

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

----- X

March 13, 2023

Start: 10:11 a.m.

Recess: 4:45 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS-CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Tiffany Cabàn
Crystal Hudson
Linda Lee
Chi A. Ossè
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams
Gale A. Brewer
Amanda Fariàs
Shahana Hanif

A P P E A R A N C E S

Jess Dannhauser
Commissioner for Children's Services

Winette Saunders
First Deputy Commissioner for Children's Services

Margaret Pletnikoff
Deputy Commissioner for Finance at ACS

Molly Wasow Park
First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of
Homeless Services

Jill Berry
DSS First Deputy Commissioner

Lisa Fitzpatrick
HRA Administrator

Joslyn Carter
DHS Administrator

Rosine Ferdinand
DSS Executive Deputy Commissioner of Finance

Abby Biberman
Associate Director of the Public Benefits Unit at
the New York Legal Assistance Group

McGregor Smyth
Executive Director of New York Lawyers for the
Public Interest

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

Katherine Wurmfeld
Center for Justice Innovation

Raun Rassmusen
Executive Director of Legal Services NYC

Mary Fox
Housing Conversation Coordinators

Adriene Holder
Chief Attorney of the Civil Practices Legal Aid
Society

Zainab Akgar
Bronx Defenders BDS and CFR

Lauren Shapiro
Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice
at Brooklyn Defender Services

Emma Ketteringham
Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice
at the Bronx Defenders

Teyora Graves Ferrell
Family Defense Supervisor at the Center for
Family Representation

Gloria Kim
Senior Policy Analyst of the Human Services
Council

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

Gabriela Sandoval
Director of Policy and Communications at New
Destiny

Juan Diaz
Policy and Advocacy Association at Citizens
Committee for Children

Nicole Hunt
Associate Director of Public Policy at Food Bank
for New York City

Jerome Nathaniel
Director of Policy and Government Relations at
City Harvest

Greg Silverman
CEO of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Emilio Tavaréz
Policy Director for Hunger Free America, also
known as Hunger Free NYC

Stephen Grimaldi
Executive Director, New York Common Pantry

Rachel Sabella
Director of No Kid Hungry New York with Share our
Strength

Vic Benson
Policy Analyst at City Meals on Wheels

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

Alan Yu
Executive Director of New Yorkers for Children
NYFC

Dr. Sophine Charles
Associate Executive Director for the Council of
Family and Child Caring Agencies

Quentin Walcott
Executive Director of Connect

Amiee Abusch
Senior Vice President of Foster Care Prevention
and Community Partnership Programs at JCCA

Betty Baez Melo
Attorney and Director of the Early Childhood
Education Project at Advocates for Children of
New York

Sierra Kraft
Executive Director at the ICARE Coalition

Tanisha Grant
Executive Director and Founder of Parent Support
and Parents New York

Cynthia Stuart
Chief Operating Officer at the Supportive Housing
Network of New York

Wilfredo Lopez
Director of Government Affairs for the Urban
Resource Institute

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

Danna Dennis
Senior Organizer at the Riders Alliance

Jimmy Meagher
Policy Director for Safe Horizon

Doreen Thomann-Howe
Chief Operating Officer at Project Renewal

Terry Lawson
Executive Director of UnLocal

Beatriz Diaz Taveras
Executive Director of Catholic Charities
Community Services

Eric Lee
Director of policy and planning at Homeless
Services United

Joseph Toles
Senior Director of Family Permanency Services at
You Got to Believe

Nickesha Francis
Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd
Services

Nia Meeki (SP?)
Independent Contractor and Youth Advocate with
You Better Believe

SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone test with the Committee on General Welfare. Today's date is March 13, 2022. Location in the Chambers, recorded by Elori Gonzalez Rodriguez (SP?).

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Can we start the webinar please? Can we start the webinar?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: It's started.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Good morning and welcome to the New York City Hybrid Hearing on the Preliminary Budget Hearing for the Fiscal Year 2024 on General Welfare. Please silence all electronic devices. Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [GAVEL] Good morning everyone. Before we begin, the Committee may not get to all of our questions today and we may not receive responses to every question, so we will send a follow-up letter for any unanswered questions.

Good morning everyone and welcome to today's Hybrid Budget Hearing. My name is Diana Ayala and I serve as the Chair of the Committee on General Welfare. Today's hearing is on the Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget for the Administration for Children's Services or ACS, and the 2023 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report or PMMR.

Thank you to Commissioner Jess Dannhauser for joining us and we're also joined by Council Member Chi Ossè and Council Member Lee who is joining us online.

Following testimony and questions with ACS, we will hear from the Department of Social Services and finish with public testimony at around 2:30 p.m.

Thank you to all of the advocates and community members who have joined us today. I will keep my comments here brief and request that the Commissioner keep his oral testimony to about ten minutes, so that we can move on to questions from Council Members.

ACS's Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget is \$2.7 billion down \$71 million from Fiscal Year 2023's Adopted Budget. PEGs have minimal impact on ACS's budget this Fiscal Year, however, ACS is facing various federal and state funding uncertainties around foster care program areas and the close to home initiative. I am delighted to see the data in the PMMR shows increased child care voucher enrollment due to successful clearings of the voucher waitlist with the State of New York City raising the income eligibility for child care assistance to 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

I believe that more families, especially those in high need communities will benefit from our childcare services. Additionally with the pandemic ending and the family court operating at full capacity, ACS was able to increase the number of children adopted at the Census for Close to Home in the first four months of Fiscal 2023. Unfortunately, although ACS is working closely with providers to increase access of preventive services, the agency did see a decrease in the number of families entering the welfare prevention.

I look forward to hearing from you on how ACS will strategize to meet its annual target of assisting 9,000 families and what is the budget to meet the health and financial needs of families. Juvenile justice issues are certainly concerning. ACS saw its average population in the juvenile detention rise to 30 percent and admissions to juvenile detention increased by more than 60 percent, driven by an elevation in arrests. ACS cannot release these youth on its own but I would like to know what the strategy is to stabilize the system and ensure trauma informed community-based treatment wherever possible.

The approaching expiration of foster care titles, Title IV E-waiver, which provides federal reimbursement for certain calls of foster care and the lack of state funding to sustain foster care rate increases, present moderate financial risks to ACS's operation over the length of the plan.

In addition, the state Fiscal 2024 Executive Plan proposes making the close to home initiative permanent but no funding is included for its operation. I am fully aware that ACS has been struggling with the restoration of close to home funding in the last few years and look forward to hearing about ACS's plan and strategy in face of these funding uncertainties. I would like to learn what ACS's vision is for keeping New York kids on the right track and out of the criminal justice system. I also look forward to hearing how ACS is dealing with staffing issues and capital upgrades at the two secure detention facilities Horizon and Crossroads.

The capital commitment plan includes \$524 million between Fiscal Year '23 and '27, of which \$322 million is for the detention projects. It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the city's budget is fair, transparent and accountable to New

I look forward to an active engagement with the Administration over the next few months to ensure that the fiscal 2023 Adopted Budget meets the goals the Council has set out. I would like to thank both my staff and the staff of the finance and legislative divisions for their help in preparing for this hearing Austrid Chan Financial Analyst, Alyia Ali Unit Head, Aminta Kilawan Senior Counsel, David Romero Counsel and my Deputy Chief of Staff Elsie Encarnacion, and my Director of Communications Malek Al-Shammary.

I will now pass it over to the Counsel for procedural items and swear in but I would like to acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council Member Brewer went somewhere. Oh, there she goes and Council Member Cabàn.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Today, we'll be hearing testimony from Jess Dannhauser, Commissioner for Children's Services, Winette Saunders First Deputy Commissioner for Children's Services and Margaret Pletnikoff Deputy Commissioner for Finance at ACS. Will you please raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

PANEL: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin when ready.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Good morning. I'm Jess Dannhauser, the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services. Thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala, and the members of the General Welfare Committee, for holding today's hearing on our Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2024. I appreciate the opportunity to share the important work we are doing at ACS to help make New York City a more safe, just and equitable place for children, youth and families to live and thrive. I'm joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Winette Saunders and Margaret Pletnikoff who is the Deputy

Commissioner for the Division of Finance. Today is her official first day.

In my first year as Commissioner, I have had the opportunity to meet with and shadow, learn from staff from throughout the city, from our child protection Borough Offices, Legal units, detention facilities, the Children's Center, the training sites, and the hard-working administrative teams. I have also had the opportunity to meet with and visit our provider agencies' prevention, foster care, Family Enrichment Centers, community partnership and juvenile justice sites. I have been impressed and moved by the deep commitment and the passion the staff have to our mission of making New York City a better place for children and families.

I want to take a moment to thank all the staff for the work they do each and every day. I have also had the opportunity to meet with many youth, parents, advocates, elected officials, foundations and outside experts and I want to thank them for all their commitment and tenacity, and for continuing to push us as a system to keep the voices of children and families front and center in every decision and action we take.

While my testimony will focus on many of our accomplishments, I know and my colleagues at ACS know, there is much more work to do, so that we can be even more supportive to children and families, while addressing current and historical inequities in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

As you may know, ACS is required to respond to all reports of suspected abuse or maltreatment forwarded to us by the New York State Central Register. While ACS cannot directly control the front door of the child welfare system, nor all the forms necessary to address it, we have an important role to play. We know that too many families of color in New York City have reports called into the state and are then subject to unnecessary child protective investigation. Last year we found evidence of maltreatment in fewer than 14,000 of the 45,000 investigations we conducted. Moreover, this large volume of calls distracts us from the effort to protect children truly in danger.

Our job at ACS must be to get this balance right, to help reduce the volume of unnecessary reports and to ensure our child protection teams have the training, support and resources to identify the

children who are in danger, make sound decisions, and ensure that families are surrounded by the services, resources and/or relationships that mitigate the risks identified. We have taken steps to reduce the unnecessary and burdensome ministerial tasks for child protection staff so that they can focus more of their time supporting children, youth, and families. And we have increased the real time coaching from quality assurance staff that they get so that they are equipped to help those children truly in need of child protection.

That said, we understand that the impact of an investigation on a family is significant. Investigations are often disruptive, stressful and can be traumatic and they are disproportionately impacting families of color. One study estimated that 44 percent of Black children and 35 percent of Hispanic, Latinx children in New York City experience a child welfare investigation before they turn 18. Given the ubiquity of ACS investigations in some New York City communities, we know that some families feel reluctant to voluntarily engage in the supports associated with ACS, which can further impede child safety and well-being.

With the support of our Deputy Mayor, ACS has embarked on a city-wide strategy to reduce the number of unnecessary child welfare investigations and replace SCR reports where appropriate, with supports that can meet the needs of families further upstream. We believe that this is how we can reduce the number of families experiencing the formal child protection system, prevent child maltreatment and help families feel and be comfortable and safe enough to ask for and receive help without judgement or fear.

A key component of this work is collaborating with our sister city agencies, many of which have large numbers of mandated reporters, to find opportunities to train and shift the culture to supporting families rather than reporting. We do this by educating professionals who work with children and families, mandated reporters, on the many ways to provide support to families without making an unnecessary report to the SCR.

This past summer, ACS worked with our colleagues in the Department of Education to completely revise their annual mandated reporter training, which we then jointly provided the staff members from all 1,800 public schools. The overarching goal is to

1 help mandated reporters understand that there are
2 many ways to access supports for families who need
3 help, without calling the SCR, and that SCR call
4 should be reserved for instances when they suspect
5 the child is truly at risk of abuse or otherwise in
6 danger.
7

8 In the training, we focus on how to best
9 determine when a call to the SCR is in fact
10 warranted, while also helping DOE staff understand
11 the impact of making a report, the potential role of
12 implicit bias on the decision to make a report, and
13 how to access the many resources available to assist
14 families citywide.

15 We've also been working closely with Health +
16 Hospitals, so that the hospital and other medical
17 staff understand the impact reporting has on families
18 and that report should only be made when there's a
19 concern for child safety. We are now in the process
20 of tailoring and expanding this work to other city
21 agencies including the Department of Homeless
22 Services.

23 While we continue to make efforts to narrow the
24 front door of the child welfare system, we have also
25 been rapidly increasing the percentage of new cases

that we assign to the CARES track after the state forwards a report from the SCR. CARES is New York City's version of differential response, a state-authorized, non-investigative child protection response to reports referred to ACS from the state. With CARES, there is no traditional investigation, no court involvement, and no determination. In CARES, specifically trained child protective staff assess the safety of the children and then partner with the family to identify their needs, empower the family to make decisions that address their needs and the needs of their children, and connect families to appropriate services. The CARES approach is family centered, family driven and solution focused. The number of CARES cases has nearly tripled since 2019 and increase 72 percent from 2021 to 2022. There are currently 46 CARES units, and we plan to have an additional 18 CARES units by the end of this year.

We understand the impact an investigation or a court intervention such as court ordered supervision can have for families. We are committed to providing parents with information up front, at the outset of an investigation. This year, we will piloting a new Palm Card, which will in plain language explain to

parents that while ACS has a legal role to assess the safety of the child, the parents are not required to let ACS into their homes and that they can seek the assistance of an attorney.

As a result, much of the work we are doing, we have seen a reduction in both court filings and court ordered supervision. From 2021 to 2022, we reduced court filings by 13 percent, and we are filling about half as many cases that we did in 2019. Thanks also to our efforts to shorten the length of time families are involved with the court and ACS, we have managed to decrease the number of court, open court ordered supervision cases by 48 percent from January 2019 to January 2023.

We are working hard to reduce families' interaction with the child protection system by providing resources and support upfront. We are taking intentional efforts to increase the number and percentage of families participating in our continuum of prevention services programs through the community referral process and thus without a report to the SCR. New York City is one of the most robust prevention service arrays in the country. Our prevention services can provide help with concrete

needs, parenting skills, service referrals and counseling, and are available regardless of immigration status. Currently 45 contracted providers serve over 15,000 families per year, uh, 15,000 children per year. In a 2022 survey of thousands of parents who participated in prevention services, 94 percent said they were happy with the services they received.

It's important to note that participation in prevention services is unlikely to lead to deeper involvement with ACS. The data show that SCR reports from ACS funded providers comprise fewer than two percent of SCR calls. Given that social services account for about 20 percent, most of the calls to the SCR from social service organizations are not coming from ACS funded programs. It may be that ACS funded providers are more likely than others to understand how the SCR works and when a call is truly necessary. ACS providers are also more likely to know how to access or provide the help families need without an SCR call, which is precisely the direction we are moving as a system.

We are also in the process of expanding our Family Enrichment Centers from 3 to 30 over the next

2 years. FECs operated by community partners, provide community members with a safe and nurturing environment to build social connections and receive concrete resources like food and clothing.

Last July, we finalized contracts with the nine providers that will operate FECs in the first wave of expansion. These new FECs have been in a critical planning process, finding locations, engaging community members and elected officials, and co-designing space and offerings to meet individual community needs.

Just last week, ACS announced the recommended awards for the next eight FECs and we anticipate issuing an RFP for the remaining ten this coming fall.

Our 11 community partnerships also continue to combine a collation building and community organizing to foster broad multi-sector networks of providers, public agencies, community organizations and residents to lead community designed strategies and activities that strengthen family well-being and stability. For example, this past year three community partnerships have been working with community schools so that families who need support

or resources get connected to that help. The goal is to give school staff more community connectivity to support families, so that making a call to the SCR is a very last resort.

Our Office of Child Safety and Injury Prevention is continuing to lead efforts to provide parents and caregivers with the information and resources they need to avoid unintentional injuries and keep children safe. This winter, we continue to share critical information about infant safe sleep, educating parents of young children that babies sleep most safely on their backs in their own crib, and without blankets or other items in the crib. This month, we will be continuing our work to educate parents and caregivers on the dangers that cannabis-infused edibles pose for young children, particularly given how similar some of these items and their packaging is to other treats.

Next week is National Poison Prevention Week and we will be participating in Poison Prevention Week information and Resource Fairs where we will be sharing information and providing free lock boxes to help keep cannabis-infused edibles locked up and out of reach of children.

We are also focused on increasing access to child care assistance for low-income families. Child care is a critical support for families and we are working to ensure to expand access and remove barriers for families that need help paying for care. ACS currently provides child care assistance to the families of approximately 57,000 children through child care vouchers supported by the Federal Child Care Block Grant, as well as other state, federal, and city funds.

Child care assistance from ACS is available to families to child welfare involvement and eligible low-income families with income at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Over the summer, ACS completely cleared our child care wait list of over 35,000 children by offering child care assistance to any eligible family who applied, while also prioritizing access to low-income families in 17 high need neighborhoods.

Since the fall, we have been accepting applications for low-income child care vouchers from families citywide. This effort has been successful. In the past year we have more than doubled the number of children enrolled in child care with the

assistance of an ACS issued low-income child care voucher.

Our commitment to providing families with the services and supports they need as far upstream as possible has led to a continued decline in the number of children in foster care, with a historic low of 6,717 at the end of 2022. For those children and youth who do need to come into foster care, ACS has maintained our commitment to placing children with kin, meaning family or close friends. Over half of our children are placed in care are placed with kin and 44 percent of children currently in care are with family or friends. ACS is also committed to working with our provider partners to provide children and youth in care and their families with the services and supports they need to thrive and in most cases return home.

To accomplish this, ACS recently announced the recommended awards for both our family-based and residential foster care contracts, which will begin this July. First, the new system will add parent advocates with lived experience to help reunify safely with their children more quickly. Second, the new system will include the Enhanced Family Foster

Care program, which blends the traditional regular and therapeutic model into one program. Through EFFC, all kin parents, foster parents and staff will participate in trauma-informed training called TRIP, Trauma Responsive Informed Parenting program, designed to increase their capacity to care and support for youth with complex needs.

Third, the redesigned system will significantly increase therapeutic and evidence based supports to better meet children's needs while they're in care and reduce the amount of time they are in residential care. Fourth, the redesign system increases resources and expands the use of proven practices across the system in key areas, including visiting, continuing to increase the proportion of children placed with family and friends, expediting unification safely, and providing services and supports to youth in care such as tutoring and Fair Futures coaches.

Fifth, the redesign system includes a new fiscal model that eliminates paying providers by the number of care days and provides more predictable funding to address the costs involved in maintaining high quality services for children and families.

In addition, these awards will also create SILP, Supervised Independent Living Programs, a model that enables older youth to experience and learn from living more independently as they prepare to leave the foster care system.

In the past year, we have expanded the Fair Futures model of coaching and tutoring supports from ages 11-21 to include youth 21-26, and in our juvenile justice programs. Over 3,000 young people are now receiving coaching and nearly 1,000 middle school students are receiving tutoring and other educational supports. We have also launched VCRED, a vocational training program, and College Choice, our new model that provides housing, tuition, stipends and other supports to youth in foster care attending college, regardless of what college they attend.

As you know ACS oversees services and programs for youth at every stage of the juvenile justice continuum, which includes community-based alternatives for youth who are at risk of delinquency, as well as for their families. ACS recently released an RFP for Alternative to Detention services, which is transitioning from MOCJ to ACS, and these start of those contracts in Fiscal Year

2024. In addition, we provide secure detention services at Crossroads and Horizon, oversee nonsecure detention, and oversee the Close to Home juvenile justice placement system.

Close to Home is the juvenile justice placement system for youth found to be juvenile delinquents by the Family Court and ordered to be in placement.

Close to Home programs offer structured residential care for youth in small, supervised, homelike environments. In contrast to the traditional larger juvenile placement facilities model, Close to Home programs have been intentionally designed to enhance participation in programming while preserving the safety and security of youth, staff, and the community. Close to Home allows for engagement to occur simultaneously with the youth, the family and the community to ensure that factors leading to juvenile justice system involvement are addressed before the youth returns to the community. Each Close to Home program is required to implement an evidence-based therapeutic program model that serves as the primary mechanism of behavioral support.

The census and Close to Home has continued to remain low. In January 2023, there were 50 youth

placed in Close to Home. To help right size Close to Home and be more efficient, ACS has been working with OMB and our providers to reduce capacity. As noted in the November Modifications, starting in 2024, ACS will be reducing the size of the system from 237 beds to 171 beds. This spring, we will be releasing an RFP for Close to Home, which will also enable us to strengthen our work to better address the older youth in Close to Home as a result of Raise the Age.

While the census and Close to Home has declined, we are seeing an increase in the census in our secure detention facilities, Crossroads and Horizon. As you know, since 2018, youth who allegedly committed crimes when they were 16 or 17, who are ordered to be detained, are now detained with ACS rather than on Riker's Island. This has increased the number of older youth for whom ACS is able to provide the much-needed services and supports that they need. Since emerging from COVID, both the number and percentage of young people facing serious charges and awaiting trial in secure detention has increased. Youth in secure detention have been charged with serious offenses and tend to have more complicated legal cases, leading to longer of stay. This is a trend

also seen for adults here in New York and for both and adults throughout the country. We are intensely focused on making our secure detention facilities safe and supportive for both staff and youth. I, along with the leadership in the Division of Youth and Family Justice, regularly engage the youth and staff so that we can hear directly from them on how they can best be supported. Despite the increased census we are seeing the rates of incidents both between youth and between youth and staff decrease.

ACS has been intensely focused on recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining youth development specialists. In 2022, we hired 195 YDS, including 61 during the last quarter of 2022. And in January of 2023, we hired an addition 27 YDS.

Supporting our staff working in detention facilities is a top priority. To address attrition and to support staff, we have embedded staff and youth safety in all of our discussions. We continue to conduct regular wellness events and activities for our detention staff. We instituted professional coaching for leadership and mid-level managers, created a Director of Performance and Learning at each facility focusing on staff development and

training and launched a Team Building Fellowship for detention staff to promote increased opportunities for building positive working relationships between all staff. We've increased our efforts to engage youth in school programming and behavioral health services. In the current school year, we designated Youth Development Specialists at each secure facility to serve as school officers, to help encourage and facilitate school attendance and participation. Since September, we have seen approximately ten young people graduate with either a Regents diploma or GED. We are also expanding our programming menu to better meet the needs of the older youth in custody to include training and barbering, entrepreneurial training, and training to build a physical training business in addition to college opportunities.

ACS's proposed budget for city Fiscal Year 2024 is \$2.696 billion, including \$853 million of City Tax Levy. This represents about a 2.5 decrease from 2023 Adopted Budget to the FY24 plan and is due in large part to savings measures instituted in the November Plan and one-year Council and Administration funded initiatives. The proposed state budget continues to maintain cuts to ACS core services, including the

reduced state reimbursement rate for prevention services, 62 percent rather than the statutory 65 percent. And the total elimination of state funding for our Close to Home program, which previously received \$30.5 million.

ACS was pleased to see that the state budget proposes to increase the income eligibility for low-income child care assistance to the federal limit, 85 percent of State Median Income, which will be about a 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level now. But disappointed that the state proposes to eliminate statutory discretion for counties, such as New York City to prioritize child care eligibility when there is not enough funding to meet the demand. The state budget also proposed a 2.5 percent COLA for the foster care workforce but ACS was disappointed that the states proposed COLA once again failed to include the prevention workforce.

ACS appreciates our longstanding partnership with the Council in our efforts to ensure the state maintains its commitment to New York City's children and families and we look forward to collaborating again this year.

As you can see, ACS and our providers have continued to make progress in our efforts to support children, youth and families, in the least intrusive manner possible. But there is more work to be done. We remain committed to listen, particularly to those who have first-hand experiences with our system, and to continue to learn so that we can deepen our understanding and evolve our work even further. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you Commissioner. I have a few questions before I jump into the budget. So, you mentioned in your testimony that last year, there were 4,500 investigations that were conducted but only 14,000 were founded right?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Yeah, 45,000 investigations.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's a pretty drastic you know difference. Is that consistent with past years?

JESS DANNHAUSER: It's a bit lower. Part of that reason is the standard of evidence changed at the state level. So, in New York State, the standard of evidence for an indication used to be some credible evidence. It is now the preponderance of evidence and so, it is a higher standard for an indication. That has helped to drop the indication rate. We were

trending in sort of the 30's, a little high 30's and now we're closer to 30. This past months we were a little bit below 30.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What's an example of that change? What does that look like?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, for our staff, it means and for some credible evidence, it would mean that if there was any potential indication. If it was unclear but something looks like it went wrong, it would indicate. Here you have to have more facts than not. You have to have more evidence than not to have the preponderance of the evidence. I think it's the right standard, most of the country has the preponderance of evidence. The right thing for families.

Even when we don't indicate, we can certainly help families. Whether it's through our CARES approach or for families where we've gone down and unfounded the case, we still offer services and supports for them.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you for that. Uhm, you also mention the shift in culture. You know really focusing on supporting more than reporting and you work with the Department of Education. Does that

work order outside of the Department of Education.

Is ACS in any way participating in community-based activities and working with families outside of the system?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Absolutely, our family enrichment centers that are expanding dramatically, our community partnerships. I was in Jamaica last weekend; our community partnerships convene lots and lots of programs to provide tangible goods for families to meet basic needs. We also work, our providers have been in addition to serving families through the prevention system and signing them up for prevention services are often doing community events. They've done a lot of work for asylum seekers. There's a number of ways we're engaged in trying to support families. We're also trying to help. So, we talked about DOE, Health + Hospitals is, uhm, we're really engaged with the Deputy Mayor brought together her entire portfolio where we shared the racial disparity data around calls to the SCR and how that disparity continues throughout our system.

And it's really engaged the leadership of all systems to think about access to supports for families without coming to ACS and how to reach out

to our prevention line if that's something that they think is what's necessary for the family.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, no, that's great. I mean I'm trying to figure out what are the best ways to kind of humanize the face of ACS so that people are not as uh – you know I wouldn't even as of last year, right, I probably wouldn't have voluntarily walked into ACS or participated in the program seeking help. You know because I would fear that you know my parenting skills would somehow you know come to question and always the fear of having a case open against you, right. So, we want to figure out how and I think that the family enrichment centers are a great space to do that and I actually am really excited because I have two. I have one East Harlem and I have one in the South Bronx but three have opened so far right?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Uh, three have been open for some time.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, where is the third one?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, there's – the three that have been open for some time, one is in Hunts Point, one is in High Bridge and the others in East New York. The other nine are opening, many of them have already

1 done community programs. I was at the one in East
2 Harlem when they did a big event around the holidays.
3 They're all choosing official opening dates with the
4 community. To your point, we're not going to you
5 know, ACS isn't going to be the front person for
6 those. We really wanted the community to know that
7 this has nothing to do with the investigative system.
8 This is really community-based supports that are
9 there to help.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I actually, I really
12 like them and I like that they're all - it's kind of
13 like the same concept but a different model right?
14 That specific community, so I really appreciate that
15 and I look forward to being at the Bronx one. I
16 think we have a Woman History Month event this
17 Saturday.

18 JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you for supporting them.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, no, they're great and
20 the staff is great too. They're very excited. Uhm,
21 in regards to the infant sleep issue, are all cases
22 where an infant passes away in their sleep reported
23 to ACS? Are all those cases reported to you?

24 JESS DANNHAUSER: No, that's a determination by
25 the hospital, by the responding whether it's the

police or EMS or whether it's the medical examiner.

So, anybody could call if they suspect but there are instances when it looks like it was natural causes and we don't get reports.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, I'm trying to get to - I'm more trying to get a sense of like what the number of infant deaths were last year as a result of co-sleeping or?

JESS DANNHAUSER: I believe the Health Department tracks those numbers but we can certainly work with them to get you an answer on that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I think it's something that we don't really talk about in our communities a lot and I know as a parent, I'm guilty of having slept with my children and you know obviously it's a conversation that we need to continue to have.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On a local level.

JESS DANNHAUSER: And support our parents because you know, we know in the middle of the night when it's stressful, it's difficult not to do it but we've seen too many tragic incidents and we want parents to know how to care safely for their children. So, thank you for that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Now, I know that the program that offers the, it's not a crib, it's like playpen right for babies. Do those programs also offer because they do have these like little things that you put on the bed, yeah.

JESS DANNHAUSER: They offer sleep sacks; they often offer appropriate cribs. We, I think the number is many thousand cribs that we delivered last year as ACS. So, they offer a variety of not only tutorial but tangible good sleep sacks and cribs as well.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you work with ACS by any chance with VHS to better educate residents that are in the shelter system about these things?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Yes, absolutely and DHS has done a great job. Whenever they have a family, they make sure that they have a crib and make sure that they check in on that to make sure the family has everything they need for sleep. We are kicking off additional work with our DHS partners and all of our providers in the coming months just to really sort of make sure that our staff know how to interact with one another. We have a very solid MOU but we're updating that to make sure we just communicate very

well between DHS providers and ACS providers whenever there's a family that we share and serving.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Now, you also mentioned that the census for the Close to Home program remains low but the number of young people going into the youth facilities has increased.

