

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS

----- X

Tuesday, February 28, 2023
Start: 10:08 a.m.
Recess: 12:32 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Sandra Ung, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Gale A. Brewer
Shahana K. Hanif
Lincoln Restler
Kalman Yeger

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

Dr. Sarah Sayeed
Chair and Executive Director
Civic Engagement Commission

Benjamin Solotaire
Community Board Advisor
Civic Engagement Commission

Yisroel Hecht
Deputy Commissioner of Infrastructure
New York City Office of Technology &
Innovation

Janet Peguero
Deputy Borough President
Bronx Borough President's Office

Trisha Shimamura
Director of Community Affairs
Manhattan Borough President's Office

Carol-Ann Church
Director of Community Boards
Brooklyn Borough President's Office

Celestina Leon
Future of Community Boards Working Group

Shawn Campbell
District Manager
Brooklyn Community Board 14

Jeremy Laufer
District Manager
Brooklyn Community Board 7

Barry Spitzer
District Manager
Brooklyn Community Board 12

Robert Camacho
Chairperson
Community Board 4 (Bushwick)

Jeremy Warneke
District Manager
Bronx Community Board 11

Jesús Pérez
District Manager
Manhattan Community Board 6

Melinda Perkins
District Manager
Brooklyn Community Board 5

Susan Stetzer
District Manager
Manhattan Community Board 3

Noel Hidalgo
Executive Director
BetaNYC

Mark Diller
District Manager
Manhattan Community Board 7

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning everyone. At
3 this moment place all electronic devices to vibrate
4 or silent mode. Welcome to the Committee on
5 Governmental Operation. If you'd like to submit
6 testimony you may send it to
7 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again that's
8 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
9 cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

10 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Good morning, I'm city council
11 member Sandra Ung, Chair of the Committee on
12 Governmental Operations. At today's hearing, the
13 Committee will be conducting oversight on appointing
14 and supporting New York City's Community Boards.
15 Community Boards are designed to give members of the
16 community a voice in what's going on in their local
17 area. They allow local residents to provide input in
18 everything from liquor license applications to local
19 development projects. They're also one of the ways
20 for everyday New Yorkers to provide feedback on how
21 effectively public services are being provided.

22 To be truly representative of their communities,
23 boards should look like the communities they
24 represent. For too long Community Boards have been
25 older, whiter, more male than the communities they

2 represent. Public housing residents, renters, and
3 young people have traditionally been underrepresented
4 on Community Boards. But that is slowly changing. A
5 ballot measure passed overwhelmingly by voters in
6 2018 requires borough presidents to appoint committee
7 board members to seek out individuals from diverse
8 backgrounds to serve on boards. We are here today to
9 check on the progress that borough presidents have
10 made accomplishing this goal and to discuss what
11 roadblocks they are facing and fulfilling to all
12 volunteer positions with individuals from different
13 backgrounds that have not been traditionally been
14 represented on Community Boards. The boards that the
15 Borough Presidents nominated to serve and convene
16 boards do not need to have a particular qualification
17 or expertise. They just need to care about the
18 issues relevant to the community and be willing to
19 devote several hours per month to meetings and
20 educating themselves about the issues before the
21 board.

22 But in order to do the important work, all
23 Community Boards need to show that they have the
24 resources and support that they need. I look forward
25 to hearing from district managers about what the

2 individual boards need to be successful in this new
3 era of Zoom, hybrid, and in-person meetings.

4 And with that, I want to thank members of the
5 public and representatives from Borough Presidents'
6 office, the Civic Engagement Commission, and the
7 Office of Information and Technology. I especially
8 want to thank all the individuals who have
9 volunteered their free time to serve on these
10 Community Boards.

11 Lastly, I want to thank CJ Murray and Edgar
12 Cohen, for the central staff their work and putting
13 this together, as well as my staff, Alexander Hart,
14 my Chief of Staff, and my communications director,
15 Shea Miller for their assistance.

16 I will now turn it over to committee counsel CJ
17 Murray to swear in the witnesses.

18 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you Chair. Our first
19 panel today will include representatives from the
20 Civic Engagement Commission and the Office of
21 Technology and Innovation. Before we begin, I will
22 administer the affirmation. Panelists from the CEC
23 and OTI, please raise your right hands.

2 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
3 and nothing but the truth before this committee and
4 to respond honestly to council member questions?

5 ALL: I do.

6 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you, you may begin your
7 testimony.

8 DR. SAYEED: Good morning, and thank you Chair
9 Ung and members of the committee on governmental
10 operations for holding this hearing, and for the
11 opportunity to submit testimony about the support
12 provided to Community Boards by the Civic Engagement
13 Commission, commonly referred to by the acronym CEC.

14 Chair Ung, I also want to echo your thanks to all
15 of the individuals who serve on boards all across the
16 city. I think they provide a really important
17 service, and it is a volunteer position. So I just
18 want to hold that up.

19 I'm really delighted to be here again nearly one
20 year since last testifying before the committee about
21 the role that CEC plays within our city. And as you
22 know, the charter grants the CEC broad authorization
23 to support civic engagement throughout the city in
24 partnership with community organizations and civic
25 leaders in the public and private sectors.

2 The charter also defines specific programs and
3 activities that CEC is to create and support,
4 including city wide participatory budgeting, language
5 assistance at poll sites, and assistance to Community
6 Boards. Pursuant to Mayoral Executive Order 88,
7 DemocracyNYC is also a program of the Civic
8 Engagement Commission, and works to increase voter
9 participation.

10 The charter requires the commission to provide
11 assistance and training to Community Boards. The
12 Commission provides support for identifying and
13 providing access to urban planning and land use
14 professionals, and these professionals have no
15 involvement in the land use proposals being
16 considered by Community Boards, providing services
17 and tools to address the needs of individuals with
18 limited English proficiency, training in the use of
19 technological tools, and providing guidance on
20 uniform meeting procedures. Training sessions
21 offered by the Civic Engagement Commission are not
22 mandatory for board members and complement the
23 training sessions coordinated by Borough Presidents.

24 I also want to clarify that the Civic Engagement
25 Commission does not have an oversight role, and we

2 don't require anything of boards. We just offer
3 specific support. And as it pertains to support of
4 Community Boards, the CEC has continued to expand the
5 breadth of our work since we last spoke before this
6 committee in April of 2022.

7 Between the agency's inception in 2019, and the
8 end of fiscal year 2022, we have served nearly one
9 thousand Community Board members by providing
10 trainings in many topics. These include Community
11 Board committees, how to conduct efficient meetings,
12 motions and amendments, nominations and elections,
13 citywide secretary workshop, and these are all
14 related to parliamentary procedures. We had a
15 workshop on conflict resolution and also a primer on
16 public engagement.

17 In the summer of 2022, the Civic Engagement
18 Commission hired our first Community Board Advisor
19 Benjamin Solotaire, who's seated next to me, to
20 coordinate and manage programming for our work to
21 support Community Boards. And since Benjamin came on
22 board, he has been focused on building relationships
23 with District Managers city wide, attending borough
24 board meetings, reviewing prior trainings and prior
25 Needs Assessments, including The Future of Community

2 Boards report by the Future of Community Boards
3 Working Group.

4 Since submitting our annual report to the council
5 and September 2022, the CEC has also held additional
6 training sessions for Community Board members
7 including Understanding the City Budget in
8 partnership with the independent budget office, Using
9 the Open Data Portal in partnership with the Office
10 of Technology and Innovation, and the Power of Youth
11 in partnership with New York City Youth Agenda.

12 In the area of language access, the CEC provided
13 all 59 Community Boards with access to Language Line
14 accounts, with online, on-demand, telephonic
15 interpretation in over 200 languages. We also worked
16 with OTI, the Office of Technology and Innovation, to
17 produce a citywide language map that provides boards
18 with information about the top five languages spoken
19 in their community district. This resource is the
20 first of its kind and has been published on the
21 Commission's website for public use, and the map the
22 map can be found on our site nyc.gov/CEC.

23 The CEC also created a Community Board resource
24 page on our website to provide easy access to our
25 archives of prior workshops. We've published content

2 on social media, encouraging New Yorkers to apply to
3 serve on their local Community Board, along with
4 educational information on the role that Community
5 Boards play in our city.

6 In the coming months, we plan to conduct a robust
7 series of trainings and support efforts for Community
8 Boards, including following up on our Youth
9 Engagement Workshop, which was a top interest
10 indicated in the 2020 Needs Assessment. And in
11 service of continuing efforts to engage more diverse
12 communities in the work of Community Boards, we'll be
13 holding workshops in partnership with the Mayor's
14 Office for People with Disabilities, which will focus
15 on improving disability access, such as-- with topics
16 such as Disability Etiquette and Awareness, Document
17 Accessibility and Accessible Virtual Meetings. We'll
18 also be hosting land use workshops with the
19 Association of Neighborhood and Housing Development
20 around equity in land use decisions, as well as
21 updated workshops from the Department of Housing
22 Preservation and Development on Fair Housing and
23 Affordable Housing.

2 Recognizing that there'll be new board members on
3 boarded this spring, we will also be offering another
4 series of the parliamentary procedure workshops.

5 In an effort to increase access and
6 participation. We will now be running some workshops
7 during midday, as we'd been holding most of them in
8 the evening, from 12 to two, which is a practice that
9 we learned from Manhattan Borough President's office.
10 And we'll also conduct workshops that are targeted to
11 specific committees such as Land Use and Executive
12 Committees, along with just general workshops that
13 any board member may join.

14 Regarding language access, we have a meeting
15 coming up with our Language Access Coordinator on
16 March 9, and members of the Future of Community
17 Boards Coalition to discuss in detail how we can
18 improve access for more of our language communities
19 across New York City.

20 And as you know, in 2020, we conducted a Needs
21 Assessment with District Managers and Board Chairs.
22 And this Needs Assessment, we were pleasantly
23 surprised, surpassed our initial goals and
24 participation with 49 of the 59 boards responding.

2 And we will be conducting a follow up in the coming
3 months to assess new needs from the boards.

4 Finally, we're working with OTI and the
5 Department of Citywide Administrative Services to
6 explore the possibility of making several of the EEO
7 trainings that are easily available to be more easily
8 available to all Community Board members, including
9 Sexual Harassment Prevention, the LGBTQIA, the Power
10 of Inclusion Training, and Everybody Matters, the EEO
11 and Diversity Inclusion Training. These trainings
12 are required for New York City employees, and many
13 boards have expressed interest in providing these to
14 all board members, not just to their paid staff.

15 The CEC is proud to work with Community Boards.
16 And we are also proud to work with our fellow city
17 agencies, such as the Community Affairs Unit, the
18 Department of City Planning, the Mayor's Office of
19 Immigrant Affairs, the Mayor's Office for People with
20 Disabilities, OTI, the Office of Management and
21 Budget and DCAS. And we're looking forward to
22 collaborating with everybody to provide more
23 resources to Community Boards and support their
24 needs.

2 And I just want to thank everyone, and thank you
3 for the opportunity to speak about the work of the
4 CEC, and look forward to answering your questions.

5 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you for your testimony.
6 I just have a few questions. And thank you for the
7 programming that you have listed out. Just in terms
8 of the land use matter: Is there any technical
9 assistance for land use matters, if a Community Board
10 member is requesting it? And if so what does that
11 look like?

12 DR. SAYEED: So far, what we've been able to do
13 is provide a directory of independent consultants
14 that boards may consult. And that has been the
15 degree to which we've been-- and the charter charges
16 us with providing these in a neutral manner. So
17 we've provided that to all the boards. And we have
18 not received specific requests for technical land use
19 assistance. And in the future, we're, you know,
20 happy to talk with boards, should that request arise.

21 CHAIRPERSON UNG: So thank you. So independent
22 consultants, are they-- I'm sorry. So these
23 independent consultants, will the Community Board
24 members need to pay for that? Like, how does that

2 work? Do they just place a phone call to these
3 independent consultants?

4 DR. SAYEED: The directory provides the list of
5 MWBE consultants. So they-- Yes, they would need to
6 be paid through the board's budget in order to use
7 their services.

8 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Okay. Thank you for clarifying
9 that. Also the charter says the CEC is supposed to
10 develop and provide technology training to Community
11 Boards. So what-- what does that look like, again?

12 DR. SAYEED: Yeah, we we've been working with our
13 city agency partners in this area. And all-- In all
14 of the areas that were providing trainings for
15 community works, we actually work very closely with
16 agencies that have over overlapping missions. So in
17 this particular area, we've been in close
18 coordination with OTI from the beginning. And we
19 made sure, for example, during the pandemic, you
20 know, we-- we coordinated, and OTI was very active in
21 providing Webex training as an example.

22 Additional tech tools include the language line,
23 which overlaps with language access and tech tools,
24 as well as the language access map. In additional
25 trainings about technology, some of the areas that

2 Community Boards did request training in is like
3 social media training, as an example.

4 So we can, you know, in the future work towards
5 providing that. Again, we're-- we'd like to work
6 closely with OTA just to make sure we are, you know,
7 staying in our lane and not duplicating anything that
8 they may have and be planning as well. I don't know
9 if anyone wants to add...

10 CHAIRPERSON UNG: So if OTI could add to-- So
11 what type of assistance have OTI provided? For
12 example, if the committee board members or District
13 Managers, for example, wanted to know how to better
14 use social media or how to use Open Portal. Like,
15 how does that work?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HECHT: Hi. Good morning
17 Chair and good morning Council members. The Social
18 Media Division is not currently under my purview, so
19 I can't speak specifically to that. But I do know
20 that OTI does offer training for many services. And--
21 - Such as they make training available for the
22 Portal-- Open Portal data, so they can collect data
23 from their BetaNYC, so they can get district
24 snapshots of their, you know, Community Boards. And
25 if there are specific needs for training, OTI takes--

2 will take that back and make-- have an internal
3 review and make those trainings available.

4 CHAIRPERSON UNG: So if Community Board members
5 or District Managers, you know, contact OTI, if they
6 don't know how to use the Open Portal, or they have
7 issues, you know, connecting to the Open Portal,
8 would it be something that OTI could walk them
9 through the process?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HECHT: That's correct,
11 Chair. We do provide regular training for Open
12 Portal data, one-on-one training, and should there be
13 a need for a followup and additional training, that
14 is correct, we would provide that service.

15 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great. Thank you. And do you
16 know how many committee board members or District
17 Managers, you know, have been using this service?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HECHT: I don't have that
19 readily available. We can follow up with you.

20 CHAIRPERSON UNG: That would be great. I do have
21 some questions about language access. As I heard
22 from the testimony that CEC provides access to all
23 the boards to the language line. So does--
24 Practically speaking, how does that work out? If
25 there was a Community Board meeting, which required

2 probably more-- if it required-- let's just say, you
3 know, in terms of-- if there was a-- let's say,
4 sometimes there's a meeting, or some agency is
5 presenting to the Community Board and to the public,
6 how does that information get translated in those
7 meetings?

8 DR. SAYEED: The specific scenario you're
9 mentioning is a scenario in which Community Boards
10 would have to contract with a translator to be
11 present in those meetings and provide live
12 interpretation.

