burden but do not qualify for CityFHEPS. Severely
4 rent burden is paying more than 50% of their income
5 towards the rent. The same data shows that more than
6 40% of households with a disabled or elderly member
7 are severely rent burdened. Creating even just 5000
8 vouches for these households would reduce
9 homelessness, preserve affordable housing, and
10 maintain community stability. In this spirit, we
11 support the expansion sought with Pre-considered
12 Introductions 2864, and 2863.

13 We also support elimination of the 90-day rule.
14 That's been testified about. [BELL RINGS]

15 So I'll wrap up by saying we support the
16 elimination of the 90-day rule. And in response to
17 the city's mention of affordability, we think that
18 the city should adopt the exception payment standard
19 that's used by HPD and used in the emergency housing
20 vouchers. We echo the sentiments of our partners
21 that are advocating for the youth, that the CityFHEPS
22 should be expanded to the homeless youth, and there
23 shouldn't be this distinction based on the contact--
24 the agency that they've had contact with.

2 In addition, we urge elimination of the rent
3 reasonableness rule. We know that it hasn't been
4 used for some time, but it should not return. And we
5 also, you know, we spoke a lot about the delays with
6 move-ins and the bureaucratic delays that prevent
7 people from getting apartments timely, and also that
8 cause the disengagement and people losing apartments.
9 Our testimony goes on at length about that, and has a
10 number of ideas that we think would be beneficial to
11 improving CityFHEPS.

12 We thank you for your time and appreciate to--
13 appreciate your commitment to this issue and look
14 forward to working with the City Council on resolving
15 these problems and coming up with ideas to really
16 improve CityFHEPS and make it the program that it
17 should be.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you all. I
19 have a question regarding the number of voucher
20 holders who have lost the unit that they found-- you
21 know, identified, as a result of the lengthy time
22 wait. Have you experienced that in your work?

23 MS. PLUNKETT: Yes, at Sanctuary For Families, I
24 can absolutely speak to that happening within the
25 last year at least three times, which might not be

2 the largest number. But you know, if you're thinking
3 that that's happening across the system, definitely
4 problematic. And that has happened, like just
5 anecdotally, where if the wait had gotten to three
6 months or more, a landlord maybe would engage in some
7 conversation about continuing the process, but if
8 there was no assurance that it would be actually
9 closing soon, they would back out.

10 MR. DESIR: Yeah. I would echo that and say that
11 the you know-- you know, part of my job is as a
12 litigator, and I litigate a lot of cases involving
13 source-of-income discrimination. And that's usually
14 a factor in our discussions about holding apartments
15 and allowing the process to go forward, while you
16 know, someone leases up and tries to, you know,
17 finalize the paperwork and such. However, we do want
18 the process to be much quicker and to kind of avoid
19 these situations because, you know, where-- where
20 there is this slow process, it would cause a
21 disengagement and kind of, you know, cause a
22 disengagement with the different voucher programs
23 and, you know, put them in a light where they're not
24 favored. So we want to avoid that.

2 However, we do recognize that source-of-income
3 discrimination is plainly illegal. And to that end,
4 one of our other points is that we urge strengthening
5 of the Commission on Human Rights, particularly the
6 early intervention measures that were successful many
7 years ago, but are not taking place to the level we'd
8 like to see right now.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Well, that's a good-- that's
10 a really good point. Do you have a question?

11 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah. Um, hello. Many
12 of you testified that the program should be expanded.
13 But do you have like any ideas where the money could
14 come from to expand the program? Like? Yeah.

15 DR. LOVE: Well, I think one of the things for us
16 about the expansion of the program, at least on the
17 shelter side, is that CityFHEPS is cheaper than folks
18 going into shelter. So right now, the cost of
19 getting a family shelter is about \$188 per day, where
20 CityFHEPS is \$72. So in and of itself, it will be a
21 price reduction. So I think for us, that's one of
22 the big cost savings. In addition to folks not going
23 to shelter, we know there's a host of different
24 developmental, health, you know, outcomes that are
25 exacerbated on the city and the system, education,

2 that are much, much larger than just those numbers.

3 So it's cost saving in and of itself, I think just to
4 move forward with CityFHEPS.

5 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Is that in the package
6 that you submitted, that data?

7 DR. LOVE: Yeah. Some of that is, yes.

8 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Okay, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, you gave me a lot
10 of really, really, really good information. And if
11 you have anything else, we-- you know, I just want--
12 my-- my committee and I are working on creating some
13 sort of guiding principle, if you will, of how-- you
14 know how to more efficiently use existing resources
15 to really help address, you know, the situation. One
16 of the things that I have, maybe for the Legal Aid
17 Society, there is a question: Regarding the-- the
18 income discrimination unit, our understanding is that
19 it is severely understaffed. And we've heard from
20 some advocacy groups that say, "We've like compiled
21 all of the data, all of the information, like we've
22 literally built the case around the income
23 discrimination," right?, for a client, and they're
24 like, "Yeah, you know, we don't have-- we don't have

2 the capacity right now." Is that something that you
3 guys are experiencing as well?

4 MR. DESIR: Um, certainly. You know, we're
5 definitely aware of cases that have lingered for some
6 time. And I think that's especially crucial where,
7 you know, there are people who have experienced
8 income discrimination, but they're housed. But when
9 someone is experiencing it in real time, someone
10 who's trying to leave shelter, and, you know,
11 they're, you know, having these roadblocks presented
12 to them, it's really important that they're able to
13 have advocacy that addresses it right away. And
14 that's what the Intervention Team was able to do a
15 number of years ago, and I think they were successful
16 in a lot of cases. But, you know, we're not seeing
17 that presently. So, we really need a--

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm not familiar with the
19 Intervention Team. What exactly did they do?

20 MR. DESIRE: Well, they were, you know, attorneys
21 and staff who were receiving complaints and really,
22 before any litigation measures, or, you know,
23 pursuing a complaint, we're acting to-- acting
24 directly with the housing providers, you know, trying
25 to use the, I guess, the, the looming litigation to

2 convince them to rent this apartment to a person. So
3 you have the litigation measure, which is great, and
4 which is good towards deterring conduct in the
5 future, and getting redress for people who have been
6 wronged. But we also want to get them the ultimate
7 result that they're seeking, which is securing
8 housing.

9 MS. PLUNKETT: I'll also add to that on the
10 provider end, that office actually did outreach to
11 us. So close to five years ago, we would have
12 somebody come speak with our housing navigation staff
13 so that they could know how to identify it, how to,
14 you know, even take some additional steps before they
15 submitted to that office. But I-- as far as I know,
16 that office is not at the same staffing capacity that
17 it was. And so that hasn't happened.

18 DR. LOVE: And-- .

19 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Sorry. That wasn't CCHR
20 though. That-- was that-- [crosstalk]

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [crosstalk]

22 MS. PLUNKETT: [crosstalk]

23 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: They just recently moved
24 the Source Of Income Unit into CCHR. So I just

2 wanted to be clear, that wasn't CCHR. That was
3 probably HRA.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, a different program.

5 DR. LOVE: Yeah. And I just want to add that,
6 you know, this is not unique to New York by any
7 means, in terms of source of discrimination that HUD
8 has been dealing with across the country, with
9 Section 8 vouchers, right? And I think the other
10 caveat I would add to this is that it's not just
11 source-of-income discrimination, is intersectional,
12 right? So whether you're a young person that has a
13 voucher and is being discriminated based on source of
14 income in addition to being young. For our clients,
15 where families were 94% of our clients are black and
16 brown, right? So it's intersecting with race. It's
17 intersecting the class. And it's intersecting with
18 the fact that we have a voucher, and it making
19 incredibly challenging. And so it's a huge area that
20 really needs to be funded and supported.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I agree. I agree.

22 Well, thank you all very much for coming today
23 and testifying, and thank you for the suggestions,
24 and if you have any others that you think about after
25 you leave here today, please feel free to share.

2 Thank you.

3 COUNSEL HOMERO: Our next panel will also be an
4 in-person panel. It will consist of Dominique Tatom,
5 Samantha Kahn, Jack Boyle, and Andy Monontay[ph].

6 MS. TATOM: Good afternoon. Thank you Chair
7 Diana Ayala, the members of the General Welfare
8 Committee for the opportunity to present testimony to
9 you today about the availability of CityFHEPS

10 vouchers for youth with a foster care background. My
11 name is Dominique 'Dylan' Tatom and I'm here today on
12 behalf of the Fostering Youth Success Alliance, where
13 I currently serve as a Policy and Advocacy Associate.

14 Two years ago, I served as a FYSA Youth Advocate
15 as I am a former youth in care, so this issue is very
16 dear to me. FYSA is a statewide advocacy group that
17 promotes responsive policy programs to improve the
18 socioeconomic, physical and mental health, housing,
19 and educational outcomes for youth in, and aging out
20 of foster care. FYSA is housed at and managed by
21 Children's Aid.

22 One of the most common things we hear from young
23 people is how vital stable housing is for youth as
24 they transition out of care. However, we also know
25 that in New York City, it is incredibly difficult to

2 access affordable housing for your average New
3 Yorker. For young people with a foster care
4 background. This is even more difficult, and it is
5 vital that the city provide support to make
6 affordable housing and attainable reality for youth
7 when they exit care.

8 What we know is that nationally, one in five
9 youth who age out of foster care will become
10 homeless. And in New York, we know that as many as
11 25% of youth, of young people surveyed share that
12 they're either facing or fearing housing instability.

13 In 2021, advocate supporting both youth with a
14 foster care background and runaway homeless youth
15 celebrated the passage of two pieces of legislation
16 that simplified access to CityFHEPS vouchers. In
17 April of 2022, Local Laws 170 and 157 went into
18 effect, and we believe they would make youth
19 transitioning out of ACS care, as well as youth
20 experiencing homelessness in DYCD-funded HIY programs
21 eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having to
22 first enter a DHS shelter.

23 For youth with a foster care background, their
24 time spent in foster care was thought to count
25 towards their CityFHEPS eligibility and ACS will not

2 have to advocate for specific allotment to serve
3 their population. However, because DSS's
4 interpretation of the laws, transition age youth, and
5 youth experiencing homelessness still will not have
6 access to CityFHEPS vouchers. This creates an
7 additional barrier for transition-age youth as they
8 navigate leaving foster care and achieving
9 independence.

10 During FYSA's 2022 Shadow Day, one youth
11 participant shared that there are not sufficient and
12 safe housing options for young people. Another
13 stated when youth do have access to vouchers, they're
14 still difficult to navigate. Young people very
15 clearly voiced their needs for easier access to
16 housing and this decision represents one step away
17 from what young people have shared as their needs.

18 We strongly urge the Department of Social
19 Services to uphold Local Laws 157 and 170 of 2022 as
20 the community and Council intended. Upholding this
21 legislation as intended, opens the pathway to support
22 some of our most marginalized-- [BELL RINGS]

23 Can I continue? Most of our-- one of our most
24 marginalized New Yorkers not only to survive, but to
25 thrive. Thank you again to the Chair and the

2 committee for allowing me to bring this issue to
3 raise this concern. I'll take any questions. Thank
4 you.

5 MS. KAHN: Hi, my name is Samantha Kahn. My
6 pronouns are she/her and I'm the Policy and Advocacy
7 Manager at Care for the Homeless. I would like to
8 thank Deputy Speaker and Chair Ayala and all members
9 of the General-- General Welfare Committee for
10 holding today's oversight hearing on the CityFHEPS
11 Rental Assistance Program.