JESS DANNHAUSER: The secure detention, yes.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, are those two things one and the same? Like, are we seeing less children going into the Close to Home program because they're going into the justice system?

JESS DANNHAUSER: No, the Close to Home population has been pretty steady and low. Those are for children who have been deemed juvenile delinquents by the Family Court and sort of only Family Court. Most of the young people who are in secure detention are in the youth part of the criminal court and they've been charged with more serious offenses and are typically older than the young people who are going into Close to Home. I think the easiest way to sort of think about is, those are the kids who otherwise would have been in the adult system, would have been at Riker's.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I know that Close to Home was eliminated from the state funding, the state budget. Has there been any conversation about having that money reinstated?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the exact number of young people in the Close to Home program today? What is the current census?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And we're budgeted for how many?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We are, this year, we are taking the nonsecure placement down to 171 and a little over 200 for both, limited secure and non-secure.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I want to acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council Members Riley, Hudson, Stevens, Ung and Williams.

JESS DANNHAUSER: It is 51.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 51, okay. Thank you, alright, okay, so ACS has \$2.7 billion Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget, down \$68 million from the Fiscal 2023 current budget. Considering the increasing needs of children services amid post COVID economic uncertainties. Does ACS have enough resources to support an equitable recovery for children and families?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We believe we do. We have opportunities to expand a number of programs, enrichment centers, our Fair Futures programs. We are making enhancements to our foster care system. We have made enhancements to our prevention system and are glad to be processing the workforce investment in prevention now, about \$5.7 million. The largest of the three PEGs is actually a

replacements of federal dollars for city tax levy.

So, we have the opportunity now where there are federal resources for child care. And so, families who were previously paid for, who got childcare through our child welfare arm, we are moving them onto federal subsidized, which is a more sustainable funding stream and that will save us over \$20 million by moving them onto the federal. So, we do believe we have the resources necessary.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, the PMMR indicates progress on addressing the backlog of cases in family court for adoption services and allowing more families to meet eligibility for child care vouchers. Yet the situation and prevention services in juvenile justice looks more challenging. What investments are in the budget to support those services?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, there is a significant amount of resources you know over \$300 million that we put into prevention services. So, this is mostly about stabilizing the provider workforce with some of the workforce enhancements I spoke about. The workforce has been the primary reason it's been difficult to have as many preventive services as we fund. So we are working with all of our providers.

We're also working with providers to think about how to access, how to really serve families, to be connected to schools, to be connected to homeless shelters and others, to help serve families without an SCR call.

Previously, most of the family served in prevention services have been referred by Child Protective Services. We'd like to flip that and we've seen some providers be able to do that. We know that there's important advocates settlement here in the city that if you come through the voluntary door to preventive services, it doesn't come with the same oversight as it does with a child protective investigation. We've set targets with providers to help them really reach, to reach more families. But I think obviously the workforce and I'm glad we're putting money into the preventive budget. We're disappointed that the state did not, and once again left out the prevention workforce. That is the key. We've also been meeting. KAFCA had a set up with prevention case planners and foster care case planners, so hearing from them about their experience and working on engagement between ACS and the providers at the direct practice level to make sure

that our provider staff have a good experience with us.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Did the state justify the cuts? The reason for the cuts?

JESS DANNHAUSER: They traditionally have left the prevention workforce out of the COLA's. It doesn't seem to make sense to us that they would do that, given the importance of prevention and New York has been a leader in prevention services. We don't have a stated reason.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Regarding the vacancy reductions. The preliminary plan has a budgeted headcount of 7,079 positions. As of January 2023, ACS had 6,129 active positions. ACS has 950 vacant positions. How quickly will ACS staff up these positions and is OMB reviewing each hire?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We're working very hard to hire staff. In this Fiscal Year 2023, that we're currently in the midst of, we've hired 654 staff to ACS. 330 of those were child protective specialists. 139 of those were youth development specialists. 26 of those were attorneys. So, we are pushing very hard to hire as quickly as we can. For child protective specialists and for youth development

specialists, we hire in classes. So, we have a class right now of child protective specialists around 125 that are in the training process. We are gearing up for our next class in May and trying to get between 125 and 150 child protective specialists onboard.

We do, the Youth Development Specialist Training is a little bit shorter, at six weeks and we hire because of a traditionally greater need there, we've been hiring cohorts every four to six weeks to bring on new Youth Development Specialists.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the actual starting salary for the Child Protective Specialist and the Youth Development Specialist?

JESS DANNHAUSER: For Child Protection, it's a little over \$50,000. We're glad that the agreement with DC37 looks to be moving forward, so that will increase average salaries closer to \$60,000, about \$58,000 for CPS. Average for YDS is about \$51,000. I'll get the starting salary for you in a moment.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And what is the number of cases assigned to each child protective specialist?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Our current average is around ten.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Ten cases, okay.

JESS DANNHAUSER: National standard is 12 and we're always looking to stay under that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I mean I always want to go on record saying that you know our human services sector gets paid you know very little in comparison to the type of work that we're expecting them to do and this is really heavy-duty work, right. It takes a special skill set to be able to do this work and to work with families and often times you know our specialists are witnessing you know situations that are you know quite traumatic and you know they burnout.

And so, you know I always, and I think that that's part of the problem post pandemic is that you know folks are a little bit more, paying closer attention to the types of work that they do and not necessarily settling right for the sake of getting a paycheck and so, I'm really hopeful that you know OMB and through our conversations is able to persuade the Administration to really take a better look at our workforce strategy and salary rates, right? And really figure something out that works for everyone because at this point, every city agency is severely understaffed and that's proven to be very

JESS DANNHAUSER: You know we're very fortunate to have an extraordinary group of staff, just to answer your previous question, the starting salary for YDS is a little over \$47,000. You know we certainly have not been immune to the changes in the workforce. I spend a lot of my time with our staff understanding their experience. I think part of what they want to see and we're working hard on whether it's safety in the justice facilities, whether it's the type of work that they're asked to do in child protection, their experience really matters to them. And that is I think extraordinary because it means we have the right people who want to serve families who want to do right and want to have a good working experience. Part of that is some of the you know bureaucracy that they're asked to do. And so, we're in a process, our child protective specialist as an example have to complete the many, many templates depending on the circumstances of a particular

1 family. We're looking at really pushing that towards
2 guidance for them and documentation that supports
3 their thinking and decision making, rather than
4 documentation that just sort of you know checks every
5 box. We want to make sure that our staff have time
6 with families but it is absolutely the case when we
7 look at our exit surveys, the experience that folks
8 have as staff, is the most important thing.

9 And so, we are working really, really hard on
10 those things in every dimension of our work.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, the two for one hiring
12 process. The citywide vacancy reduction memo issued
13 in November described a change to the city's hiring
14 process, ending the policy that only allowed agencies
15 to fill one out of every two vacant positions. Yet
16 we have seen, we have been hearing from many agencies
17 that this practice is still being enforced in some
18 cases. Since November, has ACS been approved by OMB
19 to fill an all vacant positions or are you still
20 required to provide two vacant positions for everyone
21 to be hired?

22 JESS DANNHAUSER: We are not subjected to the two
23 for one rule. We have been approved to hire for all
24 of the vacant positions.
25

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect. Now, is it, it is the Personal Approval Request that agencies have to send to OMB to see how many people they can hire. That's part. According to information provided by OMB, ACS has submitted 1,158 PARs in between July of 2022 and February of 2023. Only 747 have been approved. That is 65 percent approval rate lower than the average 83 percent across agencies.

What are the top reasons that ACS received from OMB for the non-approvals and what type of positions were being denied?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, PARs are not denied in that there might be questions that OMB have and so, they send those to us. OMB has been very, very supportive of our work for our direct practice staff, so our Child Protective Specialists are Youth Development Specialists, our special officers, they have been approving and making sure that we have what we need in the most important work that we do.

Some of them that we have conversation about are where we need either a specialized skill set or we're looking to pay outside of preapproved, whether it's a ten percent or the income and minimum. This morning, the agency heads got a memo that OMB is committing to

timelines for ten days for PARs that are within the guidelines and 21 days for those that fall out for special circumstances. And so, we've been really pleased to partner with OMB and are looking forward to working with them under these new guidelines.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and we've been joined by Council Member Hanif. And regarding the family court, we noticed that there have been difficulties with family court cases moving, especially after the pandemic. What cost is the backlog of cases in family court and what is the vacancy rate of lawyers at ACS?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, thankfully we've seen some movement on the Child Protective side in Family Court. The Family Court is actually many, many, many more of their cases are custody and visitation, which typically do not include ACS.

We have seen on the Child Protective side; things begin to move forward including what you mentioned earlier Deputy Speaker. We have a workforce of attorney's that are fabulous. Those have been hard to fill. We have recently been recruiting actually nationally. We used to do the family court legal services attorneys once a year or twice a year when

1
2 it made sense to have classes. We are now going one
3 by one as soon as we can bring somebody on and we'll
4 do specialized training for them. So, we're hopeful
5 that they'll move it forward. Even though the number
6 of Family Court legal services has come down, we
7 filed far fewer cases. Compared to 2019, we're
8 filing 40 percent fewer cases in Family Court. So,
9 workloads while not perfect, uhm, have also come down
10 in the association with the number of attorney's but
11 we've had to change our hiring thinking or recruiting
12 thinking around those family court legal service
13 attorney's and we're seeing some early promise around
14 them.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's great. Regarding the
16 federal and state funding uncertainties, Title IV E
17 provides ACS with federal reimbursements for certain
18 cost to foster care. Title IV E is approaching
19 expiration but no extension has been announced. The
20 state comptroller report estimated that the
21 expiration for Title IV E would cost ACS \$120 million
22 per year from Fiscal Year 2024-2027. Is ACS aware of
23 this financial risk and what mechanism ACS has in
24 place to manage this risk?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We are very aware of this risk. Last year OMB put \$60 million in our budget to ensure that our foster care contracts that we meet the obligations to the children and to the providers that are providing services. We are working with OMB to continue to assess what that number will be. Some of this you know will relate to the number of children in foster care. We are committed to meeting the obligations in the new contracts and all of the investments that we made there and OMB has been a committed partner in that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect. I will now pass it over to my colleagues for questions but I want to recognize that we have also been joined by Council Member Fariás who I did not see. Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. First of all, I want to thank you. I know you came to positive influence at Amsterdam Houses, NYCHA and much appreciated. Family Court, I know the Chair was just asking about it. I have a lot of friends who are family court judges and I have to be honest with you, they have big cases on their own but they're not happy. So, the question I have is, you said I know

1
2 it's hard to hire attorney's. I've been criticizing
3 that since last year, saying if they're not going to
4 be able to be hybrid, they aren't going to work for
5 you, the City of New York. So, are your attorney's
6 able to hybrid? Is that helping you? Would it help
7 you? Is it helping you to hire?

8 JESS DANNHAUSER: Our attorneys are full time in
9 person and they are extraordinarily committed. I've
10 shadowed them but they are full time in person.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay and how many
12 attorneys are working in the courts, Family Court
13 from ACS?

14 JESS DANNHAUSER: We have a little over 130, I
15 believe the number is 137 FCLS attorney's.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and then are they --
17 how big are their cases? In other words you need
18 more? You said you're still trying to fill because
19 it's somewhat hard to fill.

20 JESS DANNHAUSER: We are. The exact workloads I
21 believe let me make sure I get the right answer for
22 you. But we are looking to hire. We're hiring at a
23 continuous basis, a rolling basis now and that's a
24 very, very important part of the work that we do.
25

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They'd be happy if you could make it less full time. You can't say that. I can. The other question though is what is the family child care? Something near 1st Avenue that is in the 30's?

JESS DANNHAUSER: It's the Children's Center.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, that you run that?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We do.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And how does that -- how much staff is there? And what is the purpose of it? Because it's my understanding that some people are there, young people, longer than one or two days. And then again, Family Court Judges, not happy.

JESS DANNHAUSER: We are pleased to hear that they are going to be hiring six more family court judges. I think that is good news in that regard. The children center is the center where children who are not immediately placed with family while coming into foster care come. First Deputy Commissioner Winette Saunders leads the work there and she'll talk you through some of that. But we're very, very pleased to have Council Member Williams come visit us there. It's a really important piece of our work.

WINETTE SAUNDERS: So, good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Good morning.

WINETTE SAUNDERS: Council woman Brewer and I also want to echo thank you to Council Member Williams for visiting us on February 22nd. We really appreciate the support.

So, the Children Center is a 24/7 operation where young people who are entering foster care arrive. At the Children Center we offer children to stay but we have housing. We also have a mental health team. We have programming. We have nursing. We have social workers. We have a comprehensive team of staff who support young people 24 hours a day.

With that being said, we provided service to about 1386, 1,386 unique children last year. Today our census is 73. We have 40 females, 33 males. We have ages zero to 21 and our staff, we have about 300 staff.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, but how long are the young people there? The 73 or whatever? That's what the complaint is from the judges that they're supposed to be there for a short period and they are there for a long period. I'm just telling you because I give the bad news. You can give the good news but I am really swamped with complaints.

JESS DANNHAUSER: We'd be happy to meet with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're not going to meet with you.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Well, I've recently shadowed a judge in Brooklyn and will be doing that in other places as well to make sure that we're familiar with the concerns.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're not going to meet with you. They don't want people to know even that they're complaining. That's why I'm just saying the judges in general.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Got it. The majority of children are there for less than three days. Currently, about half of the 73 children are there for over 20 days.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay because that's what the problem. They are getting complaints that they're there for longer than what they think they are supposed to be. I'm just telling you, the whole, the other issue, I get complaints because all the nonprofits are working in the courts too. They all complain to me and the issue there is they feel that your staff is not trained well enough, even though

you might think they are to be in Family Court. So, how long; I know you're hiring but how long? This is the last question Madam Chair. How long have the staff members been working in the courts? What's the length of stay? It's a hard job and they don't get paid enough. I got it but what's the length of stay and what's the training?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, there's extensive training program that we're now tailoring to individuals. That is done by the Deputy Commissioner for Family Court Legal Services Office. These are all staff who have obviously gone through law school. Who are committed to this work. So, we can get you the specifics around that. The Family Court Legal Services Attorney's, there's a Borough Chief in every single borough who has, most of them have over 10 to 15 years' experience. Who are extraordinary leaders in their own right and do ongoing training for the staff. They're often shadowing the staff in court as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so they have been there an average timeframe in terms of the one's who were ACS employed working in the courts. 10 years, 5 years, 20 years.

JESS DANNHAUSER: I'll get you that. That's the leadership level that I shared with you. We'll get you the specific around -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Staff, okay. Those are the complaints. Thank you.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, thank you. Council Member Cabàn followed by Council Member Hudson.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you so much Chair and thank you ACS for being here. I'm going to focus my questions on the Promise NYC program. A new program launched in January to expand access to subsidized child care to all children regardless of immigration status.

Last budget season, this program was just an idea laid out on a one pager and championed by a couple of electives and a whole lot of advocates. And ACS, I have to say you deserve a ton of credit for the real heroic work you've done on this program and I hope that everybody recognizes that. So, thank you and in the interest of time, I'm hoping to ask all of my questions at once but happy to restate them if needed.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you Council Member and thank you for your leadership on this important issue. We're thrilled to already be up and running with Promise NYC. This was a \$10 million investment as you know. Our staff did an extraordinary job figuring out that this had to look different from the traditional child care voucher process and that we

1 had to work through community partners. And so, we
2 are working with NMIC in Manhattan and the Bronx.
3 We're working with La Colmena in Staten Island, with
4 Chinese American Planning Council in Queens and the
5 Center for Family Life in Brooklyn. They have been
6 outreaching in the communities and doing an
7 extraordinary job. They obviously just hit the
8 ground running the beginning of this calendar when
9 all the planning was done before that. 172 children
10 have been enrolled and they have found an additional
11 304 children eligible for the program. So, we're
12 thrilled by that. I think it obviously shows the
13 demand and we've been in productive conversations
14 with OMB about the future of this program.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: And my second question was
17 like, what are some of the challenges that you've
18 heard for providers in accepting those vouchers,
19 especially like where the funding might dry up in a
20 few months and just also like you're, the ACS's take
21 on whether the discontinuation would be disruptive
22 you know in terms of stability and supports?

23 JESS DANNHAUSER: I think the enrollment numbers
24 show that the providers are willing to take the
25 voucher and so we're very pleased by that. We also

think this is an important program. OMB obviously made a commitment to it last year and we're looking forward to continuing to discuss this with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: I appreciate that. I think I'll just close by saying quickly that I'm hopeful that the Administration won't only recommit to current levels of funding for Promise NYC in Fiscal Year 2024 but double it to \$20 million. You stated in your response just how needed it is. I think in Brooklyn alone, Center for Family Life has a wait list of about 300 families. So, in recognition of the growing population of eligible families with asylum seekers coming in, you know I think that nothing less will do and so, I just thank you and if there's anything that we can do to help partner to make sure that this not only shows up in the budget but early enough that these programs have the ability to do the planning necessary to keep like a continuation of care going here.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Hudson. Are you done Council Member Cabàn? Are you done? Okay, oh look and you still had time left. Council Member Hudson.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you Chair and hello Commissioner and team. You know first I want to say the task before you all is not an easy one and I commend you for the work that you've been doing I know we still have a lot more work to do but hope that we can be partners with you in doing that work. I just wanted to ask a couple of questions. You mentioned clearing the child care voucher wait list of more than 35,000 children. Do you have the exact number of how many children and then, how much was allocated to make that expansion happen?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, we can get the exact number. The clear on the wait list require that we reached out to every family with children on the waitlist. Some have been on the wait list for some time, so were no longer eligible or didn't apply and some did. We have doubled and now it's more than doubled. As of January, we had doubled the low-income vouchers, so we are now over 15,000 families who children who are enrolled using those vouchers, so we've seen a really, really significant increase. That's of the around \$58,000 total children who are enrolled in vouchers.

Your second question Council Member Hudson?

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Was just the amount allocated. The funding allocated to accommodate that expansion.

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, the state has committed to \$4 billion over four years. We are working hard to get to get as much of that money out the door as possible. So, we are in full systems go to continue to be open for applications citywide and have the resources to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you and then uhm, you mentioned in your testimony that most calls to the SCR from social services organizations are not coming from ACS funded programs. And so I'm just wondering what specifically you're doing to address this and to inform non-ACS funded programs and organizations about the SCR?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, our Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services has been an extraordinary leader on this. She convened her entire portfolio. I want to thank the Chancellor as well for allowing us to work with his staff to retrain all 1,800 school liaisons. So, most of the schools have a liaison around child maltreatment reporting. We retrain them from a sort of a focus about when in doubt report to

really understand what's going on with the child and family. We are supported also by a change in the states training. Most of these trainings previously, I think were fairly fear based Council Member. Now, we are looking to say, you know there are really two pieces of information you have to have if you're considering a report. The first is, is the child in some of level of risk.

The second is, is the parent demonstrating a minimum degree of care? If that's the case, the parent needs help, and we can help them in a variety of ways. Each of these systems has resources to support families. Our next big engagement is with all of the Health + Hospital Staff. So, we've been engaged with Dr. Katz and his team and we are also planning around the DHS shelter system. The state is also retraining all mandated reporters across the state at the same time over the next five years. We're trying to accelerate that here. We know that this is retraining but it's also culture change. People are afraid not to call. We've taught them for years when in doubt call.

And we are working through that culture change to make sure that folks know how to access services

1 within their own continuums and agencies. How to
2 reach out to ACS services without an SCR call. We
3 have a prevention hotline. This is a huge priority
4 for us. I think the benefits of not having an
5 investigation when it's unnecessary, are for the
6 child, they're for the family, they're for our staff,
7 they're for our system. We want to focus on where
8 children are truly at risk and in danger. So, it's a
9 full effort across the entire city continuum to get
10 this right.
11

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you and then just
13 my last question and forgive me if you mentioned this
14 before, but the 79 percent of uhm, the 79 percent
15 statistic is staggering to know that uh, you know
16 almost 80 percent of Black and Latinx children
17 experience a child welfare investigation before the
18 age of 18. Of your 45,000 investigations, what
19 percentage of those impacted families are Black and
20 Latinx?

21 JESS DANNHAUSER: Just to make sure I was clear;
22 it's about 44 percent of Black children experience
23 investigation and 35 percent. Those aren't
24 cumulative. Those are percentages of each. So, it's
25 not 79 percent of -

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Got it, got it.

JESS DANNHAUSER: But it's still staggering and we are making sure, so right now, in 2021, we're running the numbers for 2022. It was 6.6 times more likely for a Black child to have a call to the State Central Registry and about a little over four and a half times for a Hispanic Latinx child compared to a White child. I can get you the exact proportion of investigations that involve them for 2022 shortly.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Great, thank you so much.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We will now hear from Council Member Ossè followed by Council Member Hanif.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Good morning Commissioner. Nice to see you. I was very interested and intrigued by the Close to Home program that you were speaking about in your testimony, especially because you know not only within the district that I represent but across the city, there is a deep concern with young people and other participation in getting into trouble as a means of a public safety concern here in our city.

I want to learn more about the Close to Home program and I wanted to start off with a question of how much does ACS if at all within the Close to Home program, interact with the NYPD?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, with the Close to Home program, these are home like settings, group home settings. These are young people who a judge has determined placement is necessary. They're young people who have been classified as juvenile delinquents in the Family Court. There's about 50 young people. There are a range of services. Young people typically do very well onsite and we welcome to have you come visit a Close to Home provider. We've hosted a number of visits. They're very impressive. The staff is very engaged with the young people.

There's also after care as part of that.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Absolutely.

JESS DANNHAUSER: The family component. There is also a youth component. We're adding our Fair Future just to the sort of broader issue around young people. We're adding our Fair Futures model sort of modifying it a little bit for the juvenile justice population but adding on the front end of our Family

JESS DANNHAUSER: You know these are judicial decisions and I have you know no reason to second guess those. These are family court judges who have made a determination. The other determination they

can make in these cases is to offer family services and youth services through our Juvenile Justice Initiative, which we call JJI. There's a whole continuum of services that are available outside of ACS, so those judicial decisions are important that they're made by the judges.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Hmm, hmm. And you may not have the knowledge on this but in terms of those judicial decisions, what is usually the result of a judge in Family Court deciding that a young person should be involved in the Close to Home program?

JESS DANNHAUSER: More often than not. I don't know the exact numbers but more often than not they are ordering services for young people and their families rather than placement.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: And in terms of the Close to Home program, how do you all track success rate in terms of you know those that leave that program and maybe do not get into more trouble or go on to do great things?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Yeah, we have some limitations in the tracking because of confidentiality but we are through the aftercare program making sure that young people have a smooth transition. That their families

are doing well and through Fair Futures will be in their life for a longer trajectory and might have some more information about their success.

We know anecdotally for many of our alumni who come back and are doing quite well. Vocation is also an important piece of this dimension. We've got a workforce RFP in programs that are starting soon that we're adding more workforce and all of our, you know we do a lot of partnerships with CUNY and others to make sure the young people have access to a career trajectory as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: And what's the budget allocation within ACS that goes to the Close to Home program?

JESS DANNHAUSER: It's about \$87 million I believe.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Okay, is ACS hoping or looking to expand the Close to Home program?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We are not. Because we have sufficient capacity there. We want to make sure that we're aware of cutting. We're cutting in a place where it's not going to cut services. It's one of the things I'm proud of around these PEGs. It's not going to have major implications for services but we

will always make sure that there is sufficient resources for Close to Home.

We're putting out an RFP in May. The RFP design, we put out a concept paper. The design really is to shrink the Census by intensifying the programs, not by taking resources away from providers and where we have cut from providers, we have tried to close whole programs, so that we're not watering down the quality of those programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: And can I have a couple more seconds Chair? I mean this program sounds like a great model that I think you know can be provided in array of different options, especially in terms of how it is focused on supplying resources, whether it's vocational training, the after care. You know partnering with local nonprofits to instill you know a promising future for a lot of these young people that could be at risk of getting into trouble or more trouble within their futures.

I know that this is a judicial decision that decides if an individual does go to Close to Home or gets involved with a Close to Home program. Are these same services that are provided, especially when it comes to mental health care provided to young

people that get into trouble that are not going to the Close to Home program but are being provided some of your other services that are outside of Close to Home?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Yes, and we're working on enriching those. Currently, we have family therapies through our Family Assessment Program that are accessible in all five boroughs. We are adding the Fair Futures component to make sure that young people have someone whose by their side, helping them with academic and career counseling across the board.

We also are awarding the alternative to detention programs very soon, which are coming over from MOCJ and those are additional services that can be available for young people.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: And you may not have this answer off the top of your head but I know you're trying to expand 30 family enrichment centers in the city. Am I getting one in my district?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Yes, I believe yes, you are. Bedford Stuyvesant right?

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Thank you.

JESS DANNHAUSER: You're welcome. We'll make sure you get who it is so we can connect you.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Amazing, wonderful. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's what he really wanted to know. Council Member Hanif.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you Deputy Speaker and good morning. It's so good to see you. Thank you for being here. I want to build on the questions my colleague Council Member Cabàn was asking about Promise NYC. It's a bit troubling to not see funding allocated for FY24 and particularly given that thousands of families, asylum seekers are in our city, why doesn't the preliminary budget include programming for this critical program and unless there is, please let us know.

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, we're thrilled to. We're really aiming to get this program started. You know the \$10 million began July 1 and you know with city procurement rules and lots of different processes, we really worked hard to get up and running by January 1st. At this moment, we're just still assessing the need. We're making sure that all of the processes are worked out and so, with such a new program, it's important that we provide OMB with all of the analysis around you know what's going well. Where we

see opportunities for growth or you know working with the current families who are accessing services. So, we are in that process of conversation with OMB.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: This is an exciting historic program that launched in our city and I'm really grateful that the administration has supported this in the FY23 budget and I know that the anticipated enrollment was slated for around 600 children. Could you share what the outreach has looked like or what some of the challenges have been as you're assessing the needs?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We are well on our way to that 600, so we are confident that we will be able to hit that number. The agencies have been extraordinary. Again, this is Center for Family Life, La Colmena and NMIC and the Chinese American Planning Council. They are deeply embedded in communities and doing a phenomenal job. So, we have 172 children who are already enrolled. They've also found an additional 304 children eligible for a total of 476, so assuming that many of those eligible children find child care and enrolled, we're very, very close to hitting our 600 goal just being in March.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then how long is the wait list for each of the four provider sites? And again, deep gratitude to the providers. I see their work. We are really grateful for the work that they're doing and building in this moment when we really need them.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Yeah, I don't think there's a wait list. There's these 304 children who are eligible, who are now with the support of the providers now seeking access to child care. So, we watch those numbers every single week and make sure we understand it. Some providers were able to get started a little bit earlier than others. And so, have a bit of a running start but all of them are now up and running and finding families eligible and then working with them to access care with those.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What does the application process look like?

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, families have to demonstrate income eligibility, which is consistent with our overall voucher, the 300 percent of federal poverty line. In this case, given the population that we're serving we use at the stations for the other key components of that. And so, it's a very

streamlined process working with those providers and in that testation to their circumstances.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's really great and I just want to wrap up by saying you know I agree and wholeheartedly am a proponent of increasing this allocation to \$20 million, which Council Member Cabàn has called for. And for this necessary urgent program to have continuity and no disruptions, particularly given the ways in which we welcome so many families, in particularly our youngest, newest, youngest New Yorkers. Do you anticipate Promise NYC will be rolled out again in FY24 and if so, how much would be adequately funded moving forward?

JESS DANNHAUSER: That's the process. The conversation we're in right now with OMB, I think, the city has responded in such an extraordinary way to so many New Yorkers coming to make sure that they have the services and supports. That includes our provider network that's been providing services at various at various herks and other places sort of outside of the formal system, really just responding in ways with tangible goods. Promise NYC is going to keep part of that this year and we are making sure that we're in active conversations with OMB about the

trends that we're seeing, the enrollments. So, we're going to continue that planning process.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Great and we'll certainly stay in touch and look forward to the findings and the assessments and for the funding to be increased. One of the struggles we've had of course is that many of our asylum seekers haven't been able to work and this program really gives an opportunity for folks to begin working.

So, looking forward to ensuring continuity at Promise NYC. Thank you.

JESS DANNHAUSER: And thank you for your leadership Council Member and I know you've heard the Mayor speak to how important it is to him that we have opportunities for families to work that are coming here. So, we completely agree.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I just had a question about the Children Center. We don't have like exact amounts. I know we can probably get it but can you tell me like which line item it falls under? Is it its own separate budget line item? And then if you

can share with us like the operational costs and any capital cost?

JESS DANNHAUSER: Sure, there's a capital allocation while we get the exact line items. We are looking at sort of accelerating some of that capital by really looking at sort of needs today in addition to sort of larger renovations. First Deputy Commissioner is working through, looking at that around the early experience of children when they come and families. Do you want to speak to that Winette a little bit?