13 So the service that CEC is providing is a service
14 that is telephonic interpretation that boards may use
15 if a District Manager, for example, gets a phone call
16 from a constituent and doesn't speak the same
17 language. So that's-- that latter is the service
18 that CEC is providing. Again, the boards have the
19 ability to hire the translators to come and serve in
20 their public meetings. And that's part of what we
21 want to explore further with the Future of Community
22 Boards meeting that we have coming up next month.
23 It's just to have a better understanding of what's
24 happening on the ground as far as, you know,
25 providing translations.

2 I believe that many of the boards are actively
3 working to provide -- sorry, I should be careful in
4 my language -- interpretation. They are providing
5 translations, for example, of Spanish, you know, in
6 their materials, written translations. I-- We are
7 not sure at this point, how many boards are using
8 live interpretation in their public meetings as an
9 example.

10 CHAIRPERSON UNG: So does CEC provide assistance
11 with the written translations?

12 DR. SAYEED: With the written translations?

13 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Yes.

14 DR. SAYEED: No, that is not something we do.

15 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Okay. So just to summarize:
16 CEC provides assistance with giving the boards the
17 language line access.

18 DR. SAYEED: That's right.

19 CHAIRPERSON UNG: And that's the extent of what
20 CEC right now provides.

21 DR. SAYEED: That's right. And also the planning
22 tool of the language access map. And in the past,
23 we've, you know, provided training on Language Line,
24 as well as just thinking broadly, helping boards plan
25 around language access as well.

2 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. We've been joined
3 by my colleague, city council member Lincoln Restler,
4 and I'm-- I'm happy if you have any questions right
5 now.

6 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I was just-- Thank you
7 so much Chair. And I was just reading Dr. Sayeed's
8 testimony. And it is always good to see you. Thank
9 you for your service to the people of the City of New
10 York. I have a great deal of respect for you. And
11 it's good to see you, Ben. Similarly, I appreciate
12 your great service.

13 I have to admit, I struggle to understand the--
14 how responsibilities are split between The Mayor's
15 Office and the Borough Presidents in supporting the
16 Community Boards. Could you help me break down what
17 are-- what's the CEC responsible for? I believe it
18 it had been CAU previously, but what is CEC
19 responsible for relative to what is the
20 responsibility of the Borough President?

21 DR. SAYEED: Sure, I'll-- I can-- I can try to
22 help you With that. So the Borough Presidents are
23 responsible for appointing the board members. And as
24 you know, they work closely with Councilmembers. CEC
25 has no appointing authority. We also don't have the

2 authority to mandate trainings for board members.
3 Our services or our trainings are really-- they are
4 provided as you know, additional support for what
5 Borough Presidents are already providing to Community
6 Boards. My understanding that-- is that when new
7 members are appointed, each Borough President offers
8 them some orientation and trainings. And so what
9 we're trying to do is complement that and deepen the
10 knowledge that is being provided in that-- in that
11 initial orientation.

12 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: You know, there's no
13 centralized support for IT, for HR, for any support
14 for Community Boards. And so they're left on their
15 own to navigate these issues. I have one Community
16 Board in my district that's had the same District
17 Manager for 40 years, since before I was born, just
18 to give you a sense, my age. They're going through a
19 search right now. And they have one person left in
20 the office, they haven't been able to sign any
21 contracts, because they only have one employee. MOCS
22 has been confused and confounded by how to help them
23 through Passport and-- and even approving things like
24 getting bottled water delivered to their office, you
25 know, the jugs of water, because they only have one

2 person to sign for contracts. And then there's no
3 technical assistance or support or help in them
4 navigating it. They're just off on an island. And I
5 just struggle.

6 Either, we need to empower the Borough Presidents
7 to have resources to provide centralized support for
8 our Community Boards, to help them through HR issues,
9 IT issues, fiscal issues, or CEC needs to take
10 responsibility for it. But asking these entities to
11 figure it out on their own doesn't make any sense to
12 me, and doesn't seem to be working all that well.

13 I mean, I could go through other examples. I
14 have a tremendous Community Board in my district
15 that, you know, puts out the best Statement Of
16 Priorities every year about expense, and capital
17 priorities. They are rigorous and thoughtful. And
18 we haven't gotten approval for their District Manager
19 to be-- to take on that role. She's been working in
20 a lower staff position. She has been promoted, but
21 can't get it approved for her to be District Manager
22 for-- it's been years.

23 So it's-- I wonder, could you elaborate on your
24 thoughts here? Do you agree that there's a need for
25 more centralized support? And whose responsibility

2 should it be to provide that kind of support and
3 technical assistance?

4 DR. SAYEED: I certainly agree that boards need
5 more support for sure. I think that my-- you know,
6 when I-- when I first assumed this responsibility to
7 be the Executive Director of the CEC, we did go
8 around to each Borough President's office to try to
9 get a better understanding of what they're doing, you
10 know, for boards in terms of the-- the areas you
11 mentioned, HR, finance. And I think that Borough
12 Presidents are providing support in those areas. And
13 my rough impression, and just a cursory impression,
14 is that they're not necessarily all doing the same
15 things in every borough, right? So that-- that's
16 something for us to look at. The-- the processes of
17 appointing and serving boards vary by Borough
18 President office, so we may, you know, want to look
19 at that a little bit more.

20 And then on the tech, I don't know if Deputy
21 Commissioner, you want to speak to some of the tech
22 support needs that OTI provides for?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HECHT: Sure. Good morning,
24 Councilmember. So OTI has a charter that is meant to
25 provide the City of New York with IT services and

2 support. Uniquely, in my position, I'm responsible
3 for infrastructure management. I guess the vast
4 majority of our modern life today supports and
5 resides on infrastructure. So it's quite a big
6 portfolio. We do provide this service throughout the
7 City of New York in various forms, including the
8 Community Boards. Now, typically most agencies that
9 we support have local IT staff that actually cater to
10 the day-to-day needs and their operations of the
11 local particular agency. And when they have a need
12 for additional services from OTI, such as something
13 more complex or something that is interdependent with
14 other agencies, they will typically reach out to OTI
15 through the Citywide Service Desk as it relates to
16 Community Boards.

17 What's unique about the setting with Community
18 Boards is in addition to the general support that we
19 provide to the various agencies within the city, we
20 have a dedicated IT person, just for the Community
21 Boards, in addition to the pool of members.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: One person for 59
23 Community Boards? Is that what I heard?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HECHT: That's correct. One
25 person dedicated in addition to the pool of members

2 that serve as the rest of the city. So we actually
3 cater to them individually, in addition to the
4 general support we provide to them.

5 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 59 offices for one person
6 is, you know, seems like a very modest staffing ratio
7 to me.

8 I would just say this: Dr. Sayeed, I appreciate
9 your response, but I don't believe that we provide
10 any resources to the Borough Presidents to provide
11 this work. I think we should. I don't know if my
12 Borough President would agree with me. And I agree
13 with whatever he says. But-- that was a joke. Thank
14 you for laughing Sandra. No, but seriously, I don't
15 know what Borough President Reynoso would say, or
16 Levine, or Richards, or Gibson. But I, I do think we
17 should be providing dedicated personnel to support
18 the HR operations, the IT operations, the fiscal
19 operations of these Community Boards, because they
20 are on an island, and they don't have the support
21 they need. And we have folks here from CB12 and CB4,
22 and I'm sure other great Community Boards in Brooklyn
23 who do phenomenal work, and who I have the utmost
24 respect for the staff and the board members
25 themselves, who are volunteers, who bring rigor and

2 creativity to making our neighborhoods better, but we
3 don't provide them the support they need.

4 And, you know, I would strongly encourage the CEC
5 to work with the council to dedicate resources to the
6 Borough President's, supplemental, new resources to
7 actually support this work, because I don't think
8 it's happening right now. Certainly not adequately.

9 If I could just Chair Ung, have one more
10 question. Thank you very much. Two related
11 questions, actually, if it's okay. One is, I think I
12 heard you say, Dr. Saeed, that you're not sure of how
13 many Community Boards are accessing the CEC language
14 access services, just you're aware that it's made
15 available, but we're not-- we don't have data to
16 inform how frequently they're utilized?

17 DR. FAYEED: I was referring actually to the land
18 use consultants.

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Ah.

20 DR. FAYEED: We do have a way to track the use of
21 Language Line. And so far, it's been limited usage.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Any more specifics you
23 can share?

24 DR. FAYEED: I don't-- The number that we had in
25 our in our annual report--

2 MR. SOLOTAIRE: The last reported number was 30
3 had used it at least once?

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: In a year or in--?

5 MR. SOLOTAIRE: Yeah. That was in the last
6 annual report. So yeah.

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 30 times in a year.

8 DR. FAYEED: Yeah.

9 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So each-- one half of
10 Community Boards use Language Line once in the course
11 of a year.

12 DR. FAYEED: So I want to just explain that a
13 little bit more, if you don't mind.

14 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Sure.

15 DR. FAYEED: The use of Language Line requires
16 people who are limited English proficient to know
17 that boards exist. It requires people to know that--
18 the services that boards provide, and that they can
19 call their boards to get help on something.

20 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Right.

21 DR. FAYEED: And I think we have a lot of work to
22 do to educate the general public about, and to do
23 that outreach in a language-sensitive way that boards
24 exist and they're a resource for communities, right?
25 Because in providing the language line resource, it's

2 great because all agencies have access to language
3 lines. So we thought it was important for boards to
4 get it as well. However, there needs to be that
5 additional layer of education, and I think we're all
6 collectively responsible for that.

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Yeah.

8 DR. FAYEED: So-- So that that to me kind of
9 accounts for low numbers, as well as the fact that we
10 started this during the pandemic. And a lot of
11 Community Board District Managers were not in their
12 offices, you know.

13 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Right. Yeah. Look, I--
14 There's 10 meetings a year for 59 Community Boards.
15 So there's 600 meetings around the city. 30 uses of
16 Language Line is pretty--

17 DR. SAYEED: Quite low.

18 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Quite low. So I agree
19 with your assessment of the barriers that we face,
20 but-- but it's-- it's a pretty crisp indicator that
21 we are failing to reach English language learners and
22 immigrant communities in the ways that we should be.

23 The last thing I just want to ask on. I have-- I
24 hope that, you know, the pandemic silver linings--
25 that one of the pandemic silver linings is the, kind

2 of, long-term, kind of, hybrid solutions for
3 Community Boards. I believe that every Community
4 Board meeting should be streamed. And it's
5 critically important to have a record of those
6 meetings that people can view online. And that for
7 everybody who's working so hard to make it to
8 meetings, that they can enjoy and be a part of them
9 from home. Is the CEC intending to put out any
10 guidance about, kind of, long term recommendations
11 for Community Boards around hybrid meetings moving
12 forward?

13 MR. SOLOTAIRE: Thank you for that. In the
14 immediate term, as we mentioned, we are going to be
15 holding trainings on disability access virtually both
16 in documents and on how to hold virtual meetings so
17 that they're accessible to everybody. And then we
18 will be conducting another Needs Assessment. We did
19 want to 2020. Obviously, it's time for a new one to
20 examine what their needs are exactly in that area.
21 And then I hope that next-- in the coming cycle in
22 2023 fall, that we will hold smaller cohorts meetings
23 with Community Boards. We've been holding them
24 citywide or borough wide. But I'd like to start
25 meeting more individually or maybe with two or three

2 to find out what their in fact needs are. So we can
3 do an examination of how to best serve them
4 virtually, as well as in person.

5 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate the
6 technical assistance. I really think we need crisp
7 Guidance for Every Community Board in the city. And
8 the expectation for hybrid meetings, that should be
9 our standard, and we should help support Community
10 Boards to make that happen.

11 DR. SAYEED: So just to answer that, on that-- on
12 the legal side, because I think part of that is legal
13 guidance. So we have worked with the Law Department
14 on that question, to share guidance with Community
15 Boards on how to conduct these meetings. And we
16 also, you know-- The law department coordinates with
17 the Borough President, counsels on giving boards this
18 kind of guidance, and we can-- we had sent out some
19 guidance around it before and we can reshare that,
20 and share it with you as well.

21 CHAIRPERSON UNG: We also have been joined by my
22 colleague, Shahana Hanif, and I believe she has a few
23 questions.

24

25

2 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much Chair and
3 salamu alaykum, Dr. Saray Sayeed, and welcome to the
4 administration.

5 So I'll jump right into it. And apologies for my
6 delay coming to this hearing. The charter requires
7 that you provide services to the Community Boards to
8 address the needs of limited-English-proficient
9 individuals. However, I consistently hear from the
10 three Community Boards that I represent -- Brooklyn
11 Boards 6, 7, and 12 -- about the difficulties they've
12 had in securing interpretation services. Could you
13 walk me through what specific services you all
14 provide?

15 DR. SAYEED: Sure. I can start and invite both
16 of my colleagues to add. So one of those services,
17 as was already mentioned, was the provision of
18 Language Line. We noticed that while city agencies
19 have access to Language Line, boards did not. So we
20 started that process of giving them each an
21 individual access number, that if they had a
22 constituent calling, the District Manager would be
23 able to, you know, get live interpretation
24 telephonically. We also worked in to create a map so
25 that District Managers and boards could become more

2 aware of the language diversity in their communities
3 and start to plan around language access for their
4 community members. And-- What are what am I leaving
5 out, Benjamin? I'm sorry.

6 MR. SOLOTAIRE: I certainly hear that across the
7 board across the city, that language access is a key
8 element of it. With our limited resources, we are
9 moving forward with a meeting on March 9 with some of
10 the District Managers from the Future of Community
11 Boards Report to talk more specifically about what
12 their needs are, and--

13 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: What's happening on March
14 9th?

15 MR. SOLOTAIRE: We have a meeting a meeting with
16 the some of the District Managers to be more specific
17 about how we can help and what their needs are
18 regarding translation and...

19 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: So since the CEC had been
20 tasked with interpretation, I guess, providing maybe
21 a guide with this map and then access to the Language
22 Line, how many boards have used the Language Line
23 services? Is that being tracked in any way? Or have
24 there been maybe quarterly meetings outside of the
25 one that's happening on March 9th to check in on

2 Community Boards and the utility of the language line
3 services?

4 DR. SAYEED: Well, in our annual-- last annual
5 report, we reported that there were 30 uses of
6 Language Line. And I think we were just discussing
7 with Councilmember Restler the need to grow that
8 number, right?, and how we can educate communities
9 about that option that people with, you know, limited
10 English proficiency can actually call a board for
11 help, and that they'll-- there's an interpreter
12 there.

13 I'm not sure how many people know that boards
14 exist and that boards are there to serve them from
15 the language communities, you know, that we are
16 working with.

17 The suggestion about a quarterly meeting is a
18 really great one. So we can definitely look into
19 that. As you know CEC is-- was established in 2019.
20 And we are literally building the plane as we say as
21 we're flying it.

22 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Absolutely.

23 DR. SAYEED: So we really welcome, you know, your
24 ideas and suggestions for us about how we're-- how we

2 set up systems and processes to better serve all New
3 Yorkers. So yeah, great idea. Thank you so much.

4 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Of course. And I would
5 love to continue this conversation, particularly
6 because language access is so important for the work
7 that I've been doing in the 39th District, and of
8 course, we've been in contact with Community Boards,
9 not just the ones I represent, but across Brooklyn,
10 to better understand just how we can lean on our
11 community members to provide those services.