12 Care for the Homeless has 38 years of experience
13 providing medical and behavioral health services
14 exclusively to people experiencing homelessness in
15 New York City. We operate 27 federally qualified
16 community health centers in all five boroughs and
17 three transitional housing residences.

18 For the past year, we've been working as part of
19 the-- of the Homes Can't Wait Coalition to address
20 issues that both voucher holders and staff members
21 encounter when attempting to access, navigate, or
22 utilize the CityFHEPS voucher.

23 We commend the Administration for starting to
24 take important steps to improve the effectiveness of
25 the voucher program. However, a variety of important

2 concerns remain to be addressed. The recent influx
3 of asylum seekers has exposed the long standing
4 challenges non-citizens and immigrants face in our
5 city. Many homeless New Yorkers have been stuck in
6 the shelter system for years and sometimes decades
7 because of a lack of housing assistance for
8 undocumented residents. We strongly support the
9 resolution sponsored by Councilmembers Sanchez and
10 Hanif that calls on the state to pass legislation
11 expanding eligibility to city-- for CityFHEPS to
12 noncitizen households. We suggest that the language
13 be changed to specifically support the state's
14 adoption of A10510, S9416, which would grant
15 localities discretion to extend housing benefits to
16 noncitizens regardless of status.

17 We also need significant resources to hire
18 additional DSS staff to improve capacity and ensure
19 New Yorkers experiencing homelessness are moved into
20 housing quickly. There remain inefficiencies in the
21 processing of CityFHEPS applications that are likely
22 due to staff shortages. And with the
23 Administration's proposed budget cuts, this will only
24 worsen. Our housing specialists report that on
25 average, only about half will get processed without

2 having to follow up, and for those that do require
3 follow up, they're asked to submit more up-to-date
4 documents do the time lapse between submission and
5 review, which unnecessarily delays a client's
6 application. They also continue to experience
7 different responses from staff when-- when reviewing
8 applications, receiving inconsistent feedback about
9 what corrections are needed.

10 The workflow needs to be streamlined and clear
11 tracking via potentially an electronic portal will
12 help increase transparency.

13 We also support the elimination of the 90-day
14 rule sponsored by Deputy Speaker Ayala, eliminating
15 the utility allowance deduction, expanding the
16 definition of a rental assistance voucher to include
17 households experiencing housing instability or at
18 risk of entering shelter, and committing to a 30-day
19 maximum turnaround from finding an apartment to
20 approval to ensure that voucher holders can make--
21 can retain permanent housing prospects.

22 We urge the Administration to implement the
23 important changes outlined today to the reforms
24 already announced to the CityFHEPS voucher program.
25 Thank you so much for your time. [BELL RINGS]

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you make sure that your
3 mic is on?

4 MR. BOYLE: My name is Jack Boyle. I'm a Housing
5 Staff Attorney with the Neighborhood Defender Service
6 of Harlem, and my pronouns are he/him. I want to
7 focus my testimony today specifically on the Homebase
8 Program that New Yorkers who are not currently living
9 in a shelter must navigate in order to obtain a
10 CityFHEPS voucher. We'll be following up with more
11 detailed written testimony after today's hearing.

12 So unlike the vast majority of public benefits,
13 New Yorkers in the community cannot directly apply
14 for CityFHEPS. Instead, they must complete a process
15 which can take as much as six months to a year with
16 Homebase. As Homebases are not governmental
17 entities, they're not subject to the same kind of
18 oversight and response requirements as HRA. And thus
19 far today I don't believe we've heard from a Homebase
20 provider. But like HRA, we understand that these
21 entities are severely understaffed, and combined with
22 systemic inefficiencies in the application process,
23 these issues have presented an insurmountable barrier
24 to many of our clients and have directly contributed
25 to homelessness.

2 The initial problem that we've noticed is a
3 complicated multi-month procedure to even begin an
4 application for CityFHEPS. So when clients attempt
5 to call or email Homebase for initial appointments,
6 we're told that no one responds. When clients have
7 attempted to go in person, they have been turned
8 away. And even when our office has specifically
9 referred clients to Homebase, it typically takes
10 somewhere between six weeks to four months to get an
11 initial response, and at that first stage, Homebase
12 won't actually evaluate anyone for CityFHEPS, but
13 only evaluate whether they can speak with a
14 caseworker.

15 And so from there, we're told that they must wait
16 another eight to ten weeks to be seen by a caseworker
17 and conduct a second intake, often going over similar
18 information. There's then a further wait of weeks to
19 months to be processed for a voucher. We found that
20 clients are routinely lost in this convoluted
21 procedure, and have not been able to move past it
22 without extensive advocacy from NDS, often involving
23 HRA itself. And our clients simply cannot afford
24 these delays. With the end of many pandemic
25 protections in housing court, judges and landlords

2 attorneys are not willing to wait six months for
3 Homebase to begin a voucher application. And
4 additionally, clients face are really agonizing wait
5 racking up rental arrears which the program may not
6 actually pay out in the end.

7 A second issue that we've noticed is that
8 routinely Homebase will not provide assistance in
9 actually finding an apartment. This is a significant
10 problem as many clients report applying for hundreds
11 of apartments without success. Homebase, however
12 knows which landlords and brokers have accepted
13 vouchers as they must complete the complex leasing
14 process in order to-- for someone to move in. And
15 Homebase also has access to the city's home system,
16 and can directly schedule viewings for affordable
17 listings. [BELL RINGS]

18 I'll just conclude in one moment. And the third
19 sort of problem that we've noticed is that, should a
20 client need to make a change to a voucher or need
21 Homebase to complete the leasing process, we found
22 that they'd been told that that their cases were
23 already closed, and that they need to return to the
24 multi-month intake process again, at the beginning.

2 So while we sympathize with the staffing issues
3 at Homebase and the lack of resources, and we all
4 understand that the strain that all providers are
5 under at the moment, we believe that these procedural
6 problems are really substantially contributing to the
7 wait times that our clients are seeing. Thank you
8 for the opportunity to testify.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

10 MR. ANDY: Good afternoon, Speaker Ayala, good
11 afternoon, City Council members. I'm here more to
12 testify on a personal basis. Very much informal,
13 just my personal story.

14 I became homeless at the end of November of 2022.
15 I didn't know basically anything about the shelter
16 program or any of the other programs associated with
17 it. But I decided if I was going to-- I was put in
18 the situation unfortunately, due to unfortunate
19 circumstances, I was going to try to do my best to be
20 prepared for whatever journey I was about to embark
21 on.

22 I was sent to Ward's island where I immediately
23 started doing research as to what is the voucher?
24 What vouchers apply to me? What are the boxes I have
25

2 to tick to apply to any voucher that's available to
3 me?

4 Eventually, I got sent to a permanent shelter in
5 Brooklyn, where I've spent about 75 days now. I
6 can't say I know much more about the process, or how
7 to expedite it in any kind of way. I hear some of
8 the stories here today, and they don't give me much
9 comfort. But as I continue, I pretty much spend
10 Monday through Friday trying to research. I have a
11 phone list of about 20 phone numbers that I can call
12 Monday through Friday just to receive any bit of
13 information that might help me in this process.

14 As of right now, I have applied for reasonable
15 accommodations. And-- and this is because I'm
16 experiencing severe mental health and physical health
17 issues at my current shelter. That was done on
18 December 22nd. I still have not heard anything about
19 these reasonable accommodations.

20 Just to expand a little bit further on that I
21 have asthma. Just to be very quick about this,
22 there's poor ventilations in the rooms that affect
23 me. I've had to call ambulances several-- several
24 nights for nebulizers, which, which basically is the

2 next step when my rescue inhaler doesn't work
3 anymore. So I'm waiting on that.

4 Supportive Housing seems to be something that I
5 also am waiting for. I've gotten all the paperwork
6 submitted. Now I just-- it feels like I pretty much
7 just sit and wait at this point. While I'm in an
8 unsafe room where I have to call for an ambulance.
9 The only thing I could do personally is go out and
10 get my own nebulizer, through my own pharmacy, my own
11 doctor, so as to protect myself and my own health, so
12 I don't feel like I'm drowning every night, when I
13 wake up because of inhalation of things I don't want
14 to inhale.

15 Other than that, because I've been in the 2010e.

16 [BELL RINGS]

17 Sorry. Because I've been in the 2010e process
18 for so long, I eventually will qualify for CityFHEPS
19 which then, I will have to find out what that's like.
20 But since it becomes available in 90-days, I am here
21 to say that if that was available from the beginning,
22 I would have started that process a long time ago,
23 and I would have done what I needed to do to get,
24 basically, myself out of the shelter.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How many-- how many days did
3 you say-- you were 75 days in the Brooklyn
4 facilities.

5 MR. ANDY: That's right.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How long were you at Ward's?

7 MR. ANDY: I was at Ward's for about a week.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: A week?

9 MR. ANDY: Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So close to 80 days.

11 MR. ANDY: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So you would have had 10 days
13 left, according to the 90-day rule--

14 MR. ANDY: Right.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: --to qualify. Now has-- has
16 there been any attempt to meet with you by a
17 caseworker or housing specialist?

18 MR. ANDY: I meet with my caseworkers and I meet
19 with my housing specialists, and I basically feel
20 like I'm a middleman. They give me papers. And I
21 give it to my doctors, and then they give me the
22 papers back, and then I give it to them and then they
23 have to send it to the correct people, either at HRA
24 or DSS.

2 So it's a big waiting game, I feel like a
3 middleman. The part that's stressing me out is I
4 have to get on the BQE every day because all my
5 appointments are in Queens. And they seem to place
6 me in Brooklyn. So I am on lack of sleep on a daily
7 basis because I can't sleep because I have asthma.
8 My medication, also, because -- I'm taking medication
9 for mental illness -- is not working properly. So I
10 feel like I'm an unsafe driver on the BQE every
11 single day and night, while I wait for reasonable
12 accommodations.

13 And at this point, I don't know who to contact
14 anymore. The director was very helpful in in getting
15 me these applications for reasonable accommodation
16 sent out. But as of now, I've been what-- the 22nd?
17 Like three weeks going on now, and they haven't, they
18 haven't helped me.

19 So I'm basically a sitting duck, who's declining
20 in mental health and physical health, while I wait
21 for whatever programs, or whatever needs to be done,
22 you know. Supportive housing could come back one day
23 and say, "Hey, we have some places for you to look
24 at." Or DHS could come back and say, "Oh, we have
25 something more reasonable for you. So you don't have

2 to keep making these unreasonable drives back and
3 forth between Brooklyn and Queens." And other than
4 that, in like 10 days, I'm going to apply for
5 CityFHEPS. So we'll find out what that's like. You
6 know?

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

8 MR. ANDY: Other than that, I'm just-- it's my
9 first time being homeless. But struggling to say the
10 least.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I've been there. It's
12 difficult.

13 MR. ANDY: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's difficult. Oftentimes,
15 when we have constituents and we usually try to avoid
16 homelessness, and sending people to shelter, but when
17 they do we have to have like a whole, you know, prep
18 talk, right?, about what is it going to look like?
19 What is it going to feel like? So that way, you walk
20 in there with your eyes wide open and you're not
21 surprised, right? And it's not a pleasant
22 experience. I don't-- I don't-- I don't recall any
23 one of our saying to me, right? It's-- the system
24 has changed drastically throughout the years. But we

2 can, if you need help, you know, we can provide that
3 help. If you share your information with the staff--

4 MR. ANDY: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We can call to see about the
6 reasonable accommodation. And you know, to-- you
7 know, we can poke around and find out what's
8 happening with your assisted living situation and
9 stuff like that.