WINETTE SAUNDERS: Sure. Council Member Williams, thank you so much again for coming out on February 27th. Just to share a little bit about the capital project and the assessment that we're doing internally to determine what parts of the Children Center should we focus on. The areas that we want to focus on is the entry for young people as well as the visitation space for families. As you know, we already increased the programming areas but we do think that we can use some more beautification around some of the programming for young people.

We're also looking at increasing electronic voltage around the Children Center because we want to

add additional technological solutions to support our young people. So, those are some of the things that we're focused on right now. Thank you.

JESS DANNHAUSER: And we have a little over 300 staff as you mentioned earlier. We'll get you the exact budget. There's been a commitment from OMB to make sure that the young people there have everything that they need. We've had staff as you know across the agency who can volunteer and come in and do additional programming. So, we'll make sure that we get those specific answers to you though Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you. And so, would you say like you have the support you need there? I know you also are dealing with some challenging conditions. Not too many of the challenging conditions, the one that I experience but do you feel like you have what you need to be able to support the children at the center?

JESS DANNHAUSER: We do and so much of this is about providing our providers what they need. Our foster care providers, our residential providers. So, in the contracts that we have recently awarded, we're making about \$35 million in investments for the

workforce of the foster care providers. As you know, most of the young people who come to the Children Center are there just for a very short period of time and we're able to identify an appropriate family or setting for them.

There are some young people who have extraordinary needs who are working with their families and identifying the best supports and services for them. Our team has been amazing. We can obviously both the nurses and then our CARE staff working together to meet those needs. We're also trying to identify ways in which we can identify children earlier. Often, if a child needs support in a hospital, we need to make sure that the state office of People with Developmental Disabilities steps up because once those children coming to our care, some of those service discontinue.

So, we've been building our acumen to make sure the children are on the right pathway to services and if the Child Welfare System is not the right place for that, then we do that before they come into our care.

But we do have the resources and constantly are trying to improve everything that we do and the

training and support that provide to our amazing staff there.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. I just have a few more questions on the same line as capital. So, ECS continues to make consolidations and upgrades to its field offices across the five boroughs. Just wondering what your goals are to making changes in the field offices and if you anticipate communities having any difficulty accessing the agency, considering the reduction of your footprint.

JESS DANNHAUSER: So, not concerned about the later. I think we'll always make sure that anyone who is reaching out to us gets the support that they need. One of the key focuses for our borough offices, our child protective borough offices is the Bronx. There's been some important landlord negotiations in some of those Bronx sites and we are trying to consolidate.

We've consolidated a number of our Brooklyn offices at Metro Tech in a much nicer setting, both for families and for staff. We're looking to do the same for some of our other Brooklyn sites. These are multiyear projects but the sites in both the Bronx and some of them in Brooklyn are a real priority.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, and then the Queens site?

JESS DANNHAUSER: The Queens site is also consolidating. So, we have a couple of sites out there.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: You have like skirts and you have like multiple spaces along Jamaica Avenue.

JESS DANNHAUSER: We do. Archer Avenue, we're at Union Hall and obviously a lot of our providers are out there as well. They could definitely use some spruce ups in our part of the capital projects.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member Stevens and I think yeah, I think she will close us out.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, good morning.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Nice to see you. I just have one question and you probably don't have the answer but if you can get back to me, it would be great.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Just with Promise NYC, I know this is a great program and it's been a priority for a lot of folks here. But just wondering, do you have like a demographic breakdown of the family, you know people that are served in that program for this last year?

JESS DANNHAUSER: I don't. That's a great question. We will get it to you. Uhm, so let me not —

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I didn't think you did but if you can get back to me, that will be really important just want to see how the breakdown is happening. I have a very high number of West Africans in my district and they often are not able to get those services and so, I'm just trying to see how we are you know doing in those areas and doing outreach in those communities as well.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Excellent and if there's a gap there we'll be sure to address it with our providers.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yes, thank you so much.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and with that, we conclude this portion of today's hearings and I want to thank you for coming. It's always a pleasure to

have you here and I look forward to continued conversations on you know as we enter into a deeper phase of this budget negotiation. Thank you.

JESS DANNHAUSER: Thank you Deputy Speaker and we'll be sure to answer the questions we weren't able to.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you guys. We're going to take a short recess and we will follow-up with DSS. I'm not sure if folks are here yet. A five minute; let's take a ten-minute recess, because that was the Speaker. [1:28:54-1:31:45].

[GAVEL] Good afternoon and welcome to the second portion of our hearing today. I want to welcome you all for joining us and I am going to turn it over to Speaker Adams for opening remarks.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you very much Deputy Speaker Chair Ayala for holding today's Preliminary Budget hearing for the Committee on General Welfare. We welcome you all here today. At this point in the hearing, we will examine the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget as it relates to the human resources administration, HRA section of the Department of Social Services.

HRA's FY24 Preliminary Budget is \$594.1 million less than the agencies adopted budget for Fiscal Year 2023. As part of the administrations program to eliminate the gap or PEG, HRA has eliminated nearly 900 positions. And as of January, the agency maintained over 1,700 vacancies, a vacancy rate of 14.7 percent. This understaffing has disproportionately harmed New Yorkers who rely on the agency for critical benefits, including those provided entirely with federal funding. At a time when New Yorkers, especially our working families are stretched thin, we need a strong HRA to support New Yorkers, not a weakened one that undermines their ability to succeed. It is critical that we urgently prioritize staffing and support for HRA.

New Yorkers who can't access their SNAP food benefits because of agency delays are left hungry. City FHEPS housing vouchers that are slow to be processed, result in New Yorkers being unfairly evicted or unnecessarily remaining in homeless shelters. And when families default on their payments because cash assistance from the city didn't arrive on time, they fall even deeper into a stability. The health, safety and wellbeing of our

city, communities and New Yorkers are all tied to how well we support essential human services. Our municipal workers and the New Yorkers they serve deserve our full support.

Acting Commissioner Park, I look forward to hearing from you today about how your agency is working to meet the needs of vulnerable New Yorkers and the gaps that need to be filled to effectively provide essential services. Thank you all very much and I now turn it back over to Chair Ayala.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Speaker. Good morning again, well good afternoon. I am Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala, Chair of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for joining me for the second part of the Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget hearing for General Welfare Committee, where we will hear from two agencies, the Human Resource Administration and the Department of Homeless Services, testifying under the umbrella of the Department of Social Services.

The city's proposed Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget totals \$102.7 billion, of which approximately \$13 billion or 12.7 percent funds DSS. This income passes \$10.7 billion for HRA and \$2.3 billion for

DHS. DSS serves the most vulnerable populations in the city, sheltering the homeless and improving the economic wellbeing of those facing poverty. These services are more vital now than ever. Changes made in the Preliminary Plan were relatively modest for both agencies. HRA has one baseline new need of \$1.2 million starting in Fiscal Year 2024. Other adjustments increase HRA's budget by \$23.3 million in Fiscal Year 2023 by \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2024. And there is a negligible increase in the outyears.

The vacancy reduction PEG decreases HRA's budget by \$14.3 million in Fiscal Year 2023 and by \$28.4 million in Fiscal Year 2024 and in the outer years including a baseline headcount reduction of 938 positions. Since the release of the preliminary plan, the Council has successfully negotiated with the Administration to reinstate 340 of the eliminated positions in Fiscal Year 2023.

In the preliminary plan, DHS has no new needs and other adjustments increase the agencies budget by \$7.4 million in Fiscal Year 2023 and by \$806,000 in Fiscal Year 2024 and in the outyears. The vacancy reduction PEG decreases DHSs budget by \$2.1 million in Fiscal Year 2023 and by \$4.3 million in Fiscal

Year 2024 and in the outyears, including a baseline headcount reduction of 107 positions.

While the budget maintains the essential benefit programs administered by HRA and the shelter programs administered by DHS, we need to think more deeply about where we can most effectively allocate our limited resources, especially during these uniquely challenging times.

In February of 2022, the DHS shelter centers was around 4,500. Just over one year later, the shelter population has grown rapidly to over 71,000. This is nearly a 60 percent increase, largely due to the influx of over 31,000 asylum seekers into city shelters since last Spring. While the city has truly stepped up with its response efforts to serve these individuals over the last year, the escalating cost and how they are budgeted are an area of concern for the Council.

The cost estimates from the Administration have risen since the release of the Preliminary Plan. Little federal funding has been secured and the support included in the proposed state budget is far below the expenses the city expects to incur. This will lead the city to shoulder most of the cost.

The budget as the preliminary plan, does not reflect the increase in cost estimates or budget for expenses in Fiscal 2024 and beyond. Additionally, with an average shelter stay for all populations at well over a year, the city needs to prioritize moving long term shelter residents out of shelter and into permanent housing. Which will allow it to better serve the recently arrived asylum seekers.

Additionally, I am concerned about the high level of vacancy rates at HRA, the slow pace of hiring and the extensive benefit processing backlogs and vital spacing at programs, including cash assistance, SNAP and rental assistance. These backlogs are having a significant impact on low income New Yorkers who rely on HRA to help them move towards stability and self-sufficiency.

The agency needs comprehensive planning and a clear path forward on how we will address the staffing and processing issues and prioritize permanent housing solutions, such as rental assistance vouchers over the long term use of costly shelters.

And before I welcome the Commissioner, I would like to acknowledge my colleague who are here today,

Council Members Riley, Cabàn, Lee, who is joining us online, Council Member Ossè, Council Member Stevens and Council Member Williams. I'm not sure if I missed anyone. I don't think so.

And finally, I would like to thank the General Welfare Committee Staff for their work on preparing this hearing, Julia Harmas, Principal Financial Analyst, Alyia Ali Unit Head, Aminta Kilawan Senior Counsel, and David Romero Counsel. I would also like to thank my Deputy Chief of Staff Elsie Encarnacion, and my Director of Communications Malek Al-Shammmary. And now, Acting Commissioner Parks, our Counsel will swear you in.

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

MOLLY PARK: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin when ready.

MOLLY PARK: Okay, thank you. Good afternoon. I want to thank Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair Brannan and the members of the General Welfare

and Finance Committees for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify about the Department of Social Services' Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget.

My name is Molly Wasow Park. For the past several years I have served as the First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Homeless Services, and for the bulk of my career I have worked to promote and finance affordable housing development.

Today I introduce myself as the Acting Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services, which is made up of the Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services. I look forward to working with the Council as Acting Commissioner. I am joined by DSS First Deputy Commissioner Jill Berry, HRA Administrator Lisa Fitzpatrick, DHS Administrator Joslyn Carter, and DSS Executive Deputy Commissioner of Finance Rosine Ferdinand.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank our DSS frontline staff and providers for their dedication and service to our clients and New York as a whole. During the pandemic and in our recovery, DSS staff and providers have stepped up repeatedly to

1
2 meet the challenges New York City has faced to ensure
3 New Yorkers in need can access the services and
4 supports many rely on in these challenging times, and
5 they continue to do so every day.

6 Under the leadership of Mayor Adams, DSS, HRA,
7 DHS staff and providers work every day to fight
8 poverty and provide New Yorkers in need with
9 essential benefits such as Cash Assistance, SNAP,
10 Medicaid, Home Energy Assistance, Rental Assistance,
11 Fair Fares Transit Discounts, anti-eviction legal
12 services, and other benefits and programs.

13 We work to prevent homelessness, provide shelter
14 when there are no alternatives, address unsheltered
15 homelessness with care and compassion, and connect
16 vulnerable New Yorkers to suitable housing to set
17 them on a path to stability. It is my honor to serve
18 as Acting Commissioner as DSS works to advance these
19 critically important goals. With an FY24 Preliminary
20 Budget of \$10.7 billion, including \$8.4 billion in
21 city funds, and a staff headcount of 12,127 total
22 positions, DSS/HRA continues to serve millions of
23 low-income New Yorkers through a range of programs
24 that address poverty and income inequality.

The nation's largest municipal social services agency, DSS/HRA assists approximately three million New Yorkers every year, administering many public benefit and support programs. The majority of the DSS/HRA budget supports entitlement spending; close to 85 percent of HRA's city tax levy and almost 80 percent of total funds are allocated for Medicaid payments to the state and cash assistance payments to clients and, on their behalf, rental assistance payments to landlords.

DHS's FY24 Preliminary Budget is \$2.3 billion, including \$1.5 billion in city funds, and a staff headcount of 1,920 total positions. DHS staff and our network of service providers administer the city's shelter system and provide supports for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Over 95 percent of DHS's budget is allocated for direct and contracted shelter, intake and street outreach. Those figures, \$10.7 billion at DSS/HRA and \$2.3 billion at DHS, only scratch the surface of all the critical social supports we provide to vulnerable New Yorkers. As the safety net of the safety net, our team is committed to uplifting the well-being of New Yorkers in need.

Some of the key programs we administer in DSS/HRA include: The Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, Medicaid and Cash Assistance entitlement programs, all of which help provide food, health care access, and income security to New Yorkers; rental assistance programs such as City FHEPS, State-funded FHEPS, and federally-funded emergency housing vouchers, which provide housing stability; the Home Energy Assistance Program or HEAP, which helps keep vulnerable New Yorkers warm in the winter and cool in the summer; programs for people living with HIV/AIDS, domestic violence survivors, and those in need of adult protective services to meet the needs of highly vulnerable individuals and families; and the Fair Fares program, which provides low-income individuals, regardless of immigration status, with discounted Metro Cards to support their transportation needs.

At DHS, we provide shelter to families and adults; we provide 24/7 outreach and low-barrier beds to unsheltered people, and we support their transitions to stable and subsidized permanent housing. Just as there is no single profile for a New Yorker, there is no single profile for a client of

DSS, HRA, DHS, a client may avail themselves of our education, training, and job placement services to pursue a career, a client may be a survivor of domestic violence securing their safety, or a client may be a person living with HIV/AIDS gaining assistance to live more independently.

We serve working families and individuals; we serve people who are unable to work; we serve people who need our services for a short while and those with longer term needs; we provide one-time and on-going assistance; we provide means-tested and universal benefits. From children and their guardians receiving assistance from HRA's Office of Child Support Services to seniors and individuals with disabilities who we assist with home care, protective services, and long-term care programs, New Yorkers of all ages benefit from our wraparound programs and services and will benefit from the preliminary budget we discuss today.

Before my colleagues and I take your questions, I do want to discuss a few key issues facing DSS, the steps we have taken, and our pathway forward. First I'd like to start with asylum seekers and the DHS Census. I can report that as of March 12th there are

21,841 asylum seekers currently residing in DHS shelter. New Yorkers should be justly proud of our identity as a sanctuary city, and of our centuries-long history of welcoming newcomers from around the globe. We will continue to build on that rich tradition. We have opened 96 emergency shelters since the spring of 2022, responding in real time to ensure asylum seekers coming to New York have a safe place to stay.

While our shelter census is currently almost 71,000 people, I think it is important to understand that without the asylum seeker crisis, the DHS census would be approximately 49,000 today. That 49,000 figure represents a marginal increase over last year and shows that this Administration's efforts were keeping the shelter census stable even in the face of increased housing costs, inflation growth, the end of the eviction moratorium and the State's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, as well as the continued financial and housing challenges low-income New Yorkers face every day.

Our team works tirelessly to deliver services that support the dignity and respect that every New Yorker and our new New Yorkers deserve, no matter

1
2 their background, no matter their origin, no matter
3 their present circumstances. We will continue to
4 work with partners at the Department of Education,
5 Health and Hospitals, the Department of Health and
6 Mental Hygiene, at New York City Emergency
7 Management, Administration for Children's Services,
8 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and at other
9 agencies across the administration to provide
10 services using a whole of government approach.

11 As Mayor Adams has said, we have a
12 "responsibility as a city to care for New Yorkers in
13 the greatest need." While recognizing that critical
14 responsibility, I would like to restate Mayor Adams'
15 important call on state and federal authorities to
16 aid in addressing this crisis, assisting us and all
17 our partners across government and the nonprofit
18 sector, in delivering the care and support asylum
19 seekers deserve. The Mayor's recently released The
20 Road Forward Blueprint to Address the New York City
21 Asylum Seeker Crisis, outlines the key ways in which
22 the New York State and federal governments can
23 address this crisis in partnership with New York
24 City.

Next, I'd like to move to Housing Subsidies and Housing Retention. DSS actively works to keep people in their homes, and thereby keep our New York neighborhoods strong. As sociologists, urban planners, and public health experts all agree, the consequences of housing instability can be catastrophic, having impacts on the ability to create and maintain supportive social networks, employment, food security, education opportunities, and health. DSS wrestles with the breadth of housing instability in New York City. Because of the scale of this challenge, we believe it requires a coordinated and multi-pronged response. Only through mobilization of all levels of government can housing instability truly be overcome.

Despite the scale of the challenge, we at the city-level diligently employ a multiplicity of tools. We believe the most appropriate course of action is to carefully target assistance for those in need. The rental assistance subsidies and the emergency rent arrears that we provide and the homelessness and eviction prevention work we pursue serve as essential tools here. Rental assistance programs, including City FHEPS, State FHEPS, and HASA enhanced rent

1 supplements, help keep New Yorkers housed and help
2 those experiencing homelessness move out of shelter
3 and into stable housing by providing monthly rent
4 supplements.
5

6 In addition, HRA provides over \$200 million on
7 average each year in emergency cash assistance rent
8 arrears to prevent eviction. Homeless prevention
9 services and aftercare services to families and
10 individuals exiting shelter and moving to permanent
11 housing are provided through HRA-administered
12 Homebase offices. Our 26 Homebase locations help
13 connect eligible New Yorkers with services to prevent
14 eviction, assistance obtaining public benefits,
15 short-term financial assistance, and more.

16 And our Office of Legal Services has served more
17 than half a million New Yorkers since 2014, and we
18 are continually working to strengthen our first-in-
19 the-nation universal access, Right to Shelter
20 initiative. In order to meet this housing challenge
21 we need your partnership in advocating for a more
22 proactive, federal-scale response on tackling housing
23 affordability; that is a challenge that confronts us
24 not only as New Yorkers, but also residents of
25 communities across the country. Last year, the Pew

Research Center found about half of Americans say the availability of affordable housing in their local community is a major problem, up ten percentage points from 2018.

As we work on a local level to foster housing stability, let's recommit to working to mobilize the resources at other levels of government necessary to truly end the housing crisis. I'd also like to speak about the processing of SNAP and Cash Assistance benefit applications and recertifications. First, I would like to begin with the context created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused extraordinary adversity across the nation and particularly in its epicenter in New York City, resulting in a significant increase in demand for public benefits.

Beginning in March 2020, HRA saw an unprecedented and sudden increase in application volume that has not abated. Today, we continue to see an historically high volume of applications when compared to pre-COVID pandemic figures. Relative to January 2019, January 2023 Cash Assistance applications are up by 70 percent. Over that same time period, SNAP applications are up 67 percent. We took steps to streamline processes to keep up with

growing needs; including implementing waivers from New York State to allow for extended recertification periods and suspension of some eligibility requirements; more remote screening, processing and submission methods; expanding our Interactive Voice Response System for SNAP recertifications; and continuing and expanding phone interviews.

In order to continue to meet the unprecedented need for assistance, we are updating our staffing models to better meet the significant, sustained demand we have seen for SNAP and Cash Assistance. We are actively working to recruit, train, and onboard the staff we need.

In addition to prioritizing frontline staff hiring, we are also looking at steps we can take to improve access by streamlining and simplifying the SNAP and Cash Assistance application process for our clients, as well as reducing the administrative burden on our staff. This requires a thorough and thoughtful approach in conjunction with our State and Federal partners, but we also want to make sure we are seizing this opportunity to reevaluate and reassess. We are asking key questions like: What further information technology tools can we deploy to

streamline processes for clients and staff? What lessons can we draw from our experience with the pandemic to pursue greater innovation and better deliver for the New York communities we serve?

Despite the unprecedented increase in applications and related challenges, our teams processed more applications and connected more New Yorkers to benefits than in recent pre-pandemic years. 1.77 million New Yorkers receive SNAP benefits, the highest number since 2014, to address food insecurity, and more than 450,000 receive CA benefits to meet basic needs and housing costs.

While DSS has faced challenges this year, we have also had some significant achievements that benefited New Yorkers, including: We made the largest funding commitment in DHS history to street homeless services, including 4,000 safe haven and stabilization beds. We increased Home Energy Assistance Program accessibility by adding applications to HRA's online application and case management platform, Access HRA. We increased the availability of fresh produce, balanced nutritious meals, and food packages through our Community Food Connection pantries. Expanded IDNYC by adding six

1 eligibility documents for asylum seekers. Worked
2 with New York State to provide over \$2.3 billion in
3 federal pandemic ERAP benefits to approximately
4 160,000 households. Worked with New York City Health
5 + Hospitals to analyze health care outcomes for
6 clients experiencing homelessness in order to
7 increase access and provide enhanced Medicaid
8 services. HIRENYC connected nearly 5,000 low-income
9 New Yorkers to employment opportunities across the
10 city, the highest number of job placements in any
11 fiscal year since its inception. Implemented One-
12 Number, a technological update that consolidates
13 multiple DSS telephone helplines and adds additional
14 interactive voice response options so clients can
15 quickly and more efficiently get access to
16 information about their benefits.

17 I will close by underlining our ongoing
18 commitment to break down government silos and improve
19 access to services. The challenges DSS, HRA, DHS works
20 to confront bridge across agencies, and further,
21 bridge across jurisdictions. Overcoming these
22 challenges goes to the heart of creating the kind of
23 caring, compassionate communities we seek to live in.
24 We appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and
25

we welcome any questions that you may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and I'll turn it over to Speaker Adams for questions.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you very much Chair Ayala. Welcome again Commissioner and to your team. Commissioner, you referenced a new office of the asylum seeker operations and the road forward. Under which city agency will this new office be located? Will it be under DHS?

MOLLY PARK: City Hall is the lead on that right now. Right now, they are still finalizing the operational plans. I do not expect it will be under DHS.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Going forward, what role will DHS and HRA have in the response efforts?

MOLLY PARK: As I said today and we've said at past hearings, I think responding to the asylum crisis is going to remain a whole of government response. This new office is going to play an important role in coordination, but I anticipate that we're going to continue to play a role in sheltering in the interpretation contracts that we have and in really planning for the overall needs.

1
2 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay, uhm, to date, DHS has
3 opened more than 90 emergency hotel shelters for
4 asylum seekers. Will the agency continue to
5 administer those contracts and oversee the operations
6 or will that responsibility be moved to the new
7 office?

8 MOLLY PARK: Discussions are still underway
9 there.

10 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Alright, let's talk a
11 little bit about asylum seeker OMB estimate increases
12 in federal and state funding. Since the release of
13 the Preliminary Plan, there have been updates
14 impacting the asylum seeker response costs. OMB's
15 Fiscal 2023 cost estimate, the city's asylum seekers
16 response efforts increased from \$1 billion to \$1.4
17 billion. The proposed state budget included a
18 potential \$1 billion for reimbursement of 29 percent
19 of the city's asylum seeker shelter costs over the
20 city Fiscal Year's 2023 and 2024.

21 Just last week, at our March 6th hearing, the OMB
22 Director indicated that the city is no longer
23 expecting federal funding to be received this year.
24 So, what adjustments are expected to DHS and HRA's
25

1 budget in the Executive Plan for these updates? For
2 which years and which funding sources?

3 MOLLY PARK: So, we're still coordinating with
4 OMB on outyear funding to cover the asylum seeker
5 costs. I think everybody understands that this is an
6 essential function that we have to keep going but the
7 funds are not yet baselined.

8 SPEAKER ADAMS: For either Fiscal Year's 2022 or
9 2023, has DHS submitted any documentation to FEMA or
10 another federal government entity for reimbursement?

11 MOLLY PARK: So, the federal reimbursement
12 process is being coordinated by OMB, not by the
13 individual agencies. So, we're providing all of our
14 information there and I will defer to OMB on the
15 specific status of those submissions.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: Do you know how much and for what
17 expenses?

18 MOLLY PARK: I do not. Rosine, do you have any
19 detail on that? We'll get back to you on that.

20 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. With regard to DSS,
21 attrition is a big area of concern for the Council as
22 I'm sure you all know, especially given the impact of
23 the asylum seeker crisis on the DHS shelter census
24 and the impact backlogs and benefits processing at
25

HRA has had on low-income New Yorkers as the Deputy Speaker referenced in her opening remarks.

According to attrition information provided by OMB for FY2023 through January, HRA has lost 753 employees and DHS has lost 136 employees. What are the main reasons each agency, particularly HRA has seen such a significant level of attrition for this Fiscal Year?

MOLLY PARKS: So, I think DSS like any other city agency, like private sector organizations right, we exist in a very complicated labor market right now. There's a lot of dynamics that are affecting our employees. That are larger than city government. I think just to – we are very focused on hiring. We have aggressive hiring plans. We are doing widespread recruitment and we have seen that those trends reverse, so just if you look since December for HRA in particular, we've seen a net growth in the agencies headcount despite the earlier, attrition earlier in the year.

SPEAKER ADAMS: So, can you just restate in which areas and positions or titles have you seen more attrition and has the loss been disproportionate?

MOLLY PARK: I don't have attrition rates by title with me but we are actively prioritizing hiring a frontline staff.

SPEAKER ADAMS: How many new employees have DHS and HRA added thus far during FY23? We don't have that.

MOLLY PARK: I don't have that with me but we can certainly follow-up.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Alright. It's our understanding that Personnel Approval Requests, so PARs are what agencies submit to OMB for approval to hire a candidate they would like to hire for a job opening. According to information provided by OMB, HRA has submitted 3,421 PARs and just 1,470 have been approved. That's just a 43 percent approval rate, one of the lowest of all city agencies. In contrast, DHS has submitted 371 PARs and 319 have been approved, an 86 percent approval rate.

What are the top reasons for denial from OMB, especially as it relates to HRA?

MOLLY PARK: OMB has been a tremendous partner in the hiring process. I think those overarching statistics reflect a variety of different dynamics. One of the things that we have seen as we are focused

1 on hiring particularly for some of the frontline
2 positions at HRA is that people begin the hiring
3 process. They accept the position and then they
4 change their minds. Something that we're digging
5 into and looking for ways that we can address that
6 but I think just looking at the start and ending
7 points of the process may not be giving quite the
8 complete picture because there are more pathways
9 there. But we're happy to dig into that data with
10 you and follow-up offline.

12 SPEAKER ADAMS: Are there consistent types of
13 positions that are being denied? Do you see some
14 positions being denied over others or is it just -

15 MOLLY PARK: No, again, we have found that OMB
16 has been a tremendous partner in trying to solve for
17 this. I think it is a challenge to identify
18 candidates and to get them to all the way through the
19 process because there are so many dynamics and much
20 of that rests, candidates have other options, so they
21 begin the process. They ultimately go elsewhere.
22 Sometimes even to other city agencies, so I do think
23 just the top line data may not be telling us quite
24 the complete story but again, we're happy to dig into
25 it.

1 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Let's talk a little bit
2 about the hiring rule. The citywide vacancy
3 reduction memo issued in November described a change
4 in the city's hiring process. Ending the policy that
5 only allow agencies to fill one of every two vacant
6 positions, yet we've been hearing from many agencies
7 that this practice is still being enforced in some
8 cases.
9

10 Since November, has DHS and HRA been approved by
11 OMB to fill all vacant positions or has there been
12 any point when the agencies were still required to
13 provide two vacant positions for every one to be
14 hired?

15 MOLLY PARK: No, we have approval to hire all of
16 our existing vacancies, which we are moving forward
17 with prioritizing frontline staff.

18 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay, that's great. And what's
19 been done differently at DHS and HRA since the
20 issuance of the vacancy reduction letter to improve
21 the hiring process?

22 MOLLY PARK: Thank you we have a number of
23 different initiatives underway to recruit. We are
24 doing a lot of hiring fairs. We've done a number in
25 conjunction with Council Members. We would love to

1 partner with other members on district-based hiring
2 fairs, so please let us know if you're interested.
3 We're working with DCAS on their hiring fairs. We
4 are really trying to recruit people with lived
5 experience. We think it's great for our clients when
6 they can get employment and it makes for a better
7 service delivery as well when we can bring in people
8 with lived experience. So, we're using business
9 link. We're using job postings on Access HRA, other
10 ways to try and bring our clients into our employee
11 base. We're working with local colleges and
12 universities. There's a lot of people who are going
13 to be graduating in the next couple of months. We
14 would love to have them join city service. We're
15 using social media in lots of creative ways.

17 So, it really is an all-hands-on deck, lots of
18 different pathways going to try and solve for our
19 hiring issues.

20 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you. I just want to touch
21 on something before I pass it back to the Chair.
22 When it comes to comparing hotel shelters versus
23 other types of shelters, what is or do you have data
24 comparing how many hotel shelters you have compared
25 to other types of shelters.