12 And so for Language Line, is there an option for
13 interpretation equipment? Or is the idea that the
14 person who needs interpretation is on a phone
15 getting-- receiving interpretation while they're at
16 the meeting?

17 DR. SAYEED: No. It's actually just if they're
18 calling as a constituent with a case issue.

19 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: I see. So the, like,
20 Community Board district office?

21 DR. SAYEED: Yeah. So-- So the provision of
22 interpretation services at board meetings is a
23 separate matter. We haven't used Language Line for
24 that purpose.

2 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: What's happening at the
3 meetings?

4 DR. SAYEED: That is left up to the individual
5 boards to decide what languages. You know, they
6 would need to provide interpreters in, because it
7 varies across the city. So it's-- We have-- Any
8 time boards have talked to us about that piece of it,
9 and the meeting on March 9 is to further explore
10 that. But it is left up to the individual boards to
11 provide that.

12 [BELL RINGS]

13 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Chair, I have a few more
14 questions, if you would grant me the permission.
15 Thank you.

16 So that's, that's really good to know. But, of
17 course, concerning to know, because the priority
18 should be that the Community Board meetings which I
19 consider the gateway to local democracy, should be
20 equipped with robust interpretation services, whether
21 that's ensuring that there's interpretation
22 equipment, and robust outreach, to make it known --
23 and I'd be curious what the city's plans are to make
24 known -- that Community Boards exist, Community
25 Boards are where you could get started on the issues

2 that matter most to you and get connected to your
3 Councilmember, get connected to your neighbor who
4 cares about climate equity and sanitation pickup on
5 your blog, and all the other matters. So I'm curious
6 to know how much money is allocated per Community
7 Board for interpretation and translation services?
8 Is that coming from a pot of money, or is that
9 assessed by each Community Board? And what's the
10 range of funding that Community Boards are spending
11 on interpretation and translation?

12 DR. SAYEED: I would defer to the Office of
13 Management and Budget on the exact amount. My
14 general understanding is that boards are given an
15 OTPS budget and have the discretion to use those
16 resources for their own priorities.

17 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Understood. But from
18 conversations you've had, does it look like Community
19 Boards are spending maybe \$1,000 per month?

20 DR. SAYEED: I actually don't. I'm sorry.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And then-- So just to
22 clarify, Community Boards are sort of left on their
23 own to determine how it is that they want to provide
24 interpretation and translation, how it is to do
25 outreach to communities who've not been engaged or

2 involved as either members of the board, or in
3 attendance, to-- to be there for the public portion
4 and to raise their issues. That is left to the
5 Community Boards?

6 DR. SAYEED: That is correct. I mean, we have
7 worked on trying to raise awareness about boards, and
8 also tried to raise awareness about the application
9 process to serve as members. Boards do do their
10 local outreach to their communities. And I think the
11 provision of the language access map was meant to be
12 like a resource to sort of systematically think
13 about, "Who are the language communities in my
14 district? And how can I better, you know, begin to
15 do like or continue to do outreach to these
16 communities?"

17 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Understood. So I hope that
18 the meeting that's coming up on March 9th will
19 elucidate further just the incredible need and the
20 urgency around the services to be equipped at the
21 meetings that take place. I mean, I think our
22 Community Board meetings are where we could perfect
23 what deep community engagement and language justice
24 could look like in our public meetings.

2 I mean, I know how hard they are. I used to
3 organize a CAB where we used to run meetings in three
4 Asian languages, and we used to begin the meeting in
5 one of the Asian languages and then interpret
6 simultaneously. And doing that work takes an amount
7 of expertise that requires rehearsals, and agenda,
8 and this cohesion among all the facilitators. So I
9 recognize how much of a challenge it is. But also,
10 I'll continue to push on the urgency to bring in our
11 neighbors, particularly as we continue to live
12 through COVID and COVID recovery, and want folks
13 across our neighborhoods to be engaged in the
14 political facets of-- of our of our communities.

15 And then, you know, one piece of legislation that
16 I have been pushing for is the creation of an Office
17 of Language Translation and Interpretation. This is
18 Intro 570. And several Community Boards have
19 endorsed that piece of legislation. But hearing your
20 responses really shows the-- the critical nature of
21 why we need to be more cohesive around prioritizing
22 language access services in these public meetings.
23 And I again, urge that we take seriously the
24 opportunity for Community Boards to be where we pilot
25 and expand on what language justice could look like

2 in our-- our easiest, I would say-- this should be
3 the easiest opportunity for our neighbors to-- to
4 enter local democracy. Thank you all so much.

5 DR. SAYEED: Thank you. I'd be happy to also
6 talk with you further just in the-- the idea of
7 piloting and expanding to understand better what
8 your-- the boards you specifically named are looking
9 for support with, and see if there's a way for us to
10 collaborate with them.

11 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much. I'm
12 looking forward to that. Thank you, Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you all for testifying
14 today. I think, you know, from so far, this hearing,
15 we are pointing out the really-- the need to have
16 language justice in our Community Boards.

17 And I do have a-- I mean, I just have a
18 question. It's a more general question, Dr. Sayeed.
19 Is there-- How do you envision CEC. If you, you
20 know, if like, for example, budget wasn't necessarily
21 an issue, how actually do you envision CEC working
22 better with the Community Boards?

23 DR. SAYEED: I think that as we are just
24 beginning, there's a lot of opportunity for us to
25 learn from best practices of what, you know, Borough

2 Presidents have already done, and also working with
3 our city agency partners. I think the introduction
4 of term limits also has made it so that we have more
5 and more new people coming into the board space,
6 right? And I think there's a lot of opportunities to
7 train people and make them aware of even basic
8 meeting procedures, right? Because diversity
9 necessarily means that people are coming to these
10 spaces with very different understandings of how you
11 operate in a public meeting.

12 So, I think we've, you know, we've started--
13 we're kind of like in a maybe in like toddler stage
14 now, but to really grow the types of trainings we're
15 providing is something that I think we could do. And
16 also to strengthen and collaborate with Borough
17 Presidents to make sure that we're reaching all of
18 the new board members, as an example, you know, to
19 make them aware that we're providing these trainings.
20 I'm also going to ask Benjamin, if you want to
21 comment on-- on anything about vision and what you
22 see?

23 MR. SOLOTAIRE: Yeah, I think, you know, just
24 touch on the language access issue, which I think we
25 understand is definitely as urgent as you-- as you

2 say, and we've heard that from the DMs, and we're
3 hoping that the meeting that we're coming up with
4 will actually provide some direct avenues and
5 direction to take in that, that we can actually move
6 forward with. As we do the trainings, we are trying
7 to make sure they're accessible to as many members as
8 possible, with the disability access specifically,
9 but trying to see what times of days are important.

10 We've been meeting with the borough boards.
11 We've met with Manhattan and Queens. We're meeting
12 with Brooklyn tomorrow morning. So that's a way to
13 get to know people, and trying to get out there more
14 on an individual board basis. Like I said before,
15 some of our trainings maybe being targeted towards a
16 small cohort so that we can get to know them better
17 and more direct access, and become a more trusted
18 partner with them, and then advocate for their needs
19 citywide.

20 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great. Thank you all for your
21 testimony.

22 DR. SAYEED: Thank you.

23 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Our next panel will
24 include representatives from the Borough Presidents'
25 offices. From the Bronx Borough President's Office,

2 we have Deputy Bronx Borough President, Janet
3 Peguero, who's joining us via Zoom. From the
4 Manhattan Borough President's Office, we have
5 Director of Community Affairs, Trisha Shimamura, who
6 is here with us in person. And from the Brooklyn
7 Borough President's Office, we have Director of
8 Community Boards, Carol-Ann Church, who is also
9 joining us via Zoom.

10 Before we begin, I will administer the
11 affirmation.

12 Panelists, please raise your right hand. I'll
13 read the affirmation once and then call on each of
14 you individually for a response.

15 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
16 and nothing but the truth before these committees and
17 to respond honestly to council member questions?

18 Janet Peguero?

19 Hold on while we unmute you.

20 MS. PEGUERO: Yes, I do. Thank you.

21 COUNSEL MURRAY: Tricia Shimamura.

22 MS. SHIMAMURA: Yes, I do.

23 COUNSEL MURRAY: And Carol-Ann Church.

24 Sorry, let us unmute you. Go ahead.

25 MS. CHURCH: Yes, I do.

2 COUNSEL MURRAY: Great, thank you.

3 So we'll hear from Janet Piguero first, followed
4 by Tricia Shimamura, and then Carol-All Church.

5 After that, we'll open it up to councilmember
6 questions. Janet Peguero, you may begin when ready.

7 Bear with us while we unmute you again.

8 MS. PEGUERO: There we go. Thank you. Thank you
9 so much. Good morning. And thank you Chair Ung and
10 the members of Committee on Governmental Operations
11 for convening this hearing today. I am Deputy Bronx
12 Borough President Janet Piguero, testifying on behalf
13 of Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson.

14 The task of supporting the Bronx is 12 Community
15 Boards is an essential function of our office, and
16 one that we are continually working to improve. But
17 also look to the administration for more technical
18 assistance and stronger support in order for us to
19 reach our mission of community involvement in local
20 democracy.

21 This year, our office has transitioned to an
22 electronic application portal that will help
23 streamline the appointment process. The electronic
24 application provides broader access to our residents,
25 will improve collaboration with the Councilmembers by

2 providing real time updates, and will improve the
3 officers ability to compile the Annual Community
4 Board Demographics Report.

5 Additionally, we offer the application in
6 Spanish, the only borough to do so. We're conducting
7 outreach to the Spanish language press to ensure that
8 we are engaging all communities. Our goal is to
9 recruit residents who reflect the diversity of the
10 Bronx, and that includes the 46% of Bronxites who
11 speak Spanish at home.

12 These new processes will enable us to accomplish
13 this and give more people the opportunity to apply,
14 highlighting the need of the administration support,
15 and supporting more language access and support for
16 our Community Boards. Furthermore, we are aiming to
17 recruit and encourage a larger youth participation
18 with the promotion of our online portal, conducting
19 social media outreach, and working to directly reach
20 our students via our education and public school
21 advocates and stakeholders.

22 Since the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic, our
23 Community Boards have been nimble and made great
24 strides with holding meetings remotely and live
25 streaming them. Though this has brought some

positives, it's also brought some challenges. In the post-pandemic period, moving to a hybrid model can be a way to find a common ground while still adhering to the New York State open meetings law. Continuing hybrid meetings will require more investments in technology, to help the boards maintain this option. We've had had conversations with BronxNet, our local news media outlet, to improve the board's access to streaming broadcasting and recording, but this is not a complete solution.

The City should do more to fund the technology and services required for the boards to be able to stream and record their meetings. This could include cameras, microphones and internet hotspots as well as the training to operate these technologies appropriately. We hope that OTI will be able to fulfill this role.

Another challenge that the Community Boards are facing has to do with location, both their offices and their meeting spaces. Meeting spaces needs to be large enough to handle a full Community Board or committee meeting, be accessible to the members of the public, and be able to be equipped with AV technology and internet access. Presently, at least

2 four boards in our borough are seeking new district
3 office space. We're asking DCAS to work with our
4 boards to provide available space and additional
5 support to accommodate this process. These efforts
6 are highly supportive for other agencies, but
7 Community Boards tend to be forgotten.

8 Another common issue for many of the boards
9 citywide is that members do not have the requisite
10 planning experience to evaluate land use proposals
11 that come before them. Boards require access to
12 planning services to assist them by providing
13 professional expertise and guidance on these types of
14 land use issues. This cannot be done solely through
15 DCP, as the boards have to provide an independent
16 recommendation on projects. We propose that the city
17 council should consider funding for additional
18 planners that will work directly with the boards.

19 Our office hopes to increase the number of
20 trainings that the board members receive and expand
21 our new member orientation. Our office has provided
22 training on numerous topics, but we hope to continue
23 working with DCAS and the Civic Engagement Commission
24 to provide additional opportunities for training.
25 We're asking that the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit

2 update the Community Board Handbook, a vital resource
3 for the board members that has not been updated since
4 2010.

5 Overall, the city needs to provide more
6 assistance to Community Boards to help them achieve
7 their essential mission, which is ensuring that the
8 community voices can be heard in our local
9 government. We need to cut through the red tape and
10 help the boards get the resources training and
11 services that they need to fulfill their mandates.
12 Together we can ensure that Community Boards and the
13 hardworking and passionate board members who will who
14 fill them work even better moving forward.

15 Thank you so much for your time.

16 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you Next we'll hear from
17 Trisha Shimamura.

18 MS. SHIMAMURA: Good morning Chair Ung and
19 members of the Committee on Governmental Operations.
20 My name is Tricia Shimamura, and I am the Director of
21 Community Affairs in the Manhattan Borough
22 President's Office. I'd like to submit the following
23 testimony on behalf of Manhattan Borough President
24 Mark Levine, who was unfortunately unable to attend
25

2 today's hearing. Our full testimony has been
3 submitted as part of the public record.

4 Community Boards are one of our city's most local
5 essential elements of civic engagement and provide a
6 critical voice on issues like transportation, parks
7 and an open space, and land use, amongst many other
8 elements of urban living. The Manhattan Borough
9 President's office is committed to an equity agenda
10 that includes operating a robust outreach program to
11 encourage Manhattanites who have historically been
12 less represented on Community Boards to apply.

13 Particular attention has been spent on outreach
14 to youth 16 years and older, public housing
15 residents, people holding marginalized identities,
16 caregivers, immigrants, non-native English speakers,
17 people living with a disability, veterans, and other
18 Manhattanites who have long been underrepresented.

19 Our efforts to diversify our Manhattan boards are
20 both data driven and board specific. Our office
21 utilized a broad range of communication tools in
22 promoting the application process, including
23 partnering with community based organizations
24 educational forums, purchasing ads, through local
25 news outlets and on social media, as well as running

2 advertisements on LinkNYC kiosks throughout the
3 borough.

4 Creating diverse boards that reflect their
5 neighborhoods also means taking a close look at the
6 existing board composition. That is why we asked all
7 applicants, regardless if they were returning board
8 members or completely new, to submit a formal
9 application and to participate in a two hour
10 interview process. Applicants were judged based on
11 their ability to communicate with each other, problem
12 solve, find consensus, and identify creative
13 solutions to complex problems.

14 Our outreach efforts proved to be successful in
15 2022 with 892 applications, among the highest number
16 of applicants ever recorded in Manhattan. We are
17 very proud to report that of the 91. First time
18 appointees, 70% identify as BIPOC, including a
19 greater percentage of individuals who identify as
20 African Americans, Hispanic, and Latinx, and AAPI.
21 48% of first-time appointees identified as women, 42%
22 identified as men, and 1% identified as gender
23 nonconforming. 26.4% of new appointees are under the
24 age of 30 years old, with six individuals falling
25 underneath under the age of 20, and 79% of first-time

2 appointees do not own a car. More information can be
3 found on our website, ManhattanBP.nyc.gov.

4 We have taken ambitious steps towards providing
5 additional training and support to our Manhattan
6 Community Boards. We require all board members to
7 take three trainings per year, conflicts of interest,
8 EEO which is an equal employment opportunity, and
9 implicit bias.