10 But thank you for coming here. Because I think
11 that the important part of it, right?, is like people
12 like you, people like me, people like Councilmember
13 Williams, and other members of this body. It's like
14 it's really an all of you were impacted individuals
15 that-- that spoke today. It's important that we
16 share, you know, our perspective on the issues
17 because we are the change that we're waiting for,
18 right? And so, you know, I really appreciate your
19 taking time today to so carefully and so articulately
20 describe what so many other people are going through
21 in the system that looks exactly like you know what
22 you're going through.

23 MR. ANDY: If I can end with one last thing, Ms.
24 Ayala. Most of the help and encouragement that I
25 found has been from past members who have been

2 homeless, either through the coalition or the CAG.
3 So I want to shout out to them. They've been very
4 helpful. They gave me some of the best advice. One
5 of them being, just be patient.

6 Also, I want to just end by saying, throughout
7 this whole process, I still get the opportunity to
8 play the national anthem at one of my favorite major
9 league sports teams. And I will do so with pride.
10 Even though I am in a, what seems to be a slow and
11 broken system. I do believe that this is going to
12 become some of my future work. And I do believe that
13 this is a starting point for that. So thank you very
14 much for letting me speak.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Congratulations on that.
16 Congratulations.

17 MR. ANDY: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Did you have any questions,
19 Nantasha?

20 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Just one question. So
21 are you saying this is for the youth aging out of
22 foster care? I'm sure Councilmember Stevens would
23 have loved to hear this testimony. But are you
24 essentially saying that the city is in violation of
25

2 the law we passed last year? Because you said
3 there's two laws that passed last year, right?

4 MS. TATOM: Mm-hmm.

5 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah.

6 MS. TATOM: So what we're saying is that youth
7 who have a foster care background, that they should
8 not have to enter a shelter before being eligible for
9 a CityFHEPS voucher.

10 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, because you had
11 said something in your testimony, saying that you are
12 urging DHS to comply.

13 MS. TATOM: Uphold, Mm-hmm.

14 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah. So they-- so are
15 you saying that they have not been upholding what
16 they're supposed to do in the laws we passed last
17 year?

18 MS. TATOM: I'm saying that our young people are
19 still facing housing insecurity.

20 COUNCILMEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And you're doing a really
22 good job advocating. Thank you. Yeah, I-- I always
23 enjoy interacting with your-- your groups. They're
24 really great. Um, thank you. Thank you all so much.
25 We have a number of panels still waiting. So we're

2 going to try to move this along. But thank you for
3 your testimony today.

4 COUNSEL HOMERO: Our next panel will be a virtual
5 panel. It will consist of Jennifer Hinojosa, Abby
6 Biberman, Nicole McVinua, and Carolyn Ioso.

7 Hello, can you hear me? Let me see if I could.
8 Okay.

9 MS. HINOJOSA: Thank you for this opportunity to
10 comment on the issue of CityFHEPS Rental Assistance
11 Program. My name is Jennifer Hinojosa. I'm a Policy
12 Analyst at the Community Service Society. The
13 Community Service Society is a 180-year-old,
14 independent nonprofit organization that addresses
15 some of the urgent problems facing low income New
16 Yorkers and their communities, including citywide
17 rising housing insecurity and homelessness.

18 Today, a record number of people are experiencing
19 homelessness. According to the Department of
20 Homeless Services, one year ago about 47,200
21 individuals were in shelter. Last week, about 70,500
22 people are the city shelter system. This is an
23 increase of about 23,000 individuals from this time
24 last year, for a 50% increase in a one year span. In
25 addition thousands more were living on the streets

2 and subways, or crowded into unsafe and precarious
3 living conditions. Average shelter stays are
4 incredibly long, ranging from 483 days for single
5 adults to 773 days for families. Shelter-to-housing
6 move out rates, appallingly low to begin with,
7 declined by 27% in the last fiscal year as the crisis
8 deepened.

9 Given this background, we applaud the City
10 Council and the Committee on General Welfare for
11 convening this hearing on rental assistance in
12 general and CityFHEPS in particular.

13 While CityFHEPS can be a powerful tool against
14 homelessness, the program is plagued with issues
15 including, first, eligibility. Many households need
16 CityFHEPS vouchers, yet strict rules limit who
17 qualifies. To qualify for CityFHEPS families have to
18 navigate a maze of harsh and often contradictory
19 requirements. Even those who meet the complex
20 criteria, the program is plagued by excessive delays.
21 For example, advocates have long called to the end of
22 arbitrary 90-day rule, which requires most assistance
23 seekers to spend a minimum of three months in the
24 shelter before they become ineligible-- sorry, become
25 eligible. This rule takes a toll on families with

2 young children, especially those whose lives are
3 disrupted from repeated moves.

4 Our recommendation is to expand eligibility to
5 more households such as families where everyone is
6 undocumented. We appreciate the initiative, but we
7 need more than just a resolution. It's just not
8 enough. We thank you for proposing the bill to do
9 away with the 90-day rule.

10 The second is delays. Unfortunately, it often
11 takes months for someone with a CityFHEPS voucher to
12 secure and move into an apartment. Typos, missing
13 documents and other minor mistakes and cause entire
14 applications to be denied or delayed, which forces
15 some households to stay in shelter for longer than
16 they have to. Our recommendation is to reform
17 bureaucratic processes to make sure that the city and
18 shelter staff quickly process applications, and that
19 minor errors no longer result in month long delays or
20 outright denials.

21 Third, unfair rules: Unnecessary rules make it
22 difficult for voucher holders to secure apartments.
23 Under one rule the city deducts a utility allowance
24 from allowable rents, reducing the maximum rent.

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

2 MS. NIHOSA: Oh, can I just wrap it up?

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can wrap up. Yes.

4 MS. NIHOSA: Okay. So our recommendation today
5 is to eliminate the utility allowance and ease rent
6 reasonableness rules.

7 My last point here is poor apartment conditions.
8 The limited pool of apartments available to and
9 accepting of voucher holders are often in really poor
10 conditions. Landlords tend to do less upkeep and
11 outright neglect buildings where majority of tenants
12 have vouchers. Our recommendation to this is to
13 improve code enforcement by ensuring the oversight
14 agencies regularly conduct through inspections. The
15 Community Service Society of New York urges you to
16 make the above changes to CityFHEPS program as the
17 number of homeless individuals, families, and
18 children are growing at an alarming rates. Thank
19 you.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you

21 MS. BIBERMAN: Can I begin?

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Abby? Yes.

23 MS. BIBERMAN: Yeah, thank you. Deputy Speaker,
24 Councilmembers, and staff thank you for this
25 opportunity to speak. My name is Abby Biberman, and

2 I am the Associate Director of the Public Benefits
3 Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group. I
4 appreciate the opportunity to offer the following
5 comments and will follow up with detailed written
6 testimony after this hearing.

7 First, the city must repeal the 90-day rule.
8 This rule prevents individuals and families from
9 obtaining stability and it exacerbates shelter
10 overcrowding. These households have already
11 completed the owners' and sometimes lengthy shelter
12 eligibility application process, and there's no
13 reason why they should need to remain in shelter for
14 an additional 90-days before even being able to start
15 the process of searching for and securing permanent
16 housing, a process which adds even more time onto
17 their time in shelter.

18 Second, those with CityFHEPS shopping letters are
19 unable to secure an apartment due to source-of-income
20 discrimination, and other problems with the
21 administration of the benefits.

22 In order to truly fix the source-of-income
23 discrimination, this council should also look at all
24 causes. Some landlords simply don't want to rent to
25 lower income tenants, but according to our clients,

2 much of the reticence of landlords also stems from
3 DSS's own practices, not the clients themselves.
4 Landlords are concerned that there will be
5 administrative problems with the city paying the
6 rent.

7 In addition, the process for getting an apartment
8 approved is lengthy and overly burdensome for
9 landlords. After the client finds an apartment it
10 can take months for the voucher to be approved, and
11 landlords often have to abandon the process, then
12 rent to somebody else. Once the apartment is
13 approved, our clients routinely report and we confirm
14 with HRA printout that DSS is not paying the rent on
15 time, or will discontinue the rent without notice.

16 Those with CityFHEPS vouchers are unable to reach
17 anyone to report problems or make changes to their
18 case. As we know now there's no dedicated CityFHEPS
19 unit. Our clients report to us they have spent
20 months trying to notify DSS of a problem with their
21 CityFHEPS voucher, or an important change and NYLAG
22 attorneys and paralegals conduct extensive advocacy
23 with DSS to reinstate and adjust vouchers to prevent
24 evictions.

2 One recent client was forced to apply for a one-
3 shot deal to stop her eviction because months had
4 gone by with no meaningful response from DSS to her
5 request for modification. She was able to stop the
6 eviction, but the modification still wasn't
7 processed, causing her to fall into arrears again,
8 and the landlord was unwilling to discontinue the
9 housing court case. Finally, NYLAG was notified of
10 what was needed to correct the CityFHEPS problem,
11 assisted the client, and a new CityFHEPS application
12 was approved six months and two scheduled eviction
13 dates after initial contact.

14 In addition, CityFHEPS should be available to all
15 eligible New Yorkers. NYLAG supports the resolution
16 calling upon the New York State Legislature to enact
17 legislation that would expand eligibility regardless
18 of immigration status. This will help create room in
19 the city's extremely overburdened shelter system and
20 will provide stability and a pathway to permanent
21 housing for families who would otherwise languish in
22 shelter. In addition, the city must improve the
23 shelter intake process because it prevents people
24 from accessing shelter and even become--

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time has expired.

2 MS. BIBERMAN: [inaudible] CityFHEPS. May I
3 finish my thought?

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may.

5 MS. BIBERMAN: Families who are denied shelter
6 must reapply for shelter when they are initially
7 found ineligible often to be found ineligible again,
8 approximately every 10 days. Families become
9 entrenched in a continuous cycle of application,
10 denial, and re-application. This causes considerable
11 harm and the risk of street homelessness. Without a
12 finding of eligibility for shelter, it is almost
13 impossible for these families to transition to the
14 stability of permanent housing. NYLAG supports the
15 amendments to the administrative code that would
16 expand CityFHEPS eligibility and I thank the
17 Committee on General Welfare for the work that it has
18 done to facilitate services for vulnerable New
19 Yorkers and for holding this hearing. I hope NYLAG
20 can be a resource for you going forward.

21 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I just want to say thank
22 you, Abby. It's good to see you. It's been a long
23 time, but really couldn't appreciate that testimony
24 more, and couldn't agree with it more fully. So it's
25 nice to see you. Hope to see you again soon.

2 MS. BIBERMAN: Thanks.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Next panelist is... Nicole?

4 Yes.

5 MS. MCVINUA: Good afternoon. Good afternoon

6 Ayala and members of the Committee. My name is

7 Nicole McVinua, and I am the Director of Policy at

8 Urban Pathways. Thank you for the opportunity to

9 testify at today's oversight hearing on the CityFHEPS

10 Rental Assistance Program.

11 Urban pathways is a nonprofit homeless services

12 and supportive housing provider. We serve about 3900

13 single adults annually through a full continuum of

14 services that includes street outreach, drop-in

15 services, safe havens, extended stay residences and

16 permanent supportive housing.