1 MOLLY PARK: Excuse me, let me pull up the data.
2
3 So, DHS is currently in 139 hotels across the city.
4 That covers all of our different programs. So, some
5 of that is specifically related to the asylum seekers
6 but we also still have a small number of hotels that
7 we're using for COVID purposes, right, so we can have
8 isolation in quarantine space. And then we were in
9 some hotel space for single adults even before the
10 asylum seekers started coming to New York City.

11 SPEAKER ADAMS: Commissioner, do you have any
12 idea how the information is being provided to either
13 Council Members, Community Boards, Community Members
14 when status of hotel shelters become permanent
15 compared to temporary status?

16 MOLLY PARK: Sure, there have been a handful of
17 those cases where we have converted from an emergency
18 contract to one of our typical nine-year contracts.
19 In that case, we would follow our normal notification
20 process. So, our team will reach out to local
21 electives and the community board to let them know we
22 do that a minimum of 30 days in advance of the
23 conversation but typically its substantially more
24 than that.

1 SPEAKER ADAMS: Not happening. I'll just share
2 that with you from personal experience. As of two
3 weeks ago, in my own district which I have had
4 several. I'm in Southeast Queens with a larger
5 perimeter of hotels around the JFK area, and not
6 happening. We were notified of one particular hotel
7 a month or so ago, that was supposedly temporary and
8 we got an email two weeks ago, stating that as of
9 "yesterday," the temporary hotel is now permanent,
10 so.
11

12 MOLLY PARK: Okay, I'm going to follow-up with my
13 team on that.

14 SPEAKER ADAMS: I can send you the email.

15 MOLLY PARK: Yes, please.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: To show that to you. So, I said
17 all that to say because I wanted to hear what the
18 answer was 30 days would be fantastic. We're not
19 getting any days.

20 MOLLY PARK: Okay.

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: We are being told and dictated to
22 how these— how the residencies are happening without
23 any input from the Council Members, from the
24 Community with no notification and it's pretty much
25 here it is, ready or not, here we come.

1 I will also just share with you that as a former
2 Chairperson of Community Board 12 in Queens, we have
3 traditionally been disproportionately handling the
4 brunt of shelter, sheltering for Southeast Queens.
5 Uhm, and that is not to say that we're not here to do
6 that, it's just that the issue of equity has yet to
7 be established and we understand we're in a crisis
8 but the issue of equity has yet to be established in
9 Southeast Queens when it comes to helping our most
10 vulnerable in sheltering. And I can also speak for
11 my colleagues in the Bronx. I believe they too have
12 similar circumstance where there is not equity in the
13 city across the board. We understand that that now
14 there is an extreme crisis but we were here before we
15 got here. And the same communities that were
16 inundated before the asylum seekers began to come in,
17 are the same communities that are now being triply
18 and more than inundated with obstacles I will say.
19 Without the appropriate resources to take care of our
20 most vulnerable who are arms have always been open to
21 and will continue to be.

22 So, that's something that I want to put on the
23 plate of every one here this morning and I would be
24 remiss to my constituents not to say that over and
25

1 over and over again. The issue is not new to us but
2 we continue to be the ones that are bearing, bearing
3 the large majority of this tremendous responsibility
4 for our most vulnerable and we would love to see
5 equity across the city.
6

7 MOLLY PARK: I will certainly follow up on the
8 notice issue. With respect to citing policy going
9 forward, as you note, we are in a particular point of
10 emergency and the emergency sites, I'm going to put
11 to the side but for our longer-term pipeline because
12 it is important that we do maintain a longer term
13 pipeline, we have been very focused on making sure
14 that we are citing in districts that have
15 traditionally had smaller shelter footprints. We
16 haven't done a lot of notifications on those recently
17 just because we have been opening so many emergency
18 sites, but we do have a pipeline coming and I expect
19 that you will see some notifications in a array of
20 districts over the next couple of months.

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: I appreciate that very much. I'm
22 going to sneak in here one other question, and that
23 has to do with cost. When it comes to a hotel,
24 sheltering versus non-hotel sheltering, what is your
25

data when it comes to paying for the hotels on a daily basis?

MOLLY PARK: Sure, uhm, so we look at shelter cost by a per diem, which is an all-in rate that includes not only the real estate but also the services and things like that. For our asylum sites which are almost entirely in hotels, the average per diem is about \$254 a night. By contrast, a families with children site that is just in our non-asylum site is about \$188 a night. Single adults are less than that, so yes, hotels are an expensive way.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Tremendous difference. Tremendous different and I will also add that and then I promise you I'm going to turn it. I will also add that I mentioned that this issue has been an issue before the asylum seeker crisis, in that we have had several bad actors throughout our communities just waiting for this opportunity to gouge the city and now the doors are wide open for them to exactly that.

MOLLY PARK: Right. DHS has been committed to scaling back use of hotels. We actually had all families with children out of hotels at the end of 2021. It was a point of pride for the agency.

Unfortunately, we haven't been able to maintain that because of the influx of the asylum seekers but we remain committed to a future that has much less reliance on hotels.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Chair Adams and I think just piggybacking off the Speakers questions on the average hotel stay and how much we're paying. I'm a little bit curious about the per diem cost.

What is the average cost per day per person per diem obviously, in the emergency hotel shelters for the asylum seekers and what is included in that cost?

MOLLY PARK: So, the average per diem for our emergency sites is \$254. That includes the cost of the hotel, but also security, food, services, it's an all in cost.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay and how does the asylum seeker hotel compared to the per diem in traditional VHS shelter and how does that defer by population site?

MOLLY PARK: Sure. So, the average per diem for a single adult site is \$136 for an adult family. So, that's a family without a minor child. \$172 and families with children \$188.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, now regarding the asylum seeker population in the shelters, you know we would like some clarity around the intake process. I think there's been a lot of confusion about who goes where, what and when. When a new asylum seeker arrives, what is their typical first point of intake or contact with the city now? Because I know that that's changed in the last few weeks.

MOLLY PARK: Excuse me, so for an individual or family who comes to DHS, they would go to the intake center that is for their respective population. So, families with children are going to the Path Center in the Bronx. Single adult men are going to 30th Street and so on.

And we absolutely see families and individuals coming to us. So, they would go through a standard intake process and then we would refer them to an appropriate sanctuary site that's operated by DHS.

When there is capacity within the HERK system, we would also give them the option of going to a HERK. It is entirely voluntary. Uhm, earlier when there were organized buses coming, semi-organized buses coming into the Port Authority, those were often referred directly to the HERK, so people were

1
2 bypassing the DHS system but at this point, because
3 people are coming in a much more at hawk way, I
4 believe anecdotally that many people are coming; the
5 front door is the DHS system.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And then does DHS refer to
7 the HERK?

8 MOLLY PARK: We give people the option to go to
9 the HERKs if they would like to and if there's
10 capacity, but nobody is required to.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is that done before or after
12 the persons been entered into the system?

13 MOLLY PARK: It's early on in the intake
14 screening process.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, before?

16 MOLLY PARK: Yeah, uhm, can I just clarify that
17 the per diam's that I read a minute ago are by
18 household and not by individual, so.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So, I know that you
20 mentioned that there is an option you know this
21 provider two asylum seekers but how does DHS
22 determine who you know who to refer out or who to -
23 is that something that - is like a blanket response
24 to every person that's coming in that identifies as
25

an asylum seeker? Like, is that option given to everyone or are you selecting who –

MOLLY PARK: Correct, any household that identifies as an asylum seeker is given the opportunity to switch to move to a HERK when there is capacity in the HERKs. If there is not capacity in the HERKs, or they would prefer to remain with DHS, they will remain with DHS.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Now, if I was an asylum seeker, why would I choose to go the HERK as opposed to DHS? Like, what is the difference?

MOLLY PARK: It's really I think a personal decision. The people may be connected to friends and family who are already staying in a particular site. There may be a certain level of familiarity. You know we are all providing services. We are all providing a safe place to sleep, three meals a day, referrals to health care and other things so you know I don't believe people are making a decision based on quality of services.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean I know that all of these programs are meant to be temporary but temporary you know today can mean three years, four years. So, there seems to be a level of permanency

1 if you will. A more stability right, at the VHS site
2 and the hotels well, to me, feel a little bit more
3 temporary in nature. I mean, I'm sure that will
4 change. Does the city have long term contracts with
5 these hotels? Because I know that there was a
6 situation in my district where a hotel wanted to
7 enter into a long term lease and VHS opted out you
8 know of contracting with that specific hotel because
9 of that but given the current circumstances, like
10 what is the agreement?
11

12 MOLLY PARK: So, right now, our emergency sites
13 are on one year emergency contracts. I think that is
14 something that we will be looking at. That years
15 starts to end in September and you're correct that we
16 are still going to have some need in September. You
17 know I can't speak to the details of the individual
18 site that you mentioned but you know we have
19 certainly had some hotel owners come to us with some
20 creative proposals for how they would like to
21 structure contracts and we are trying to keep things
22 fairly consistent across the board.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: There was recently an RFP
24 that was issued. Was that for DHS or was that just
25 specific to the HERKs?

MOLLY PARK: DHS did a sanctuary RFP in I want to say this spring. Uhm, there was a more recent one that was issued by EDC for the HERKs and I can't speak to the details of that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, okay, I just wanted to get clarity on who. Okay, we would like to get into detail on the population of the asylum seekers in the facilities. How many asylum seeker households and individuals are currently in the shelter system? That was about 20? A little over 21,000?

MOLLY PARK: It's approximately almost 22,000 but let me just pull up the most recent data. 21,841 as of last week.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Could you repeat that? I'm sorry.

MOLLY PARK: Sorry, yup, 21,841. I should clarify that's individuals. If you want households, it's 9,486.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and what is the average length of stay for asylum seekers in the system?

MOLLY PARK: Uh, we have not broken it out that way. Just, we always look at length of stay across the system in aggregate.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay but have we seen a reduction in the numbers? People that aren't in the HERKs I mean, are those folks — because I mean I've mentioned this at other hearings that my — I get the situation that we're in, so I'm trying not to be too overly critical but because the HERK was meant to be really, really temporary and it was meant to be a space where people would have like, have the time to determine what, I guess to try to figure out right what the next move would be and whether or not there were other housing opportunities that they could explore with family and friends. Have we seen a reduction in any of the two systems. I mean I'm sure you cannot speak specifically to the HERKs but at the VHS sites, have you seen a reduction in the number of asylum seekers looking for housing?

MOLLY PARK: So, you're correct that I can't speak to the details of the HERKs and I do want to clarify that the numbers that I just read on households and individuals are specific to the DHS system.

The number of individuals in the DHS system — of asylum seekers in the DHS system has the net number has been rising only marginally over the last few

months. I would say the families with children that are in the system are fairly consistently staying. Single adults tend to be a little bit more transitory. They're coming and going a little bit more.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The numbers are rising?

MOLLY PARK: They're rising but much more slowly than they were.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I wanted to get a little clarity on that because I know that there's still some stuff happening at the border that's it's preventing you know most folks from coming into the United States. So, I'm trying to -

MOLLY PARK: We have been seeing I would say probably about 100 people and that's people, not households a day, maybe a little bit more are coming in.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Identifying as asylum seekers?

MOLLY PARKS: Identifying as an asylum seeker. So, although you know as I understand from the same federal reports that you're hearing that the number of people crossing the border is lower, there is still interest from people coming to New York City.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On average, what is the number of people coming into the shelter system pre-asylum issue?

MOLLY PARKS: Administrator Carter, can you take that one?

JOSLYN CARTER: I will have to get back to you on that specific number. Uhm, because I think that varied before the asylum seekers were coming.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, now in regards to the emergency shelters that DHS has opened, uhm, can you provide a breakdown of the emergency sites by borough and the shelter type? Are they single adults? Adult families? Families with children?

MOLLY PARK: We will circle back on the by borough. Just in general, I can provide some location information. So, of all the asylum seekers and some of them are in standard DHS shelters, so this is location of the asylum seekers. 15 percent in the Bronx, 24 percent in Brooklyn, 24 percent in Manhattan, 35 percent in Queens and 3 percent in Staten Island.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and those are broken up how?

1
2 MOLLY PARK: Sorry, it's by numbers of
3 individuals.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is that what you were going
5 to get back to us, the information on the breakdown
6 on whether or not these are singles, families.

7 MOLLY PARK: Yeah, we can circle back to that by
8 location.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So, just a question
10 out of curiosity. So, I'm coming into the shelter
11 system because we, you know we're at capacity
12 everywhere. It doesn't matter where we are. I'm a
13 New Yorker. I've been displaced. I need emergency
14 housing. Am I going into a hotel that is also
15 occupied by asylum seekers? Or are you separating
16 families based on their status.

17 MOLLY PARK: To the extent possible, we are
18 creating what we're calling our sanctuary sites,
19 which are specifically for the asylum seekers. So, a
20 number of our sites are 100 percent asylum seekers.
21 That's not always possible. In particular because
22 some of the asylum seeker families are larger and
23 really need a larger unit than we can accommodate in
24 a hotel. And there's a little bit of you know our
25 priority is making sure that we are placing somebody

very quickly, so it is possible that it is a New York born household that you could end up in a hotel but we are generally trying to focus our emergency sites specifically for the asylum seekers.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And so where are we placing New Yorkers in need?

MOLLY PARK: In tier II shelters for families with children.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, uhm, okay, regarding the state budget. The recently proposed Fiscal 2024 State Executive Budget includes a potential \$1 billion in funding that would flow directly to the city to reimburse – sorry hold on. This side of the room is always problematic.

Let me start again because I lost my track of thought. The recently proposed Fiscal 2024 State Executive Budget includes a potential \$1 billion in funding that would flow directly to the city to reimburse expenses relating to sheltering asylum seekers. It would reimburse the city for 29 percent of shelter services for asylum seekers. Has the DHS or HRA incurred any expenses that it believes may not be eligible for state reimbursement under the program and if so, how much and for what?

1
2 MOLLY PARK: I think that's going to be one that
3 we're going to need to see how the rules and policies
4 filter down from the state. Once the governor's
5 budget is passed, we will work with OTBA on that and
6 OMB on that reimbursement process.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And what type of expenses
8 does DHS typically well plan to submit to the state
9 for reimbursement?

10 MOLLY PARK: The bulk of our spending to date has
11 been for shelter and shelter related costs and I do -
12 based on my understanding right now, that would be
13 eligible but I also think that there is a lot that
14 remains to be understood about how the exact nature
15 of this will work. Rosine, anything you want to add
16 there?

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, so we're paying for
18 shelter, we're paying for food, we're paying for what
19 foster services, is that?

20 MOLLY PARK: Services, security, HRA has a
21 contract for interpretation services right? So,
22 there's a variety of different costs that we are
23 incurring but because we have not got any guidance
24 from the state yet about precisely how this will be
25

implemented, I think it's premature to get more specific.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and I'm sure there's going to be a million other questions regarding the asylum issue but I want to really get to some questions on the HRA vacancy reduction. Because I know that you stated in your testimony that 67 percent of SNAP applications are I guess that's the rate of completion to date.

MOLLY PARK: Sorry, the 67 percent was the percent increase in applications relative to January 2019.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, where are we to date in terms of because I know that the budget, the staffing shortfalls were significantly impacting our ability to complete applications and there was some conversations with the state about continuing some COVID you know measures that allowed us to push back recertifications for up to a year to allow for more priority to be given to new applicants.

MOLLY PARK: Yup, so we are absolutely focused on the cash and SNAP backlog issue. This is an enormous priority for me and for the agency and I will just say if even one household is having to wait for their

benefits, that's too much and we are laser focused on resolving this. As of December, which is the most recent point and time for which I have data, the timeliness rate for SNAP was about 36 percent for new applications. But we have made a tremendous amount of progress since then. The backlog is much smaller than it was in December. We have virtually no pending recertifications on the SNAP side. So, as we are able to refresh that data, I think you're going to see very rapid improvements in the timeliness rate on SNAP.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What changed?

MOLLY PARK: I'm going to start and I'm going to pass it to Administrator Fitzpatrick. We are aggressively hiring and we have brought on a lot of people particularly in the SNAP program. We are working very closely with the state. We have gotten some additional waivers as you know to change timing of recertification. So, that's allowed us to focus on the new applications. And we have a lot of technology investments on the SNAP side that have allowed us to catch up. But Administrator Fitzpatrick.

LISA FITZPATRICK: Thank you Commissioner Park.

Those were actually the bulk of the reasons for the decrease in the backlog for SNAP. We also opened up the on-demand telephone interviewing system back about a year ago and that actually helps to speed up the process. We had some staff that were working in SNAP. We deploy temporarily in SNAP and they helped us to clear up a lot of the backlog as well. But primarily it is simply just hiring. We need more people on board to do this work.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I participated in a couple of the DCAS you know job fairs and I know that the issue has been even getting people into the door to apply for the jobs because of the rate of pay. What changed at HRA that is now, I think folks are getting the attention of individual job seekers to apply for HRA. Because I think a couple of months ago, we were still having trouble.

LISA FITZPATRICK: Yeah, as the Commissioner said, we've been advertising everywhere and I think the outreach is really working. We also changed the recruitment flyers for the eligibility specialist job which works in SNAP to make it more focused on customer service. You don't need a degree to be an

1
2 eligibility specialist, so that helps with the
3 recruitment as well. And I think it's really just
4 about like an all hands on deck effort to try to get
5 as many applicants processed as possible.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Has there been any change to
7 the work from home policy? I mean any consideration
8 to remote work, especially for the people that are
9 processing applications?

10 MOLLY PARK: So, we're very encouraged by the
11 agreement that was reached with DC37 assuming that is
12 ratified. We do expect that these positions, the
13 eligibility specialists and the job opportunity
14 specialists, which are the staff that process cash
15 assistance, we will work with the union to ensure
16 that those positions are part of the remote work
17 pilot.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think that that will be a
19 game changer and I'm looking forward to helping
20 modernize HRA before I leave here because you know I
21 think that you're like in desperate need of you know
22 modernizing and whatever. You know I think even in
23 hiring practices right. I mean this is something
24 that we use for payroll for you know paying out
25 contracts with paying rent. It's still pretty

MOLLY PARK: And we love your collaboration on that.

So, regarding the preliminary plan, the PEG removed 938 baselined positions starting in Fiscal Year 2023. 165 were in the Medicaid program area and most of the other positions were in the general administration area. The plan also reflects savings in Fiscal Year 2023, of \$14 million and in Fiscal Year 2024 and the outyears of \$28.1 million.

Since the release of the preliminary plan, the Council and the Administration have agreed to restore 340 of the positions eliminated in Fiscal Year 2023. Could you provide us with detail on which executive program areas are impacted and what positions will be removed? And for the 340 positions that were reinstated, and which areas will they be reinstated?

1 MOLLY PARK: So, we're still working with OMB and
2 our finance team is working with OMB to allocate the
3 positions, the lost positions, across specific areas.
4 We have approximately 2,000 vacancies that's across
5 DHS and HRA and we are full steam ahead on hiring
6 with an emphasis on frontline staff. So, the ES and
7 workers that we discussed for benefits processing but
8 also staff working in shelters, case workers and
9 others, anybody who is client facing, that is our
10 priority.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Oh, and I'm sorry, I kind of
13 -I lied a little bit, I have one more question. It's
14 a City FHEPS related question. It's really important
15 to me. As you know, you know we have been really
16 looking at you know the current census at DHS and
17 really reexamining right how we legislate right? In
18 a way that is helpful to the Administration to help
19 reduce the number of people in shelter. And to try
20 to create systems that prevent people from even
21 getting there to begin with.

22 And so, obviously City FHEPS you know vouchers
23 are really an important part of this conversation and
24 remains you know a priority. So, it remains a
25 priority to the City Council that those in shelter or

at risk of eviction are able to obtain rental assistance in a timely manner and use it to secure and maintain permanent housing. Has HRA seen an uptick in City FHEPS utilization since the rent levels were increased to be inline with Section 8 and if yes, please detail the increases and if not, why not?

MOLLY PARK: Thank you Council Member. So, it's a slightly challenging question to answer just because there's been a lot going on during that same time period. So, what I can say is that we have seen a steady increase in the number of City FHEPS vouchers used each year since the program was started. So, we saw that there was an increase in City FHEPS utilization following the increase of the rent levels but there was an increase before that as well.

I think just as knowledge about the program, both on the tenant and the landlord side became more widespread. The other piece that happens sort of almost at the same time was the rollout of the emergency housing vouchers, the federal program that serves a very, an overlapping population of clients. So, some households that might have used City FHEPS

used DHV instead. That's not a bad thing but does distort the data. With that being said, we absolutely believe that that increase of the City FHEPS rent levels to benchmark it to the NYCHA payment standard has been hugely helpful. I think it's really important for making it a stronger program.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Uhm, can you tell us what the current number of active users of vouchers is?

MOLLY PARK: There are about 28,000, a little more active City FHEPS users. Note, that that does not include any of the predecessor programs that are where there still some households on those, nor does it include like state FHEPS or EHV or anything like that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and finally, can you tell us what the percentage of clients who were deemed eligible for City FHEPS end up actually being able to use their vouchers for housing?

MOLLY PARK: So, our policy again, it's a slightly complicated answer to what should be a straight forward question. I apologize but our practice at DHS is to help clients qualify for any

1 identify an apartment and Council Member Williams and
2 I will be facilitating and hearing soon just to kind
3 of figure out how we can fine tune those operations a
4 little bit more efficiently.
5

6 Alright, did you have anything? No, okay. We
7 will now move onto Council Member questions, starting
8 with Council Member Brewer followed by Cabàn followed
9 by Ossè.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I
11 know that you're also working with a lot of
12 nonprofits and I know I think if you talk to them,
13 they're number one. Like, maybe yours is the hiring
14 of staff. So, I know you are concerned about this,
15 we all are but is there any possibility that their
16 staff could be compatible with the staff of DHS and
17 DSS? In other words their salaries to be the same
18 because it seems to be a place where there's so much
19 variation and they can't recruit staff.

20 MOLLY PARK: So, absolutely prioritize our
21 provider hiring to. Providers are providing really
22 essential frontline services and they can't do it
23 without the people. We are connecting them into the
24 same HRA workforce development programs that we're
25 using to try and bring people with lived experience

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, because I think some of the folks who are doing many of the food pantry's as you know have their own system to their credit of figuring out how to get people benefits. But they are still frustrated. Are they getting -- because this takes too long. Are they getting the same kind of support that you're trying to do for those in the agency trying to get SNAP? Because they are not feeling that that kind of as you say fast tracking, which everybody wants. I know you want is happening. Is there something different that goes on with the nonprofit sector?

MOLLY PARK: So, happy to follow-up with specific providers if you have some in mind. I think and we really value the outreach that our, that food pantry's and others do about SNAP. At the end of the day, under I believe it's regulation. It may actually be law. The benefits can only be processed

by city employees. So, it is you know, while they are performing a really vital outreach function, the actual processing is happening at the agency. But anyone want to add anything on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright. I'm just, that is an ongoing problem and it doesn't seem to go away because of the food insecurity that everybody is feeling. So, something -

MOLLY PARK: Happy to follow-up.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Homebase, you know it's never been my favorite agency, I'll be honest with you. So, how much is allocated? What are their challenges? Are they able to keep people in their homes? And then some of the advocates are pointing out that it would be better for them to follow-up on case work because they are swamped.

And then, leave some of the benefit opportunities for getting benefits to some of the nonprofits, which are underfunded.

But just in terms of how is Homebase doing? I know you have to say they're always perfect, but they're not. So, what can we do to improve them if we can be honest about it?

MOLLY PARK: Well, I'm a believer that we can always find ways to improve across the board.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Me too.

MOLLY PARK: Everywhere, so I will never be saying that anybody is perfect.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

MOLLY PARK: I do think Homebase is a program that has a proven track record, really strong success rate of the households assisted. Very high percentage Avoid the Shelter System, which is exactly the goal.

Demand is high for Homebase services and we are working with our providers to make sure that they are able to serve as many households as possible, as they are triaging appropriately so that the households with really urgent needs are getting seen first.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you meet with some of the nonprofits that are working with Homebase to see if they have some other ideas about how Homebase could be structured?

MOLLY PARK: That's not something that I have had the opportunity to do yet in this role but that's a good suggestion.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I mean obviously you want people to stay in. Now, the only other opportunity for paying the rent is one shots. We all know how to get one shots but is there any other suggestion financially for keeping people in their home when it's just an economic issue? I know one shot like the back of my hand. I know what to do. I know how to get it. I got \$39,000 once, I was very proud of myself.

But generally, that third part. What else do we do to keep people in their homes?

MOLLY PARK: So, we do have — homelessness prevention is really important to us and we do have a toolbox with a number of different options. So, Homebase and the services that they provide are really important. The one shots are really important. The legal assistance that we provide is really important and then there's an array of rental assistance. City FHEPS is a piece of it but State FHEPS and others can play an important role in helping people avoid homelessness as well. So, really what we're trying to do whenever we're intersecting with a family that a household that is

at risk of homelessness is finding the most targeted way that we can serve them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Not to belabor but at some point, can you get us statistics as to what Homebase has done to prevent? Obviously, is that some kind of numbers that you have? Prevention as opposed to obviously something on a monthly basis or whatever?

MOLLY PARK: Sure, we can certainly follow-up with that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright. And then I just Bellevue should be torn down and start over. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Agreed. Council Member Cabàn followed by Council Member Ossè.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you. I'm going to start with a question on the special officers and then move into NGBV and the microgrants programs. Bear with me, but uh, I'm concerned that DHS is planning on spending \$30.1 million in FY24 on its own police force of 554 special officers to expand the use of policing practices when interacting with our homeless neighbors. I don't think it's the right

1 approach sending homelessness and puts New Yorkers at
2 risk of further harm and criminalization.

3 So, you know in my opinion, I think we should be
4 using these resources to close important gaps in
5 services, which have been highlighted already. And
6 so, can you confirm that your budget is \$30.1 million
7 for special officers in FY24? And can you also share
8 your reasoning for prioritizing resources for that
9 force? So, instead of closing other gaps in shelter
10 services or permanent housing placement?
11

12 MOLLY PARK: So, we'll pull up the exact number.
13 While we're doing that, uhm, let me take a step back
14 and talk a little bit about what DHS PD does, right?
15 So, we have a modest DHS police office force. It is
16 substantially smaller than it was a few years ago.
17 These are officers that go through really extensive
18 training on not just to become licensed peace
19 officers but also to really understand that the
20 clients that they are serving, to understand the
21 underpinnings of homelessness to understand de-
22 escalation techniques to and to really experience
23 uhm, what it might be like to be in a shelter.
24 Actually a fair number of the — we've been recruiting
25 from people with lived experience and something that

1 we think is really helpful. DHS PD under its current
2 leadership, it's now completely administered by the
3 agency, not NYPD but DHS PD under its current
4 leadership has really been emphasizing community
5 engagement, client engagement, so that they are doing
6 a lot of programming, working in conjunction with
7 shelter staff and with clients. So, that security is
8 an integrated part of what we do as an agency. 24/7
9 security is part of our shelter model under any
10 circumstances. It's really important that we are
11 keeping both clients in community safe but we
12 absolutely believe that a trauma informed client
13 centered approach can be brought to the DHS PD, as
14 well as to our social service staff. Commissioner
15 Carter, anything you want to add?

17 JOSLYN CARTER: Sure. Thank you Commissioner.
18 One of the things that's important to us is that DHS
19 PD comes from a certain trauma based, trauma informed
20 care. And so, they have been also working with not
21 only the shelter providers but with our program staff
22 to really assess the needs and not just policing a
23 point of view.

24 So, we're doing much more integrated work and
25 it's not a separate entity, so they're integrated

with social services within the shelters that they serve at.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: But is that — I just want to confirm that that \$30.1 million is the correct number and I'm just going to state that I do believe that instead of supplemental training for police officers, that there is no substitute for full time trauma informed professionals to do the work that we're asking those folks to do but I just yes or no is that the number? Because I want to make sure. I said it in my other questions.

MOLLY PARK: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Okay, thank you. So, the microgrants program, I just first of all want to commend NGBV because they stepped this program at the peak of the pandemic and did a phenomenal job and was excited to pass the Support Survivors package. You know it's this new microgrants program for domestic and gender based violence impacted clients and was announced in the Mayor's housing blueprint as a result. I see that the Preliminary plan adds \$1.2 million in baseline city funding starting in FY 2024. And I mean it's incredible. It removes a lot of barriers. It puts money in peoples hands at the most

critical time for whatever it is that they need and I just want to set the stage a little bit, I really wish I had like a katy board or white board with me but during the pandemic, during the peak of the pandemic, two months this program, the pilot of this program functioned \$450,000. Average grant size of \$1,200. Organization and NGBV I think would say how lifesaving these interventions were. Most of it 60 percent was used for housing and phones. And just based on those numbers, the math doesn't add up. The \$1.2 million falls short just based on those numbers over that two-month period. And I was encouraged that at the bill signing, the Mayor said, you know "we are going to identify the dollars to make this happen." But I want to now add some more numbers.