10 Additionally, we have a week-long series of
11 virtual seminars focused on helping professionalize
12 Community Boards and giving them resources to
13 increase advocacy. Topics included conflict
14 resolution skills, environmental policy, and
15 understanding the city's budget. We also provided
16 specific onboarding training to all new board members
17 including reviewing HR responsibilities,
18 parliamentary procedure, and conflicts of interests.
19 These onboarding sessions will continue with the 2023
20 cohort.

21 Additionally, our office has worked to support
22 boards by providing access to MBPO staff and issue
23 area experts, and through our monthly borough service
24 cabinet and borough board meetings. Each meeting
25 features speakers focusing on topics relevant to

2 Community Boards, and time is dedicated to share best
3 practices among boards.

4 The pandemic and New York's ongoing recovery
5 continue to present unique challenges to Community
6 Boards. Subject to the open meetings law boards have
7 very little notice as to whether or not they can
8 continue to meet virtually as the decision is
9 dependent on State or City Emergency Order. This has
10 made it difficult to plan meetings, conduct outreach,
11 or secure venue spaces.

12 When the final emergency order is lifted, the
13 hybrid model will still require a quorum of board
14 members in person, and will also require the use of
15 audio and visual equipment to ensure fair
16 participation. Both options will decrease
17 accessibility for Community Board members and
18 potentially have a negative impact on public
19 participation. And in order to mitigate these
20 impacts, it is imperative that all boards receive
21 additional funding for technical equipment and
22 personnel in order to conduct essential business, as
23 well as continued support finding adequate space to
24 conduct in person or hybrid meetings.

2 We have continued to advocate for increasing the
3 budget for Community Boards and urge the state to
4 consider amending the open meetings law as it relates
5 to hybrid meetings, as we continue to adjust to the
6 new normal.

7 Lastly, there is still much work to be done to
8 make Community Boards more inclusive and accessible.
9 If Community Boards are to reflect the diversity and
10 cultural vitality of our city, they will have to be
11 fully language accessible. Language translation
12 services are currently difficult and costly to
13 access, and boards currently manage these services on
14 an ad hoc basis, not as part of regular operations.
15 The city must work to better provide language
16 translation services for Community Boards, and we
17 must continue to push for a changing culture that
18 incorporates multiple languages as part of regular
19 business.

20 As always, the Manhattan Borough President's
21 office stands ready to assist the City Council, our
22 fellow Borough Presidents, and of course our
23 Manhattan Community Boards in improving
24 representation and expanding support for the sake of
25 our collective future. Community Boards provide

2 critical services for our city and we remain
3 committed to ensuring the future of these services
4 for generations to come.

5 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Next we'll hear from
6 Carol-Ann Church.

7 MS. CHURCH: Good morning, Chair Ung and
8 Committee on Government Oversight. Thank you for
9 holding this hearing today. My name is Carol-Ann
10 Church, and I'm the Director of Community Boards for
11 Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso.

12 Prior to taking this role, I served as the
13 Assistant District Manager for Brooklyn Community
14 Board 2, so I'm very familiar with issues that
15 Community Boards face. Our boards are a critical
16 link between public and city government, weighing in
17 on everything from small businesses, to street
18 safety, and the availability of affordable housing.

19 As director of Community Boards and the point
20 person of contact for Brooklyn's 18 boards, I also
21 oversee the appointment process, sharing the Borough
22 President's goal of ensuring that Brooklyn's boards
23 are as diverse as the population of the communities
24 they represent. We know we have a way to go to
25 achieve that goal.

2 Our office has struggled to quantify this due to
3 a lack of available data. But we are aware that
4 historically, board members tend to be older, more
5 likely to own their own home, and drive a personal
6 vehicle than the general population.

7 To address this, our office has taken several
8 steps to improve the appointment process. We now
9 utilize an updated application designed to capture
10 additional demographic information, such as more
11 precise age ranges, housing types, preferred
12 transportation modes, educational attainment, and
13 even comfort with technology. This year, we targeted
14 our outreach efforts to two populations that remain
15 underrepresented on our boards: public housing,
16 residents and youth. We made contact with more than
17 150 NYCHA Tenant Association presidents, youth
18 leadership organizations, and our local colleges to
19 enlist their assistance with promoting applications.
20 Our partners at the College of Technology sent the
21 application to over 14,000 students.

22 We also met with community-based organizations
23 across the borough and some with citywide impact,
24 such as the Chinese American Planning Council, the
25 Organization of Staff Analysts, 500 Men Making A

2 Difference, and conducted outreach at the central
3 branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. We also
4 advertised the opportunity through media, we did a
5 public television episode, we use the LinkNYC kiosk,
6 and did a series of radio online and local newspaper
7 interviews and opinion pieces.

8 Our deadline was last Thursday, February 23. And
9 we've already started interviewing our applicants. I
10 look forward to doing a robust demographic analysis
11 of the applicants and appointees so we can quantify
12 the impact of these efforts.

13 Our office is also working to codify best
14 practices for appointments, we drafted an
15 interpretive statement on the requirements outlined
16 in the city charter. Our goal is to articulate the
17 standards that can inform the Comptroller's periodic
18 audits. All applicants must complete the full
19 application by the posted deadline. Once selected
20 for an interview, applicants must attend and
21 recommendations from the council member. If an
22 applicant is recommended from a council member, the
23 council member must certify that their applicant
24 meets the qualifications and that the appointment
25

2 furthers the goal of having a diverse and
3 representative board membership.

4 I know the Council is also interested in how we
5 support our Community Boards. This has been a
6 fraught subject for years as Borough Presidents'
7 Offices and agencies have debated their roles and
8 responsibilities, sometimes leaving the boards with
9 nowhere to turn. Our proposed interpretive statement
10 will address this by defining what types of training
11 and technical assistance our office can provide as
12 opposed to what other agencies should provide.

13 For example, the bar president's office can
14 provide connections to other agencies, legal
15 perspectives, and training on administrative tools,
16 whereas agencies should provide trainings on upon
17 request their areas of technical expertise. Our goal
18 is to ensure that boards will be able to obtain the
19 assistance they need from the appropriate source. We
20 understand this will require buy-in from the city
21 agencies, and we will continue to advocate for them
22 to have the dedicated staff to provide boards with
23 meaningful assistance.

24 Boards do need the resources to function.
25 Staffing is a particular concern as the boards'

2 existing budgets only provide for minimal number of
3 staff lines and leaves little room for competitive
4 salaries, making recruitment and retention of
5 professional staff difficult.

6 Additionally, Community Board offices must handle
7 tasks with little external support and no dedicated
8 staff. For example, Councilmembers offices rely on a
9 central staff for tasks such as HR, IT, and
10 procurement, but boards have no such resource.
11 Increasing their staff budgets and providing more
12 administrative supports would allow boards to be more
13 efficient and to connect more directly with their
14 constituents, encouraging diverse engagement from
15 others, including youth.

16 Advocates have also been long been asking for
17 professional planners to support our boards, which we
18 continue to advocate for. The boards need funding to
19 support technology upgrades to facilitate holding and
20 live streaming hybrid meetings, as well as producing
21 non-digital communications, such as flyers and
22 mailers, as well as translation services for those
23 materials for their websites and for their meetings.

24 Thank you for your time today and for drawing
25 attention to this very important issue. We look

2 forward to working with your City Council, and our
3 fellow Borough Presidents' Offices, to diversify and
4 offer the support for our Community Boards.

5 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. We will now turn to
6 Councilmember questions for the Borough Presidents'
7 panel. For panelists who are on Zoom, we'll send you
8 a new unmute request, and please just try to stay
9 unmuted throughout the question and answer period.
10 Go ahead, Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. I'd also like to
12 acknowledge my colleague, Gale Brewer, is here today.
13 Gale, do you have any questions first? Yes. Feel
14 free to... Yeah.

15 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Yeah. Okay. Thank you
16 very much. Obviously, I have a lot of experience
17 with Community Boards.

18 So the first question I have is: Are the Borough
19 Presidents-- I'm not a big CEC fan. I fought
20 against them when they were being created. I think
21 they're duplicating what you're doing. What do you
22 think?

23 MS. SHIMAMURA: I'm happy to jump in. So-- So
24 certainly, you know this very well, and we're we are
25 very much in our office working to expand upon the

2 work that's-- that's been done before. We do provide
3 robust trainings. We do provide robust-- we have
4 extremely high, I would say, expectations for our
5 board members to do mandatory trainings and to then
6 participate in these optional and additional
7 trainings. I think that while I am not the Borough--
8 Manhattan Borough President, so I won't speak on his
9 behalf, I will say that I think that from the
10 perspective of the Director of Community Affairs who
11 works very closely on this process, we're still
12 looking forward to seeing more coordination with CEC
13 to ensure that there is no duplication.

14 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. Because it seems to
15 me there is some, and they would give you-- if you
16 had some more funding to work on the Community
17 Boards, you could do it without CEC. Total
18 duplication in my book.

19 Second question is: Are you able to have the
20 same demographics-- Obviously, this is supposed to
21 be the law, but not easier-- easier said than done--
22 Community Boards to represent the demographics of the
23 community? Is that happening for all of those who
24 testified today? When you when you try to make sure
25 that the demographics of the Community Board

2 represent the demographics, we always did that, and I
3 just didn't know if it's possible to continue to do.

4 MS. SHIMAMURA: Absolutely. So not only are we--
5 are we using (and this is an longer version of the
6 testimony), but we use every single data tool that we
7 have-- have available to us. So US Census Bureau
8 data, data from the New York City Planning
9 Department, to look at-- as much as possible to
10 assess demographics based on geographical or racial
11 and ethnic breakdown, people who own-- the type of
12 housing that's there and things like that. But we're
13 also going further than that, arguably, and trying
14 to-- trying to understand diversity in-- in other
15 means: People who are caregivers, people who are--
16 who are teachers, or working non-salaried positions,
17 people who are-- don't use a car regularly. All
18 these other ways are trying-- are trying to look at
19 diversity and broadening of voices on our boards.
20 And so we are, of course, always looking for more
21 data-driven tools. And we'll continue to present
22 those demographics as-- as you did, but also-- we are
23 also trying to expand on-- on those voices that--
24 that have not had yet, we feel, a seat at the table.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. And the other
3 question I have is: Eight years is ridiculous. You
4 need at least 12. So my question is, if there is a
5 charter, Mayor, I guess or done by the Council would
6 do support at least 12 years for the members of the
7 board?

8 MS. SHIMAMURA: For me, unfortunately, since I'm
9 not the Borough President, I'm not able to-- I'm not
10 able to say-- to speak on where he falls on that at
11 this time, but I'm certainly willing to bring it back
12 to him.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. Because I-- are you
14 finding that leadership changes quickly because of
15 the eight years? Is that something that is of
16 concern to people? It's-- you know, you can't learn
17 land use in eight years. There's no way.

18 MS. SHIMAMURA: I think the boards are really--
19 are really starting to-- to realize that there are
20 term limits in place where we're seeing more
21 conversations about this. Of course, it's not going
22 to impact-- it's not-- it won't really impact them
23 for a couple more years, but we are seeing some--
24 I've-- anecdotally I'm seeing some boards start to
25 realize that this is the case and really think

2 carefully about leadership pipelines, about committee
3 leadership, about how they start to incorporate some
4 new voices earlier, so that they can learn some of
5 those leadership skills. So it's-- it's been-- it's
6 been really interesting to see. But I will certainly
7 bring back--

8 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: It might be interesting,
9 but it's not successful, in my opinion. Manhattan
10 has more land use than any other borough combined, in
11 terms of ULURPs, and so that's particularly where I
12 think you need the 12 years.

13 In terms of technology, is that something that
14 the boards still need? Or do you think that-- I know
15 there was a little bit extra funding that Mayor de
16 Blasio put in, some purchase technology. Is that
17 still an issue?

18 MS. SHIMAMURA: Still, I believe, yes. We
19 testified-- In the testimony, we say that boards are
20 still needing technological support, although I
21 wouldn't classify it all, you know, with one specific
22 need in mind. As you know, every board is a little
23 different. Some boards are in need of personnel to
24 help run that technology. Some boards are in need of
25 actual equipment. Some boards are still trying to

2 figure out what how they're going to manage in a
3 hybrid setting, and are, you know, are still-- those
4 needs are still a little unclear. So what is clear
5 is that more support, financial support, is needed
6 for these boards.

7 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then just
8 finally: Obviously, you have 800, 900 applicants,
9 you know, many of them are not going to get on just
10 because there's no room. Do you-- do any of the
11 Borough Presidents have ideas (I did not) as to how
12 to handle those who are qualified, just no space to
13 keep them involved in their communities?

14 MS. SHIMAMURA: Yes, I'm very excited about--
15 about what we're thinking about with these-- these
16 folks. I always look at the appointment day as a day
17 where it's a little sad for me because you say yes to
18 300 people, but you say no to, in our case, nearly
19 600. We are-- We are actively talking about
20 opportunities, like a volunteer corps, where you
21 become part of something that you regularly volunteer
22 in your communities. There's, of course, other
23 appointments that can be done. There are other--
24 There are other ways of engagement. I would like to
25 see us continuously engaged with those folks, so that

2 we don't just say no and say reapply again next year.
3 So hopefully more to come with that.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank you,
5 Madam Chair.

6 COUNSEL MURRAY: And just for the-- the panelists
7 on the Zoom, please feel free to go ahead and respond
8 to any of this as well.

9 MS. PEGUERO: Thank you, Councilmember Gale
10 Brewer. Great to see you. I just want to shine some
11 light on-- on the item regarding the expansive view
12 on diversity.

13 The Bronx Borough President's Office, as we
14 mentioned earlier, in our testimony, this is the
15 first year that we developed an online portal and
16 we've also translated our Community Boards
17 application into Spanish, to ensure again, that we--

18 GALE BREWER: I was I was listening to your
19 excellent testimony. Yes.

20 MS. PEGUERO: Thank you. And so you know, 40% of
21 our Bronxites speak Spanish at home. And currently,
22 right now, the language to accessibility-- and again,
23 I give up my-- the Borough President and myself give
24 huge thanks and shout outs to the City Councilmembers
25 on this committee for, you know, ensuring that when

2 the administration did provide testimony that we are
3 advocating for language access. That is a huge, huge
4 element. It is one thing that we're doing our job
5 and our due diligence and ensuring that there are
6 applications that are available in Spanish. Some
7 folks just feel more comfortable with their native
8 language. And that helps bridge-- bridge the gap.
9 But also there needs to be support. There needs to
10 be live support, in order to encourage the
11 involvement of this-- this level of diversity, and I
12 think it is crucial, and we definitely believe that
13 it should be mandatory and something that the
14 administration should deeply consider.

15 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So maybe CEC could be
16 helpful and pay for it. Thank you.

17 MS. PEGUERO: Thank you.

18 MS. CHURCH: I'd like to add a couple of things
19 as well. Diversity was just the theme for us this
20 year. "Your Voice Matters" was what we said. And in
21 order to reach underrepresented groups, apart from
22 the youth and NYCHA in those broad terms, we reached
23 out to community-based organizations that serve
24 individuals who do not speak English as a first
25 language. Specifically we reached out to them so

2 that they can get the word out, and possibly have
3 someone who can bridge the gap for their-- their
4 constituents, and the Community Board to join the
5 boards.