17 Our primary concern with the CityFHEPS program is

18 the ability to actually use the voucher once it's in

19 hand. As others have spoken to today, the limited

20 number of apartments in the current housing market

21 with record-high rent prices and little availability

22 within the fair market rent makes it difficult to

23 locate apartments that meet the rental limits of the

24 voucher. Once an apartment is located rampant

25

2 source-of-income discrimination still keeps people
3 from renting these apartments.

4 One thing that our staff are reporting to us is
5 that when the DHS re-housing unit becomes aware of an
6 apartment that is available that meets the CityFHEPS
7 requirements, between 10 to 20 voucher holders are
8 sent to view the apartment at once. So when our
9 client arrives to the viewing, they find a room full
10 of people vying for the same listing. This is
11 creating a sense of competition between apartment
12 seekers. And it's also really discouraging to them.
13 Our clients returned from the viewing feeling kind of
14 really hopeless, many of them have taken off work to
15 go to the viewing and lost the day of pay, adding to
16 their frustration.

17 Source-of-income discrimination continues to be
18 an issue. Sometimes it's really blatant, where
19 landlords just say that they don't accept the voucher
20 at all. But other times -- and it seems like more
21 and more often -- it's becoming a little bit more
22 subtle forms of discrimination, which are more
23 difficult to report and to prove. But this sort of
24 comes in the form of just our clients being
25 completely ignored. You know, they don't receive any

2 information about their application and any of their
3 communications, their phone calls, emails, text
4 messages are just not followed up on, or they're told
5 to come back in a month, or some other duration of
6 time, even though the apartment is still clearly
7 available.

8 Others are, you know, hesitant to rent to folks
9 who have experienced homelessness or are experiencing
10 homelessness. Once they find out that they're in a
11 safe haven, they're no longer interested in and
12 again, say, "Oh, come back in a month." And then
13 once a client does finally find an apartment through
14 this very arduous process, the lease-up process is
15 very tedious and time-consuming, as others have
16 spoken to. And although HRA states that a response
17 will be provided in 48 hours, it sometimes takes over
18 a week. And the communication process sort of
19 throughout is very opaque and poor. It's difficult--

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time has expired.

21 MS. MCVINUA: Can I just finish up my thought?

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

23 MS. MCVINUA: Thank you. -- is to you know, it's
24 hard to get in touch with HRA staff. And it's really
25 frustrating for our staff who are trying to assist

2 folks and-- and to provide those updates to their
3 clients and to the landlords and brokers about the
4 status of the apartment.

5 So my written testimony has a list of
6 recommendations and further comments. Thank you so
7 much for the opportunity.

8 COUNSEL HOMERO: Last one, Carolyn?

9 Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Caroline
10 Iosso and I am the Senior Policy Associate at Homes
11 For The Homeless, HFH. Thank you to Chair Ayala and
12 members of the Committee for the opportunity to share
13 testimony on behalf of the over 600 families with
14 children who reside in our shelters, for many of whom
15 the CityFHEPS voucher is a critical lifeline to exit
16 the shelter.

17 We're a nonprofit-- nonprofit organization that
18 provides families with more than just a place to
19 sleep. We also provide education, employment, and
20 social services, all with the goal of ensuring
21 families can achieve family and housing stability.
22 And one critical way, as we all know, to do so is
23 through the CityFHEPS Rental Program. However, there
24 are some barriers to usage that can make it
25 challenging for families, and I want to focus on

2 lengthy periods of conditional status, which Abby
3 also alluded to, the 90-day rule, and immigration
4 status. And I'm going to discuss conditional status,
5 but the other two can be found in my submitted
6 testimony.

7 Being in conditional status, or not having yet
8 been found eligible for shelter by PATH precludes
9 families from accessing several assistance programs
10 to exit shelter, including CityFHEPS. And in 2022,
11 we found that in our shelters, about a quarter of
12 families at any time were in conditional status. And
13 instead of the purported 10-day investigative period
14 of conditional status while PATH is investigating
15 their case, we found that families were languishing
16 in conditional status for months and months. So 85%
17 of clients waited longer than 10 days to become
18 eligible, and the median amount of time was 40 days.

19 So, you know, I could talk a lot about why this
20 period of waiting is frustrating and confusing, but
21 really, ultimately, it's hindering a family's ability
22 to exit shelter, because they can't access CityFHEPS.
23 And also, I want to reiterate that their 90-day clock
24 does not start until they become eligible. So we're

2 keeping families in limbo for, you know, over four
3 months on average just totally unnecessarily.

4 And so I'm encouraged and hopeful about the
5 changes discussed today that hopefully can be made so
6 families can access this voucher more quickly. Exit-
7 - expediting where exits from shelter, and mitigating
8 the potentially harmful effects of lengthy shelter
9 stays on everyone, especially children. Thank you so
10 much.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, I agree with
12 everything that you just said. And I want to thank
13 all of the panelists. We have a number of panelists
14 still waiting to be heard. So I want to be as brief
15 as possible, but really want to thank you for coming
16 in to testify. I think that, you know, we're hearing
17 a lot of what we you know, think is happening,
18 reiterated by all of the-- the individuals testifying
19 today. So thank you for really, you know,
20 championing this issue as well.

21 COUNSEL HOMERO: Okay, our next panel will be an
22 in person panel who consists of Milton Perez, and
23 Gordon Lee.

24 MR. PEREZ: We good? Greetings, greetings. My
25 name is Milton Perez. I'm a native of the Bronx and

2 Puerto Rico. I spent over five years in the shelter
3 system, in Brooklyn, actually, and I'm a member of
4 VOCAL New York, all unions, but I'm specifically a
5 leader in the homelessness union.

6 I took a look at these bills. And to me, this is
7 just trying to get rid of some of the barriers that
8 are in place, which I support. There are many
9 others, you know, that are affected on a daily basis,
10 people's physical, mental and emotional health, that
11 hopefully we eventually get to. As far as the 90-day
12 rule, to me is it should be housing first. So
13 getting rid of the 90-day rule is a step in that
14 direction. Most people that are in shelter, just
15 have issues with affordability, paying the rent, and
16 things of that nature. So the 90-day rule doesn't
17 make any sense to have people going through or
18 jumping on kind of hurdles, that, whether, you know,
19 speaking to a psychiatrist, and psychosocial, all
20 kinds of things that many people do not need, and the
21 people would actually need that type of help often
22 don't get it, because there's not enough resources to
23 address those issues.

24 I want to highlight some of the people that are
25 that I met throughout the system. In my over five

2 years in there -- I stopped counting in five years --
3 there's many elderly people that have immigration
4 issues, whether they are undocumented, or they may
5 have a green card, and they may need a birth
6 certificate to qualify for a voucher, or things of
7 that nature, and have all kinds of health issues.
8 And I heard somebody mention, you know, that they are
9 the longest to get out. And the reason -- and
10 actually so many do not get up. You know, there's
11 many people that have died in the shelter, I believe
12 in the past couple of years, over 600 people per year
13 that have died due to homelessness in the city, which
14 is shameful.

15 And so I know some of those guys that would have
16 preferred to die in the shelter amongst people that
17 they know, then dying in a hospital or with a-- among
18 strangers, which is shameful and sad.

19 As far as you know, including people outside the
20 shelter, I think that's the next step, you know, to
21 normalize rental assistance, because people have
22 issues with homeless people, no matter what, and--
23 and that's going to take time to-- to, you know, get
24 rid of those prejudices, and including people that
25 are outside the shelter and with the vouchers and

2 CityFHEPS and such, will help in that account. As
3 far as CityFHEPS, you know, I was actually on the
4 CityFHEPS phone line for two hours and five minutes
5 yesterday and nobody picked up, so I hung up. I've
6 been trying to renew my CityFHEPS voucher since May
7 of 2022. People that I've spoken to, you know, tell
8 me "don't worry about it," you know, "you understand,
9 when they get to you--" [BELL RINGS]

10 One more minute. "--it'll be resolved." Even
11 the people in the management company. I renewed the
12 lease in September. It took about less than a week
13 and it was renewed. They said don't worry about it.
14 Once-- once-- it'll be resolved, but still, you know,
15 it's stressful.

16 So I commend the City Council, the advocates, the
17 pressure in the past couple of years, you know, have
18 helped a lot of people, you know, people that I've
19 spoken through there are on the cusp of moving out of
20 the shelter system. I notice that there's some
21 pressure from the top, that there are people now
22 doing stuff that they should have been doing for
23 years, you know, There's no reason for people to
24 spend years upon years in a shelter system in New
25 York City with all the resources that are available.

2 So thank you for-- for the effort, you know,
3 we're going to continue in the struggle.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I agree. And thank you,
5 because every single hearing you're here, and-- and
6 we greatly appreciate your insight on this issue and
7 your dedication to, you know, making a change in, you
8 know, in the way that we house individuals here in
9 New York.

10 MR. PEREZ: I'd like to answer one question that
11 that I thought I heard, as far as, you know, the
12 quickest that I've seen in the over five years that I
13 spent in the shelter system. Maybe twice, somebody
14 got out within six months. One of them, you know,
15 told me, you know, that he met somebody in the system
16 that heard his story and agreed to help him, and she
17 did. He got out within six months. And the other
18 fella had a relative in the system that helped him,
19 you know, he was out within eight months, but that's
20 it, you know. So we need to do better.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, the system has to work
22 for, you know, for-- for everyone right now, not just
23 people that are connected or, you know, have a lucky
24 interaction with someone.

2 MR. PEREZ: Yeah. We'll have a statement of
3 testimony that my organization submitted, so look out
4 for that. So, thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We appreciate that. Thank
6 you.

7 COUNSEL HOMERO: Okay, our next panel will be a
8 virtual panel consisting of Mica Baum-Tuccillo, Amal
9 Kharoufi, Christine Joseph, and Jose Perez.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

11 MS. BAUM-TUCCILLO: Hi, good afternoon. My name
12 is Mica Baum-Tuccillo. I'm a licensed social worker,
13 a doctoral candidate in psychology at the Graduate
14 Center. [sneeze] Excuse me, and a professor at John
15 Jay College. I'm here today as a member of Youth
16 Empower, which is a participatory action research
17 collective that brings together advocates,
18 researchers, and young people. [sneeze] Excuse me,
19 to better understand and advocate for youth and young
20 adults who are transitioning out of foster care in
21 New York City. I want to thank you for holding this
22 hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

23 First, I just want to say we believe housing as a
24 human right. And young people with lived experience
25 in the shelter system and foster fought for these two

2 laws, Local Laws 157 and 170 in 2021, to break down
3 barriers between young people and housing and to
4 honor this right that housing is a human right. And
5 we've heard so much about this important work
6 throughout these testimonies.