I don't have the total number of adult survivors in DV shelter but my understanding is that DV shelters – I'm going to wrap up Chair, I'm sorry. That DV shelters currently like include 4109 total households. And so, after the 15 percent admin set aside and a \$2,000 grant, \$6 million would enable the city to potentially reach over 2,500 households or that comes out to more than 50 percent of the

families and single adult survivors in shelter plus some survivors who are not in the DV shelter system.

So, I just want to get a sense of how you all are feeling about the program? A little bit how it's going to operate but also whether you believe that \$1.2 is we need more than that to really feel the gap and meet the need?

MOLLY PARK: So, thank you Council Member. We actually are not the lead administrators for the program. It's out of NG – it's an acronym, I struggle with it, I apologize for that.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Yeah, it's just that NGBV isn't an actual agency and so, they don't –

MOLLY PARK: Understood, right, so we serve as a financial conduit for them but because we aren't directly involved in the administration of the program, we're going to need to circle back with them and we will make sure you get answers there.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you. I've worked so hard on that math but thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Ossè.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Hi, good afternoon Acting Commissioner Park. Thank you so much for being here and answering all of our questions. The first thing

1 that I wanted to address and I think we're all on the
2 same page about this, especially within the community
3 that I represent. You know your agency is something
4 that my constituents truly depend on, especially in
5 terms of addressing the housing crisis and those that
6 are within the shelter systems. There are a lot of
7 folks that are you know considered homeless that you
8 know are yearning to be processed out of the shelter
9 system and to move into more permanent housing.
10

11 As we know, because of staffing shortages, that
12 has been rather difficult. Would you say that you
13 know sheltering people in homeless shelters or hotels
14 is more costly than rental assistance vouchers?

15 MOLLY PARK: Let me start by saying I'm an
16 enormous believer in the value of permanent housing.
17 I spend almost my entire career in the affordable
18 housing side of city government and we as an agency
19 are hugely committed to improving access to
20 affordable housing and to continuing to help
21 households leave the DHS system for permanent housing
22 and to prevent them from coming in.

23 With that being said, the math gets really
24 complicated because shelter stays, while we can argue
25 about whether or not they are too long, are typically

finite where as permanent housing is typically subsidized over a – we hope many year period, right? So, when you do – so what is more expensive is the challenging side of math. Happy to dig in with that offline. With that being said, we're going to keep investing in permanent housing, because it is the right thing to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Hmm, hmm. So, I do want to address that the IBO did a report on the cost and I do hear you that the math is rather difficult but you know when we add things up, you know the IBO reported that the cost of an average of \$138 per person per day in 2021 is to keep someone within the shelter system. That's about \$4,100 a month compared to the City FHEPS vouchers which are about \$1,700 for one person or \$2,700 a month for a family of four.

So, from those reports, I think in terms of –

MOLLY PARK: Sure, on a night by night basis, rental assistance is absolutely less expensive. Where it becomes a little bit more nuanced right, is that a family is going to – an average family right is staying in shelter a little over a year. A City FHEPS voucher is a five year subsidy, right? So, that is where that on a cost basis that becomes

again, a slightly complicated analysis. With that being said, permanent housing is the right solution. It is the right thing to do and we are focused on it as an agency.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: And what has the agencies struggle been in terms of getting folks from within the shelter system into a more permanent housing structure?

MOLLY PARK: There's a slue of challenges. First and foremost, there is insufficient housing supply in the City of New York. Uhm, particularly at moderate rent levels. So, that is something that we struggle with every day and when we do find the housing, we want it to be of adequate quality. So, we do an inspection. We need to make sure those units are going to pass the inspection.

There are you know other challenges you know, certainly can't pretend that a source of income discrimination doesn't exist. That's an issue.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Is staffing a major issue?

MOLLY PARK: Uhm, we are struggling with staffing across the board and I can't pretend that we aren't but uhm, but I don't think it is the primary obstacle to helping households in the shelter. Uhm, yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Remind me of, so I understand the PEGs are – we're being told that they are not effecting services but they are. To deduct you know the vacancies in staffing. How many positions would your agency ideally want to hire?

MOLLY PARK: So, right now, we have about 2,000 vacancies and we are going full steam ahead to fill those with a particular focus on our frontline staff. You know we have had conversations with OMB already that in those frontline areas, if we use up all of our vacancies and the need still exists, we will have those conversations with OMB. I am not worried about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: And in your point of view or opinion, what has been the difficulty in hiring?

MOLLY PARK: Uhm, well, it's a very unusual labor market across the board right now and I think we are dealing with a lot of the same challenges that uhm, not just other agencies but other sectors are dealing with as well. So, you know but we are taking a lot of different creative steps to try and reach new audience, bring new people in and process people as quickly as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÈ: Could you elaborate on what some of those difficulties are?

MOLLY PARK: Uhm, yeah, I mean because everybody or so many different sectors have vacancies right now, people, employees have choices which is a wonderful thing for employees. It's harder as an employer. I think I am an enormous fan of working in city government. I think it offers a lot of advantages. Sometimes those advantages are more apparent if you're planning on spending your career in city government.

So, for somebody who is thinking about whether or not it is the right thing to do, it might, a private sector role may seem initially more appealing. I'll just say, we are focused, this conversation is focused a little bit on positions where we have the ability to hope to do open competitive hires. That's true of some of our frontline positions but not all of them, so for a number of our positions, we are hiring only off of lists. We take our obligations under the Long Beach decision very seriously and so, you know when – and we're calling pools expeditiously but when you're calling off of lists, that's a whole other set of challenges, right? Because it's a very

1 regimented process where you call a list order and
2 you know somebody got on the list because they really
3 wanted to work at you know Department of Health but
4 they are getting called based on where they are on
5 the list. They are getting called by us. We're
6 just, you know, we may or may not be appealing.

7
8 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you and the last
9 thing that I will note and I brought this up in the
10 last hearing that we had together. Uhm, is that when
11 you look at some of the starting salaries again for
12 these case workers, you know they have to have a
13 college degree. To sometimes be approved and
14 receiving this job but the starting salaries range
15 from \$42,000 to \$47,000 a year. That is not enough
16 for the work that you know people that work for this
17 agency do in order to keep a roof over their heads
18 and pay New York City rents, put food on their table.
19 The cost of living in the city is way too high and the
20 starting salary for a case worker in HRA, which is
21 very hard work, as I'm sure all of you know is not
22 enough. And I know that sometimes is out of your
23 power but you know I'm hoping that there is some
24 advocacy coming from your agency in terms of speaking
25 to DC37 and this administration about you know

1 hopefully seeing an increase in starting salaries, as
2 well as an increase in you know several other
3 positions across the agency. But you know I think if
4 we are providing higher pay for those that are doing
5 some crucial important work within the agency that
6 addresses many of our you know city's problems, most
7 especially in my district, I'm sure that you'll see
8 those staffing shortages maybe shrink. But that's my
9 last thing that I'll note and I'm hoping those
10 conversations are ongoing.

12 MOLLY PARK: Yup, I absolutely hear where you're
13 coming from. We are following the civil service on
14 collective bargaining guidelines but as I mentioned,
15 we're really encouraged by the DC37 agreement. Hope
16 that it's ratified and we'll be looking at that going
17 forward.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Great, thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We've also been joined by
20 Council Member Restler, who has a question.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much Chair
22 Ayala. I really appreciate your tremendous
23 leadership of the General Welfare Committee and it's
24 good to see the Commissioner. Congratulations.
25 Administrators Fitzpatrick and Carter, and Deputy

Commissioners Ferdinand and Berry, good to see all of you. Greatly appreciate each of your work.

I just want to continue on the thread that Council Member Ossè was pulling on on the vacancies, which are deeply concerning to me. Thanks to the leadership of Chair Ayala, we focused on this at previous hearings. The last time we had Administrator Fitzpatrick here, she noted in her 38 years of experience at HRA never has the headcount been as low as it is today.

And when we look year over year at 2,000 odd vacancies across DSS in addition to nearly 1,000 eliminated positions, we're talking about a 20 odd percent reduction in the workforce in an extremely short period of time. We have not seen a 20 percent reduction in poverty. We haven't seen the 20 percent reduction in people who are facing evictions. We haven't seen a 20 percent reduction in demand for the vital food stamps, for the vital services that HRA and DHS provide. But we are of course seeing a dramatic reduction in the services that are provided to New Yorkers as a result of the extraordinary reduction in the workforce.

And I am livid about it because people are suffering. We all know the data and food stamps processing down to 40 odd percent of clients who are applying, getting their food stamps within a month but when you look across the board and you talk to staff at the Homebase Center, Homebase providers, if you talk to the Legal Services providers who clients need DSS services so badly. They are all facing extended delays and it's unacceptable.

So, I just want to first ask, why were the civil service exams for the eligibility specialist in February canceled and not rescheduled. If we're saying that we're that we're prioritizing hiring and trying to bring new folks in, what's the status of those exams and how many folks were brought in, new hires were made by DSS in February?

MOLLY PARK: Thank you Council Member. Let me start by addressing your point about reduction in service. Our frontline staff, our providers are really doing a hero's job.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Agree.

MOLLY PARK: In addressing certain -- delivering services even in a challenging environment. And we are taking a lot of steps so that we can do things in

different ways. That is not to say that we don't need staff. We absolutely in staff, we have an aggressive hiring plan but we're also doing things like using technology in different ways.

Administrator Fitzpatrick mentioned our on-demand interviews for SNAP, which has been I think a significant benefit to clients, right? They don't have to wait for a phone call, they can do it on their own schedule and has made operations more efficient and allowed us to really catch up on our SNAP backlog.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate there are efficiencies in technology and I appreciate that you know I have great respect for the people on this panel and most of all for the staff at DSS who I think do a tremendous job. It's one of the most effective agencies in city government but you can't do it without people and PMMR results couldn't be clearer and when we talk to providers who are engaging with DSS on the ground every day, and not getting the responsiveness that they are accustomed to because you don't have staff. There is no excuse.

MOLLY PARK: I am not going to pretend that we don't need staff. We do need staff. I just wanted

to recognize the fact that we are still continuing to deliver services.

To answer the specific question, the civil service exams are offered and scheduled by DCAS but that has not stopped our hiring whatsoever. We are — because there aren't lists right now, because there isn't a test, we are treating them as open competitive and we may have covered this before you were able to join but we are recruiting really aggressively. So, we are doing a lot of hiring fairs. We've been in conjunction with DCAS, but also in conjunction with Council Members and others. We would, I know we've spoken about this. We would love to host a hiring fair in anybody's district. We are bringing on people with lived experience by posting jobs on Access HRA and using our business link tools. We're collaborating —

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate all that. I know you've covered some of this too. Do you have a number of people that you brought on in February?

MOLLY PARK: Yes. We will pull it up if you want to keep asking.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You know just because Chair Ayala is going to kick me out of asking

1 questions in a moment. The next thing I just wanted
2 to ask is, I believe we're down to ten percent of
3 eligible tenants who deserve Right to Counsel,
4 actually accessing an attorney when they're facing
5 eviction. Is that the most up to date number or what
6 are the figures that you have at your disposal?
7

8 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, that does not seem like an
9 accurate representation of what's going on the
10 ground. I'm happy to dig into that particular data
11 point but if I could just talk a little bit about how
12 we're approaching -- how the right to Counsel's
13 process works on the ground. When a household comes
14 to one of our providers, there is an individualized
15 assessment where it's determined, to determine what
16 the level of service they're eligible for and what
17 they need right now.

18 So, it may be based on either need or income that
19 what they are going to get is a brief consultation,
20 so it's a one time legal assessment and advice or it
21 may be that they are going to be assigned to an
22 attorney. If they are assigned to an attorney, it
23 might be active at the time or if they don't have an
24 active case, they may be assigned to an attorney for
25 the future. So, and that's most particularly the

case for households with ERAP cases where because of their ERAP status, they are not actively in housing court. We're not going to assign them to actively to an attorney while they don't have an active court case. So, there is this case by case assessment going on to make sure that people are getting the level of services that they need.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Do you have the February hiring numbers? Sorry to keep asking questions. Are you looking for something else? But I just -

MOLLY PARK: You know, I'm going to get back to you on the specific February.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We will definitely follow-up with you on that Commissioner and I just, I am concerned that we are neglecting the Right to Counsel program to such a degree that we are - it's having significant impacts on increasing homelessness in New York City.

And it is the evidence based solution for how we prevent homelessness, is to provide counsel to individuals in Housing Court and our failure to do so is really terribly hurting vulnerable families and increasing the role at a time when none of us want to see that happen. We never want to see that happen.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

MOLLY PARK: So, let me clarify what's happening with that. During the height of COVID, we issued an interim policy on use of single rooms. And it was based on the information that we had at the time and the medical tools that were available to us at the time. As the medical landscape has changed, we reissued our policy on accessing single and double rooms within the DHS system. There is a reasonable accommodation process that people need to follow that

shows that they have – that they are immunocompromised in some way or have some other need, safety or other kind of need for a low density setting. We actually thought that the timing on this was really appropriate. There are people who may have a need for a single room that is not related to COVID, who the interim policy didn't accommodate. At the same time, with the availability of vaccines and treatment and through better information about the disease, some of the people who needed a single room in the height of COVID, maybe don't need it now. The process that we are going through right now is an individualized reassessment of what peoples needs are. We are going very slowly and deliberately case by case, so that if people do still need it, have medical reasons for a single room, they will retain their single room. If given the changing medical landscape, they don't have that need, we will move them to a different setting and somebody coming in who has a set of circumstances that might not have qualified the for a single room during the height of COVID, now has the opportunity to get that.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I know how thoughtful you are. I hope that you consider seniors to be a

class of people who deserve single rooms, considering the risk that they face to COVID. It doesn't sound like that's the current policy but I hope that you consider that. I just want to say, I want to be a partner. I want to help. We want to see you staff up so that you can do the work that you need to do to help vulnerable New Yorkers. Any ways in which I personally can be helpful, please let me know and congratulations again.

MOLLY PARK: Appreciate it, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Council Member Restler. Council Member Williams followed by Council Member Stevens.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. In reference to the Mayor's State of the City speech. So, he talks about pursuing legislation, allow New Yorkers to keep public benefits for up to six months. Are you able to detail the plan or a timeline and if you think there would be any need for a state or a federal approval for this effort he mentioned.

MOLLY PARK: So, I'm going to start and my colleagues will jump in. I believe this does in fact reference a proposed state legislation for an earned income disregard. It's something that we

enthusiastically support but Administrator Fitzpatrick, anything to add there?

LISA FITZPATRICK: Yeah, there's in the governor's proposal, there is a plan to extend benefits for those who find employment for various types of employment and that count that income for up to six months. So, that hasn't been finalized at this point. And we support it. We think it's the right thing to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you. The other question I have is in reference to some of the funding that you receive from the federal government. Uhm, you know you were allocated funding through the Federal Pandemic Relief Funding to ongoing programs. And just wanted to know if funding is no longer being shown in these budget codes starting in Fiscal 2026 because the funding is no longer available. Is all of this funding for ongoing programs continued?

MOLLY PARK: So, federal funding may or may not be continued. I think that remains to be seen but we are certainly working with OMB to align our budget going forward. At this point, we are not anticipating any significant changes to our core programming. But Rosine, anything you want to add?

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Sorry, tracking and making sure. I just feel like the federal government is a little uncertain. So, are you balancing your budget based off of the uncertainty of not receiving.

MOLLY PARK: So, we are working with OMB. I think where we have core programming, we will work with them so that if there is future gaps associated with the federal government that we are addressing that, exactly what that looks like, I can't speak to right now but we are collaborating with them very closely.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Williams, can you speak a little bit louder because I can't hear you on this side. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Sorry. That's all the questions I have for now. I have other questions but oh, I have more time. I mean, you already answered it but it's like where and what funding sources but I mean I guess you don't really know. You're still trying to figure it out. Okay, I'll turn to the Fair Futures Initiative. Don't laugh at me.

Okay, as you know it's a priority of the Council, are you able to provide a breakdown of the Fiscal 2023 \$75 million budget by expense type?

LISA FITZPATRICK: So, the \$75 million that was baselined for Fair Fares, we do expect to fully expend those. We're still looking at expenditures as they come in and utilization. We're almost all the way through the Fiscal Year but we're waiting on bills from MTA. But the majority of that will go towards the transit benefit itself.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, I know that the MTA is looking to transition into the Omni system. Will Fair Fares be added to that system?

LISA FITZPATRICK: We are working very closely with MTA on a very regular basis to make that transition from the Metro Cards to the Omni Cards. Obviously Metro Cards won't be available after a point and time. We want to make sure that the system, the Omni system is set up so that our clients can take good use of the system and have a great client experience. MTA and we both share that goal.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, one last question on federal funding again, the federal pandemic aid. So, the preliminary plan swapped \$75 million in city funds to federal pandemic related funding from the American Rescue Plan. What was this funding allocated to?

MOLLY PARK: So, this is a fairly technical adjustment related to health care funding. I'm going to pass it over to Rosine for more information.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And just as you wrap that question. Any expectations you may have for receiving additional funding but I'm guessing the answer would be you're going to work with OMB.

ROSINE FERDINAND: Most of this funding was put in rental assistance. The \$75 million swap that you referred to.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, I don't understand that but I guess I'll follow-up later. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are you done? Thank you. Okay, Council Member Stevens.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Hello, good afternoon. So, just a few things. Uhm, one, I know you said that you guys are having hiring fairs. Would definitely love to hold a hiring fair in my district. I know there's a number of folks in the Bronx also who express interest as well. So, maybe thinking doing like a Bronx allegation hiring fair, so we can make sure that we're getting some Bronx folks some of these jobs that you guys are desperately looking for.

1 So, definitely let's set some time up for that.
2
3 But I know we had a conversation about this offline
4 but just wanted to follow-up some question because
5 one of the issues around City FHEPS and landlords
6 reaching out about not being paid and just wanted to
7 say on the record of like how this can be very
8 detrimental of like why a lot of landlords do not
9 want to take the vouchers because they aren't getting
10 paid.

11 And so, just could you talk a little bit about
12 like what's the issues and how do we work through
13 this together?

14 MOLLY PARK: Absolutely, thank you for the
15 question. It is something that we've looked into.
16 Looked into it additionally after our offline
17 conversation. So, there is a recertification process
18 for City FHEPS. Clients need to send in some basic
19 documentation for that annual renewal. And we've
20 looked into the processing there. We have seen some
21 minor processing delays at this point, nothing
22 systemic but it's something we're monitoring very,
23 very closely. We're also taking a step, some steps
24 to reassess our approach to it to see if there's ways

that we can streamline the process, make it work more smoothly.

We do have technology plans that are well under way that we think as we roll that out, we'll also assist with that. As I say, at this point, we have not seen anything systemic but we do know that there have been some cases where there have been renewal problems. So, really want to urge you and your colleagues if you do encounter cases, please flag them to us, so we can follow up.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And do you think some of these issues might because of the lack of hiring or staff or do you think those things have a correlation?

MOLLY PARK: I'm going to say it again that we absolutely can use staff across the board and we are having an aggressive hiring plan to make sure that we are filling our vacancies. But I think it's - as we have looked at this, there isn't a single issue that is the problem with City FHEPS in part because as I say, we're seeing some mild processing delays and nothing substantial but you know there have been some hiccups around tenants sending in documents. There have been you know a handful of technology glitches.

1
2 There have been a few things that have led to again,
3 I really want to say this is not a substantial
4 problem. There are some minor processing delays.
5 So, we are addressing it across the board and again,
6 looking at ways that we can streamline wherever
7 possible.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, and I just want to
9 note too that like, we can't say it's not substantial
10 because anyone who is not getting paid and this is a
11 trade of the city. They're not paying anyone on
12 time. So, it is a problem across the board. So, it
13 might not be in the numbers that you think but
14 because we're not paying anyone, it's making it a lot
15 harder. So, just want to make sure we say that on
16 record because no ones being paid at this point.

17 MOLLY PARK: Understood.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: That's it.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Brewer.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Two quick
21 questions. One is the telephone. So, I have
22 complaints from people who are trying to get SNAP,
23 you can imagine and they say there's no phone to be
24 able to express their concern. I didn't know if that
25 was true. I saw it on notes her that there's some

hope for some kind of a phone system in the future.

So, is there a telephone to complain when you have a problem? Maybe they just don't know.

MOLLY PARK: Yeah, so we've recently rolled out one number, so -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, they just rolled out.

MOLLY PARK: Yes, that has been rolled out but Administrator Fitzpatrick, do you want to elaborate on -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Does it work.

LISA FITZPATRICK: Yeah, so the one number takes Infoline and the number of our other call center numbers and combines them into a single call center. The new version of one number went live at the end of January and it has a lot more self-service options for people to be able to get much of the information that they're looking for.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is there a human being? If you hit 0000 like I do?

LISA FITZPATRICK: Absolutely, always.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Just tell people to hit zero, skip the rest. Second is, this is not here but it's a concern of mine. So, people coming from upstate prisons. Do you have a number? Because I've

1 always believe they should go not to the DHS system
2 but we should provide the funding to Fortune Society
3 etc., to work with them because they're better
4 equipped.
5

6 Same thing for veterans. How many veterans and
7 what's the budget for veterans? But I think Exodus,
8 Stanley, the rest of them should handle people coming
9 from upstate. Is that something you're considering?

10 MOLLY PARK: So, we are working -- we always
11 collaborate very closely with state docs to ensure
12 relatively seamless discharge planning. That is
13 something that we try and do. I believe there's a
14 bill in the state legislature now that would require
15 State Docs to do discharge planning and to cover some
16 of the costs if an individual did come to the shelter
17 system. So, that's something that we're looking at
18 very closely.

19 With respect to veterans, if you'll give me one
20 more minute.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you support instead of
22 going to DHS, we could provide the funding to go to
23 the Fortune Societies of the world and there several
24 of them.
25

1
2 MOLLY PARK: It sounds like a really interesting
3 idea that's worth exploring. I think there's a lot
4 of logistics in there to work through but we'd be
5 happy to partner on doing that with you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and veterans?

7 MOLLY PARK: Veterans.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They come with money.

9 MOLLY PARK: So, as of last month, we had a total
10 of 549 veterans in shelter. So, that is a number
11 that over the last several years has come way down.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and so they are in
13 the system but there isn't any other opportunity for
14 them to find permanent housing?

15 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, there are housing resources
16 that are specific to veterans.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm aware of that. I'm
18 asking the question that I know the answer to but
19 what is it that we can do more of for 549?

20 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, you know this is a number where
21 there's a lot of churn in that number because we are
22 really aggressively working with veterans, as is the
23 VA to connect them with permanent housing. I think
24 one of my first meetings that I, outside meetings
25 that I went to in this capacity was a meeting that

Administrator Carter and her team hosted to bring together all the veteran services providers to think about additional ways that we can serve this population.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

MOLLY PARK: So, I think you know what you're seeing here is a point and time number rather than an indicator of —

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so let's — we can talk further then about those who are coming from upstate so to speak.

MOLLY PARK: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: JoAnn wants them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Uhm, I still have a couple of procedural questions that I just really want to get on the record, so I'll try to go through them as quickly as possible. I know you've been sitting here for a really long time.

MOLLY PARK: Happy to be here.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We're happy to have you here. So, I have a question regarding the SNAP. The federal aid for SNAP benefits. So, since the onset of the pandemic, SNAP benefit payments have been

higher for recipients nationwide, as indicated by a federal pandemic related change. Recipients have received a greater of the maximum possible benefit amount for their household size and the benefit that extended the higher amount as long as possible.

As a February 2023 was the last month where participants were eligible for that extra funding. How many individuals would you estimate residing in New York City are enrolled in SNAP? And how many of these recipients will be impacted and see a reduction in their benefits?

MOLLY PARK: Yup, so I just want to make it, I know you understand this but want to make it very clear for the record. This is a federal policy change right, rolling back the expansion of those benefits.

It effects everybody whose receiving SNAP. So, it's about one million households, 1.8 million people.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And do you know what the average dollar amount of the loss of benefits would be?

MOLLY PARK: Yeah, for a single person, it's about \$100, for a four-person household it would be about \$200 a month.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Of the 1.8, all of those families are signed up? All of those people are signed up for SNAP?

MOLLY PARK: That's the SNAP number yes.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, how many of those people are not going to get the max?

MOLLY PARK: I'm not sure I'm following the question.

JOSLYN CARTER: I'm sorry Council Member, are you asking how many people are currently not at the max? So, because they were not at the max that they were getting additional money. They all received additional money even those that were at the max SNAP benefit.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Got it and you said the number was for singles was \$100 right? Close to \$100.

MOLLY PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And for families?

MOLLY PARK: Well, it varies by family size, so what I have with me is for a family of four, it would

be a loss of about \$200 but you know at three percent would be a slightly different number.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, yeah, we're also hopeful that the state will consider adopting a similar policy change like the one in New Jersey. Governor Murphy recently signed into law a change and that would allow SNAP recipients \$95 in addition to what they will be receiving a month.

You know, it's always helpful. I remember you know when I was a SNAP recipient and just how difficult it was to just make ends meet you know. By the end of the month, you know you're struggling and trying to kind of figure out like what you can do without and so, I'm sure that even \$95 is a huge deal for those families that need it and it's a shame that you know that we're seeing that reduction. I saw something similar in the Department of Education budget right. I think that there's a huge out cry for maintaining these supplemental you know temporary programs. And I think it's because it's really long overdue. We're not getting increases for cost-of-living adjustments right? The rate I think at HRA for rent is still the same but it was when I was an HRA recipient, which is like it was like \$286.

MOLLY PARK: The state shelter allowance correct. I mean it varies by families but yes, it has not been adjusted.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But it hasn't yeah, so I think that that's what families are crying for when New Yorkers are you know crying for and it is really just an adjustment right to resources that we know help families. And so, you know we're putting in a letter to the state asking but you know. If anything changes on your end, please let us know.

Now, in the Mayor's State of the City, I know he said a lot of things and he made a lot of promises that you can't really speak to. But one of the things that he did speak about was, one of the other things that he spoke about was investing \$22 million in tenant protection programs. Now, will HRA have any role in this as it relates to rental assistance voucher discrimination?

MOLLY PARK: We're still working through details on any plans there.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, it would be great. Uhm, regarding the end of the federal public health emergency, it was recently announced that the federal public health emergency will end on May 11th. What

implications does this have for DHS and HRA's programs and budgets?

MOLLY PARK: I think that's something that we are still assessing. You know we've talked a number of times about how we've incorporated some of the emergency funds into our programs. We're working with OMB to realign budgets going forward without those funding. With respect to the end of the emergency, you know from an operational standpoint. Although there is a hard date coming from the federal government, I think we have seen a changing health landscape and that we've been adapting to it more gradually over time. For example, changing our single room policies for DHS.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And will this trigger the resumption of the work requirements for HRA cash assistance clients? If so, when? I mean, I think I've heard recently, as recently as maybe last week that this program would be recent even though there was no mandate requiring that it should. This is an HRA based decision?

MOLLY PARK: There is state regulation there. We are looking at all of that and exploring exactly how we want to finalize our position.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and I mean I think that that is an area that really requires a lot of planning and resources. We don't want to see families, individuals that are receiving cash benefits sitting in a classroom one day not really learning anything that is useful and gaining the employable skills that they obviously would need to become self-sufficient. And so, you know I again, this is something that I you know and sometimes I always share but I think it's important tool to share because it lends credibility and really humanizes right the program that are effective. And when I was an HRA recipient and I was supposed to do you know the work assignment because I was receiving cash benefits. In lieu of going into some senior center you know and helping to wash the dishes, which I already knew how to do. It was a skill I knew very well. You know I was allowed to school. I was allowed to go to college and you know and get credit that counted towards those hours. And it's self sufficient now.

And that was you know thanks to that accommodation and I think that we really need to rethink that program because if we're really honest

about our attempt to make people more self sufficient that we really have to give them the skills they need and that program right now is as it stands it not.

MOLLY PARK: Thank you for the feedback. You know HRA has really robust career development, job training programs. It's something that we are digging into you know in the context of this discussion that we've been having all afternoon. It does feel like there's a lot of opportunity here where employers need jobs and or employers need workers and clients needs jobs and that there ought to be ways to make this a win, win and it's certainly something that in general, you know outside the context of mandatory engagement that we are looking at very closely.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I love that response. Appreciate that. Regarding the human services contract, both DHS and HRA utilize contracts with community based organizations to provide shelter and social services across the city. Contracted organizations have also been reporting high levels of vacancies including at shelters, legal service providers and home base providers. Does DSS track vacancy issues with contractors?