6 In diversity, we also spread it to look at
7 housing and transportation modes. Do you bike more
8 often? Or walk? Or do you own a car? We're looking
9 to make sure that all those voices are represented on
10 the boards. Where do you live? Do you live in rent-
11 stabilized housing or market rate condo? We look for
12 every possible area of diversity we're looking at
13 when we view our application process this year. It
14 was a much more robust application in terms of what
15 was being requested demographically.

16 There was one more thing: In terms of
17 technology, having worked at a board for 12 years
18 before coming here, boards need so much more support.
19 CEC does offer some assistance, but that assistance
20 comes with having to have the budget to use it. So
21 that would be reflective of why the usage numbers are
22 so low. It isn't that there isn't a need. It's that
23 the boards do not have a budget in order to take
24 advantage of those services. Thank you.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I guess my
3 comment would be, literally, I haven't done many,
4 many hearings with translation in the back with a
5 person with the technology. When needed, that should
6 be available. And like I said CEC should pay for it.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. Also I'd like to
9 acknowledge Councilmember Kalman Yeger joining us
10 today.

11 I actually do have one follow up question: How
12 often does the Borough President's Office and CEC
13 connect and communicate regarding working with
14 Community Boards? Is it you know, Borough President
15 by Borough President? Is it-- you know, I still
16 think, because it's the CEC and really the Borough
17 President's office that give the most assistance to
18 the Community Boards in theory. How often do-- do
19 the two groups, you know, CEC and the Borough
20 Presidents connect?

21 MS. CHURCH: Can I go? This is Carol-Ann Church.
22 Um, I think I have a good working relationship with
23 CEC, with Ben Solotaire. I recently said to him,
24 "Hey, Ben, I'm thinking of doing a training for our
25 board members on program evaluation and monitoring."

2 And he actually got that done for us, as CEC
3 facilitated the contract for getting that done. And
4 it was good. So we do interact. He attends our
5 Borough Report Meetings and our Borough Service
6 Cabinet meetings.

7 MS. PEGUERO: Same here for the record. I just
8 want to share that we do connect and work with our
9 CECs. But I think that this hearing and this
10 conversation has shined a light on what-- what we
11 need to prioritize and what the discussion should be
12 around in terms of additional resources and services
13 and support for our Community Board members.

14 MS. SHIMAMURA: I probably echo that, in terms of
15 general coordination. But I would like to just be
16 very clear on the role of Borough Presidents. We
17 take the role of training and assistance extremely
18 seriously. So for us, the-- the responsibilities
19 for-- and the relationship between Borough Presidents
20 and the Community Boards is very, very clear. We do
21 not just do appointments. We do-- we provide robust
22 trainings. We provide robust support. And I think
23 that while our office is still working on that
24 coordination with the CEC, it's for us very clear
25 what our responsibilities are.

2 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. And just one
3 followup question to all three of you, since this has
4 been brought up so much today about the issue of
5 language justice and language access. How does each
6 of your offices envision, you know, CEC, yourselves,
7 the City Council, New York City, like, to be more
8 engaging and to be more helpful to the Community
9 Boards because of this issue?

10 MS. SHIMAMURA: I'm happy to jump in because I
11 included it in our-- in our testimony. Currently,
12 language translation services for full board
13 meetings, which the Councilmember had referenced
14 before, it's something that's done on an ad hoc
15 basis. It is costly. It is-- It is difficult to
16 access and without significant lead time, Community
17 Boards are truly struggling to-- to meet the needs of
18 these communities.

19 At a bare minimum, we believe that that should be
20 what's achieved. And it is just too difficult to do
21 right now. We do believe, as I mentioned in our
22 testimony, that not only should these as-needed
23 translation services be more easily accessible for
24 Community Boards, but truly, we should be doing more
25 to really embrace a multilingual atmosphere on these

2 boards so that, as somebody else-- as another member
3 had noted, we change the culture around who's even
4 accessing or engaging with Community Boards.

5 If our-- if more language access is not done, we-
6 - it would be unreasonable to expect people who don't
7 speak English to regularly engage with their
8 Community Boards when they're looking for resources,
9 when they're looking to take a stand or advocate for
10 something in their neighborhoods. So in addition to
11 creating more-- just on a bare minimum, more access,
12 in terms of translation services, we should be
13 thinking about other ways to really change the
14 culture around what languages are used in and with
15 our Community Boards.

16 MS. PEGUERO: I also want to add to that. You
17 know, the lack of language access is a deterrent for
18 local engagement of local democracy. And without it,
19 are we really doing our jobs of encouraging, again,
20 local democracy? And so the fact that Community
21 Boards have to kind of navigate and figure it out
22 without-- with limited resources, is really a
23 deterrent, and it does not speak to our mission.
24 We're looking to serve the most vulnerable New
25 Yorkers by, you know, formalizing and stabilizing our

2 Community Boards. And so a huge percentage of our
3 borough does not speak English, and so that
4 completely removes them from the ability of being a
5 part of local democracy, and speaking to the changes
6 that are coming to their communities.

7 I know that the City of New York tries to do
8 better when-- when we speak of equity and diversity
9 by ensuring language access through other city
10 agencies, but that same effort needs to be mirrored
11 on a local level through our Community Boards.

12 MS. CHURCH: I can only echo my colleagues here,
13 saying that when we talk of civic engagement, and we
14 leave a high percentage of our residents here in New
15 York City, we're not doing a good job. Civic
16 engagement begins, as we like to say, at the
17 Community Board level, and when our citizens cannot
18 even engage there, they're not going to be voters,
19 they're not going to possibly engage in public works,
20 good volunteer opportunities.

21 So the lack of language resources really impacts
22 not just the individual's quality of life, that
23 particular language group, access to resources, it
24 really impacts the way they integrate with society.

2 So it's really critical that we expand language
3 resources.

4 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great. Thank you all for your
5 testimony. I just want to-- Do you? Great. A
6 colleague has a couple more questions for you. Thank
7 you.

8 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Thank you very much. I
9 don't want to let you go without my fun. I, by no
10 means, have as much experience in this as my
11 colleague, Councilmember Brewer, but I do have some
12 and in every aspect of my professional and personal
13 life. I've interacted with Community Boards as a
14 teenaged aide to a member of this body, as an aide to
15 a Borough President, and as an 18-year member of my
16 own Community Board (to which I was appointed by
17 three Borough Presidents, one of whom works across
18 the hall from here), and in every single part of that
19 experience I found that Community Boards were the
20 very foundation (as the representative of Borough
21 President Levine said), of our community. It's the--
22 it's the most important part of government, in fact.
23 And a lot of attention today was paid to membership
24 on the board, which is I think, very important. But
25 I wanted to ask about the resources for the

2 professional part of the board. The work that the
3 board does, as the-- what should be the first place
4 that people in the community turn to for a standard
5 problem like a pothole.

6 And in my communities, I'm very fortunate that I
7 do have boards where people in the community know
8 that they can call the board. But I'm curious, and
9 I'd like all the Borough Presidents' Offices to
10 answer if you can, what kind of professional
11 assistance to the problem-solving work that Borough
12 Presidents-- that Community Boards have to do, do you
13 provide? In any order, I guess the person here.
14 Hello.

15 MS. SHIMAMURA: Hi, Councilmember. Again, Trisha
16 Shimamura, from the Manhattan Borough President's
17 Office. I'm-- We're very proud of our relationship
18 with our District Managers in this, and the
19 professional staffs at every Community Board in
20 Manhattan. Not only do we-- And we've taken a
21 particular eye towards when we meet together, which
22 is on a monthly basis, at a minimum, with the Bureau
23 Service Cabinet meeting, to use those meetings as a
24 way to really check in with everybody, share best
25 practices, give boards the space to strategize

2 together, when it comes to shared problems, and come
3 up with some really strong solutions.

4 An example is just last month, when we were
5 talking about how boards go about publicizing
6 meetings and how they get more members of the public
7 to participate in those meetings, we gave space in
8 our actual meeting for District Managers to do a
9 small presentation on the ins and outs of social
10 media, how a flyer should get attention, how to go
11 about formatting it for LinkNYC kiosks, who you need
12 to contact in order to get those up on the kiosks,
13 and really do try to give space for those best
14 practices.

15 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: I appreciate that very
16 much. But-- But my question really is: You know, so
17 much attention has been paid to the public meetings
18 of the Community Boards, which is but 1/30th of the
19 month. That's a very important part of the what the
20 Community Board does, but it's one day of the month.
21 The other 29 days, the Community Board is there doing
22 the work in the community. And I guess the question
23 that I have is: You know, when a Community Board
24 District Manager is reaching out to a city agency and
25 getting the door slammed in his face -- which I think

2 we all know, anecdotally and in reality, it does
3 happen all across the city every day -- what assist
4 can a Borough President's office give? And what are
5 you doing--? Do you have a resource to turn to --
6 and this is for all three borrowers that are here --
7 Do they have a place to turn to? And are you able to
8 help them push that door wide open?

9 MS. SHIMAMURA: We certainly do. And again, in
10 response to that, we do whatever we can to support
11 them. That-- In those instances, when they come up,
12 we oftentimes to make sure and try to ensure that the
13 city agency is then represented at Borough Service
14 Cabinet, so that if they aren't responding or being
15 responsive to a single Community Board, then they
16 have another opportunity to-- for the issue to be
17 addressed at a Borough Service Cabinet meeting with
18 us in the room. We share our contacts and-- in terms
19 of individuals we found to be more responsive at
20 various agencies. And we do really try to address it
21 on a case-by-case, Community-Board-by-Community-Board
22 basis. And we found it to be very successful. We
23 regularly talk about the case work and the work that
24 goes on -- as you put it, the rest of the 29 days of
25 the of the month -- and are fairly open in terms of

2 our lines of communication with our boards to address
3 any problems that come up.

4 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Let's look the folks from
5 Brooklyn and the Bronx--

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I just want to add
7 something: Most of the District Managers in
8 Manhattan are either former staff or former interns
9 of mine. They know what they're doing.

10 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: I don't doubt that anybody
11 who ever worked for Councilmember Brewer knows
12 exactly what they're doing.

13 MS. PEGUERO: That's right. Thank you,
14 Councilmember Yeger. Thank you for the opportunity.
15 And thank you for the question. You know, I just
16 want to echo my colleague at the Manhattan Borough
17 President's Office. At the Bronx Borough President's
18 Office, we mirror a very similar structure, from FOIL
19 to KOI, to record retention, to Robert's Rules of
20 Order, EEO, sexual harassment, interview best
21 practices.

22 Just recently, we hosted a 10-hour training for
23 Board staff and members on structured interviewing
24 and unconscious bias, and it was very well received.

2 You know, again, conflict resolution, open
3 meetings, social media usage. But I do want to
4 highlight, and we stressed this in our testimony,
5 that the handbook-- the handbook hasn't been updated
6 since 2010. You know, an office staff and board
7 members have turnover. And they really do rely on
8 the handbook, which is completely outdated. And
9 that's-- you know, that's the biggest feedback that
10 we received from our District Managers and members
11 alike. So I do want to highlight and amplify that
12 need for the handbook to be updated. It hasn't been
13 updated since 2010.

14 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: And what agency produces
15 that handbook?

16 MS. PEGUERO: That's the Mayor's-- the Mayor's
17 Office--

18 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: CAU.

19 MS. PEGUERO: --Community Affairs unit.

20 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Okay. Okay. And Brooklyn?

21 MS. CHURCH: Brooklyn. So we offer as much
22 support as possible on a daily basis as situations
23 arise. If they don't respond to the District Manager
24 and they don't respond to me, then it goes to our
25 Chief of Staff. Unless someone has a personal

2 relationship, it goes through the Chief of Staff, up-
3 - up to the other agency. We also use our Borough
4 Service Cabinet as a way of getting conversations
5 going, especially when they involve more than one
6 agency, because multi-agency issues can be really
7 difficult to resolve, because there's always a gap in
8 between where agency A, you know, begins an ends, and
9 agency B picks it up. And so the Borough Service
10 Cabinet can really fill in that gap.

11 So that's how we try to assist the boards.

12 Again, you know, the Borough President's Office is
13 not an enforcing agency. So all we can do really is
14 advocate as strongly as possible for our Community
15 Boards.

16 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Okay. And thank you all for
18 joining us today.

19 MS. PEGUERO: Thank you, Chair.

20 MS. CHURCH: Thank you.

21 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. We will now turn to
22 public testimony. We'll be limiting public testimony
23 today to three minutes per panelist. For in-person
24 panelists, please come up to the table once your name
25 has been called. For virtual panelists, once I call

2 your name a member of our staff will unmute you and
3 the sergeant will set the timer and give you the go
4 ahead to begin. So please just wait for the sergeant
5 to announce that you may begin before starting your
6 testimony. So our first panel will include three in-
7 person panelists. Celestina Leon, Shawn Campbell,
8 and Jeremy Laufer, please come up to the table now.

9 Feel free to begin whenever you're ready in
10 whatever order you prefer.

11 MS. LEON: All right. Good morning. My name is
12 Celestina Leon, and I'm the District Manager of
13 Brooklyn Community Board 4, which serves Bushwick.
14 Although today I'm here on behalf of the Future of
15 Community Boards Working Group. This year makes six
16 years that I'm the District Manager of Community
17 Board 4, and it is about year three that I've been
18 working with the working group.

19 Prior to the pandemic, I initiated a conversation
20 among colleagues in Brooklyn about the challenges
21 that Community Boards face. This eventually became
22 the future of Community Boards Working Group, which
23 primarily includes District Managers citywide. Our
24 first report you may be familiar with was published
25 in December of 2021. We also have discussed, and

2 continue to discuss, land use challenges, district
3 needs, operations. We've heard a lot today about
4 language access and technology. In the past year,
5 we've also established the first website for all
6 Community Boards. Boards individually have their own
7 website, but our only online presence was under the
8 mayor's Community Affairs Unit, which as autonomous
9 city agencies, we thought it made sense to have our
10 own presence as a collective. You can now find us at
11 nyc.gov/CommunityBoards.

12 We look forward to continuing the dialogue with
13 our agency partners and the Governmental Operations
14 Committee, and we're excited to share a followup
15 report outlining our work over the past year.

16 Today you will hear from colleagues that have
17 taken the lead on specific challenges. I want to
18 thank them all for their insight and support. And
19 I'd like you thank you for this opportunity to speak
20 as well.

21 MS. CAMPBELL: Hello, my name is Shawn Campbell
22 and I'm District Manager of Community Board 14 in
23 Brooklyn, and here on behalf of boards in general to
24 speak about our baseline budget. Community Boards
25 are historically under resourced and have not had a

2 significant baseline budget expansion since 2014, and
3 that's debatable depending on your definition of
4 "significant."

5 Staffing needs and responsibilities have
6 nevertheless grown. Future of Community Board
7 Working Group participants have reported having
8 challenges with hiring and retaining staff due to
9 budget constraints. The baseline budgets of many
10 city agencies saw double-digit percentage increases
11 in the last decade. The headcount at many of our
12 sister agencies has increased accordingly. For
13 example, from 2001 to 2021, headcount at DOB
14 increased by 138%, DYCD by 131%, Parks by 104% (and
15 good for them), but Community Boards headcount
16 citywide has decreased in that same time period by
17 11%.