7 Over a decade of working closely with young
8 people, I have learned firsthand how deeply
9 interconnected stable housing is with sustaining
10 employment, pursuing education, and feeling rooted
11 and connected to community, and as a psychologist and
12 a social worker, I can attest to how important secure
13 housing is for psychological well-being and a sense
14 of ontological security. And yet we know and we've
15 heard throughout the testimony today that many young
16 people in New York City struggle to obtain housing, a
17 lack of funding, and political will, well-
18 intentioned, but onerous bureaucratic rules, private
19 development interests and lack of affordable housing,
20 racism and discrimination are just some of the forces
21 stacked against them, many of which we've heard about
22 today. With the introduction of this legislation,
23 young people and advocates hope to address an
24 important injustice, and we're here to urge you to
25 honor the clear intent of this legislation, which was

2 to permit homeless youth in the DYCD and ACS systems
3 to access CityFHEPS vouchers without forcing them to
4 enter the DHS shelter system first. It's wrong to
5 force young people who are often already navigating
6 an impossibly complex and underfunded housing system
7 to go into the adult shelter system before they can
8 even get a CityFHEPS voucher, knowing full well that
9 once they get the voucher, it can be months or even
10 years before they're able to put it to use. So today
11 I stand with our allies at the Coalition for Homeless
12 Youth calling for the city to honor the intent of
13 this legislation and make sure that young people have
14 access to CityFHEPS vouchers. I thank you for this
15 opportunity to testify. I and the Youth Empower
16 Collective are ready to help make sure this happens.
17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you Mica.

19 COUNSEL HOMERO: Next is Amal.

20 MS. KHAROUFI: Good afternoon, everyone. And
21 thank you Chair Ayala and the rest of the General
22 Welfare Committee for holding this hearing. My name
23 is Amal Kharoufi. I'm 22 years old, and I'm a leader
24 with Youth Empowerment and Transforming Care, we are
25 a collective of gifted leaders, researchers,

2 organizers and policy advocates who care about our
3 community of young people who have experienced the
4 foster care system and have the same goals and
5 comments to help our people.

6 In 2021, we fought to break down the barriers
7 surrounding young people and housing. We trusted you
8 to help us, and now it seems like we're back at
9 square one. We are aware that young people face so
10 many challenges in using these vouchers to get stable
11 housing. But the purpose behind these two bills is
12 to help break down some of those barriers. It's
13 wrong to force youth into the adult shelter system
14 before even applying for a CityFHEPS voucher. Young
15 people in transitioning out of foster care will face
16 long wait times and it takes years before they can
17 even get stable housing. And vouchers can expire
18 before then. I know firsthand that some youth are
19 forced to live in unsafe environments where people
20 are constantly taking advantage of you while you wait
21 for housing.

22 Being forced to keep your mouth shut and hide the
23 pain because ACS says because of your age, your
24 placement options are next to none. Waiting for your
25 own housing to live independently takes a heavy toll.

2 We shouldn't have to wait like this. We don't
3 deserve to be re-traumatized. We deserve a home
4 because this is what we need to thrive, establish
5 roots and reconnect with ourselves. I urge the
6 Administration to right this wrong and give our youth
7 access to CityFHEPS vouchers. Thank you for this
8 opportunity to testify, and the Youth Empower
9 Collective stands ready to help make sure this will
10 happen. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

12 MS. JOSEPH: Good afternoon. Thank you for
13 holding this meeting. I'm Christine Joseph and I'm
14 26 years old. I'm a leader with the Youth Empower.
15 We are a collective of gifted leaders, creators,
16 teachers, researchers, organizers and policy
17 advocates who care about our community of young
18 people who have experienced the foster care system
19 and have the same goals in common: To heal our people
20 and the restoration and that has meaning. In 2001
21 young people with lived experience in our shelter
22 system of foster care fought for those two laws to
23 break down barriers between young people and housing.
24 We trusted you and the city to make this important
25 change for young people like me. We know that young

2 people face so many different challenges in using
3 these vouchers and getting stable homes. It is wrong
4 to force them to go into the adult shelter system
5 before they can even apply for a CityFHEPS voucher.
6 This is what those two bills were supposed to change.
7 Young people who have experienced foster care face
8 long waits to find stable homes. Often that mean
9 waiting for years to get stable housing. They can
10 wait before they get a voucher and after they get it.

11 These verses can expire before they even move in.
12 That can mean living in a DV shelter with a child.
13 That is part of my experience. That can mean moving
14 from place to place, never having a stable
15 environment. Young people are forced to worry about
16 feeling unsafe, a constant reminder, "Am I ever going
17 to get through this?" Young people deserve not to be
18 retraumatized. They deserve a home because this is
19 what we need to grow and thrive and establish roots
20 and build community. I am here today to stand with
21 the Coalition for Homeless Youths and all other young
22 people who organize and advocate for these laws.

23 It's time for the city to do what is right. Give
24 youth access to CityFHEPS vouchers. Thank you.

25 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Jose?

2 MR. PEREZ: Thank you. Good afternoon council
3 members. Thank you for holding this hearing. My
4 name is Jose Perez. I am the project manager-- I am
5 the project manager here at the Children's Defense
6 Fund on a Youth Empower Transforming Care Project.
7 Youth Empower is a collective of gift of leaders as--
8 as my one of my colleagues just-- just told you. And
9 we care about our community of young people who have
10 experienced the foster care system and have the same
11 goals in common: To heal our people and the
12 restoration that is needed. You know I bring my own
13 experience in the foster care system to this work,
14 and to my testimony before you today.

15 In 2021 young people with lived experience in the
16 shelter system and foster care fought for these two
17 laws to break down barriers between young people in
18 housing. This was a youth-led solution to a very
19 real problem: Forcing young people who were in
20 foster care to unnecessarily enter shelters to apply
21 for CityFHEPS vouchers. That is what these bills are
22 supposed to change.

23 I know from my work with young people in New York
24 City that housing is a foundation for so much else
25 for a sense of safety and privacy, for a feeling of

2 purpose and self-reliance for building a family. I
3 also know it can take years of struggle for young
4 people to actually navigate these systems that are so
5 unresponsive to their age and their stage in life.

6 As young adults who have lived in foster care,
7 they deserve so much more. Young people deserve not
8 to re-traumatized. They deserve a home because this
9 is what we need to grow and thrive to establish roots
10 and build community. So today, I stand with the
11 Youth Empower Collective and our allies at the
12 Coalition for Homeless Youth calling for the city to
13 honor the intent of this legislation and make sure
14 that young people have access to CityFHEPS vouchers.
15 Thank you.

16 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Our next panel will
17 consist of Erin Sternlieb, Annie Minguez, Michelle
18 Maynard, and Jennie Stephens-Romero.

19 MS. STERNLIEB: Good afternoon. My name is Erin
20 Sternlieb, and I'm the Affordable Housing Specialist
21 in the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender
22 Services. I want to thank the Committee and Chair
23 Ayala for inviting us to testify today.

24 BDS is a Public Defense Office. We represent
25 approximately 22,000 people each year, who are

2 accused of a crime, facing loss of liberty, their
3 home their children or deportation. Our civil
4 justice practice works with clients and their
5 families to present a loss of housing, benefits, or
6 services due to a legal case or investigation. The
7 people we serve face significant barriers to access
8 and using CityFHEPS. And BDS enthusiastically
9 supports today's bills, and is strongly in favor of
10 expanding access to CityFHEPS. In particular Chair
11 Ayala's pre-considered legislation regarding rental
12 assistance eligibility will make a huge difference
13 for many of our clients who are currently facing
14 eviction, but cannot access CityFHEPS simply because
15 they do not yet have shelter history. In our written
16 testimony, we offer a number of additional
17 recommendations to strengthen the CityFHEPS program,
18 but in my limited time, I'd like to highlight a few.

19 First as many advocates have been over today, the
20 90-day shelter requirement unnecessarily keeps
21 families and individuals waiting in shelter for
22 months before they can begin searching for permanent
23 housing. We strongly support legislation to
24 eliminate this requirement and clarify that
25

2 otherwise-eligible shelter residents should be issued
3 vouchers immediately upon entering shelter.

4 Additionally, we urge the council to expand full
5 CityFHEPS eligibility to undocumented and mixed
6 immigration status households. Without access to fit
7 CityFHEPS, many of our undocumented clients have no
8 path out of shelter and no lifeline if they're
9 evicted from their homes. It's morally and
10 financially irresponsible for the city to continue
11 paying substantial shelter costs while denying
12 undocumented New Yorkers a path to permanent housing.

13 We also know that Homebase remains severely
14 backlogged and our clients facing eviction can wait
15 up to a year to be issued shopping letters. This
16 wastes crucial time that is needed to search for
17 housing, and we urge the council to ensure that
18 Homebase is adequately staffed and resourced, and to
19 allow other providers to submit CityFHEPS
20 applications as well. As important as expanding
21 access is we know that access to CityFHEPS vouchers
22 does not mean access to an apartment. Despite New
23 York City's strong source-of-income protections.
24 Landlords and brokers are well aware that enforcement
25 is weak. The Council must work with the commissioner

2 on human rights to strengthen enforcement and make
3 sure that shelter and Homebase staff equip voucher
4 holders with the tools they need to actually locate
5 apartments.

6 And then finally for the CityFHEPS program to
7 function it's essential that the department approval
8 process runs smoothly. As it stands, the process is
9 riddled with errors, delays, and lapses in
10 communication, eroding trust in the program. We urge
11 the council to establish strict time guidelines for
12 the approval process and make sure that the necessary
13 units at HRA are equipped to meet these guidelines.
14 We also encourage other--

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 MS. STERNLIEB: I'll wrap up quickly. --including
17 eliminating utility adjusters, maximum rents,
18 standardizing incentives across voucher-eligible
19 groups, and implementing direct deposit. The
20 legislation discussed today is an important step, but
21 we urge the council to consider our recommendations
22 to ensure that vouchers are true path to permanent
23 housing. Thank you for the time.

24 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Next we have Annie.

2 MS. MINGUEZ GARCIA: Thank you, Chair Ayala and
3 council members of the General Welfare Committee. My
4 name is Annie Minguez Garcia, I'm the Vice President
5 of Community Relations at Good Shepherd Services.
6 Good Shepherd Services is both a foster care and a
7 runaway homeless youth provider. Good Shepherd also
8 operates a youth supportive housing program in East
9 Harlem.

10 My testimony today will focus on the importance
11 of having clarity from the Administration on their
12 interpretation of the new laws that should-- should--
13 that should this interpretation stand, you will be
14 forced to enter the adult system to qualify for
15 CityFHEPS vouchers. These bills disrupted a cycle of
16 inequity, where for years these two populations had
17 been equally prioritized for the scarce-- had not been
18 equally prioritized for the scarce housing resources
19 in New York City and should be upheld. In 2021, I
20 joined my colleagues in the Coalition for homeless
21 youth advocating to expand CityFHEPS eligibility for
22 homeless youth and youth transitioning out of care,
23 by counting their time spent in DYCD and ACS towards
24 the 90-day shelter requirement.

2 Our goal in advocating for these bills in 2021
3 was simple: that as a city, we should meet the needs
4 of all youth meeting shelter and housing in our-- in
5 our city.

6 It's our understanding that ACS and the DYCD
7 interpretation of the law is consistent with ours.
8 And that DSS, DHS interpretation of the law is
9 different. The Coalition for Homeless Youth was told
10 by DHS counsel that because of this inter-agency
11 disagreement, the legislation was reviewed by the
12 city law department, who issued an advisement of
13 sorts that essentially ignores the council's
14 intentions when passing these laws in 2021.

15 For the record, DYCD and ACS city public pilot
16 pilot that the Administration referenced earlier
17 provided agencies with 50 CityFHEPS voucher that were
18 already in place when these bills were approved by
19 the Council. The goals of this particular law was to
20 allow future use once the pilot ended to have access
21 to CityFHEPS without being required to enter the
22 adult shelter system.