1
2 MOLLY PARK: So, as I think I've probably said
3 before, but our providers are existing in the same
4 really challenging labor market that we are and that
5 other for-profit organizations are. We don't track
6 on a line-by-line basis their vacancy rates but it's
7 something that we're definitely well aware of and
8 that we're collaborating very closely on with them.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Would you be able to tell us
10 where you're seeing the biggest area of concern in
11 regards to those vacancies?

12 MOLLY PARK: Well, frankly because our providers
13 are offering such critical services and really are on
14 the front lines. We have concerns in a number of
15 different areas and we're monitoring it really
16 closely. So, you know there's - we're working with
17 them against trying to tap them into all of the HRA
18 career development, the business link work. I think
19 there's a lot of opportunity to fill vacancies by
20 connecting them with our clients who are searching
21 for jobs.

22 Also, there was included in the adopted budget,
23 there was workforce enhancement funding that we think
24 will be really useful for staff recruitment and
25 retention.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright, one of the things that I have been hearing from and it is not specific to HRA. I think it's a contracting issue. Obviously, we know that contracts don't get paid out on a timely basis and my concern is that because we're opening so many shelters at such a rapid rate, you know that contracts are not you know being fulfilled until our nonprofits are exhausting what ever cash on hand they have and I want to make sure that that's not the case right. That people are you know staff is getting paid accordingly and that services are being rendered in the way that they were intended to be rendered and you know, is that something that you monitor? Is what you know the ability of a contractor being able to you know, do they have the cash flow right on hand to sustain them until the contract is finalized?

MOLLY PARK: Absolutely. Looking at our contracting status is something that is a really top priority. There's a few things that we've done in the context of the asylum seeker and the rapid expansion that we had done to try and mitigate some of the impacts.

Big one is that most of the hotel costs are paid through a single contract that we have with the hotel association of New York which is a centralized essentially trade organization. By putting the hotel costs on running that through the HANICK contract, it takes it off of the individual contracts with the not-for-profit, so they are not on the hook for managing any of those costs. It makes it easier for us to administer and it really is a lot of the burden that we would otherwise be passing on to the not for profit.

So, that I think has been really helpful and that contract is registered and in place. We've been working really closely with MOCS on their bridge loan program and MOCS and OMB, they were able to add bridge loan funding specifically around the asylum response, so that we were able to get not-for-profits funds in advance of contract registration. And then, I think we've talked about it in a slightly different context around the asylum. Because we have been moving so fast, some of the sites, although they are attributed to a not-for-profit, they're actually really being operated by the agency. You know where we have staff working overtime and using National

Guard, so that again, we're not creating financial obligations for the not-for-profits too far in advance with the contract registration.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is the bridge program loan — is that different from the shelter loan acquisition funding that the mayor announced?

MOLLY PARK: Yeah, uhm, different things. So, the bridge loan funding is a structure that's been available for a while for all, I think it's all not-for-profit contracts. Not just human service providers but essentially the idea is to address exactly the issues that you just raised where we might be asking a provider to do work in advance of contract registration.

So, the idea is that they can borrow against their contract from this centralized fund for just you know it's typically just a couple of months but that they can access funding in advance so that they are not put in a place where they are taking on financial liabilities for the city. You know it's not available, or sorry, I shouldn't say that. It's broadly available, not every provider taps into it for a variety of reasons but we were able to expand it specially to deal with the asylum seeker crisis.

The not-for-profit Acquisition Fund is one that I am quite excited about. I was very deeply involved wearing my prior hat.

One of the things that we as we develop new shelters going forward and this is outside of the context of the emergency but our new pipeline of new shelters, we really want to get to a place where we have more that are owned by the not-for-profit service provider. We think it's good for the not-for-profits to control the real estate. They can do a better job with managing it, with making sure that it's designed specifically with clients needs in mind. It's good for their balance sheets and then from a city fiscal perspective, when you have these are the sites are actually being financed with long term debt that the not-for-profits take out so that we get a steady real estate cost over 30 years rather than being subject to rent increases on a shelter every few years.

So, having not-for-profits own their own sites is a real win, win but these are typically new construction projects and they have to do things like acquire land and pay for architects in advance of the

construction financing. So, this fund is intended to cover that timing gap.

Dollar amounts on that case tend to be more significant because you're borrowing money to actually acquire a site as opposed to cover a couple of months' worth of shelter operation.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, now regarding the subway safety plan and the Street Homeless update. On February 18, 2022, the Mayor released a subway safety plan outlining the city's strategy to address street homelessness and safety on public transit. The plan included how services and outreach, as well as new drop-in centers, safe haven beds and stabilization beds. The Fiscal 2023 Executive Plan added baseline city funding of 171.3 million starting in Fiscal Year 2023 to support the plan.

Additionally, 20 new positions were added for street homeless outreach staff. Since the start of the administration, how many new low barrier beds broken down by type have opened?

MOLLY PARK: Yup, 784 beds have opened. That 620 are stabilization beds and 164 are safe havens.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 164? Okay. How many drop-in centers have opened?

MOLLY PARK: One.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Where?

MOLLY PARK: It's in Manhattan on 14th Street.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you have any more in the pipeline?

MOLLY PARK: Yup, we have two more in the near-term pipeline. Another one in Manhattan and one in Queens.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And what is the current capacity at the low barrier beds?

MOLLY PARK: Yup, we have about 3,400 plus 370 chairs in drop-in centers.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I hate the chairs; can they be recliners?

MOLLY PARK: Uhm.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I know, I know, I know. The Mayor's Involuntary Removal plan for unsheltered homeless and mental health with mental health issues. What role does HRA and DHS play in this plan, if at all?

MOLLY PARK: So, DHS is playing a consulting role with DOHMH and NYPD but is not directly involved as the lead but Administrator Carter, you want to speak more to that?

JOSLYN CARTER: Certainly, thanks Commissioner. DHS and DHS's outreach workers certainly working with the individuals before there's any cleanup to try and engage them to come into shelter. And so, that's the role that we continue to play. We're not doing any other pieces. So, I got to find once we identify what— our staff is out engaging clients who are there.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. One of my concerns with the model of I don't know if they would be considered stabilization beds and I don't want to mention groups by name but uhm, one of the issues that I had with my brother who you know is in and out of the shelter system because of his mental health issues, is the lack of mental health resources within the actual shelter and you know I had an incident where I actually called because I saw that he was becoming more and more manic and asked if he had been referred to you know a mental health provider or a social worker. Had anyone helped or assisted maybe with you know Medicaid applications so that he could be referred to outside community based you know services. And they said that he was responsible for doing the application and I'm like, he doesn't even

1 know who the hell he is today. Like, how is he
2 expected? So, I'm sharing that story with you to say
3 that even though I understand the intent right of
4 involuntary removals and I struggled with a lot of
5 the issues that the Mayor's has indicated. It's our
6 own system, your know are responsible. Right we're
7 capable here be we're not necessarily looking at
8 mental health in the way that we should be right?
9 And if to me, you know I'm thinking if we are sending
10 folks to a shelter that specializes in mental health
11 services, that that means that there's a
12 comprehensive plan for that individual. That it's
13 not just, there's a bed. You're coming and you're
14 going and you're coming and you're going.

16 And so, I just want to really you know point that
17 out because that is what happens unfortunately a lot
18 of the times and then you know, they end up back in
19 the street because they're still not getting - So,
20 we're sending them to the hospital. The hospital
21 can't hold them and then they go back to the shelter.
22 The shelter you know allows so much independence that
23 you know there's no intensive effort right to ensure
24 that they have a medical plan. You know that they
25 are referred to doctors and that has to change. You

know because otherwise we're going to continue, like my mom used to say right, with the dog chasing his own tail and never getting anywhere.

MOLLY PARK: Well, thank you for sharing your brother's experience. That's helpful information. I think a few things that I would comment there. One is, we have been steadily adding services to both our low barrier beds and across our system. I'd say the earlier models of stabilization beds were certainly much more lightly staffed than what we are bringing online now. So, you know maybe we can follow up offline to understand which site in particular if it is a site that has been, that should be staffed to be doing exactly the kind of work that you're doing then I want to make sure that we are following up with the provider and ensuring that the appropriate level of service is happening.

And then just to speak more broadly and certainly not equipped to address every aspect of the plan but I would say that the involuntary removals are a small piece of what is a much larger overall administration approach to mental health issues, right? So, while they have gotten a disproportionate piece of the attention, I think you know what we are seeing is

enhanced investment in services, mental health services in shelters and a significant array of services coming from Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and partnership with the State Office of Mental Health, right?

So, there are a lot of different layers going on, recognizing that you know mental health challenges are some of the most complicated and thorny issues and that people really do need individualized responses. But again, happy to follow-up offline.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think the outcry is one, you know obviously fundamental objection to having somebody involuntary is grapple to street and puts them against their will but also in acknowledgement that those services that we're you know announcing that we're proposing don't exist. Right, there's no community base program to send anyone to, right? And so, we're releasing somebody from a public hospital, from whatever hospital and we're sending them you know to their local community program, a mental health program.

The waitlist can be you know upwards of a year because we don't have mental health providers in our community. I mean, there's a serious shortage and

1 so, I think that the plan you know was just executed
2 very quickly without really consultation from
3 providers that are doing the work on the ground, that
4 have a little bit you know more experience and
5 insight into the nuances of you know, of getting this
6 done.
7

8 I think that you know I often hear a lot of
9 things that I agree with but I don't, the execution
10 of those things, I think is where we don't ever you
11 know usually get to agree. And I think one of the
12 other things that was really concerning me was the
13 issue of the domestic violence and really trying to
14 understand and correct me if I'm wrong. In terms of
15 domestic violence, we have 180 days state rule, right
16 that requires that the person either find housing or
17 then transition to DHS.

18 MOLLY PARK: So, I'm going to start and then I'm
19 going to pass it to Administrator Fitzpatrick.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

21 MOLLY PARK: So, for the emergency beds that are
22 regulated by the state, those yes, have 180-day rule.
23 In addition, HRA administers 539 transitional units
24 that within our DV shelter system that don't have
25 that 180 day rule. For families that continue to

LISA FITZPATRICK: Yeah, just regarding the 180 days. It's actually 90 days at a time. So, you can get 90 days as a stay in an emergency shelter system and then another 90 days for a total maximum of 180 days. If there's a break in stay during that period, then the clock starts all over again.

LISA FITZPATRICK: I can't speak to the states expectation but -

LISA FITZPATRICK: It's probably to stabilize the family and they do get, they are eligible for a City FHEPS, a FHEPS B voucher in order to get housing in the community. So, we work with them during that time to make sure that they can qualify for a housing voucher and look for housing and perhaps can find more stabilized accommodations.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Now, considering the current state of the shelter system and the fact that we are

you know at capacity and beyond, has there been a request to extend that rule?

LISA FITZPATRICK: Multiple times, yes.

CHAIPRERSON AYALA: Okay. Alright, there's a letter going out for that as well but I wanted to get it on record.

Okay, so the new microgrant program for domestic violence impacted clients was first announced as the Mayor's housing blueprint. The Preliminary Plan has \$1.2 million in baseline city funding starting in Fiscal Year 2024 and one position. Can you please describe how this program will operate and what criteria will be used to determine who gets the grant.

MOLLY PARK: Unfortunately, because we're not the ones directly administering it and we are not the best equipped to answer the question but we'll circle back with our colleagues and make sure you get responses.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I really appreciate that. Thank you. Uhm, oh, I forgot about this. This is also going back to Tier II. So several Tier II domestic violence units was to open over the course

of the calendar year 2022. Are all of those planned units now operational?

MOLLY PARK: So, there are currently 539 family transitional housing units and 105 additional units expected to open this spring.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and what is the current domestic violence shelter capacity in Tier II units?

MOLLY PARK: That's the 539.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's the 539 and emergency beds?

MOLLY PARK: 2,375 emergency beds.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Wow, okay. Alright, does anyone have— Okay, well thank you so much for your time and I you know, this is the beginning of a few months of back and forth conversation. You know our intent is to ensure that you have whatever resources you need to properly and expeditiously help families in need. Obviously SNAP you know and the hiring shortfalls are of concern. I'm happy to hear that you've been able to make some you know, some headway in that area and I'm really excited about the possibility of incorporating the workforce development program you know into the existing model for cash recipients. I think that that would be a

win-win and you know allow people the independence they need. So, thank you and have a good day.

MOLLY PARK: Thank you we look forward to collaborating.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And with that, this portion of the hearing is concluded and we will take a quick recess and then convene the public testimony portion of today's hearing. [3:49:52-3:50:20] Alright, thank you all for joining us here today and we will now start the public portion of this hearing and I will pass it over Aminta Kilawan.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Aminta Kilawan, I am the Senior Counsel for the Committee on General Welfare and I am going to be calling up individuals in panels today for public testimony. Once your name is called, if you are in person you can approach and take a seat and prepare yourself to give testimony. If you are online and joining us via Zoom, a member of our staff will unmute you and then you may begin your testimony once the Sergeant at Arms sets the clock and gives you the queue. As a reminder, all testimony today is going to be limited to two minutes and for those who are joining us online, just a reminder that there's a few

seconds of a delay before you're unmuted and before we can hear you, so please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may begin before you begin your testimony.

And as well, another reminder –

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I just want to clarify. If anyone is here for the NYCHA hearing, that is next door. This is the General Welfare Committee.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And also, if you are here and you have not filled out a witness slip to testify, even if you have registered online, you must fill out a witness slip so you can approach the Sergeants and they will help you to fill out that slip. And although you are limited to two minutes of testimony, we will accept any amount of written testimony that you would like to submit to us and you can do that by emailing testimony@council.nyc.gov.

And so, we will now begin with our first panel and our first panel will be an in-person panel. And they will be comprised of the following individuals: Abby Biberman, McGregor Smyth and Katherine Wurmfeld.

Thank you. You may begin when ready. You might have to press the microphone.

ABBY BIBERMAN: Deputy Speaker Ayala, Council Members, and staff, thank you for this opportunity to speak to the General Welfare Committee about the Fiscal Year 2020 budget. My name is Abby Biberman, I am the Associate Director of the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group. NYLAG has a unique model which through over its 30-year history, has focused on embedding staff in partnering community organizations, allowing us to provide critical services to the most vulnerable New Yorkers by meeting them where they are.

The demand for legal services outpaces the number of advocates that are available to provide high quality, meaningful representation, and continues to grow. New Yorkers experiencing poverty are facing unprecedented civil legal issues. Now is the time to recommit and increase funding to legal services, so we may give those struggling in our city a fighting chance to protect their rights and access benefits to which they are entitled.

NYLAG is grateful to the city of New York for its deep and ongoing commitment to civil legal services, however, legal service providers have reached a tipping point. Years of contracts that haven't kept

1
2 pace with rising costs, coupled with systemic
3 contracting and payment delays and issues have
4 threatened organization financial stability and
5 resulted in extremely high rates of attrition.
6 Underfunding and payment delays doesn't just affect
7 us but also the legal rights of low-income New
8 Yorkers and New Yorkers in crisis. We are calling
9 on the city to invest in civil legal services so
10 providers like NYLAG can continue to effectively
11 protect the rights of New Yorkers, and ensure they
12 can access basic needs, and help them on a pathway to
13 stability. A budget that addresses funding fairness
14 and contracting policies is critical.

15 NYLAG is also asking the counsel for the
16 following initiative funding: \$2,000,000 in legal
17 services for low-income New Yorkers; \$600,000 in
18 Immigrant Opportunities; \$473,000 in Immigrant
19 Health; \$400,000 Low Wage Worker Support; and
20 \$275,000 in Legal Services for Veterans. I also have
21 policy recommendations.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can go through them
23 really quickly.

24 ABBY BIBERMAN: Very quickly. The following
25 policy recommendations to address the delays, so that

HRA may properly administer benefits. HRA must find ways to fill positions, whether through increasing salaries, or making positions more attractive with remote work opportunities. Our clients desperately need these assistance benefits and emergency assistance to prevent eviction. HRA has been systematically failing to process applications and recertifications. Failing to conduct eligibility interviews either by failing to reach out to clients or failing to maintain a phone system that clients can utilize to call back and failing to index documents submitted by clients resulting in delays, wrongful denials and inadequate benefit levels. And I will save the rest of my recommendations for my written testimony but I also have four very important points for improving the City FHEPS program.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

ABBY BIBERMAN: Thank you.

KATHERINE WURMFELD: Should I start? Okay, good afternoon, my name is Kate Wurmfeld with the Center for Justice Innovation, formerly the Center for Court Innovation. Since its inception, the center has maintained a vision to reduce unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system wherever possible

and to build public safety and wellbeing through sustainable solutions and programming that bridge gaps across systems and communities.

The center has outlined modest investments in such programming in its written testimony from supervised release to alternatives to incarceration, youth based, and housing and community based programs but I want to focus today on a family court program that the Deputy Speaker is aware of that works on behalf of families across systems and intervenes with very young children at the earliest entry into the justice system at a critical stage of brain development to prevent family separations, reduce disparities and interrupt intergenerational cycles of system involvement. There are more than 10,000 babies known to the New York City family courts, the majority of whom are Black and Brown and their families are contending with multiple adversities, including poverty, substance use, housing insecurity and having been child welfare involved themselves.

In 2015, the center piloted the Strong Starts Court Initiative in the Bronx, a two generational model that incorporates expertise in early child development and trauma into all aspects of practice.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

These are outcomes all families deserve from a system that is too often punitive and can exacerbate harm. However, Strong Starts is currently only able to serve a limited number of families across the five boroughs as it is funded almost entirely with private foundation support, which is just not sustainable. With recent federal funding, strong starts is beginning a statewide expansion, that includes bringing the program to two new county's outside of New York City but it remains a priority for the center to expand capacity in New York City and diversify the sources of funding to include government support so we can scale the model and increase access to justice for vulnerable young children and their families. Thank you.

1 MCGREGOR SMYTH: Good afternoon. My name is
2
3 McGregor Smyth, I'm the Executive Director of New
4 York Lawyers for the Public Interest. I just wanted
5 to start by thanking Deputy Speaker Ayala and this
6 Committee and the Council for being such a champion
7 for civil, legal services.

8 Do you see the importance of investing in the
9 full spectrum of approaches, including NYLPI's, which
10 combines law organizing and pro bono legal and
11 medical services to achieve justice for all New
12 Yorkers.

13 I wanted to echo the call for all of the other
14 providers for funding fairness and for sustained
15 increased in funding to recognize the need for
16 livable salaries, increase operating cost, and
17 increased client need. And then of course, also the
18 need for a significant contracting reform that has
19 been the subject certainly of the testimony this
20 morning.

21 The ongoing micro-crisis that you know has been a
22 major focus in the Council, really shows one aspect
23 of the increased client need that we've seen on the
24 ground. We are proud to be a part of the Council's
25 Immigrant Health Initiative and through the Council's

leadership over the last few years, we are advocates have actually saved lives and increase access to health across the city.

One recent client that I wanted to share, Edmar, has in-stage renal disease and actually had very limited access to health care because of his immigration status until he reached out NYLPI for help. Our advocates were able to file an immigration application for him. Enroll him in state funded Medicaid and now he has been just this week cleared for a kidney transplant and he'll be scheduled later this month.

This is because of the Council's leadership in supporting a wide range of civil legal services and we thank you for the support and also we're asking for an enhancement of the initiative this year to meet the increased need. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Have you seen an increase in the number of people that are reaching out to you and specifically around the increase of asylum seekers coming into the city every single day?

MCGREGOR SMYTH: It's definitely been a factor in the increased need and you know I think you know one of the other challenges that we've seen is capacity

with you know we're limited in our ability to provide more services to meet the increased need without the sustainable funds to meet it.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, that's what happens when we don't have emergency planning in place.

MCGREGOR SMYTH: Exactly.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Right, to account for things like this when we're not expecting them, right?

That's what an emergency is by very definition. And you know I want to thank you and I want to thank the legal service providers as well. The NYLAG for all the work. I know you guys have been really instrumental in helping with a lot of you know, the eviction cases and the prevention of the eviction cases in the South Bronx part of my district, primarily where we were lacking that level of resource. And families quite often self-evict because they don't know what their rights are. So, I want to really thank you for that and thank you for the Safe program for bringing that up. I hope that you got some answers today. A little bit. I think that there's still a lot more conversation to be had. I know that we're like you know, we're really inching into the budget process as we speak and you know it's

important to hear from the providers regarding you know specific issues that we're not really preview to right. If we're discussing the need for increases in the budget, which makes sense. This has been a very difficult past year and I think that we need to be a little bit more creative in how we spread our resources around. So, thank you for coming today.

PANEL: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. We'll now call on the next panel which will also be an in-person panel. The next panel will be comprised of Raun Rassmusen, Mary Fox and Adriene Holder.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can begin when you're ready just make sure that you put on the mic. Is your mic on?

MARY FOX: I think it is. Thank you. Thank you Chair Ayala, Committee on General Welfare and Counsel at large for the longstanding support of the legal services for the Working Poor Coalition. My name is Mary Fox, I work for Housing Conversation Coordinators. One of the five members of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition. That also includes CAMBA Legal Services, Mobilization for Justice, NMIC, and TakeRoot Justice. The Coalition

was created with the support from the City Council to address the civil needs of working poor and other low-income New Yorkers whose income is slightly higher than the poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering them ineligible for free legal services while being only missed by a paycheck will lead to dire consequences. Legal Services of Working Poor services are critical, allowing New Yorkers to maintain financial independence and preserving economic stability in the communities across New York City.

In Fiscal Year 2023, Legal Services of the Working Poor initiative was funded at \$3,205,000 from City Council, with the five Coalition members receive \$455,000. In Fiscal Year 2024, HCC, as a member of the Coalition, is requesting a full restoration of \$450,00. A full restoration to the five Coalition partners would support critical legal services in the areas of employment, immigration, consumer, benefits law, housing and other areas civil legal practices. We continue to see the working poor who can barely make ends meet. They are facing catastrophic consequences as a result of their civil legal problems. Among other things, common problems include not being paid for their work. Not being

1
2 paid overtime, identity theft, freezing of bank
3 accounts, as a result of collection efforts, they
4 weren't even aware of.

5 We serve with Working Poor in all five boroughs
6 on consumer foreclosure, immigration, benefits,
7 employment and housing. In the aftermath, I'm going
8 to be cut short, can I have? In the aftermath of the
9 COVID crisis, working poor New Yorkers continue to
10 disproportionately face long term health and economic
11 consequences and related legal problems.

12 Even before the COVID crisis, tens of thousands
13 New Yorkers were hanging by a thread to their homes,
14 their families and their dignity. During the crisis,
15 many New Yorkers incurred unexpected debt which
16 resulted in an increase in debt collection litigation
17 and for some, bankruptcy, rental and mortgage arrears
18 grew to unprecedented levels. Their other legal
19 issues have snowballed.

20 Many poor New Yorkers were adversely effected and
21 our coalition is set up to address these needs. I
22 submitted this online. I don't want to take away
23 time from other members but -

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We will review it. Thank you
25 so much.

MARY FOX: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can turn off your mic now. Yes.

RAUN RASMUSEN: Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Raun Rasmussen and I am the Executive Director of Legal Services NYC. Our staff of 640 fights for justice for low-income New Yorkers by providing free civil legal services to more than 110,000 New Yorkers every year. Matt Desmond, the Harvard Sociologist who wrote 'Evicted' stated, without shelter, everything else falls apart. But it's also true that without safety from domestic violence, without a sufficient stable income and without a high quality education and access to healthcare, everything else falls apart. But it's also true that without safety from domestic violence. Without a sufficient stable income and without a high-quality education and access to health care, everything else falls apart. Your funding for legal services for low-income New Yorkers allows us to help our clients hold their lives together in all the ways that are so critical. We ask that you increase that funding in Fiscal Year 2024 to \$9 million for the five organizations that provide those services. We

also ask that you restore funding for legal services NYC's Veterans Justice Project to \$150,000, a return to Fiscal Year 2020 levels.

Since we began that project in November 2011, we've helped thousands of veterans and their families stabilize their homes and incomes. New York City's children were hit hardest by the pandemic and we ask that you provide \$500,000 to support our Access to Education Project, which will help kids with special needs and disabilities, provide language access for students and their parents and will work with the schools to implement restorative healing programs.

So that children who are victims of sexual harassment or violence in the schools can be responded to with measures that are supportive and not punitive.

Finally, you'll hear from the defender and civil legal services community that both the state and the city are dramatically underfunding the work that we do by tens of millions of dollars annually. Legal Services NYC for example gets roughly \$30 million to provide eviction prevention services to the city.

But because the case rate is so low, we need to raise an addition \$10 million to \$15 million to hire sufficient staff to do the work that our contracts

1
2 require and that's just one underfunded contract. We
3 can't keep up. You've been our partner for decades
4 in working to meet the needs of all New Yorkers.
5 Thanks for your help now to make sure that we're
6 fairly funded for the work that we do to help low
7 income New Yorkers get and keep the benefits they
8 need and deserve.

9 ADRIENE HOLDER: Good afternoon. I am Adriene
10 Holder, the Chief Attorney of the Civil Practices
11 Legal Aid Society. It's a real pleasure to here
12 today with my colleagues as well as with you all.
13 Some great champions. Thank you Deputy Speaker.
14 You've been on the frontlines of these issues for us
15 for so very, very long. Just to add what my
16 colleague Raun Rassmusen was saying around
17 fundamental funding fairness. It is key that we have
18 partners in the Council that they are going to be
19 able to help to move the city to making sure that we
20 are whole on these programs. There is no way that
21 we're going to be able to sustain the high quality
22 services or the staffing that's needed to be able to
23 keep these folks in business.

24 But there are so many other initiatives that you
25 all fund that you all actually help to create that we

1 are asking for your continued support. The first is
2 the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project where we
3 actually partner with Bronx Defenders and Brooklyn
4 Defender Services to represent immigrants who are
5 taken out of their communities by ICE and detained.
6 It is a Right to Counsel project for detained
7 immigrants and we are asking for you all to maintain
8 our funding at \$5.5 million for that work.
9

10 Moving forward, we also are looking to expand
11 some of the work with unaccompanied minors and
12 families. We've been asked and there's been a
13 tremendous pressure given all the changes and things
14 that are going on with immigrants here in the city to
15 be able to provide more services and we are looking
16 for an increase. A little bit of an increase, up to
17 \$1.85 million in order to help with these
18 unaccompanied minors and their families and the
19 adults with children cases. We also were looking for
20 the same funding and a restoration for the low wage
21 worker initiative where we're actually helping low-
22 income workers seek enforcement of workers rights and
23 fighting discrimination and unpaid wage theft that is
24 going on.
25

A lot of these folks are being exploited and we know that it was happening before the pandemic. It has escalated as people continue to be chilled in their ability to be able to seek assistance. In terms just really quickly, on our criminal defense side, we are proud members and provide legal services through the Anti-gun Violence Initiative through our Community Justice Unit and we ask for continued funding of \$1 million to continue to work with folks in the community. Victims as well as people who are accused of being the folks who are engaged in activities that we know the violence in our communities are a public health crisis and we want to continue to work with our 28 community partners in all five boroughs to provide those communities, their families and individuals with those services. We also are asking for an increase on our pre arraignment project and diversion programs that have proven to be extremely helpful and things that actually saw were people being able to get all kinds of other diversion and actually evaluate it at arraignment and being able to look at the success that we've had and being able to keep people in the community to defend themselves as well as getting the

right kind of treatment because incarceration is not always the way. We're looking for an increase to \$2.34 million in that project and lastly, I know I'm out of time. For the Prisoners Rights Project, we are inundated. We run a hotline where we receive phone calls from prisoners at Rikers as well as their family member or folks in the community that are advocating on their behalf. You can imagine with an uptick in the violence in those jails, and all kinds of issues our clients are facing, that we have had a dramatic increase in the number of calls that we've had to take. Up to 15,000 in the last nine months and we're asking for an increase from \$1 million to \$2.7 million because we need to get additional staffing and platforms so that we can readily deal with those issues as we continue to try to deal with the atrocity that is Rikers.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I really appreciate that. Regarding the \$15,000 calls. Are those primarily local calls from Rikers or city-based run facilities or do you get calls from upstate prisoners as well?

ADRIENE HOLDER: We get calls from upstate prisoners as well. The 15,000 number is almost the number that we're providing is in what's happening

with the city with some state calls but we also have a separate state line as well.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I wasn't aware of that. Thank you. Thank you guys and we will most definitely take into consideration, as you can understand because we're in the early phases of the budget negotiating, we can't make any promises. Really happy to have partners in government that believe in the same things that you know that we're fighting for every day. And so, we're really lucky for the partnership and to have you guys out there fighting on behalf of New Yorkers every day.