18 Yet our responsibilities have increased. We've
19 been assigned additional responsibilities for
20 accounting with FMS and passport. District Managers
21 are now Agency Privacy Officers. There have been
22 eight zoning text amendments in the past three years.
23 Service delivery requests are up. And our meetings
24 are held in various combinations of remote, in-

2 person, and hybrid requiring new technical skills and
3 often equipment.

4 City Council provided two allocations of \$42,500
5 in 2018 and 2019. But these were not baselined funds
6 and could not be used to hire staff or make long-term
7 plans. Some boards have addressed these challenges
8 by forming "Friends Of" groups. But other boards
9 don't have the capacity or the-- or the communities
10 that can pony up for their Community Boards, and some
11 of us feel awkward about going hat-in-hand to the
12 communities that we are charged with serving.

13 While the city covers rent cost, the qualities of
14 offices varies widely. One District Manager reported
15 not having light switches in their office for a
16 decade while another has been waiting for over 10
17 years for their bathrooms to be made accessible.
18 Some districts have meeting spaces, while others must
19 turn to local space creating additional
20 administrative and budget burdens. Needs vary from
21 board to board, but all boards would increase the
22 number and pay rate for staff. In a time of budget
23 austerity, Community Boards are a good investment for
24 city dollars. The city has the advantage of 50
25 community members who serve voluntarily.

2 In 2018, the Charter Revision Commission
3 established the Civic Engagement Commission as
4 evidence that local input is a value that the city
5 espouses. Just last week, the Department of City
6 Planning announced a new Civic Engagement Unit. Are
7 these possibly lost efficiencies when Community
8 Boards are the established liaison to local
9 communities? Our district offices are already on the
10 ground, and our district needs statement is already a
11 well-documented expression of local needs.

12 As the most local city agency, we give voice to
13 the individuals who make up our communities. City
14 agencies have expressed a desire to reach the most
15 local levels and communities. We are their liaison,
16 and the value of this role should be reflected in our
17 baseline budget. Thank you.

18 MR. LAUFER: Good morning. My name is Jeremy
19 Laufer. I'm the District Manager for Brooklyn
20 Community Board 7. I have previously testified
21 before this committee and others about our board
22 support for Intro 570, so I could spare you my
23 biography.

24 I join many of my colleagues today to discuss
25 Community Board resources and needs, but I want to be

2 clear that each of us is an independent agency
3 serving different populations that we are well aware
4 of, and geographic areas. Our needs are not exactly
5 the same in all areas.

6 Today, I would like to reiterate our request for
7 assistance in providing interpretation and
8 translation services at the Community Board level, as
9 well as a request for security evaluations for all of
10 our public offices.

11 In previous testimony, I discussed two public
12 meetings in which interpretation was left to our
13 board so that our other agencies could communicate
14 with the public. In October 2020, our board invited
15 DOT to present on major plans to change two avenues
16 in the heart of Brooklyn Chinatown. Despite our
17 request for interpretation, DOT informed us that that
18 was entirely up to us. We paid an outside service
19 nearly 5% of our entire OTPs for the year for a
20 single meeting to provide interpretation services.
21 And by the way DOT did not translate its
22 presentation. So much of it was useless for a huge
23 plurality, if not majority, of our audience.

24 The other meeting was at the request of MTA, to
25 inform the community about an elevator installation

2 at the Eighth Avenue subway station, again in the
3 heart of Brooklyn, Chinatown.

4 The \$50 billion agency refused to provide
5 interpretation and left that to the quarter-million-
6 dollar agency.

7 As it was at the end of the fiscal year, we did
8 not have enough money in our budget for the
9 unexpected cost, and we needed to rely on board
10 members to provide interpretation, which is not
11 particularly reliable.

12 Our board holds 8 to 12 public meetings a month.
13 Currently our need for interpretation is impossible
14 to meet. And it's not like we have been quiet on the
15 issue, having testified before the city council,
16 requested systems from the mayor's office and the
17 CEC, lobbied Borough Presidents and other elected
18 officials, and many of us have made it a high
19 priority in our annual budget requests, so far to no
20 avail.

21 We have also recently learned that the
22 Comptroller has created a form to report language
23 access problems with city agencies, including
24 Community Boards. Ironically, our boards can now be
25 officially reprimanded for not providing the unfunded

2 mandate for which we have been requesting funding and
3 our resources. Our 59 tiny independent agencies can
4 not self-fund this mandate.

5 In addition to the necessity for interpretation
6 and translation services for our agencies, I also
7 want to bring to your attention the need for security
8 evaluations for all our offices. Recently, one of my
9 staff members was confronted by an angry patron of
10 the Brooklyn Public Library with whom my agency
11 temporarily shares a building. Often we are confused
12 for the library. It didn't strike me until recently
13 why the library has a security guard resource we do
14 not have. You can read the rest of my testimony. I
15 know I've reached my time.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So all thank you very
17 much. I'm a big supporter of District Managers. One
18 question is: When you have translation, it's
19 obviously a human being with the technology to do the
20 translation. And if that was available at your
21 general meetings -- not to mention the special DOT
22 are the special occurrences -- would that make a big
23 difference in terms of participation at your
24 meetings? Number one. And the second issue is, just
25 generally technology: This is what I find. It's

2 hard to get space for the meanings. These are the
3 ones that are in person or maybe hybrid, and
4 sometimes you're in a basement, you're in the-- I
5 know there's one basement of a synagogue that has no
6 internet access, no matter what you do. So is the
7 issue of technology general something-- generally
8 something that is challenging for you? Those are my
9 two questions.

10 MR. LAUFER: Thank you. My board is actually
11 quite lucky in that we have a large meeting space in
12 our building. With regard to technology, all of us
13 have 59 different ways in which we are able to
14 provide access. My board uses Zoom. Zoom has an
15 interpretation feature, where we could have-- we have
16 hired, in that particular meeting I mentioned,
17 interpreters who are actually off site, who were able
18 to provide a simultaneous-- simultaneous
19 interpretation. Zoom, I assume other platforms, is
20 very helpful in that.

21 But again, we have 59 different systems. And it
22 will require, if we are hiring an outside agency,
23 for-- for my board, that's \$300 an hour.

24 MS. LEON: I'd also like to echo my colleagues
25 comments and say that having translation assistance

2 for our meetings would dramatically affect how folks
3 in our district are able to be involved. We've been
4 exploring ways to mirror the model of the Community
5 Education Councils, and we hope that our upcoming
6 conversation with the Civic Engagement Commission may
7 lead to something more fruitful than what we've been
8 hearing thus far.

9 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. And I also note you
10 get an Urban Fellow from Aldrin Bonilla, or from the
11 Fund for the City of New York. Does that work out?
12 How do you use this person? Et cetera.

13 MS. CAMPBELL: I have three Planning Fellows from
14 the Fund for the City of New York right now, and it
15 works out beautifully in terms of being able to
16 really dig in and-- dig in and dig deep on questions
17 that are pending on the board that we don't have the
18 staff capacity to drill down on.

19 And just quickly on: Translation services would
20 indeed help us reach a broader audience. And then
21 on-the-spot interpretation services would make that
22 participation meaningful. We've actually had to
23 limit where we hold our public meetings when we have
24 had them in person. We used to bop around our
25 district a little bit more. But now we're kind of in

2 one spot, because we know we have the capacity to
3 stream it there.

4 MS. LEON: In reference to the Planning Fellows,
5 we also believe that they hold great support for our
6 district. We have two right now. We've worked with
7 the program before. And whenever there are projects
8 that the board would like to move forward with
9 limited staff capacity, I often rely on them to be
10 able to do so.

11 MR. LAUFER: I just want to reference the
12 Planning Fellows as well. We have one at the moment
13 who's helping our board become a citywide leader on
14 last-mile trucking issues and is also helping us
15 initiate a study of Third Avenue the most dangerous
16 roadway in Brooklyn because DOT has refused to
17 initiate that study.

18 MS. CAMPBELL: If I could quickly add, bringing
19 that-- bringing that Planning Fellows program up to
20 scale citywide is one way that we could have a
21 planning person at each board

22 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: No, because they leave
23 after the year. So you'd have to have more funding
24 is what you're requesting to have somebody there on a
25

2 permanent basis. Is that what your saying? Because
3 I believe that--

4 MS. CAMPBELL: Even better. Even better.

5 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you. You do need a
6 planner. There's no question. Thank you. Another
7 thing CEC could do.

8 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Thank you. First of all,
9 I'm a little biased. But I know Brooklyn has the
10 best District Managers of anywhere in the city. And
11 I'm sitting next to Councilmember Brewer, so I'm
12 going to take some heat for saying that. But I know
13 it's true, and some of you are my friends and my
14 colleagues. And my home board is here in this
15 building today, so I have to behave.

16 I appreciate Mr. Laufer, that, you know, in your
17 last paragraph that you left off, because of time, it
18 sort of hit home, because you mentioned my friend and
19 colleague, your friend and colleague, James Davis.
20 And it really did talk about some of the concerns
21 that you bring with regard to your office and
22 security. And this is-- Again, this is a 59-
23 building problem around the city, where I think the
24 common denominator of a lot of things that we are
25 hearing, with regard to security, with regard to

2 staffing, with regard to budgeting, with regard to
3 your interactions with government agencies is, in
4 essence, that the Community Boards are treated as the
5 stepchild of municipal government in a way that
6 doesn't recognize, as Jeremy said, the independence
7 of a city agency. It is a city agency. It's not
8 subservient to any other agency. It's a free-
9 standing, charter-created city agency.

10 So I'd like to just ask a few questions. First
11 of all, to each of you, how many staff do you have,
12 paid staff?

13 MS. CAMPBELL: One full time, one part time, and
14 me.

15 MS. LEON: Two full time, including myself.

16 MS. LAUFER: Three full time, including myself.

17 MR. YEGER: These are city agencies that are
18 responsible for in some instances, close to 200,000
19 of our neighbors, and sometimes because these lines
20 haven't been redrawn in decades, over 200,000
21 neighbors. They're not equally drawn like, like
22 political districts.

23 Do you-- Do you find in your interactions with
24 city agencies, when from the mundanity of a
25 constituent calling about a pothole, to the broader

2 problems like redesigning Third Avenue, that you know
3 -- not to pick on any one particular agency but let's
4 just say [coughs] DOT -- that they treat Community
5 Boards as-- as a part of the government, or more --
6 let's just get my bias out, because this is what I've
7 seen -- more as simply a nagging constituent,
8 reporting a problem?

9 MR. LAUFER: Well, you just picked a scab for me.
10 DOT is not my favorite agency. I think you've
11 characterized it very well, that they-- I think they
12 consider Community Boards more of an annoyance.

13 MS. LEON: We are very fortunate to have a great
14 liaison from DOT at the current time, although I
15 think that it depends, and it varies from agency by
16 agency. If you do not have a great relationship with
17 the liaison, you may not get as much done. That
18 being said, in the short-term sense, we're able to
19 address potholes, you know, small scale issues.

20 When it comes to larger projects, there have been
21 challenges. We've tried to rise above those
22 challenges very creatively, although that has led to
23 us relying on outside sources to be able to come up
24 with studies that we continue to hear need to be
25 done, but we never get a timeline to actually do

2 those studies from the agency themselves. So I
3 think, you know, with very limited means we've
4 happened to be very creative, but it really relies on
5 our relationship with those agencies to be
6 successful.

7 MS. CAMPBELL: I think with most agencies when it
8 comes to day-to-day service delivery, our rapport is
9 such that we get the assistance on-- on the baseline
10 asks. Where we get into bigger policy, or planning -
11 - land use changes, zoning -- that's where we're
12 treated less like the valuable funnel for public
13 input that we actually are.

14 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Do you find that-- that
15 before a city agency undertakes a major (depending on
16 what your definition of major is) infrastructure, I
17 won't say improvement, but "thing" that they're doing
18 in the neighborhood, that there's a sufficient
19 consultation for you to be confident that they've
20 taken the concerns of the neighborhood into-- into
21 consideration as they do these projects?

22 MS. CAMPBELL: Too often they make their jobs
23 much harder on themselves by not coming to us first,
24 or early.

25 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: I'm getting nods. And...

2 MR. LAUFER: I share that-- that comment.

3 MS. LEON: I would also echo that comment. And I
4 have a, you know, particular policy not to call
5 anything out in specific, but I guess I am. But
6 there is the Parks Without Borders initiative from
7 the Parks Department. And granted, it's an amazing,
8 you know, proposal. It wants to make, you know,
9 landscape design more accessible. However, every
10 neighborhood, every district is different. And when
11 a Community Board is telling you, this is not going
12 to work in a district for very specific safety
13 reasons. They're not just saying it to, you know,
14 waste their time. They're saying it to be
15 intentional and to prevent issues further down the
16 line. So again, you know, best intentions can have
17 disastrous results in a district, and we seek to
18 prevent that, and we hope our agency partners will
19 work with us.

20 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Well now you've picked my
21 scab. Because Parks Without Borders is-- is one of
22 the banes of-- of my existence. And-- and they
23 don't-- and they don't. You're right. I mean, I--
24 and I don't want to do the dialogue, because it's
25

2 really supposed to be Q&A, and the bell rang, and the
3 Chair has been nice to me.

4 But the city agencies, in my experience, come in
5 and heavy-foot us, big-foot us. You know, and I
6 think-- I think wise Councilmembers, wise elected
7 officials, and I know some of your work for elected
8 officials (one of you was my colleague 200 years ago
9 here in this body), I think it's to the detriment of
10 elected officials who don't value the Community
11 Board, because you are the-- the eyes and ears and
12 when the city agencies come and big-foot us, I mean,
13 my experience, for example, in 14 and also in 12,
14 which we'll hear from in a little while, has been
15 that a city agency has done something, and then it
16 didn't work, and they had to undo it, or they refuse
17 to undo it, even ignoring the evidence that it didn't
18 work.

19 I guess the point that just going-- I'll wrap up
20 Chair. I guess the point that I'm going to, and as I
21 said, the common denominator, it's this-- it's this
22 idea that somehow the Community Boards, as one of you
23 testified, that is more of a hindrance to municipal
24 government, rather than a successful arm that ought
25 to be respected. And I think the-- you know, you've

2 seen that in a lot of things. For example, when we
3 did the-- the 42-5 allocations, and they weren't
4 baselined, it was it was almost like a nice little,
5 you know, holiday gift. And you try to do something
6 nice for the year, but you can't permanentize an
7 improvement in the agency. And I think it's very
8 important for us as we go into the budget this year,
9 Madam Chair, and I know you're very involved in this,
10 that we push for more resources into Community Boards
11 so that they can do the jobs that we here rely on you
12 to do.

13 And I'll let the Chair have the mic back because
14 we got to move on. But thank you very much for being
15 here.

16 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you for your testimony.
17 I just have one quick question. Earlier, there was
18 testimony that CEC is having their meetings, and
19 there may be a way to mirror that model in terms of
20 language access. Can you explain a little further
21 what that looks like?