23 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify
24 and I can answer any questions that you might have at
25 this time.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Annie. So nice to
3 see you.

4 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Up next we have
5 Michelle.

6 MS. MAYNARD: Good afternoon. My name is
7 Michelle Maynard, and I'm the Real Estate Coordinator
8 at Covenant House. I would like to thank the
9 committee for the opportunity to testify today.

10 At Covenant House I'm responsible for locating
11 housing for our young people who have successfully
12 completed our long term programs. After two years in
13 these programs, the majority of our young people are
14 driving and ready to embrace adulthood and
15 independence. That's where my job comes in. I help
16 young people who are ready to live on their own and
17 take the first big step towards independence of
18 finding their own apartment. But even for our youth
19 who do everything right in our programs, and save a
20 lot of money, the housing market in New York City
21 makes it extremely difficult.

22 The best option for youth to be able to stay in
23 their long-term housing after their program has ended
24 is the housing voucher. Sadly, these are short in
25 supply. We cannot overemphasize the importance of

2 enabling a youth who has often needed to move from
3 home to home during their childhood to have a
4 permanent place they call their own. But we need
5 access to vouchers like CityFHEPS to make this
6 happen. The housing team at Covenant House
7 celebrated when we found out the passage of the laws
8 allowing the youth to access vouchers to find out New
9 York City doesn't attend to honor the original
10 intention of these laws was devastating, forcing
11 housed youth to leave their home and enter the adult
12 system if they wanted to access CityFHEPS voucher,
13 which is cruel and ineffective.

14 Let me be clear, I love my job and nothing makes
15 me happier than seeing the smile on the face of a
16 young person who experienced homeless notice when
17 they find a place stabling long term place to stay.
18 But it's painful for me to tell a young person that
19 the money that they saved during this time with us is
20 most likely not enough to afford rent in New York
21 City. Frequently they respond, excuse me, by
22 pleading for housing for alto, my heart breaks every
23 time a youth asked me for a voucher and I have no
24 choice to explain to them that only people in DHS
25 shelters have access to city fare vouchers. Why

2 would the city require a journey-- journey from the
3 trauma of homelessness to stable housing, and again
4 back to homelessness in order to have access to a
5 voucher? Thank you, everyone.

6 COUNSEL ROMERO: Thank you. And now Jenny?

7 Good afternoon. My name is Jennie Stephens-
8 Romero and I'm a Supervising Attorney at Make The
9 Road New York. Thank you to the committee for
10 hearing from some of _____ on this important issue.

11 Make the Road New York builds the power of
12 immigrant and working class communities, and our
13 Legal Services Department routinely represents low-
14 income tenants, many of whom are undocumented, and
15 who face instability in housing, mostly due to a lack
16 of affordable housing in New York City.

17 I'm going to focus this testimony on two major
18 issues that we would like to change, and my written
19 testimony will include more details.

20 The most significant change that we think could
21 be made to CityFHEPS eligibility is expanding it to
22 undocumented New Yorkers. Too many New Yorkers
23 continue to live on an economic brink because of
24 their legal status. Giving undocumented New Yorkers
25 access to stable and affordable housing would give

2 them and their families a chance to flourish here.
3 Too often Make the Road New York staff have to give
4 the unfortunate news that there is no assistance
5 available to keep them housed, simply because
6 everyone in the household is undocumented. Our
7 clients form a part of a backbone of the City and New
8 York cannot forget these essential members also have
9 a right to affordable housing.

10 Similarly, recognizing the total number of people
11 in a household, including undocumented household
12 members will result in more affordable rents.
13 Currently, undocumented members of the household are
14 not counted towards the household total for purposes
15 of CityFHEPS vouchers, leading to a smaller number of
16 bedrooms and a lower monthly rent for those
17 households. Counting everyone in a mixed-status
18 family would increase the assistance to a level that
19 family actually needs for an affordable home.

20 The other change that we'd like to see, as so
21 many of my colleagues have testified today, is doing
22 away with a 90-day requirement. Currently CityFHEPS
23 , as people have recognized requires recipients to
24 have stayed in a shelter for at least 90-days. This
25 means that families must first lose their homes and

2 live in a shelter for a significant period before
3 receiving this help. Facing eviction and losing a
4 home is a traumatic life event, and as some of our--
5 our colleagues have testified today, it has a proven
6 health and economic consequences that can last
7 generations. Forcing families to experience eviction
8 before giving them assistance is too late. Which can
9 and should be stepping in before a family loses their
10 home by offering them assistance like CityFHEPS.
11 Expanding eligibility to tenants who have received a
12 rent demand or can otherwise prove their risk of
13 housing instability would prevent many New Yorkers
14 from facing those long-lasting consequences of
15 eviction and the loss of a home. Thank you for your
16 time today.

17 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Our next panel is
18 going to be Juan Diaz, Julia Davis, Eric Lee, Leticia
19 Hernandez, and Ethel Brown.

20 MR. DIAZ: Good afternoon. Sorry. Good
21 afternoon. Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala for
22 holding today's hearing. My name is Juan Diaz and I
23 am a Policy and Advocacy Associate, at Citizens
24 Committee for Children, a multi-issue children's
25 advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that

2 every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and
3 safe. Today's timely oversight hearing confirmed to
4 the CityFHEPS housing voucher program is among the
5 best solutions to mitigate the housing-- the current
6 housing crisis, both families residing in shelters,
7 and those facing homelessness in the community. We
8 are deeply concerned about proposed staff reductions,
9 given that families throughout the city are already--
10 already unable to access cash assistance, food
11 support, and housing assistance. Timely due to
12 understaffing and HRA. We urge the City Council to
13 not only oppose staffing reductions, but to advocate
14 that the City provide the resources and support
15 necessary to fill existing vacancies quickly.

16 A key strategy for improving families with
17 children's access for CD fabs housing eligibility is
18 to eliminate or modify the 90-day shelter stay rule.
19 We urge you to continue your support for eliminating
20 this illogical and costly administrative law. We
21 also strongly support Intro 0121 from Councilmember
22 Salamanca, Jr, which will support families in DHS
23 shelters by requiring HRA to designate housing
24 specialists within all temporary shelters and to
25 submit an annual report on housing specialists.

2 We also support expanding CityFHEPS eligibility
3 to families and individuals that enter city shelters
4 throughout pathways other than DHS. This should
5 include HPD, DV, and runaway youth who currently are
6 ineligible for CityFHEPS unless they enter as the
7 system through DHS.

8 Many families in the community, you know, low
9 income communities do not qualify for CityFHEPS
10 eligibility due to other eligibility program
11 restrictions.

12 Therefore, CCC support the following reforms:
13 Permit accepting rent letter from landlords instead
14 of housing court eviction to qualify for CityFHEPS.
15 These eligibility requirements were temporarily
16 implemented during the pandemic and it helped many
17 families prevent eviction. This change should be
18 made permanent.

19 Also removing requirements that individuals must
20 have a shelter stay before qualifying for CityFHEPS.
21 Residing in shelter is traumatic for children, and
22 this avoiding this role can help definitely help many
23 families. Additionally, CityFHEPS assistance while
24 in the community instead of requiring shelter entry
25 would save city the city hundreds of millions of

2 dollars. Also, some advocates call today increasing
3 funding for Homeless Prevention and Aftercare
4 Services to assist families return retain their
5 CityFHEPS voucher and to apply for those who are at
6 risk of eviction. Homeless providers assist families
7 with CityFHEPS renewals, rental arrears, rent portion
8 adjustments, and transfer requests. As such, they
9 are vital housing and financial support for low
10 income communities. Thank you so much. And I'll be
11 submitting our written testimony.

12 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Next is Julia.

13 MS. DAVIS: Thank you. Thank you, Chair Ayala
14 and members of the committee. I'm Julia Davis. I'm
15 the Director of Youth Justice and Child Welfare at
16 the Children's Defense Fund in New York.

17 I want to focus your attention on Local Law 157
18 and 170. You've heard about this today from the
19 Coalition for Homeless Youth. You've heard for
20 Fostering Success Alliance, Good Shepherd, Covenant
21 House, Citizens Committee for Children, and now from
22 us. These two laws past year were really intended to
23 break down barriers for young people who have
24 experienced homelessness and have experienced the
25 foster care system. And the bottom line is that what

2 we are hearing is that there is inconsistent
3 interpretation at the agency that is required to
4 actually implement the reforms that young people
5 need. Which means we need to hear from you. Young
6 people who have left foster care should not be
7 directed into the adult foster care system before
8 they can get a CityFHEPS voucher. That's what years
9 of advocacy for people you've heard today, and for
10 people, you know, well in the community at the
11 intersection of homelessness and child welfare have
12 been talking about. We need to make sure that this
13 reform exists as intended and that the law is
14 interpreted as intended. And the reason that is so
15 is because of what you've heard today, that young
16 people who age out of foster care, face enormous
17 difficulties in finding and sustaining housing.
18 CityFHEPS is one piece of the puzzle, and we need to
19 get it right. We need to make sure that these two
20 bills now the law of the land in New York City, Local
21 Law 157 and 170, are followed as intended. That we
22 keep young people out of adult shelters and we
23 connect them with the vouchers that they need in
24 order to find stable housing. I look forward to
25 working with you. I'll be submitting some testimony

2 in support of my comments today. And thank you for
3 your time.

4 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Next is Eric.

5 MR. LEE: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Eric
6 Lee. I'm Director of Policy and Planning for
7 Homeless Services United. Thank you, Deputy Speaker
8 Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee
9 for allowing me to testify today. We will be
10 offering more detailed written testimony, but to
11 briefly outline our CityFHEPS recommendations, HSE
12 recommends expanding access to CityFHEPS voucher
13 eligibility by removing the shelter history
14 requirement for people living in the community,
15 removing the 90-day shocker state requirement for
16 people in shelter, eliminating the work requirement
17 altogether, increasing the maximum income limit to
18 50% area median income, and expanding access to
19 households regardless of their immigration status.

20 We also recommend eliminating the rent
21 reasonableness test as well as the utility costs
22 should not subtract from the maximum value of the
23 rent, and a tenant should also receive a utility
24 credit in line with Section 8.

2 We support the intention of the Pre-Considered
3 bills that were mentioned today, but we will offer
4 more for a detailed report on how to strengthen these
5 bills, written testimony. I apologize my dog.

6 I want to use the remainder of my time to focus
7 on the city's workforce challenges that are resulting
8 in harm to New Yorkers at risk of eviction and
9 currently experiencing homelessness. DHS and HRA
10 need to be funded and empowered to immediately fill
11 vacancies and bolster headcount to quickly process
12 city peps and rental assistance applications. public
13 benefits applications conduct phone interviews,
14 process paperwork, and issue rent checks. Households
15 are becoming homeless, were kept in shelter longer
16 than necessary simply because there's not enough
17 agency workers to conduct interviews and process
18 paperwork. Insufficient HRA staff at benefits access
19 centers conducting PA interviews are delaying access
20 to CityFHEPS. Because households must first apply
21 for PA in order to process the CityFHEPS application.
22 phone interviews are not occurring within the 7-day
23 timeframe, and cases for one shots and cash
24 assistance are being denied as a result, as well as

2 CityFHEPS households being delayed getting checks
3 issued.

4 The HRA paperwork backlog is causing households
5 to fall into arrears and housing crisis as effects
6 from rules are not being processed before the voucher
7 expires, throwing otherwise stable households into
8 rental arrears. Households are also seeing delays
9 matching their-- matching their submitted documents
10 to their individual applications within HRA's data
11 systems. This delay makes it appear like their
12 public benefits, one-shot deals, and city FIPS
13 applications are incomplete, resulting in denials
14 when the household submitted everything that they
15 were required to.