ADRIENE HOLDER: We're very lucky we have a very strong provider community and it's leaders such as yourselves that are really making the difference for New Yorkers, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you all. We are now going to move to our first virtual panel. This panel will be comprised of Zainab Akbar, Lauren Shapiro, Emma Ketteringham and Teyora Graves Ferrell. Again, the panel will be comprised of Zainab Akbar, Lauren Shapiro, Emma Ketteringham and Teyora Graves Ferrell. I will now turn it over to Zainab Akbar.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ZAINAB AKBAR: Thank you. I'm trying to start my video and it's not permitting me to do so. Should I just testify without video? What is the?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you Zainab, so if you want to proceed without video and we can see you now also.

ZAINAB AKBAR: Okay, there we go. Alright, thank you Chair Ayala and members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify with my colleagues from Bronx Defenders BDS and CFR. Our collective advocacy both in and out of family court has prevented thousands of children from needlessly entering foster care and has reduced New York City's foster census by almost 50 percent since 2007.

The State Commission on parental representation found that this translates to nearly \$40 million in annual savings for the city and more importantly the preservation of family bonds that are priceless to our clients, their children and to society at large. Today, we're asking the city to work with MOCJ to increase funding for a mandated representation in Article 10 cases to meet caseload standards set by the State of New York and to maintain funding for the wonderful projects that City Council has been funding

1 since 2019. The Right to Family Advocacy Project.

2 It's an unfortunate truth that we are all familiar

3 with. Black and Brown children are separated from

4 their parents by ACS and placed in the foster system

5 at rates hugely disproportionate to their presence in

6 the total population of New York City's children.

7 Two recent internal investigations Commissioned

8 by ACS itself, demonstrate that this

9 disproportionality isn't accidental. Black and Brown

10 families are targeted by ACS who then use coercions

11 to violate families constitutional rights. We're

12 very happy to hear of the Commissioners intention to

13 reduce the number of investigations, change the ACS's

14 punitive culture and to change the approach to

15 mandated reporting but that change will come as the

16 Commissioner said, on a multiyear timeline and in the

17 meantime, there are thousands of families and

18 children who are made subject to ACS's coercive and

19 intrusive investigations. Investigations that occur

20 without any evidence of harm to children or any

21 evidence that the system of reporting an

22 investigation actually prevents or reduces harm to

23 children.

What harms children is being separated from their families. What harms children is entering a system that literally guarantees higher delinquency rates, higher teen birth rates, lower earnings, and increase likelihood of juvenile justice system involvement.

We represent parents because we want to reduce these well documented harms to children and families, harms that will continue even as the Commissioner works to change ACS. Parents and children are not on opposite ends of the spectrum of rights and safety. Supporting parents is supporting their children and the family as a unit.

Just as our colleagues -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

ZAINAB AKBAR: I'm wrapping up, thank you. Just as our colleagues in criminal court service is an essential counter balance to the massive power of the criminal legal system, we provide essential representation and due process protections as public defenders for New York City's most vulnerable families. Families who deserve to have attorney's whose work is as well-resourced as the government attorneys who represent ACS and I urge City Council to continue to fund the excellent Right to Advocacy

Project and to work with MOCJ to fully fund our essential work to meet the states caseload standards for effective representation. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Zainab for your testimony. We'll now move to Lauren Shapiro for testimony. Over to Lauren.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

LAUREN SHAPIRO: Good afternoon. My camera does not seem to be working. I'm not sure why. So, I will just go forward.

My name is Lauren Shapiro, I'm the Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services. After much publicity about the inadequacy of mandated parent representation. In 2007, the city began funding interdisciplinary offices such as ours to represent parents facing the loss of their children to the foster system. When our offices started, there was no doubt about how long cases would take nor how many related cases, such as termination of parental rights cases would be involved.

Today, after 15 years of experience and data, about the length of cases and effective staffing models, our contracts still have not been allocated

1 with the funding needed to accomplish this
2 challenging work. Our programs have become national
3 and state models of parent representation and have a
4 proven track record of reducing the time children
5 spend in foster care. Yet, chronic underfunding by
6 the city has resulted in unmanageable case loads and
7 limits on how much our representation and actually
8 achieve and avoiding family separation and achieving
9 reunification.
10

11 The RFP for parent representation which has not
12 been issued since 2013 was an opportunity for the
13 city to right size these underfunded contracts. But
14 the RFP scheduled to be released last year has been
15 stalled for another year. The city can no longer
16 ignore the continuing crisis in parent representation
17 which was well documented in a 2019 report. By then,
18 Chief Judge DiFiore's Commission on Parent
19 Representation. Following that reports
20 recommendation, the States Office of Indigent Legal
21 Services completed a study and issued caseload
22 standards for parent representation. Applying these
23 standards to our current staffing, our offices have
24 determined that the city's budget should be \$80
25 million for parent representation. But the Mayor's

budget includes only \$50 million. Our offices are asking for \$30 million more to meet the ILS caseload standards and to ensure that every parent facing the temporary or permanent loss of their children –

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

LAUREN SHAPIRO: By qualified counsel.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can just wrap it up.

LAUREN SHAPIRO: Sorry, are represented by qualified counsel with the necessary expertise, time and resources. We're asking the City Council to prioritize this funding in their negotiations with the Mayor this year. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony Lauren and now, we will move to Emma Ketteringham. Over now to Emma for testimony.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

EMMA KETTERINGHAM: Hi, my name is Emma Ketteringham and I'm the Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice at the Bronx Defenders. Thank you City Council for your funding of the Right to Family Advocacy Project. I would like to address

the importance of that funding for legal representation and OCFS hearings.

At the conclusion of every investigation, ACS will determine whether the report against a parent should be indicated. If ACS indicates the case, the name of that parent is placed on the State Central Registry as a person who has maltreated a child.

This is true regardless of whether the case was ever brought to court or the evidence ever reviewed by a family court judge. The parents name is placed on this registry for years with enormous consequences. The registry bars parents from entire categories of employment, impairing their ability to support their families. The registry can bar individuals from becoming custodians of their children and custody disputes and the registry can bar relatives from becoming caregivers to children who need them, causing many children to needlessly be raised by strangers. The only way off the SCR is through an evidentiary hearing.

ACS is always represented by attorney's at SCR hearings. Yet, parents in New York City without this funding have no access to counsel unless they can afford their own and representation by an attorney is

critical to achieving the right outcome. SCR hearings require legal expertise and skill.

In January 2022, an entirely new legal standard and process was put in place. These new standards are being actively litigated and attorneys are necessary to formulate the relevant arguments. This funding addresses the one-sided unfairness of these hearings. And access to attorney's through this initiative is an issue of racial justice. It is Black and Brown New Yorkers who are disproportionately impacted by the loss of professional opportunity due to the SCR. In New York City, parents of Black children are 7.2 times as likely to end up on the SCR as our parents of White children. And parents of Latina children are 5.4 times as likely. Our contracts do not fund SCR representation and funding this initiative seeks to address that gross disparity.

We respectfully ask that the Council continue our funding at an amount of \$3.3 million to be shared between the four of legal providers of parent representation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Emma for your testimony. I will now call on Teyora Graves Ferrell. Over now to Teyora.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

TEYORA GRAVES FERRELL: Good afternoon. My name is Teyora Graves Ferrell and I am a Family Defense Supervisor at the Center for Family Representation, also known as CFR. I am also a system impacted parent.

Thank you Chair Ayala and the Committee for giving us the opportunity to testify today. CFR is a countywide assigned family defense provider representing parents prosecuted for abuse and neglect by ACS in Queens and Manhattan. We serve as a provider in the Bronx along with NDS. Every parent charged with abuse and neglect is entitled to an attorney is entitled to an attorney as soon as the case is fought in court but prior to that time, ACS workers with access to attorneys of their own, make critical decisions like whether to remove a child or to file a case report.

Typically without the parent having any access to legal counsel to assist an impacted parent like myself or to social workers. Thanks to the City

Council funding for the Right to Family Advocacy Project, our four organizations began representing some parents during ACS investigations in 2020. With this spending we can continue and we're asking for \$3.3 million split among four to continue to provide desperately needed legal representation during ACS investigations and to low-income parents in OCFS investigations and hearings.

To a parent, the can knock at the door from an ACS worker is often terrifying, traumatizing, and confusing. Parents don't know their rights and they're overcome by the fear that ACS will remove their children. Without access to attorney's, parents are asked to discuss the allegations and allow invasive home visits and searches, sign releases for personal information and allow strip searches and interviews of their children.

During my investigation, I had no legal support and I felt I had no choice but to comply with the demands of the work including a body check of my child, which was traumatic and we discussed at therapy for many, many years to come.

We are not obstructing ACS when they show up. We provide the parent with referrals, linking them to

the appropriate services based in the community and we support them during home visits and meetings at ACS. All without the threat of removing their children.

As a parent advocate, I have seen the struggles parents have in working with ACS and what is clear is that parents need support that they can trust to productively navigate these investigation without the threat of their children being removed. All of our organizations have similar impressive results, preventing family court violence, family separation and saving the city money. For example, SCFR in Fiscal Year 2020, we avoided a court filing of 86 percent of cases overall and avoided foster care in 97 percent of these cases including those that went to court, which translates to 160 children.

A modest ask means that we be able to continue to ensure that fewer families are traumatized by unnecessary court intervention and family separation, particularly of Black and Brown families targeted by the Family Regulation system. Thank you for your time today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Teyora for your testimony and thank you to this entire panel for your

1 testimony. I am now going to call on our next panel,
2 which will also be a remote virtual panel. The next
3 panel will be comprised of the following individuals,
4 Gloria Kim, Gabriela Sandoval and Juan Diaz. I will
5 now turn it over to Gloria Kim for testimony. Over
6 to Gloria.
7

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 GLORIA KIM: Good afternoon Chairperson Ayala.
10 My name is Gloria Kim, and I am the Senior Policy
11 Analyst of the Human Services Council. We're a
12 membership organization representing over 170 human
13 services providers in New York City. We thank the
14 City Council for the \$60 million workforce
15 investment, which demonstrates the importance of
16 compensating frontline workers who have been
17 essential during the pandemic and for the recovery of
18 New York.

19 However, the workforce investment is not a true
20 cost-of-living adjustment, which is important in
21 keeping up with inflation as underpaid human services
22 workers leave nonprofits for better paying jobs in
23 government or the private sector, depriving New
24 Yorkers of services for the most experienced well
25 trained staff and jeopardizing services.

1 So, we ask that you include a 6.5 percent COLA in
2 the budget to be included in every human services
3 contract. The collective services provided by human
4 services nonprofits make the difference between
5 success and failure for countless individuals and
6 families. However, nonprofits operate on shoestring
7 budgets and are often expected to offer more than
8 they are reimbursed for. For example, providers are
9 serving people seeking asylum and other reasons for
10 migration in which 96 percent of organizations
11 consulted by HSC reported providing services to
12 people seeking asylum entirely or partially out of
13 pocket. Forty percent reported that a government
14 entity asked them to provide services for people
15 seeking asylum. But less than 13 percent reported
16 that complete governmental funding was offered for
17 these partnerships. Providers are over capacity and
18 straining to meet existing needs, especially after
19 prior enforcement policies, concurrent COVID-19
20 recovery, and overall migration trends. And yet,
21 human services organizations continue to provide
22 critical services.
23

24 Government contracting practices have also
25 created an intolerable situation of extreme pay

disparities where human services workers make on average 71 percent of what government employees make, and 82 percent of what private sector workers receive. So, with the threat to sustainability and deficiency of resources, the sector faces recruitment and retention issues impacting the overall viability of organizations and program services.

The workforce is predominantly made up of women and people of color who are paid poverty level wages due to insufficient contract funding and the lack of COLA's and livable wages for workers not only disadvantages communities who rely on these workers for lifesaving services that represents a critical and overlooked equity issue.

So, a 6.5 percent COLA on the personal service line of all city funded human services contracts is needed in the budget to support the sector to continue to provide services to all New Yorkers.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Gloria for your testimony. We'll now hear from Gabriela Sandoval. Over now to Gabriela.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

GABRIELA SANDOVAL: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the Committees on General Welfare and the Council Center Staff. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of New Destiny Housing on the Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget.

My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena. I am the Director of Policy and Communications at New Destiny. Our mission is to end the cycle of abuse and homelessness for domestic violence and survivors. May I continue? We do this by developing supportive housing for homeless survivors, assisting survivors of subsidies and find apartments and by advocating for more housing resources. New Destiny is also a co-convener of the Family Homelessness Coalition.

For more than six years now, domestic violence has been the number one cause of family homelessness in New York City. Yet survivors are excluded from two lifesaving housing resources, City funded supportive housing and HPD homeless set aside units. The city Supportive Housing Initiative NYC 1515 does not include domestic violence survivors as an eligible population. We urge the administration to amend the eligibility requirements for survivors. And similarly, we support HPD in expanding access to

homeless designated units financed by the city, also known as homeless set asides to survivors in the HRA DV shelters and New Yorkers in other shelters. The administration is committed to doing so last year and in the Housing our Neighbors Blueprint.

These are two budget neutral administrative modifications that do not cost the city anything. New Destiny is also excited to support funding for the newly established housing stability program for survivors of domestic violence, thanks to Intro. 153A sponsored by Council Member Cabán. To ensure that the microgrants meet the need, \$6 million is needed for the program, which would also help support about 50 percent of households in the DV shelter.

We're also concerned about staffing shortages in HRA. Limited capacity has impacted check processing times and the late moves among voucher holders. We urge the Administration to address this issue.

On behalf of New Destiny, I would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to testify. We will submit extended written testimony and look forward to continuing to work together. And I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Gabriela for your testimony. We will now turn to Juan Diaz for testimony. Over now to Juan.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JUAN DIAZ: Thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala for holding today's hearing. My name is Juan Diaz and I am Policy and Advocacy Association at Citizens Committee for Children. A multi-issue children's advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. CCC is also a co-convener of the Family Homeless Coalition. Too many families with children are struggling to receive cash, food and housing assistance due to administrative hurdles and understaffing at city social services agencies.

We urge the City Council to not only oppose staffing reductions but to advocate that the city provide the resources and support to fill existing vacancies quickly. We applaud City Council Speaker Adams call for legislation to remove the bureaucratic barriers at social services agencies.

CCC strongly supports proposals that would expand City FHEPS eligibility and save the city millions of dollars and other initiative and funding costs. In

particular, we urge the City Council and the Administration to eliminate a 90 day shelter stay rule for City FHEPS eligibility. To require HRA to designate housing specialists at all DHS shelters, to eliminate the requirement of shelter stay or housing court eviction in order to qualify for City FHEPS, to expand City FHEPS eligibility to families and individuals that enter city shelters through pathways other than just DHS, including runaway and homeless youth and to extend and baseline \$3.3 million to maintain 25 shelter based Department of Education community coordinators currently funded with city dollars.

CCC strongly supports the expansion of City FHEPS eligibility to undocumented families and we urge the city to advocate at the state level for additional funding to support City FHEPS eligibility and expansion. Additionally, we ask that sufficient funding is allocated to enhance supports that enable special populations of youth including those involving the justice, child welfare homeless systems regardless of their immigration status to access year around youth development employment training opportunities.

1
2 Lastly, we urge the city administration to
3 increase cost of living allowance by 6.5 percent for
4 human services workers who are predominantly women of
5 color.

6 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.
7 Written testimony will get submitted with more
8 details and recommendations.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Juan for your
10 testimony and thank you to this entire panel for all
11 of your testimonies.

12 We will now move to the following panel, which
13 will be an in-person panel comprised of the following
14 individuals, Nicole Hunt, Jerome Nathaniel, and Greg
15 Silverman.

16 NICOLE HUNT: Hello, good afternoon. My name is
17 Nicole Hunt and I'm Associate Director of Public
18 Policy at Food Bank for New York City. Thank you for
19 the opportunity to testify. With inflation at a 40
20 year high, food prices have increased more than ten
21 percent since last year. In the end of pandemic era
22 assistance such as enhanced tax credits and increases
23 to SNAP allotments, come at a time when New Yorkers
24 are already cutting back and turning to food
25 assistance organization.

The number of visits to the food assistance network has increased 80 percent in the past year. Next week, nearly 1.7 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP to put food on the table will experience a loss of an average of \$82 per household per month. In New York City, this amounts to a loss of nearly \$200 million per month, an economic impact loss of more than \$240 million per month for food retailers and local economies and a loss of nearly 46 million meals each month. The network of CBO's that provide food assistance to our communities will continue to serve all New Yorkers we can. But food assistance alone cannot replace this loss of SNAP.

The FY24 budget must invest resources to help mitigate the coming rise in food insecurity and provide support to the city's Food Bank made for this work and to the CBO's on the ground at the frontline of the fight against hunger. The FY24 budget should invest in the existing social service network to help increase access to existing services and fortify the food assistance network by investing in the Community Food Connection program.

It is also essential that the city ensure support for community organizations that are not

1 participating in CFC, which currently serves 552
2 programs. Food Banks Network of providers is nearly
3 800 programs and we have dozens of programs on our
4 waiting list for membership.
5

6 The City Council has prioritized supporting
7 programs through the Food Pantries Initiative. We
8 encourage the Council to fortify that investment
9 while providing additional funding for services that
10 are responsive to community needs. Such as Food Bank
11 for New York City's Mobile Pantry, which provides
12 meals to 300 households at each distribution and
13 campus pantries, which serve approximately 16,000
14 public school students and their family members each
15 year.

16 I can wrap it up and submit the rest in written
17 testimony. Thank you.

18 JEROME NATHANIEL: Thank you so much Deputy
19 Speaker and member of the General Welfare Committee.
20 My name Jerome Nathaniel, I'm the Director of Policy
21 and Government Relations at City Harvest. City
22 Harvest is one of New York City's largest food banks
23 delivering over 75 million pounds of food across the
24 five boroughs to 400 different food charities that do
25 the direct work.

1 This hearing couldn't have been happening at an
2
3 any more critical time in our city. As you heard
4 from Nicole from the Food Bank, 1.7 million New
5 Yorkers. That's 1.7 million New Yorkers are going to
6 losing millions and millions of dollars in money that
7 would have went straight into our food economy. That
8 translates it to over 40 million meals that would
9 have fed families that are facing food insecurity.

10 For organizations like City Harvest that have
11 been fighting hunger for over 40 years, we know that
12 these past three years have been particularly
13 challenging and that we are not on the other side of
14 this pandemic and even if we were, hunger existed as
15 I said, well over the 40 years that we've been
16 around.

17 Compared to pre-pandemic levels, City Harvest is
18 now anticipating to deliver over 20 percent higher
19 than we did in 2019. We're continuing to see 80
20 percent more people come to our emergency food
21 programs that we did in 2019. So, all fingers point
22 to the real need for all of government response. We
23 understand that SNAP emergency allotments is a
24 federal short sidedness but we know that the city
25 also has a number of things that they can do to step

1 up. So, in my written testimony there's quite a bit
2 of details and from a coalition that City Harvest is
3 a part of called the New York City Food Policy
4 Alliance. But in the interest of time and for this
5 hearing, I do want to highlight four that I think are
6 really important.
7

8 The first one is to direct HRA to ensure that any
9 cuts in headcount vacancy do not impact benefits
10 enrollment and frontline positions are not
11 eliminated. Obviously, I know that we're all aware
12 of the backlog with SNAP, so that's a very critical
13 issue for us. Second is to increase HRA's budget
14 baseline to engage community base organizations that
15 are doing benefit outreach. Thoroughly to increase
16 funding for community food connect to \$59 million to
17 reflect the rising cost of food to run the program.
18 And then finally to invest \$38.4 million of new
19 funding to combat hunger among older adults for home
20 delivered meal program and congregate meals at older
21 adult centers.

22 As I said, there's more details in my written
23 testimony and I look forward to you, working with you
24 as we continue these budget negotiations. Thank you
25 so much.

GREG SILVERMAN: Thank you. My name is Chef Greg Silverman, I'm the CEO of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger and also the Founding Director of The Roundtable Allies for Food Access. The Roundtable is a dedicated network of eight of the largest frontline emergency food providers in New York City working to collective purchasing with the goal of procuring the most high quality and culturally appropriate food at the best prices. The work includes collecting bulk purchasing, ongoing price data gathering and to save money and time and improving data of transparency as we get the best food for New Yorkers in need. And that's obviously as already said, incredibly important right now. Like three little stats when it comes to food pricing for us at the hotel level, pasta is up 43 percent. Canned tuna up 28 percent. A dozen eggs up 141 percent.

Last week, we bought 90 cases of oranges. If you just add up all these things and where we are going to find another \$1 million at our organization alone, the money just can't stretch and that's why we need the community food connections program to grow to meet this need.

You know these phrases we heard earlier about streamlining processes and making things smoother, yeah we want to see those but we need staff on the ground at HRA helping sign people up for these benefits. So, there's more information in our

written testimony but we just implore that frontline services need frontline support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I had a question but it was really about the rise in cost, in food cost and what the impact was to the budget but you -

GREG SILVERMAN: Yeah, I represent eight organization in the roundtable but just Wisca alone, an extra, I think we're at \$1.3 million we're going to spend just on our purchasing our food alone, which is just one small example and that's assuming charity is going to take the need for this. You know city harvest trucks and Food Bank, everyone is at Hunts Point every day of the week, not just getting free food, we're all buying food. We're huge buyers.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, and good food. Thank you. You know listen you have to be not really paying attention to not see the growing number of people on lines. You know I represent East Harlem in the South Bronx and I see this mostly in the South Bronx but still scattered throughout you know my public housing developments in East Harlem and even around the corner from my own apartment, where we're seeing a huge increase and you know but the quality of the food is so good and I'm always so proud right

1 that — that has changed because you know it wasn't
2 always like that. I remember my mother used to make
3 miracles making you know I don't know what kind of
4 meat it was but it came in a can and she would stew
5 the hell out of it and make a delicious meal. But
6 we've come a really long way in the addition of like
7 fresh fruits and vegetable is really critical. And
8 so, thank you. You know I don't have a lot of
9 questions because I'm really indebted you know to you
10 all for the work that you do because I, you know as a
11 former beneficiary of these programs. I think if my
12 mother was alive, she would be standing in those
13 lines anyway because she just really loved the
14 quality of the food. Thank you so much.

16 GREG SILVERMAN: Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you again to this panel
18 for your testimony. We will now move to the next
19 panel which will be a remote panel. The next panel
20 joining us on Zoom will be comprised of the following
21 individuals, Emilio Tavaréz, Stephen Grimaldi, Rachel
22 Sabella, and Vic Benson. Now I will turn it over to
23 Emilio Tavaréz. Over now to Emilio.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.
25

1
2 EMILIO TAVEREZ: Alright, thank you so much. My
3 name is Emilio Tavaréz and I am the Policy Director
4 for Hunger Free America, also known as Hunger Free
5 NYC.

6 So, we are a national organization based in New
7 York City and within New York City, we do benefits
8 enrollment for SNAP and WIC both in-person and
9 virtually throughout the five boroughs. We actually
10 get a lot of referrals from DHS shelters and other
11 food distribution organizations. And I think for us,
12 you know we know that hunger is skyrocketing because
13 of several things. The migrant crisis that we've
14 mentioned several times today but also inflation as
15 well as the ending of the lot of federal nutrition
16 assistance that was available. So, we talked about
17 the emergency SNAP allotments that particularly ended
18 at the end of February and are particularly hurting
19 seniors who went from receiving over \$280 to now \$23,
20 many of them.

21 And so, for us, you know hunger is not a food
22 distribution issue, it's an affordability issue. You
23 know the price of food is too high. Other costs like
24 housing and health care eat up peoples budgets and
25 cutting your food budget is easier than not paying

1
2 your rent for a month. So, in the last year we
3 prescreened over 8,000 households for SNAP and
4 connected over 4,000 of them with benefits, which led
5 to a \$1.5 million monthly SNAP intake to the New York
6 City economy and \$19 million in annual dollars,
7 federal dollars coming into the city. And so, we
8 applaud the City Council for trying to address the
9 migrant crisis through the Welcome NYC Program. I
10 believe it was \$2.2 million and we noted that it
11 mostly went to food distribution services.

12 And so, I would just like to see more in outreach
13 funding for organizations to do more outreach in
14 immigrant communities. You know Hunger Free NYC does
15 benefits enrollment in English, Spanish, Russian,
16 Chinese and we continue to expand our language
17 because I think a lot of immigrants just don't know
18 that they're eligible which makes the lines longer at
19 vital you know food distribution services. If we
20 connected more people who are eligible to federally
21 funded benefits, then the line would be shorter and
22 we could help with food distribution those households
23 that are not truly eligible. WIC does not have an
24 immigration requirement at all. I implore all
25 Council Members to promote that and just wanted to

echo what my colleagues said just now about the need for streamlined applications.

My background is in social work. I, myself am an immigrant from the Dominican Republic and so, I know both sides of the issue. Needing help as a low-income child and then also working as a social worker connecting people to SNAP, housing and other services. So, I know that the applications mostly ask for the same information. Household size, income, expenses, so there's no reason why the clients need to have that burden of application to multiple offices.

If you want child care, go to this one. If you need food assistance, go to the other one. And so, navigating that system, especially when English is not your first language or you might have a physical or mental disability that prevents you from you know going to a food distribution. We definitely need to invest in the virtual services that we offer and I know that the mayor was supportive of a my city portal, as he called it, to you know have a one-stop shop application and I think SNAP and WIC are two programs that could lead the way. And then in terms of staffing, I also understand that you know social

workers are a great workforce particularly for all these types of services, so I know Speaker Adams was supportive of some sort of social work pipeline, workforce development pipeline. I think that's sorely needed and thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala and the whole Council for this opportunity to speak.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Emilio for your testimony. And now, I will turn it over to Stephen Grimaldi. Over now to Stephen.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

STEPHEN GRIMALDI: Good afternoon. Hi, Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today.

Last year through all of our programs, the New York Common Pantry provided over nine million meals, over nine million pounds of food, accessed over \$6 million in benefits and we saw nearly \$600,000 visitors to our programs, as Greg Silverman just mentioned. We're also a member of the Roundtable Allies for Access and together the eight organizations represent over 50 million meals.

The current four-pronged crisis that we're experiencing this kind of "post-pandemic" world,

inflation, migration, SNAP cuts have left an overwhelming number of families still struggling to make ends meet.

SNAP cuts, of course, the latest on this list, will surely increase need at an unprecedented rate over the next year. When SNAP cuts were enacted in 2014, we saw an increase in 500,000 meals served, and that level continued to grow. These cuts are much bigger. In the most recent pandemic crisis, we saw an increase in three million meals from FY20 - FY22, and this year, prior to the SNAP cuts, were seeing a 15 percent increase in FY23 compared to last year. But now you layer the SNAP cuts, these SNAP cuts coming after the economic devastation that I just mentioned, will have a far greater impact.

Food providers such as NYCP, will need to serve many more families struggling to put food on the table. And during the first two weeks of March, here is some very recent data, when SNAP cuts went into effect, many people experiencing and anticipating the crisis, we saw an 18 percent increase in our pantries. Our Choice Pantry program alone saw a whopping 23 percent increase in individuals served.

We are asking that the Mayor and the City Council to reconsider the proposed flat funding across the board for critical food assistance programs to provide transparency and how funding allocations are determined, to provide escalation clauses in contracts so agencies can cover rising cost of expenses and salaries. We are also asking that HRA and other agencies receive full funding to adequately staff and process SNAP and other applications and to expand CBO benefits access capability.

The proposed funding levels and staff cuts will be devastating for us. New York City, a place of such wealth and opportunity, having access to healthy nutritious food should not be so hard. So, we are respectfully requesting that the FY24 city budget appropriately reflect funding levels necessary to confront food insecurity in New York City. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Stephen for your testimony. I will now turn to Rachel Sabella. Over now to Rachel.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

RACHEL SABELLA: Thank you. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry

New York with Share our Strength. We're a national organization working to end childhood hunger and poverty and I have the honor and privilege of leading the organization advocacy awareness building, public policy and grant making across the State of New York.

First, I want to thank Chair Ayala for hosting this hearing today and for being such a powerful advocate for New Yorkers who are struggling with hunger. I also want to thank the entire General Welfare Committee, the City Council, and especially the Council staff members who have been tireless advocates on these issues, always open to listening, to discussing and helping to fight for those New Yorkers struggling with hunger.

I have submitted official and long testimony with a lot of recommendations but what I want to focus my oral remarks on today is a couple of quick points. Number one, I want to say thank you. It was very clear from Speaker Adam's State of the City Address last week, that food insecurity and helping New Yorkers gain access to food, to needed benefits will remain a priority for this Council.

At the start of the pandemic, we had a lot of visuals of people waiting on line for food but we

1
2 heard from panelists today, we heard Chair in your
3 recent remarks, we're seeing those same lines and we
4 want to make sure New Yorkers continue to have access
5 whether it's to SNAP, to food at Food Pantries, at
6 school pantries, but we need the Council to help lead
7 us in that battle and we were grateful to hear that
8 support last week.