22 MS. LEON: Sure. So to my understanding, right
23 now, the Community Education Councils for the
24 Department of Education provide dual-language
25 interpretation during their monthly meetings. So we

2 essentially reached out to them to see if they-- we
3 would be able to use the same vendor. I spoke with
4 my local district CEC. Unfortunately, because it's
5 the DOE, that was more bureaucratic than easy to do.
6 So we decided to go the other route that we have,
7 which is working with the Civic Engagement Commission
8 to see if there are other resources, vendors, or
9 potential opportunities, which led to us scheduling a
10 meeting on March 9 to further discuss it.

11 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Understood. So with CEC, they
12 are working the DOE, and it is DOE who's providing
13 that vendor.

14 MS. LEON: Correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great. Thank you.

16 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. We will now be
17 calling up our next panel, which will be an in-person
18 panel of two panelists, Barry Spitzer and Camacho.
19 Please come up to the table now.

20 And after that, we'll be moving to Zoom
21 panelists.

22 Good morning. My name is Barry Spitzer, I'm the
23 District Manager of Brooklyn's Community Board 12.
24 Thank you Madam Chair and Councilmembers for taking

2 the time to hold this hearing and listen to
3 testimony.

4 My testimony is going to focus on our autonomy as
5 an independent city agency as established in the city
6 charter.

7 Recent years have become commonplace for other
8 city agencies to impose Community Boards rules,
9 regulations, and procedures that are entirely made up
10 without any basis in law or it being within their
11 authority to do so. This practice has had negative
12 impacts on our boards, our staff, and our ability to
13 manage our agencies effectively.

14 There are many examples, but in the interest of
15 time, I will just highlight a few.

16 In July of 2019, Brooklyn Borough Hall issued a
17 decree that they will only process PARs (which is
18 Planned Action Reports) if they receive a copy of the
19 board minutes at which the action was presented to
20 and approved by the entire board. Many boards raised
21 the objection to this new rule simply stating that
22 every board operates under their own bylaws and have
23 their own policies and procedures for personnel
24 matters.

2 It took many months for them to acknowledge that,
3 indeed, the boards have a duty to follow their own
4 bylaws, but the damage was done. Many boards who had
5 filed PARs with OMB were left hanging.

6 Due to these actions, I personally lost thousands
7 of dollars in wages.

8 Another rule that was arbitrarily imposed is the
9 need for a justification letter submitted in
10 conjunction with a PAR. This may seem trivial, but I
11 know from my colleagues, that this has already held
12 up some board staff from getting paid.

13 In one instance OMB approved my colleagues PAR,
14 but Borough Hall asked for a letter of justification,
15 and not wanting to find the issue she sent the
16 letter. Borough Hall did not accept it because they
17 now said it needs to come from the Chair. And this
18 is for a staff member in the office. So the Chair
19 sent a justification in an e-mail under protest
20 because she was she told Borough Hall she didn't want
21 to set precedent.

22 Borough Hall again refused to accept it because
23 there was no letterhead.

24 Meanwhile, this staffer, who was not making much
25 to begin with, her raise is being held up for

2 something that Borough Hall had no right to ask for
3 to begin with.

4 Additionally, OMB got into the habit of not
5 honoring the PAR dates boards are submitting. I
6 quote from an e-mail I saw when a board inquired why
7 OMB changed the effective date.

8 "The effective date for PARs are either at the
9 time they are signed and approved by OMB or after."

10 I submit, no they are not, as the agency's budget
11 is, it is their decision not OMBs. By changing the
12 date support staff have lost thousands of dollars.

13 I also know of a case that OMB and Borough Hall
14 refused to process a wage increase for a staff member
15 of a board who was going back to school because of
16 the adjustment in the weekly hours. This went on for
17 over a year, was based on nothing, and the staffer
18 lost that money.

19 It is time that these agencies operate within the
20 laws, policies, and procedures outlined in the New
21 York City Charter. I thank the committee.

22 COUNSEL MURRAY: Camacho you can go ahead.

23 MR. CAMACHO: Hello, my name is Robert Camacho.
24 I'm the Chairperson of CB4 in Bushwick. I've been on
25 the board for 34 years, five years as the Chair, four

2 Borough Boards. Marty Markowitz, Howard Golden, Eric
3 Adams, and now Antonio Reynoso. I lived in Bushwick
4 all my life. It's really changing. Nobody wanted to
5 live there. Now everybody wants to push us out. We
6 do a lot of work with city agencies and elected
7 officials, but they don't listen to us in regards to
8 issues. As you know, open restaurants: We don't
9 have an input. We're just advisory. So we advise
10 them and they don't listen to us. Park Without
11 Borders to put these big-- little fences. Now they
12 throw the dogs over, and people are partying at four
13 in the morning. And then they wonder why, you know.
14 Citi Bikes. That's another issue. They dump stuff
15 on us, and they expect us to make miracles. It's all
16 about the money and nothing about the people.

17 So also, I didn't vote for that CEC crap, because
18 it's like inventing the wheel. We're starting all
19 over again.

20 Instead of them-- the District Manager said we
21 have two and herself. No, she has one and herself.
22 The person we had retired. The person after that
23 retired 25 years, 30 years, and 40 years, the
24 District Manager. So we're a community that's been

2 around for a long time, and we stick to each other
3 very well.

4 Also in regards to board members filling in. We
5 use non-board members, and what we do with the non
6 board members, we put them in committee, and we make
7 sure that they want to represent the community and
8 their constituents that live in the community,
9 because it's easy to be on a board and stand around,
10 and then don't come to the meetings. And then we
11 have quorums and important things that go on. And
12 I'm very tight with people coming to meetings that go
13 to every meeting. I don't care what it is. So we
14 want to make sure we represent our community in
15 whatever way we need. So I just want tip my hat to
16 these managers, man. I just don't know. I don't get
17 paid. I'm volunteer. But I just don't know how they
18 do it. They should be doing something else. Because
19 of the city agencies are not listening to them. If
20 the elected officials who bring them, and they're not
21 listening to them, and we vote for them, something
22 needs to be done. And it needs to be done right
23 away.

24 We really need to get the services we need to
25 help this community. You call 311. And by the time

2 311 comes, it's unfounded. Guess what I do? The
3 manager calls me I go to the location. I take a
4 picture, make sure, and send it out and make sure
5 that they get the services. That's what we need to
6 do to represent that community. Thank you.

7 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Well, I did say that
8 Brooklyn has the best, right? So look, I-- I'm going
9 to say publicly. You know, my-- my partnership with
10 my District Managers, Mr. Spitzer is one of them, is
11 incredible. We do talk late at night and on
12 weekends. Shawn Campbell as well. And you know, I
13 was whispering to Gale before that the-- the best
14 District Managers are the ones who know that the job
15 doesn't end at five o'clock. And I know that in my
16 neighborhood. It doesn't. And Mr. Camacho doesn't
17 get paid, because he's the Chair.

18 And you know, this is what we're talking about
19 when we say that, you know, Community Boards are
20 treated as the stepchild of municipal government. It
21 is not subservient to any other agency. It is not
22 subservient to any other elected official. It's true
23 that you District Managers are appointed by people
24 who are themselves appointed by people who are
25 elected. But notwithstanding, you're an independent

2 city agency, just like any other agency that operates
3 based on appointments, whether it's the CCRB or the--
4 the Panel for Educational Priorities, or the Campaign
5 Finance Board, or the Taxi and Limousine Commission.
6 Once you are appointed, you are independent, and you
7 are supposed to be able to run your agencies.

8 So I'm going to ask the same question that I
9 asked the previous panel: With regard to your
10 interactions with agencies and whether or not you
11 feel that they communicate what they're about to do
12 before they do it and time to stop them if they're
13 about to do something (folks know that I'm frank)
14 stupid in the neighborhood. Do they communicate
15 sufficiently with your boards?

16 MR. CAMACHO: Well, my, my District Manager said
17 it nice to you. I'm going to say it: No, they
18 don't. They come, I think, already planned on what
19 they want to hear and how they want to hear it. And
20 that's not what we want. I make sure that whoever
21 city agency is there, to make sure that they--
22 they're interests in regarding the community and not
23 regarding themselves or whoever handpicked puppet
24 they got to do what they have to do. I don't get
25 paid. I really don't care. So I'm going to tell

2 them how I feel. And I have lived in my community
3 all my life, and I have seen the change. And we made
4 the change from what it is. You know, we were called
5 crackheads and dope fiends. Now, everybody want to
6 come there and push us away, and remove us from the
7 place that we were born and raised in. And I used to
8 play with rocks in the lots. And now they got
9 basketball hoops, and that don't mean anything to me.
10 What means is the people that's in the community,
11 that made the community what it is.

12 And we really need to have elected officials and
13 agencies that are going to support us and give us the
14 help that we need, the old and the new. Because
15 history repeats itself. Just because the old person
16 is dead and he's no longer there, doesn't mean he's
17 not worth anything. And we really need to pick up
18 our people and make sure that we do-- the agencies do
19 do what they're supposed to be doing, is listening to
20 us, the community at large, regardless.

21 MR. SPITZER: I will just add that we find that
22 the many agencies come to us already with a finished
23 product. They don't come to us for input. When they
24 do come, in the event they can. So for certain
25 agencies, we used to do public hearings and committee

2 meetings. But for certain agencies right now we just
3 let them present to the board, because they're not
4 really coming to hear the opinion of our board
5 members. So we just let them present to the board
6 then, because we know that they're not really looking
7 for input.

8 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Is it more like they're
9 just checking the box? That they already have this
10 fleshed out plan, and they just need to be able to
11 say that they came to the Community Board, so they
12 show up and, you know, spend an hour with you and
13 then go back, and they're able to just say they did
14 it, but they don't actually take the concerns back
15 and revise these things?

16 MR. SPITZER: Right. It's basically a formality
17 at the point that they do come to us. And I'll just
18 point to what Jeremy brought up: When they wanted to
19 do the-- the Seventh and Eighth Avenue-- the changing
20 of the of the directions, they-- the board's were
21 like, "Why are you not coming and talking to us?"
22 "Oh, we came. We talked." And none of us knew about
23 the meeting. So they just selected a few businesses
24 that they knocked on the door. And that was

2 sufficient in their-- in their eyes on-- on what
3 community outreach means.

4 And, again, they we were not involved in the
5 drawing of the plans. And as Camacho mentioned,
6 regarding the restaurants, it's the same thing. We
7 kept being told, "We're going to include the
8 Community Boards in the rulemaking process," but we
9 were never-- we were never involved in the rulemaking
10 process. And look-- look at the results of that,
11 what happened. So, no. Agencies just basically come
12 to us to-- to just check a box, as you said,
13 Councilmember and-- and that-- to be able to say that
14 we did community engagement.

15 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: Thank you very much.

16 MR. CAMACHO: I don't call it a box. I call it
17 nonsense. Because when you're turning around, and
18 you're doing opposite than what the community wants,
19 you're not doing your job. And that's what it is.
20 People need to do the job and listen to the people,
21 the people that put them in place to do their job.
22 And if they're not going to do it, not going to
23 listen to us, then why are we here? You know, we
24 make recommendations, and before you know it, they
25 changed things. As we said, for instance, I'm going

2 to give you the example for Parks. They did a
3 beautiful park. They left a two-foot fence. Now
4 people are paying \$1.3 million in a residential block
5 that there's a park in. Now they're skating at four
6 in the morning, five in the morning, and you hear the
7 skates, "bah bah bah". "Oh, we wanted..." This
8 ain't Milwaukee. People are going to jump over that
9 fence, do what they have to do. And I know you guys
10 heard of a young kid who fell on the train tracks in
11 the back on Bushwick side and someone passed away.
12 We told them: Raise that fence. We told them:
13 People are going to jump over that fence and
14 something's going to happen. You think they listened
15 to the board? A kid lost his life. Is that what we
16 want? City agencies don't listen to us. Why are we
17 here for? Why?

18 COUNCILMEMBER YEGER: I couldn't agree more.
19 Thank you very much, Chair Camacho. Thank you.
20 Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you both for your
22 testimony.

23 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. We'll now be moving
24 to Zoom panelists, and I'll be calling on panelists
25 one by one. First we'll be hearing from Jeremy

2 Hussein Warneke, followed by Jesús Pérez, and then
3 Melinda Perkins. Jeremy Hussein Warneke, you may
4 begin upon Sergeant's announcement.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

6 COUNSEL MURRAY: Jeremy, it appears you're
7 unmuted, but we cannot hear you.

8 MR. WERNEKE: Alright, can you hear me now?

9 COUNSEL MURRAY: Yes, go ahead.

10 MR. WERNEKE: Alright, great. Thank you. Sorry
11 about that. I had every intention of being here in
12 person today. Unfortunately, someone, or something
13 else let's just say had other plans. Good morning,
14 Councilmembers. And thank you to you and your staff
15 for holding this hearing today. My name is Jeremy
16 Warneke. And I've been the District Manager of Bronx
17 Community Board 11 for the past 12 years. I'm
18 currently the longest active serving DM in the Bronx.
19 Prior to that, I worked for City Councilmember James
20 Vaca, who himself was a District Manager for 25
21 years. I'm also going to use the CB acronym for
22 Community Board, and EEO for Equal Employment
23 Opportunity throughout my testimony.

24

25

2 My written testimony of course, is longer than my
3 verbal one, in addition to my background, which I
4 provide in my written-- more about my background.

5 Due the fact that my colleagues here citywide
6 asked me to testify today, I will start with you 2018
7 was the first year that CB-- Community Board or CB
8 staff were required to take individual computerized
9 EEO training. And when taking that training, a
10 scenario came across my computer screen which had
11 played out in my office just two years prior to that.
12 I was not the only one who noticed. A member of my
13 staff who was the recipient of hostile sexist remarks
14 by a CB member also recognized the scenario and
15 pointed out to me during their training.

16 Unfortunately, the matter did not end there and
17 in 2019 I was compelled to file several EEO
18 complaints, because I too, was discriminated against
19 based on my sex and familial status by the same CB
20 member.

21 In 2020, the New York State Division of Human
22 Rights investigated my complaints and determined
23 quote, "probable cause" end quote, which led to the
24 removal of the CB member days before what would have
25

2 been their uncontested reelection for First Vice
3 Chair.

4 Things should have never gotten to that point
5 which is why I'm passionate about the subject of
6 mandatory trainings for volunteer public servants
7 also known as CB members. They should be required to
8 undergo the same train all CB staff are required to
9 take and ideally not the exact same training,
10 although something is better than nothing. Just a
11 reminder that there are close to 3000 seats citywide,
12 potentially every year to be filled by Community
13 Board members and because they are not city
14 employees, they are volunteer supervisors and
15 employers, ideally any type of training that has
16 mandated them is geared towards that or tailored
17 towards that.

18 You know-- As you know, some of you yourself have
19 served as CB members, Councilmembers, many members
20 prior to assuming their position, they do not have
21 management experience. And even though sexual
22 harassment training is required of many CB members it
23 has not been required of all of them. Ideally, it
24 would be in addition to the EEO and diversity
25 training and LGBTQ training, which CB staff are

2 required to take, or have been required to take in
3 the past few years. Thank you.