16 HRA should hire additional staff to eliminate the
17 backlog and immediately start issuing electronic
18 receipts for all documents submitted to HRA as
19 they're submitted. Homebase and shelter providers
20 are now reporting delays with HRA issuing checks.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

22 MR. LEE: If you will just let me--

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can wrap up. Yes.

24 MR. LEE: Thank you. So Homebase and shelter
25 providers are reporting delays with HRA issuing rent

2 checks for CityFHEPS, both for households at risk of
3 losing their homes, as well as trying to exit shelter
4 with the voucher. Providers are seeing check
5 issuances taking anywhere from two to six weeks,
6 which slows move-outs and prevents housing court
7 cases and Homebase cases from being resolved in a
8 timely manner.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

10 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Next is Leticia.

11 MS. HERNANDEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon,
12 everyone. My name is Leticia Hernandez and I am a
13 Housing Access Manager for Covenant House New York,
14 where we serve youth experiencing homelessness ages
15 from 16 to 24 years old.

16 I would like to thank the Committee on General
17 Welfare and Chairperson Diana Ayala for the
18 opportunity to testify today.

19 My job at Covenant House involves serving as a
20 middleman between the landlord and the tenant when
21 trying to find apartments for use. I also provide
22 aftercare services for six months after the youth
23 leaves Covenant House programming. Young people
24 usually look at me in shock when I tell them that
25 they cannot access a CityFHEPS voucher because they

2 aren't living in a DHS shelter. Most of our young
3 people are afraid are afraid of adult homeless
4 shelters because they are filled with many people
5 much older than them who may-- who may have more
6 substance abuse and long-term mental health problems.

7 Staff at adult shelters are also not typically
8 practicing youth-specific trauma informed care or
9 positive youth development principles. This is why
10 the runaway and homeless youth shelter was deployed
11 in the first place. A young people experiencing
12 homeless can stay in programs that are directly
13 suited to the developmental goals. Choosing a
14 program that is best suited for one's needs should
15 not preclude the ability to receive a CityFHEPS
16 voucher. As my previous-- as my previous colleague,
17 Ms. Maynard stated, even when we have a small group
18 of vouchers during the pilot, only 50 vouchers was
19 provided for the whole the DYCD providers, not 50
20 vouchers just for one specific provider. So we was
21 faced with pretty much applying as much as possible
22 for we could get our clients through the door. But
23 the process for the DYCD CityFHEPS vouchers made it
24 impossible for us to be successful, meaning the
25 client must have an appointment or be accepted to an

2 apartment before they can actually request a shopping
3 letter.

4 And as you all may know, all landlords and
5 brokers request a shopping letter initially before
6 the client can even deal with a unit, which this is
7 not a requirement for DHS shelters, who can more
8 easily obtain the shopping letter.

9 In summary, we are not asking for anything new.
10 We are asking for the same vouchers that DHS clients
11 have access to. It will be a basic human right for
12 everyone who is experiencing homelessness to apply
13 for any voucher that anyone else in the same
14 circumstances can apply for. A young person should
15 not be denied the opportunity of having --

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

17 MS. HERNANDEZ: May I finish?

18 CHAIRPERSON FARIÁS: You may.

19 MS. HERNANDEZ: Thank you so much. A young
20 person should not be denied the opportunity of having
21 their own home because they choose to receive
22 services in a system best-suited for their
23 developmental needs. We are respectfully asking the
24 city to honor the full intent of local of local law
25 157 and 170 of 2022 by providing equal access to our

2 youth in a DYCD system to CityFHEPS vouchers as
3 adults in the DHS shelter. I want to thank you for
4 the opportunity to talk and I will also gladly answer
5 questions.

6 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Next is Ethel.

7 MS. BROWN: Hi, how are you? Thank you so much
8 for allowing me to speak. I'm walking right now
9 trying to go and pick up my grandson. And so if you
10 hear a lot of noise, it's because of that, I
11 apologize for that.

12 Today's hearing is an oversight hearing. And
13 we're still working on an analysis of those bills.
14 But overall, I would suggest lifting up our
15 priorities for CityFHEPS, to eliminate unnecessary
16 rules and the 90-day rule, addressing the utility
17 deduction problem, so that most vulnerable New
18 Yorkers aren't harmed and the rent reasonableness
19 bill. Expand CityFHEPS eligibility for people who are
20 undocumented via city legislation, not just a
21 resolution, increase funding for the City Commission
22 on Human Rights to enforce against SOI
23 discrimination, remove bureaucratic barriers that
24 create unnecessarily long processing times for
25 apartment approval packets. As much as you know what

2 is happening today, I'm hoping and praying that
3 things do work in all our favor. The other thing I
4 would like to give is my experience, and what I've
5 been dealing with in terms of CityFHEPS and Homebase.

6 I'm so exhausted. What happened is-- Pardon me
7 for this. I'm with Safety Net Activists, VOCAL New
8 York, as well as Neighbors Together. My family and I
9 are CityFHEPS voucher holders. I live with my
10 daughter and my two grandchildren. My family, and I
11 found an apartment in May of last year with our
12 CityFHEPS voucher. First they told us we would be
13 able to move in June, then it became July, then
14 August, then September. We weren't able to fully
15 move in until October 1 of last year. It took over
16 five months from when we found the apartment to move
17 in. It should never be that way. We were back and
18 forth with the landlord, broker, and Homebase for
19 months. Homebase was like a merry-go-round. We kept
20 going back and forth, back and forth, bringing more
21 and more documents with no results. There was nobody
22 to contact at CityFHEPS. We almost lost the
23 apartment because of all of the delays. At one point
24 we were told that we made too much money even though
25 I was on public assistance, and my daughter was

2 working, and we barely had enough money to pay for
3 our bills.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 MS. BROWN: Can I finish please?

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may.

7 MS. BROWN: Okay. Pay our bills. The income
8 limit needs to be changed to help low income families
9 who are working. All of the stress and the issues
10 with and the moving paperwork caused us to get sick,
11 caused a lot of unnecessary health issues. This also
12 affects the children. My grandson worries about
13 where we're going to be, and whether we will have our
14 own space. Homebase and HRA Need more staff. They
15 could hire members who are on public assistance with
16 those jobs. They need more staff so that people's
17 paperwork can be processed and to get housing. They
18 also need to include CityFHEPS access HRA that people
19 can see the status of their CityFHEPS vouchers and
20 application. Now even after we moved in, we are
21 having issues again, even late November. We've been
22 trying to get our rent paid, we called for weeks with
23 no response, have other people assisting, nothing.
24 Finally, in January, we're told that the rent wasn't
25 paid because of a computer glitch. But they couldn't

2 fix it, it still hasn't been fixed, the landlord is
3 constantly calling us. In addition to fixing the
4 systems that makes CityFHEPS so difficult, we call on
5 the Council and HRA to get rid of the 90-day rule.
6 Also make it easy for families facing eviction to
7 access CityFHEPS. The 90-day rule is an insult.
8 Housing is a human right. You shouldn't have to stay
9 in the shelter system to get help with housing. And
10 I also would like to say that we don't need any more
11 people suffering. I don't want any more of this
12 generational homelessness. It's not right. Thank
13 you for the opportunity to testify. And I thank you,
14 City Council, for all the assistance that you all
15 have been doing and the many organizations out there.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much, Ms. Brown.
17 That was great.

18 MS. BROWN: You're welcome. You're welcome.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Send our regards to your
21 grandson.

22 MS. BROWN: Thank you. Oh, by the way, I wanted
23 to say to you all: I was just in the hospital again,
24 and while in the hospital, I was there during the
25 time of the nurses strike. And I wrote a letter to

2 the mayor on behalf of that because they not only
3 were thinking about their benefits and income they
4 will also looking out for the patients. I was in the
5 hallway. I was in the hallway, not in a room--

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Aww. Thank you so much.

7 MS. BROWN: --getting service. So I wanted to
8 let you all know that. And this has really caused me
9 illnesses that I shouldn't be having.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

11 MS. BROWN: Thank you.

12 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you our next panel because
13 it's a Sarah Wilson, Natalie Hogan, and Scott Andrew
14 Hutchins.

15 MS. WILSON: [inaudible]

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry. [crosstalk]

17 MS. WILSON: Can you hear me?

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Hello.

19 MS. WILSON: Yes. Can you hear me?

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay? Now I can hear you.
21 You were staticky there for a minute.

22 MS. WILSON: Oh, I apologize. So my name is
23 Sarah Wilson. I do advocacy with SafetyNet Project,
24 Urban Justice, VOCAL New York and Shout. I'm also
25 for identification purposes, formerly homeless,

2 disabled, dual diagnosed in substance and mental
3 health. I'm currently in recovery. I'm also a
4 supportive housing tenant. I'm so excited to see
5 this 90-day rule on there. I know that this has been
6 something people have been fighting for. I would
7 like to just correct it's actually 120 days because
8 you must do a 28 day intake before you get to the
9 permanent shelter, which then is the 90. So after
10 that four months, you know, a lot of people break
11 down in the capacity that they once entered the
12 shelter maybe with home or a little, you know, less
13 affected by the conditions of homelessness, which
14 unfortunately, there's no function that that policy
15 serves to have people wait that extended amount of
16 time, as a person that came in with documents in hand
17 that expired twice over before I was able to get
18 someone to complete my package.

19 As I said on disability, I came in with all my
20 paperwork to complete the package and I spent two
21 years in shelter. And that's more what the common
22 experience is like because there's an understood
23 wait, and it's a wait for no reason that I'm excited
24 to finally see on here and hopefully gets removed

2 immediately in addition to the fact that it just it
3 serves no purpose but a great deal of harm.

4 Also, I don't know the numbers on these, and I
5 apologize for that in advance. As far as the other
6 bill with the work requirement. For a person that
7 comes in and meets the criteria for a voucher, there
8 shouldn't be a mandated amount of hour work
9 requirement while homeless. I don't think people
10 understand you can be moved around to any of the five
11 boroughs at any point in time with two bags and hand,
12 and to secure employment during that time you'd be
13 mandated to any amount of hours as a requirement for
14 eligibility in addition to already meeting the other
15 eligibility factors does not seem to serve any
16 purpose, and I know once a person is housed, like
17 myself, I'm able now to branch out and make
18 appointments and be in a community and be able to
19 move around. When you're in the shelter system,
20 that's not a possibility. So to have that be what's
21 preventing people, because of a certain amount of
22 hours, that doesn't feasibly fit the scenario.

23 I also heard people just real quick and I'll stop
24 after this talking about Homebase, and just the
25 capacity of preventative, in community and the-- the

2 need for a Homebase to be increased, but also other
3 people like the advocacy groups that are able to do
4 2010e applications, I would love to see them also be
5 able to get certified or whatever it is to do your
6 those as well.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

8 MS. WILSON: Okay. [inaudible].

9 COUNSEL HOMERO: Thank you. Next we have
10 Natalie.

11 Hello.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Hello.

13 Hi, can you hear me?

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We can.

15 COUNSEL HOMERO: Yes, we can.

16 MS. HOGAN: Okay. Okay. Hi, my name is Natalie
17 Maria Hogan. And I am 37 years old, a Bronx
18 resident, and the mother of three young children. I
19 just want to thank Diana Ayala and and Kevin C. Rilly
20 for holding this public hearing regarding the
21 Committee of General Welfare. I'm speaking to you
22 just because I am-- I struggled with substance abuse
23 to opioids, ecstasy, and Molly, and I've been sober
24 for the last-- since April 22, 2019, to the present
25 day with all drug toxicologies to back that up. Are

2 you hearing me okay because it seems like it's a
3 little delayed.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. No, we can hear you.

5 MS. HOGAN: All right. Awesome.

6 All I'm-- all I'm saying is, as you know, I've
7 been through a lot. I've been to the shelter system,
8 and I got a Fix Advantage voucher. Give me one
9 second. I need my notes. I got a fix advantage
10 voucher in-- I had a Fixed Advantage voucher in 2011.
11 And that Fixed Advantage voucher helped me a lot.
12 But unfortunately, we have a lot of landlords that
13 even though your Fixed Advantage voucher covers your
14 full amount of rent for a year or whatever amount of
15 time that you are giving up so you've come up the
16 shelter system, which I spent four months in by the
17 way, when you get this Fixed Advantage voucher, it is
18 supposed to be rent free. Unfortunately, you know,
19 there's a lot of slum lords a lot of landlords that
20 even though with this voucher, they charged me under
21 the table and I had to pay extra money. I am very
22 thankful for HPD Section 8 for approving my voucher
23 in-- in the end of 2011. I was able to go from a
24 Fixed Advantage voucher to a Section 8 voucher, HPD.

2 And I just want to say that I have three children
3 that are-- I have one children-- one son Noah Gomez
4 who is severely disabled in a nursing home for
5 children with disabilities, and my other two younger
6 children, six and seven, Juliet and Jamison are
7 actually in the foster care system.

8 I've heard so many testimonies today that have--

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired--

10 MS. HOGAN: moved me beyond belief. If I can
11 just finishing saying-- I'm going to keep this short.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Go ahead.

13 MS. HOGAN: I just want to say, Thank you so
14 much, Diana Ayala, for all your all the things that
15 you have done. I'm going to have more information
16 regarding my testimony in the written word. So if
17 you guys have any questions or any more information
18 you can look into it.

19 And all I'm asking is to be reunited with my
20 children. I've completed everything that
21 Administrative Children's Services. I have requested
22 of me. I've been sober since April 22 of 2019. I
23 got my-- I got my certificate from the Bronx Mental
24 Health Court. I don't have-- I have my evaluations.
25 I've completed certificates, Parenting Journey,

2 Coping With Trauma and Anger, and so many others.

3 And I just want to say that I'm here today based on
4 all of the people that-- all the good city agency
5 workers that have helped me get to where I'm at
6 today.

7 And all I'm asking is for help to reunite my
8 family, my son, Noah, my son, my daughter, Juliet,
9 and my son, Jamison, deserve to be at home. And I'm
10 willing to provide any documentation to back up every
11 single word that I've said. I've completed a
12 Parenting Journey Certificate, Coping With Trouble
13 and Anger. I mean, the list goes on and on. And I
14 also graduated from the Bronx Mental Health Board.
15 And all I'm asking is for the people in our
16 community, black, brown and Latino-x, which I am
17 from. I'm Dominican-American. And I am, I'm just
18 asking for, you know, communication can bring about
19 change. But we need to-- we need to try to be
20 kinder. Agency and city workers need to treat our
21 communities with more respect and more kindness and
22 more understanding.

23 And I'm only here from the mercy of God, and to
24 sit here before you today and be able to stand here
25 and give my testimony. It's unbelievable. And I

2 just want to thank everybody for the steps to end
3 family violence. [inaudible], Margarita Ray, and
4 everybody from Drug Treatment Centers, Start, Miss
5 Black, thank you so much for all your support. I
6 also want to thank Honorable Judge Lawrence from the
7 Bronx Criminal Court System that has-- that saw my
8 hard work, even though I-- the reasonable
9 accommodation work was not able to continue my
10 inpatient drug treatment center, but I did accomplish
11 it outpatient. And I did receive my certificate and
12 I have been sober for the last three years. And I
13 have a three-bedroom apartment for my children. And
14 I have letters and letters and letters from
15 therapists from the Institute for Family Health.
16 Maria Toro, thank you so much, my love, everything
17 that you've done. And, you know, I just want to say
18 that, you know, we have to be better to each other,
19 we have to be kinder, and we have to help our city
20 agency workers that come from our black, brown, and
21 Latino community, to support those that come from
22 their own community. And I want the City to help
23 educate them better, offer them more services, offer
24 them more education. And all I want is to reunite my

2 family. And my children were removed October 22, of
3 2018, and it's January 18 of 2023.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Natalie--

5 MS. HOGAN: And I've done everything-- everything
6 and all I'm asking for is to be reunited with my
7 children. I don't want my children in foster care
8 now to end up homeless after 18 years old and not
9 have a place to live. I-- my Section 8 HPD was
10 terminated due to negligence from an attorney from
11 the Bronx--

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Natalie. Natalie. Natalie.
13 [crosstalk] Can you hear me?

14 MS. HOGAN: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I don't want you to
16 share all of your personal business, because this is
17 going to be on record.

18 But what I want to say is that I'm really proud
19 of you. I know that it's really, really hard to do
20 what you have done. And I want to thank all of the
21 people that took it upon themselves to offer you a
22 helping hand. Because that's also very unusual.
23 You've gotten, you know, this far, and those people
24 helped you, but you did this. And so congratulations
25 on that. And I'm happy to be helpful. If I can, you

2 can, you know, call my office. And we you know, we
3 can connect with your caseworker and see how we can
4 be helpful. But I'm just so proud of you. And I
5 want to thank you for having the bravery to come here
6 today. Because being vulnerable and-- and-- and
7 sharing so much of our you know, ourselves and you
8 know, our difficult times, right that that we
9 struggle with and everybody does is not always easy,
10 but it's important because it humanizes it and I'm
11 sure that there are people that are watching that
12 have a similar story and that maybe don't dare, you
13 know, to share that story because they've been
14 conditioned not to, and they need to see that there
15 are people like them that have overcome and continue
16 to struggle, but continue to fight back every single
17 day.

18 So call my office. I appreciate you coming in
19 today. Thank you so much for your testimony.

20 MS. HOGAN: Thank you.

21 COUNSEL HOMERO: Next we have Scott Hutchins.

22 MR. HUTCHINS: My name is Scott Andrew Hutchins
23 and I am currently in the third year of my CityFHEPS
24 voucher, and very concerned if I hit year five
25 without finding steady employment. I just turned 47

2 years old. I came to New York City as a graduate
3 student in 2003 and completed my master's degree in
4 2005. In 2012, I entered the shelter system because
5 medical issues my back and legs make anything but
6 desk work unsustainable for me. The only reason I
7 got into an apartment on CityFHEPS is because Urban
8 Justice Center intervened after DHS had an in-house
9 Doctor declare me mentally ill after numerous
10 independent specialists had not so that they could
11 move me into supportive housing where I could be
12 drugged up and continue to make them money without
13 causing a nuisance. Submitted as evidence on my
14 behalf were Excel logs of 3895 job applications since
15 2012 that resulted in a mere 33 job interviews that
16 were mainly scams.

17 I'm here to demand several corrections to be made
18 to the CityFHEPS program, the first of which is
19 expanding eligibility. The shelter system costs the
20 city more than double each month to house people in
21 shelters rather than apartments, but CityFHEPS like
22 the link voucher I had before it is dependent on the
23 whims of employers and a weak job market, where
24 employers continue to ghost potential employees and
25 claim that no one wants to work.

2 The eligibility also needs to be expanded to the
3 undocumented. DHS doesn't collect data on
4 immigration status for the shelter system. So we
5 don't even know precisely how large this problem is,
6 only the individual cases who have come forward.
7 This eligibility expansion needs to come in the form
8 of actual legislation as resolutions have not worked.

9 Another problem was CityFHEPS are unnecessary
10 rules that create a backlog of wait times which was
11 the 90-day rule, the utility deduction that has
12 wasted many homeless New Yorkers time on housing for
13 which they are not found ineligible for until the
14 last minute, and the rent reasonableness rule which
15 again makes homeless people innocent victims of those
16 with money and power.

17 Then there are the internal abuses by those with
18 money and power such as the extraordinary processing
19 times for apartment approval. This is a continuation
20 of the Robert Door tradition of making shelter
21 clients start their housing packages all over again,
22 after being involuntarily transferred to another
23 shelter has happened to me eight times, five of which
24 were in the middle of night. These are serious
25 bureaucratic issues that need to be resolved to

2 increase the efficiency of the process to get people
3 out of shelter.

4 While I don't know the specific issues, I can say
5 that the system seems to drag its feet.

6 As one of the authors of the Homeless White
7 Paper, The Business of Homelessness. It seems that
8 the profit motive is again behind these issues,
9 namely NGOs that provide the shelter making too much
10 money off the city. It did not surprise me to learn
11 that in 2019, the CEO of Bushwick Economic
12 Development Corporation, which runs Eddie Harris
13 Men's Shelter, the first shelter to which I was sent
14 after Bellevue was convicted of embezzlement,
15 something that I believed to be true seven years
16 earlier simply based on the fact that they kept
17 running out of food before the serving period was
18 over. Finally, there needs to be an expansion of the
19 source-of-income discrimination--

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time has expired.

21 MR. HUTCHINS: I'm wrapping up. -- an expansion
22 of the source-of-income discrimination unit in the
23 City Commission on Human Rights. This unit is
24 underfunded and has too few attorneys to deal with
25 the magnitude of the problem. Brokers and landlords

2 have been repeatedly identified as serial
3 discriminated against those with vouchers. If the
4 enforcement were not so lax, it would not be the
5 rampant problem that it is. The council needs to
6 push back against the mayor's insistence on
7 disinvesting from anything other than the police
8 force. We know that cops are not the solution to
9 homelessness or much else either, and the city's
10 budget needs to reflect that. Thank you.

11 COUNSEL ROMERO: Thank you. We have now heard
12 from everyone who has signed up to testify if we
13 inadvertently missed anyone who like testify in
14 person please visit the Sergeant's table and complete
15 a witness slip now. If we inadvertently missed
16 anyone who wanted to testify virtually, please use
17 the raise hand function in Zoom and I will call you
18 in the order of hands raised. Seeing no one else, I
19 would like to note the written testimony which will
20 be reviewed in full by committee staff I'd be
21 submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the
22 close of this hearing by emailing it to
23 testimony@Council.NYC.gov. Deputy Speaker Ayala, we
24 have concluded public testimony for this hearing.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And I want to
3 thank all the advocates and impacted individuals who
4 came in today to testify and took the time and
5 waited, you know, to share their stories with us. I
6 think that we've all learned a lot through today's
7 hearing, but also heard a lot of feedback that was
8 pretty consistent with kind of how we're seeing
9 things, you know, managed at the different agencies.
10 So thank you all so much. And with that, this
11 hearing is adjourned.

12 [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 01/26/2023