4 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Next we'll be
5 hearing from Jesus Perez, followed by Melinda
6 Perkins, and then Susan Stetzer. Jesús Pérez, you
7 may begin upon the sergeant's announcement.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 MR. PÉREZ: Good afternoon. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify before you today. My name is
11 Jesús Pérez. I am the District Manager of Manhattan
12 Community Board 6. I'm testifying today on behalf of
13 CB6 Chair Kyle Athayde, who couldn't be with us
14 today.

15 I'd like to offer confirmation on some of the
16 thoughts that you've heard this morning, and to echo
17 the testimony of my colleagues.

18 You've heard that there's confusion about what
19 all the various agencies do to help Community Boards.
20 I'm not surprised, because of all the various
21 agencies out there the CEC, CAU, OTI, the five BP's
22 Offices, as well-intentioned as they may be, none of
23 them have supporting Community Boards as their main
24 job. That is not a recipe for success. There needs

2 to be one entity whose main job it is to support
3 Community Boards.

4 You heard that Community Board facilities are
5 inadequate for properly holding hybrid meetings.
6 This is right. Community Boards have been expressing
7 this for years.

8 You've heard about the need to amend the
9 antiquated open meetings law, and that CBs need
10 increased budgets and more assistance in finding
11 meeting spaces. This is right. Community Boards
12 have been expressing this for years.

13 You've heard about the lack of funding that keeps
14 boards understaffed. This is right. Community
15 Boards have been expressing this for years.

16 You're hearing a lot about hybrid meetings in
17 this hearing, because three years into the pandemic,
18 having a virtual attendance option is expected by
19 both members and the general public. Going backwards
20 on this would be an unconscionable disservice to the
21 everyday citizens in New York. But holding hybrid
22 meetings well is not always easy to accomplish, and
23 Community Boards must do it with underfunded district
24 offices, minimal technology, and dwindling options
25 are outside venues in which to hold large meetings

2 since the city does not provide the vast majority of
3 Community Boards with dedicated meeting space.

4 Manhattan Community Board 6's position is that we
5 need to make sure it remains legal for Community
6 Boards to continue meeting completely on Zoom even
7 after Mayor Adams's COVID executive orders expire,
8 and that every Community Board should be able to do
9 the same if resources don't allow them to adequately
10 ensure a proper hybrid option.

11 You've heard in earlier testimony that currently
12 our ability to meet remotely is very ad hoc and
13 month-to-month. That is no way to run an agency for
14 the people that New York. And as you know the Open
15 Meetings Law and the ability to meet on Zoom is a
16 matter for the state legislature. And CB6 has been
17 advocating to our state elected officials for a
18 modernization of the open meetings law. But the
19 support of a united City Council would be immensely
20 helpful to amplify our voices about this urgent need.

21 Until the city hears Community Boards calls for
22 increased budget, meaningful tech support, and
23 adequate meeting spaces, meeting virtually helps us
24 fill that gap. Please help us keep it. Thank you
25 for your attention today.

2 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Next we'll be hearing
3 from Melinda Perkins followed by Susan Stetzer, and
4 then new Noel Hidalgo. Excuse me. Melinda Perkins,
5 you may begin when the Sergeant calls time.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 Greeting greetings, Chair Ung, and members of the
8 Governmental Operations Committee, Councilmembers,
9 and thank you all for the opportunity to testify
10 alongside fellow District Managers and members of the
11 Future of Community Boards Working Group. My name is
12 Melinda Perkins, and I'm the proud District Manager
13 of Brooklyn Community Board 5, which services over
14 183,000 residents in the neighborhoods of East New
15 York, Cypress Hills, New Lots, Spring Creek, and
16 parts of Highland. We're also serving in the
17 district alongside the 37th and 42nd Councilmembers
18 who are represented by-- the council districts who
19 are represented by Sandy Nurse and Charles Barron.

20 Our board is filled with active volunteers who
21 head organizations, tenure in city agencies, active
22 union reps, business professionals, and they also
23 provide leadership and associations and coalitions
24 throughout the district. Our current chair also
25 serves as the co-chair of New York City's Gun

2 Violence Prevention Task Force. So our membership
3 like other boards across the city is filled with
4 people who truly care and fight for safety,
5 empowerment, and the overall betterment of our great
6 community.

7 I was hired into the district office in 2016.
8 And prior to that, I served as a board member of
9 Brooklyn Community Board 5. So as a board member, I
10 know firsthand that there is a serious need for
11 ongoing training and support to keep members abreast
12 and prepared.

13 In that regard. My testimony today will be
14 focused on the importance of board member training
15 and support. But I do want to say for the record
16 that I thank my previous DMs and Chair Camacho for
17 highlighting the needs of our district offices
18 because it is a major priority as well.

19 Community Board membership, as you all know
20 comprises of up to 50 appointed volunteers who serve
21 on 59 boards across the city. These volunteers,
22 however, are held to a higher standard to ensure
23 connection to local government. They're bound by New
24 York City charter mandates including laws on meeting
25 protocols, ULURP procedures, and so much more. They

2 render votes and submit resolutions on decisions that
3 directly impact budget agency policy, local business
4 operations, as well as zoning and development
5 projects that shape the very fabric of communities
6 across the city. Therefore, this body of up to 2950
7 New York City advocates must be rewarded for their
8 volunteerism with ongoing effective training and
9 support.

10 The application process for Community Board
11 membership can vary from borough to borough, with
12 interviews and so on that was spoken about earlier
13 this morning. However, the board member orientation
14 process is pretty much stamped across 59 boards.
15 This is where board members are officially sworn in
16 and receive on-board procedures.

17 The orientation process needs to be expanded to
18 include a sufficient amount of training courses to
19 adequately prepare the members for the role they will
20 play.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 MS. PERKINS: My time is up, but I just wanted to
23 mention that those trainings should be implemented
24 during the orientation process. And I will submit my
25 written testimony. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Next we'll be
3 hearing from Susan Stetzer, followed by Noel Hidalgo,
4 and then Mark Diller.

5 And if there's anyone at this point who hasn't
6 heard their name called and is on the Zoom, please
7 use the Zoom raise hand function we'll call on you at
8 the end. Susan Stetzer you may begin when the
9 surgeon calls time.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

11 MS. STETZER: Thank you. My name is Susan
12 Stetzer. I'm District Manager for Manhattan
13 Community Board 3. I want to thank you for this
14 opportunity to share concerns. Community Boards
15 serve their communities often beyond what time and
16 budget reasonably allows, and we are fortunate now to
17 also be part of Future of Community Boards, the
18 citywide network of DMS.

19 The boards encourage and facilitate community
20 input into decision making for their communities. We
21 are the best bang for the buck when we are able to
22 partner with agencies. We know the unique needs of
23 our community and working together makes us more
24 effective. Unfortunately, there's less partnership
25 and collaboration than previously between CBs and

2 agencies. Other DMs have testified on specific
3 issues. I will note some miscellaneous challenges.

4 The boards always need 45 days to schedule an
5 agenda item for public input, and to vote on
6 comments, and the standard as for ULURP is 60 days.
7 Recently DOT set a 30-day period for Open Street,
8 which effectively prohibits public input. This is a
9 particular concern as DOT will soon be setting
10 procedures for open restaurants.

11 CBs have not been at the tables previously for
12 planning. For example, businesses are at the table
13 to plan for permanent open restaurants, as they
14 should be. CBs should also be there to brief on
15 issues. This would help defuse the divisiveness that
16 now exists.

17 Another example is we've previously been part of
18 roundtables and discussion on homelessness, which no
19 longer happens.

20 The budget consultations were not as productive
21 this year. And the Manhattan boards are requesting a
22 debriefing with OMB and DCP, and the Future of
23 Community Boards is attempting to work with agencies
24 to resolve.

2 Previously OMB staff always worked with boards to
3 set up a process. We did not have input this year,
4 and support for district-level consultations was
5 diminished, as was support in general from the
6 agency. Many CBs listed increase in baseline budgets
7 for CBs. We have not had a significant increase
8 since 2014. My board has lost staff to other
9 agencies that pay better.

10 Our technology has increased since COVID. Hybrid
11 meetings have been mentioned, and this will be an
12 ongoing technology expense. There is not equity
13 among boards on available resources.

14 When term limit kicks in, boards will lose
15 institutional knowledge and expertise, and it will be
16 up to the CB offices to play an enhanced role as
17 resources for the board. This can be supported by
18 supporting funding for the Civic Engagement
19 Commission.

20 And I'd also like to note on the previous
21 discussions and language support, some agencies do
22 provide translations for presentations. DCAS always
23 does. DHS does. Other agencies don't.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired. Thank you.

25 MS. STETZER: Thank you.

2 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Next we'll be
3 hearing from Noel Hidalgo, followed by Mark Diller.
4 And again, if there's anyone else who's waiting and
5 hasn't heard their name called please use the Zoom
6 raise hand function. Noel Hidalgo, please begin when
7 the surgeon calls time.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 MR. HIDALGO: Hi, good morning. Or good
10 afternoon. Thank you for creating an option for us
11 to participate remotely. We believe that remote
12 participation tools are fundamentals for government
13 in the digital era. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic
14 Community Boards and Borough Presidents turned to
15 BetaNYC to learn how to do remote meetings. In
16 partnership with Manhattan Borough President Gale
17 Brewer, BetaNYC stood up as a centralized online
18 meeting solution and was conducting virtual meeting
19 trainings before DoITT had even selected a platform.

20 Within a few weeks of the pandemic Manhattan
21 Community Boards were conducting monthly meetings and
22 sharing important pandemic related information long
23 before DoITT's official solutions for Community
24 Boards was rolled out.

2 Once it was rolled out, several boards turned to
3 BetaNYC for alternative solutions.

4 For the past eight years BetaNYC has been working
5 out of the Manhattan Borough President's office, and
6 we have provided frontline technical, analytical, and
7 staffing support to Borough Presidents and Community
8 Boards. We've outlined very clear needs and have
9 deployed prototypes to address these needs.

10 Every year we advocate for our community of over
11 5000 members to join their local Community Board. We
12 come to you today with a deep understanding of how
13 Community Boards and their staff are underfunded,
14 under resourced, and ill prepared to work in the 21st
15 century. I am now going to briefly summarize some of
16 my written remarks.

17 We fundamentally believe that each Borough
18 President should get a half million dollar boost in
19 funding to provide district offices and boards
20 technical support to ensure that Community Board
21 websites are kept up to date and virtual meetings are
22 supported. This also includes that ongoing training
23 is conducting, and a small amount of money is
24 available for external organizations to provide
25 support for boards and their district offices.

2 We fundamentally believe that there should be a
3 unified baseline process for appointments that should
4 be across the city. This process should be digital,
5 accessible, and well-resourced with staff time.

6 Current toolkit from Microsoft at OTI is
7 inadequate for this process. While we respect each
8 board's ability to have their own attendance tracking
9 record, it is not unified across the city. This has
10 a significant impact on reappointments and New York
11 City needs to have a standardized attendance tracking
12 system across all 59 Community Boards.

13 The eight-year term limits which we think are too
14 short, are going to significantly affect expertise,
15 capacity, and community knowledge. We need clear
16 guidelines and tools on how that term limited board
17 members can share their institutional community
18 knowledge across generations. Every Borough
19 President has a huge opportunity to shape how
20 agencies respond to community needs, and it should go
21 beyond having agency representatives attend borough
22 service cabinets. There should be a citywide
23 practice where the borough Statement Of Needs, the
24 Mayor's Management Report, and Borough Service

2 Cabinets are connected together through data driven
3 reports.

4 Now in regards to recommendations on boards and
5 district offices, with much respect to district
6 office staff, they-- many of them are not--

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired. Thank you.

8 MR. HIDALGO: --trained to deal with the
9 complexities with digital government. With that
10 being said, we hope that each board can apply and
11 receive at least \$150,000 to \$200,000 renewable grant
12 so that they can expand their digital and data
13 literacy development.

14 We also hope that digital services cabinet--
15 excuse me, District Service Cabinets can also be
16 data-driven so that each agency can be held
17 accountable directly inside of each community
18 district, and that gets fed up to the Borough Service
19 Cabinet.

20 Many other things to say about how technology,
21 data, and design can be used to strengthen Community
22 Boards, and I will-- I encourage you to read our
23 written statement. Thank you.

24

25

2 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. Next we'll be
3 hearing from Mark Diller. Mark Diller, you can begin
4 when the surgeon calls time.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

6 MR. DILLER: Good afternoon, and thank you Chair
7 Ung and Councilmembers for the opportunity to address
8 you. I am both the newest and perhaps-- well, I'm
9 the newest DM on this panel for sure. I'm only a
10 month into my service. But I've been serving for the
11 last 15 years as a member of a different Community
12 Board, and I'm a former Chair. So I hope that I have
13 useful observations from both sides of the aisle, as
14 it were, in terms of how this is all working.

15 I will try to add without repeating what it is
16 that my-- my colleagues have offered here and in the
17 previous panels about the need for additional
18 resources.

19 As most of us are painfully aware, it is
20 relatively easy to hold a meeting in person, it is
21 relatively easy at this point to hold a meeting on
22 Zoom, but it is still enormously challenging to do
23 both at the same time. It requires more resources
24 than perhaps even I anticipated, because those
25 resources must include the technology the-- the

2 devices as it were. It also requires the staffing.
3 And it requires to some extent consultants,
4 especially where as has been previously highlighted.

5 Many of us have to rely on outside venues which
6 have varying and differing WiFi and capacity for in-
7 house audio and staffing and so forth.

8 This very meeting has, I believe at least three
9 cameras operating simultaneously so that we can see
10 the panelists, the council members, and at times the
11 entire council chamber. That in turn requires
12 staffing that someone's got to toggle between those
13 cameras and so forth. So a director is involved.

14 This is not a frivolous ask. This is a necessity
15 for us. As someone who has held a Zoom meeting and
16 Chaired a Zoom meeting with 1300 people in it, I'm
17 painfully aware of just how difficult we've been
18 meeting the public's expectations going forward will
19 be.

20 While it is up to the state legislature to
21 determine when the when the Councilmembers need to be
22 in person, the public won't sit for requiring us to
23 go back to attending in person. So-- So I guess the
24 focus of my request is that there is additional
25 resources that are needed. We're grateful for this

2 opportunity to speak to you about it. Those
3 resources also need to be -- I echo the thoughts of
4 our colleagues who taught me what Zoom is over at
5 BetaNYC -- about having a uniform platform, so that
6 what used to be a data-driven, what used to be a
7 paper-driven process can now be a digital-driven
8 process, so that we can truly engage the public and
9 meet them where they are.

10 That's our calling. That's what we're-- That's
11 what we're here to do. And I respectfully request
12 that we be given the tools in which to do it. I
13 yield my time and thank you very much for your
14 opportunity to be speaking to you.

15 COUNSEL MURRAY: Thank you. And I see no further
16 hands raised on the Zoom. So Chair Ung, I'll turn it
17 over to you to close us out.

18 CHAIRPERSON UNG: I want to thank all of you for
19 your testimony today. And as for your service to our
20 communities. It is deeply appreciated. And I look
21 forward to talking to all of you in the near future
22 about all the issues and discussions that we had
23 today. Thank you.

24 [GAVEL]

25

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 03/07/2023