9 As we also heard a lot today, as we heard at last
10 weeks Roundtable, as we've seen a lot in the media, a
11 huge struggle facing community organizations and New
12 Yorkers struggling with hunger is the HRA delays. We
13 need them to prioritize filling these positions to
14 keep people in those roles and to process these
15 requests. We need New Yorkers who are eligible for
16 these benefits, to have them in their pockets to
17 spend money in their local businesses, to put food on
18 their table. We don't want them to come away from
19 this distrust of government.

20 For many people who struggle with hunger, they
21 hate to ask for help. People are coming for help and
22 we don't want these delays or loss of paperwork or
23 anything again to discourage them from this. So, we
24 urge you to keep HRA accountable and ensure they are
25

working with OTDA, whether it's waiver, staffing and to help those New Yorkers.

I also want to make another plug for the emergency food providers. We heard from a lot of people here today but especially as we see the needs from asylum seekers, from every day New Yorkers whose SNAP benefits are not stretching as far as they once were, these community food pantries, these school pantries, which the Council created the first in the nation, they need additional resources to be able to help all of those families coming to them for support.

Finally, we're approaching a very critical time in federal advocacy, as we begin the Farm Bill reauthorization process, I'm urging the City Council to join all of us to fight to protect SNAP, to strengthen SNAP to ensure that we are not facing cuts or additional work requirements but really asking you to be our partner, hold our congressional delegation accountable and help New Yorkers put food on the table. Thank you for the time today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Rachel for your testimony. Now turning over to Vic Benson.
Over now to Vic.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

VIC BENSON: Thank you. My name is Vic Benson and I am the Policy Analyst at City Meals on Wheels. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. City Meals was established in 1981 as a unique public, private model to fill a critical gap in the city's home delivered meal program, which provides only one meal per day five days a week, excluding weekends and holidays. More recently, City Meals has emerged as the emergency responder for homebound older adults, beginning with 911 and continuing throughout the pandemic. The need for this program has increased over past years and even as we have been adjusting to our new post-pandemic reality, many older adults continue to need meals delivered to them.

Prior to the pandemic, City Meals was serving 18,000 older adults and today we are serving 20,000. This growth is in addition the general growth in the program we have seen over the years as the population across the county ages and that continues to this day. Moreover as the number of climate related emergencies has grown, the number of emergencies we have responded to has grown.

In addition to serving more people, we have experienced a staggering increase in our costs due to inflation. In FY22, City Meals food cost increased 33 percent and our fuel costs nearly doubled. These increases are happening across the network of meal providers that we fund for weekend and holiday meals, straining the program beyond capacity. Therefore, we respectfully request the following investments in FY24. We request \$800,000 through the Senior Centers Programs and Enhancement Initiative to continue our emergency response infrastructure to keep it adequately funded, which includes a renewal of \$500,000 through the Council Initiative and 200,000 received through the Speakers initiative with an enhancement of \$100,000.

We also request \$4 million in the budget earmarked for city meals, weekend and holiday meals. And we support the ask of the Just Pay Campaign to establish, fund and enforce a 6.5 percent cost of living adjustment across all human services contracts.

We thank the City Council for your continued partnership and ensuring that homebound older New Yorkers have food to eat 365 days a year and are not

1
2 forgotten during emergencies. And we will be
3 submitting written testimony with more information
4 and more recommendations. Thank you for the time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Vic for your
6 testimony and thank you to this entire panel for your
7 testimonies.

8 I will now turn it over to the next panel which
9 is going to be an in-person panel. The next panel
10 will be comprised of the following individuals Alan
11 Yu, Dr. Sophine Charles, and Nora McCarthy.

12 I will also call Quentin Walcott to join this
13 panel as well. Alright, you may begin when ready.

14 ALAN YU: Hi, I'm Alan Yu, the Executive Director
15 of New Yorkers for Children NYFC. A nonprofit that
16 works to improve the wellbeing of people in the child
17 welfare system with a focus on youth aging out of
18 foster care. We provide educational, mental health
19 and financial support to over 1,000 youth annually,
20 while also developing innovative initiatives to fill
21 gaps in the system. We do this through our
22 longstanding partnership with the Administration for
23 Children Services, foster care agencies and many
24 community organizations.

Thank you to the City Council for the \$50,000 award this current fiscal year which is enabling us to serve youth in our Fostering Empowerment Program and back to school program. For the upcoming fiscal year, NYFC is respectfully requesting that the City Council renew our award and make deeper investments in our programs population. Additional resources are crucial for NYFS to support our clients in ore comprehensive ways and lead to increased educational attainment, mental wellness and career development for youth aging out. Over 7,000 students in the city spend time in foster care every year and they are disproportionately Black and from low-income communities. Though they represent a relatively small portion of the public school population, you in the foster system have some of the most complex educational needs and bleakest academic outcomes of any students group. One in five students in the city who spend any time in foster care drop out of high school. By state test standards, 80 percent of foster care students were not proficient in reading and math and that was before the pandemic and half are chronically absent from school.

Because many of the young people we serve have experienced multiple overlapping traumas on the individual and systemic levels, we provide free mental health support from credentialed staff that facilitate healing and growth. Another key aspect of NYFC's programming philosophy is alleviating the root causes of poverty for the people we serve. Through our commitment to providing young people with emergency cash support, we aim to empower youth to make their own financial decisions and surmount crisis that might otherwise disrupt their lives.

Overall, an investment by the City Council and NYFC means an investment in youth and families in the child welfare system in NYC. Our commitment to strengthening channels to post-secondary programs, college and careers, particularly for students on alternative paths to graduation is instrumental ensuring our youth are not overlooked, creating more equitable outcomes. Thank you for your time.

DR. SOPHINE CHARLES: Good afternoon City Council, Council woman Ayala, thank you very much and the Council Members for allowing me to testify. My name is Dr. Sophine Charles. I am the Associate Executive Director for the Council of Family and

Child Caring Agencies, also known as COFCA. We represent more than 100 agencies statewide. 50 of those agencies in New York City, all providing foster care, juvenile justice services, residential care, and special school placements for children.

I am here to really emphasize the foundation of workforce workforce, workforce. We echo the Human Services Council request and advocacy around getting a living wage for all human services workers and annual cost of living adjustment of 6.5 and parity, pay parity for City Council agency workers. Also, professional development support for educational and career advancement. About \$100,000 and we want to make sure that we get the support from the City Council and the Mayor's Office to ensure that our nonprofit providers have sustainability. And in order for them to have sustainability, we must have a well-trained, well-credentialed workforce.

Take for example, 32-year-old Jay, who is a case planner African American with a bachelor's degree. She is a case worker, making about \$43,000 a year. She's a single parent of two children living in a two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn, paying about \$1,600 per month for rent. She's got student loan

So, Jay needs to support herself but she's also charged with taking care of intensive needs of children and families and we're asking for the City Council and the Mayor's office to invest in this workforce. We need our case planners and case workers and just the general human service workers in this city to be able to sustain themselves and also, help the agencies sustain and maintain their contractual obligations without a well-trained, well-credential, well supported workforce, we are jeopardizing the children who are involved and families involved in child welfare services because we've got a 49 percent turnover rate in frontline workers. 24 percent turnover rate in case workers and each time we turn over a case worker, that means

And so, in closing, I'll just say that we're asking for the city to understand that without a well-trained child welfare workforce, that we're not able to sustain and help support all the families that need our assistance.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and we agree and the continuity of services is really important and those formed relationships really help right. So, when there's an interruption, sometimes right. It's frustrating from all angles but primarily for the families that have to you know once again rebuild and start right from the bottom getting to know someone new and sharing the same experiences. And you know some of those experiences are traumatic. You don't want to have to repeat them time after time every time you know you have to relive it. It's almost as if it just happened, so.

DR. SOPHINE CHARLES: And our workforce being one paycheck away from joining the families that they currently serve and support.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's horrible. No, it's horrible. Thank you.

DR. SOPHINE CHARLES: Thank you.

QUENTIN WALCOTT: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker and Chair Ayala and the other members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Quentin Walcott, I'm the Executive Director of Connect and we're a nonprofit organization headquartered in Harlem but provide services citywide. I submitted the testimony but I'll just talk briefly about Connect and what we do.

We're a gender violence prevention and domestic violence prevention organization in New York City. We provide training through our Connect training institute who we train most of the organizations in the city that provide domestic violence and sexual violence, support services and training in their own right to their individual populations. We also have a community empowerment program where over the 20 years, Connect turns 20 in April and that's 20 years

of support through City Council, so we are very grateful.

You know we provide over 200 organizations you know specialize in tailor made programming to address the needs of survivors, children who witness violence and those who are, children are also part of the violence cycle in terms of child abuse and neglect. And also, what really makes Connect unique other than our prevention work is the fact that we engage in boys and men and the solution to ending domestic violence. This is a reality that you know almost 85 to 90 percent of the cases that are reported and these are just the one's that were reported that where men and boys are involved in the harm towards women and girls.

So, Connects programming is build on that holistic approaches to communities to develop safety and justice for survivors and also, not to throw people who do harm away and we've developed restorative justice practices and values in our work so that we engage men in their solution by one, providing men's roundtables women's circles, of course the training where we train people to work with survivors of domestic violence. Those who do

harm, particularly men who are abusive in their relationships and children who witness violence.

So, we have a series of child witness to violence trainings and programs for practitioners to be able to kind add that to the work in New York City communities. So, I just wanted to kind of sum up and add that this is also in support for refunding for Connect, the Safe initiative and DOVE initiatives, all initiatives within the Council that support domestic violence and intimate partner violent services. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel for all of your testimonies. Now, I'm going to call on the next panel, which is going to be a remote, virtual panel. The next panel will be comprised of Amiee Abusch, Betty Baez Melo, Sierra Kraft, and Tanisha Grant, and I apologize if I've mispronounced any of your names. Over now to Amy for testimony.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

AMIEE ABUSCH: Thank you. Good afternoon. Thank you Chair Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Amiee Abusch, I am the Senior Vice President of Foster Care Prevention and Community Partnership

1 Programs at JCCA. JCCA is a child and family
2 services agency that works with 17,000 children and
3 families each year. JCCA wellness support for young
4 people struggling emotional challenges are critical
5 to preventing and addressing family disfunction and
6 instability.
7

8 In the interest of time, I will talk about our
9 ask or our recommendations. The human services
10 workforce that fulfills city contracts is
11 significantly underpaid compared to the public and
12 private sectors. Today, we ask that our staff are
13 adequately paid. We recommend a 6.5 COLA to be
14 included in this year's budget and future COLA's to
15 be indexed for inflation. We appreciate the Council
16 for recognizing the existing pay inequity by
17 introducing Intro. 510 to establish prevailing wage
18 requirements for city contracting human services
19 workers. We ask that this years budget allocate
20 funds to establish a prevailing wage for frontline
21 workers.

22 We ask that tuition rates, substantial loans and
23 non-pay internships constitute barriers for people in
24 underserved neighborhoods representing their
25 communities and service providers. We ask that the

city provide tuition assistance, loan forgiveness, internship funding to people who either or currently live in underserved neighborhoods or commit to work in a health or human services provider serving underserved populations.

As I oversee our foster care division, I am encouraged by the city's investment in Fair Futures. Thank you City Council Mayor Adams for championing Fair Futures since its founding in 2019. We encourage City Council to expand funding to offer Fair Futures so that more youth age 18-26 can receive these critical services.

Thank you again for taking the time to consider human service needs of children and their families in our city. Only by investing in the necessary supports to young people can the city break the cycle to crisis that turn struggling children into adults with even greater needs. Thankyou very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Amiee for your testimony. We'll now turn to Betty Baez Melo for testimony. Over now to Betty.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

BETTY BAEZ MELO: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Preliminary Budget. My name is Betty

Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and Director of the Early Childhood Education Project at Advocates for Children of New York.

We believe that every child should have access to a high-quality early childhood care and education program. As such, we were pleased when the city launched Promise NYC to increase access to early childhood programs for children who are undocumented. Unfortunately, the Fiscal Year 2023 budget included only one-year funding, and the Mayor's Preliminary Budget does not include any funding to continue this crucial initiative, leaving hundreds of children at risk of being turned away from their program after June.

Many child care and preschool programs, including DOE 3-K and Pre-K extended day and year programs, require families to qualify for child care assistance in order to enroll. These programs have historically excluded children who are undocumented as they are not eligible for this subsidy based on state and federal restrictions. Since its launch in January, hundreds of families of children who are undocumented have applied for child care funding through Promise NYC. At a time when New York City has seen an

1
2 increase in immigrant families, the city should be
3 increasing, and certainly not decreasing, funding for
4 this initiative so that children are not excluded
5 from programs based on their immigration status.

6 For reference about 40 percent of the thousands
7 of newly arrived immigrant children are ages zero to
8 five; access to early education program is critical
9 to helping ensure that these children will have
10 success in elementary school and beyond, while also
11 enabling parents to work, connect with resources,
12 find permanent housing, and settle into their new
13 communities.

14 In Fiscal Year 2023, with advocacy from Council
15 Members and the Comptroller, the city allocated \$10
16 million to serve approximately 600 children from
17 January to June 2023. Since \$10 million is being
18 used over six months, it will be necessary to
19 allocate \$20 million for the full year in Fiscal Year
20 2024 in order to maintain capacity. As such, we're
21 calling for the city to invest and baseline \$20
22 million in Fiscal Year 2024 for ACS funding for
23 Promise NYC.

24 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and
25 I would be happy to answer any questions.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Betty for your testimony. I will now turn it over to Sierra Kraft for testimony. Over now to Sierra.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

SIERRA KRAFT: Good afternoon. Thank you to the Committee on General Welfare for inviting testimony. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I am the Executive Director at the ICARE Coalition. ICARE is a coalition of seven legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation in New York City with the ultimate goal of universal access to counsel in the coming years. I want to take a moment to share our sincere gratitude.

Since 2014, support from City Council, through the Unaccompanied Minors and Family Initiative, has made it possible for the ICARE Coalition to stand alongside over 8,000 young immigrants, defend them from deportation, and empower them to become leaders of tomorrow. Legal representation for the lives of many young New Yorkers has been truly life changing. Many of the children we represent are escaping extreme violence and trauma in their home country, in search of protection and safety. Without ICARE's

representation, most of these children would be forced to represent themselves against a trained government lawyer.

Studies show that children without representation stand just a 15 percent chance of winning their case, and loss of access to attorneys can result in the rapid deportation of children and families to countries where their lives are at risk. As the migrant crisis intensifies, the need for legal services skyrockets. New York continues to rank fourth in the country for the highest number of unaccompanied arrivals released to sponsors. And year, nearly 2,000 young New Yorkers are placed in removal proceedings facing deportation without due process if they cannot afford a lawyer.

ICARE seeks to ensure that quality legal services are offered to all children, not only those who are able to afford them. And children represented by ICARE attorneys have more than a 90 percent success rate. Today, we renew our call to the city to prioritize funding for many unaccompanied minors in New York City, who are reliant on the critical legal services and immigration supports that the ICARE Coalition provides. Our request as a coalition is

\$5.6 million this year so we can continue to serve nearly 2,000 children and families through legal screenings, know-your-rights trainings, direct representation and referrals to city and social services. Now more than ever, it is critical that we stand in solidarity with children seeking safety, protection, and a new life in this city. We look forward to our continued partnership with you and ensuring we live our values as a sanctuary city. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony Sierra and now we will turn to Tanisha Grant. Over now to Tanisha for testimony.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

TANISHA GRANT: Hello everyone. Thank you Chair for having this meeting. It's very important. My name is Tanisha Grant. I am the Executive Director and Founder of a little community-based organization called Parent Support and Parents New York. I am here to speak for the community. I see a lot of organizations here; I see a lot of non-profits here. I see what everyone is saying but let me tell you what I am experiencing.

We support parents that are having a very difficult time with ACS right now and can't access the service that they should have or who are being penalized for poverty and things of that nature. I don't see ACS support in community-based organizations. So, when we say community-based organizations, the community based organization, I'm really confused about that. When we talk about Department of Social Services, I have a whole bunch of people right now who can't access SNAP. When we talk about all of these numbers that they give to call. They have a lot of saying they're talking about technology and how they have moved stuff over. Me in my personal capacity have not been able to talk to a case worker in HRA since before the pandemic. These are problems that have been happening and what we want Chair is for the City Council to really help us navigate it and how to take away some of that

1 money from the budget and from the big entities that
2 don't reach the people that we reach and really work
3 with community based organizations and help give us
4 the money to help people every day.

5 You know it's community based organizations like
6 mine who get the calls at 11 o'clock at night because
7 a landlord is trying to put them out illegally or who
8 need pampers for their child or milk for their child
9 or need their ConEd bill paid. Community based
10 organizations are filling in all of these gaps.

11 Right now, I am on two Preliminary Budget
12 hearings to testify on both for them because we are
13 so stretched thin on capacity but yet there would be
14 no need for me and for community based organizations
15 like mine that do mutual aid. That give away
16 laptops. That do everything on the ground in real
17 time if these systems really work the way they were
18 supposed to work and if these systems really serve
19 the people that they're supposed to serve. It's a
20 lot of trauma, it's a lot of mental health services
21 that we don't have. It's a lot of things that we
22 don't have. So, when I sit here and I listen to
23 billions of dollars going into the budgets, I ask
24 you, who are we really serving? Because I serve
25

1 people every day that cannot access any of these
2 services that these systems are supposed to provide.
3 If we're talking about ACS or if we're talking about
4 Department DSS.
5

6 It's really upsetting to me to sit here and
7 listen to these numbers and listen to this data when
8 I am the data. My people are the data and when I
9 hear you all talking, when I hear ACS talking about
10 prevention services, like they talked about with my
11 mother in 1976, it was a prevention service, but yet
12 my mother ended up losing me because she was poor and
13 because she had four children before me. I'm 47
14 years old and I'm still trying to find out who my
15 mother is because of ACS.

16 So, we really need to consider the trauma and the
17 harm that all of these policies create, which are you
18 know few by their billion dollar budget. And I yield
19 back. Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Tanisha for that
21 testimony and thank you to this entire panel for your
22 testimonies. I am now going to turn over to our next
23 panel. Our next panel is going to be an in-person
24 panel and the panel will be comprised of the
25 following individuals. Cynthia Stuart, Wilfredo

Lopez, Danna Dennis, and Jimmy Meagher. And you may begin when ready.

JIMMY MEAGHER: Good afternoon. My name is Jimmy Meagher, I am Policy Director for Safe Horizon, which is the nations largest victim services nonprofit organization. Each year we help 250,000 New Yorkers who have experienced violence and abuse. We're so grateful for the many years of support that we've received from the City Council and we're so grateful that we have many champions of the nonprofit human services sector. I have submitted my entire written testimony but I just wanted to give a couple points today. Number one, Just Pay. Safe Horizon is a proud member of the Just Pay Campaign and we're asking for a 6.5 percent COLA this year. And making sure that in the budget it's listed as a cost of living adjustment and not some other named initiative. We consistently hear elected leaders telling their constituents that they fight for victims and survivors, ensuring that the nonprofit human service workers who provide the various services and supports survivors needs, is a very tangible way for the city to demonstrate that it cares about survivors.

Second, City Council initiative and discretionary funding contracted through ACS and HRA DSS support Safe Horizon's child advocacy centers, our domestic violence law project and our immigration law project. We are seeking a restoration and enhancement to \$1 million through the initiative to combat sexual assault to sustain the general operations of our CAC's and we're grateful that Chair Ayala, when you came and visited our Manhattan CAC last year.

The City Council supports our Immigration Law Project through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative. We're seeking an enhancement to that funding just to meet the need.

Third, Safe Horizon is grateful to the City Council for passing Intro. 153A last year. Too often the survivors who come to our programs for help need small amounts of money to remain stably housed to find secure housing and to find safety. These small expenses are often the one thing standing in the way of safety and healing. The housing stability program will provide survivors of domestic violence with a low barrier grant for urgent expenses and domestic violence related services in consultation with other

1 organizations. We are recommending that the city
2 fund this program at \$6 million in Fiscal Year 2024.

3 Although the Mayor's Preliminary Budget is a
4 start, we believe that the amount of \$1.2 million
5 does not meet the need. If we estimate the average
6 grant to be \$2,000 per household for rent, that
7 amount would only help 600 survivors. So, we're
8 urging the Administration to reach and assist more
9 survivors by funding the housing stability program at
10 \$6 million setting aside 15 percent to cover
11 administrative costs and the rest is in my written
12 testimony. Thank you so much.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You can begin when ready and
14 I think your mic needs to be turned on.

15 CYNTHIA STUART: Like that, okay, thanks so much.
16 Hello Chair Ayala and members of the General Welfare
17 Committee. My name is Cynthia Stuart and I'm the
18 Chief Operating Officer at the Supportive Housing
19 Network of New York. The network is a statewide
20 membership organization representing some 200
21 nonprofit developers and operators of supportive
22 housing, which is affordable housing that have
23 embedded social services for people with a history of
24

homelessness and additional challenges. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'm here to talk about the city's commitment to create 15,000 supportive housing units, otherwise known as NYC 1515, which is in imminent danger of not being fulfilled by either the original date, which was 2030 or the Mayor's Plan to accelerate it by two years.

As you know, half of the plans units were to be new development, congregate but already at year seven, 70 percent of those units have been awarded. Meanwhile only 17 percent of the plan scattered site units have been awarded. These are apartments rented on a private market with mobile case management. This is due to underfunding of the scattered site rates in combination with a very tight housing market and rising rents.

So, to accelerate or even reach its original goal, the city needs to immediately reimagine 1515 as well as increased scattered site rates to \$17,500 to match those of congregate. The city should this year, reapportion the remaining 6,200 unawarded scattered site units into four buckets. First, we propose the city develop more congregate supportive

housing, thereby increasing the city's stock of supportive and affordable housing.

Next, we propose the city create a flexible preservation fund to help bolster the service and operating contracts under pinning thousands of older supportive housing units. Third, we recommend the city keep a portion of the original scattered site commitment albeit funded at \$17,500 per unit, rather than the current unusable rate of \$10,000 per unit and lastly, we recommend the city work with city funded affordable housing developers to overlay homeless set aside units that have little to no funding for services with 1515 scattered site contracts and to ensure equitable access to all units under 1515, the Administration should allow stays in jail and prison of more than 90 days to count toward time homeless.

So, as to allow thousands of people returning from jail or prison access to 1515 supportive housing. Meanwhile to achieve 1515 goals, the Administration needs to expedite the contract approval process at DSS, which currently takes a year.

Finally, of course, we support the Just Pay Campaign and the request for 6.5 percent COLA. Thanks so much for the opportunity.

WILFREDO LOPEZ: Thank you so much. Good afternoon Chair Ayala. My name is Wilfredo Lopez. I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Urban Resource Institute. We're the largest domestic violence shelter provider in the country and we provide a temporary housing services to people impacted by domestic violence, intimate partner violence and families experiencing homelessness. I'd like to start by expressing our disappointment with the proposed cuts that the DSS and the DHS budgets. The total cuts amount to \$755 million with \$650 million to DSS and \$105 million to DHS. The \$105 million cut to DHS includes a reduction to security and cleaning, which were particularly alarming during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Proper cleaning and sanitation are essential to prevent outbreaks in homeless shelters.

Also, the proposed cuts to DHS include reductions in outreach and supportive services risking losing ground and reducing homelessness. A \$277 million cut also to City FHEPS program will exacerbate the city's

homelessness crisis pushing more families into instability and poverty. Moreover, the Preliminary Budget proposes to cut 84 full-time domestic violence and gender based violence liaison positions from the NGBV's headcount, which will have a negative impact on the city's ability to effectively respond to domestic and gender based violence.

Survivors of domestic and gender based violence will have a reduced access to information, resources and support increasing the risk of further harm. Council Member Tiffany Cabán's Local Law 12 of 2023, that establishes a fund to disburse microgrants and qualifying individuals who have stayed in domestic violence shelters. The Mayor's proposing the budget to allocate \$1.2 million. We respectfully ask that to be \$6 million.

Further, the New York City DOVE initiative funding is critical to support survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. The initiative provides funding to domestic service providers to help them provide comprehensive services to survivors. So, we're asking the Council to increase funding for this initiative.

1
2 In conclusion, we urge the Council to prioritize
3 funding for DSS, DHS, reverse the cuts in headcount
4 to NGBV, fully fund the NGBV's microgrants program
5 and increase that funding. Thank you.

6 DANNA DENNIS: Good afternoon Madam Chair and
7 Committee at large. My name is Danna Dennis and I am
8 a Senior Organizer at the Riders Alliance. I
9 organize the public riders that fight and win or
10 fighting to win reliable, accessible and affordable
11 public transit. I actually just lost a family member
12 a few days ago. Well, it's been over a week now and
13 I flew out of town for the funeral and made sure that
14 I was back here today, so I could wait all day in
15 person just to make sure that I could say this. I
16 cleared my day, I made sure that both of my children
17 are being picked up and I have reliable child care.
18 That's how important this issue is to me.

19 I am here today to urge the Council to follow
20 Speaker Adams lead and adopt a budget that expands
21 Fair Fares eligibility to New Yorkers earning up to
22 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Fair Fares
23 is a game changer for low-income New Yorkers. After
24 years of work as a home health aide, I was a live in
25 actually, I joined the Riders Alliance. When I

I would stand at the turn styles and decide if I should \$20 on \$10 on my card. I just could not afford my overhead costs. My main, you know the main amount of my budget was going to my rent and then after that of course, I had to make sure that I could eat.

And at the time when I was fighting for Fair Fares, I knew then I wouldn't be eligible because I made "too much." But I know there were a lot more people who were making less than me who needed it. And so, you know that was some five years ago before the program was adopted. And now, Fair Fares has enrolled over hundreds of thousands of low income New Yorkers and I'm really, really proud of that but it has not yet reached its full potential because the eligibility threshold you know is really too low. It's set at the federal poverty line. So, we're talking about New York City, you know a Brooklyn rider or across the boroughs Bronx, compared to someone who lives in rural Alabama. It's the same amount.

So, expanding Fair Fares to 200 percent of the federal poverty line would save several hundred thousand dollars each year per adult and also for working families extending a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of struggling households. People who are already dealing with the cost again of food, rent, utilities and every thing else that's on the rise in this city. Extending Fair Fares now is perhaps the biggest difference that the Council can make in the lives of New Yorkers. All the things that we talked about today is at the intersection of transit. New Yorkers need reliable transit and of course it has to be affordable for them to get everywhere that they have to go. Those folks that are most dependent, the same one's that are standing on the lines that we were talking about, those are the folks who are waiting on the bus in the cold, in the rain, with their baby stroller. They are trying to get on the train. They are begging the bus driver. They are looking for you to swipe back. They are trying to make eye contact with you so they don't get arrested and get \$100 fine. Those folks need Fair Fares and they need it to be expanded because they are the working poor. And they often don't get the

eligibility for many of the programs that we're all fighting for. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I don't even know what to say to you guys. You guys are awesome and thank you for staying till now to share that. I just, I'll let you you know enter your testimony into the record but thank you all for the work that you do. I know that you know that it's important but the impact that you have on New Yorkers in need is just really just - it's really heartwarming, so thank you.

DANNA DENNIS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And my condolences on your loss.

DANNA DENNIS: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I will now call on the next panel, which is going to be a remote panel. The next panel will be comprised of Terry Lawson, Beatriz Diaz Taveras, Doreen Thomann-Howe and Eric Lee. Over now to Terry Lawson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

TERRY LAWSON: Good afternoon. Good afternoon Deputy Speaker Ayala and to the General Welfare Committee. My name is Terry Lawson, I am the Executive Director of UnLocal, we provide community

education, outreach, and legal representation to New York City's undocumented immigrant communities.

I am also the co-founder and steering committee member of the Bronx Immigration Partnership and co-founder of the Pro Se Plus Project. Thank you for convening this important hearing and for staying for the whole day.

In collaboration with our partners at Central American Legal Assistance, Catholic Migration Services, Masa, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid, which is VIA, NYLAG, African Communities Together, and the Robin Hood Foundation and New York Community Trust, we launched the Pro Se Plus Project in January to help recently arrived migrants access pro se legal assistance, advocate for themselves, and understand their rights and obligations. I testified about the Pro Se Plus Project at the immigration budget hearing but given how much talk happened today regarding the asylum seekers, I wanted to make sure to talk about this project here today. The Pro Se Plus Project helps to fill gaps while we and our partners across the city are advocating for and trying to secure increased funding to provide full representation to every asylum seeker.

To date, we've been conducting legal screenings, consultations, delivering educational presentations both online and remote to migrants and community supporters. We've been providing advice and counsel and organizing clinics to help recent arrivals meet these requirements. We are seeking City Council support in FY24 to expand our reach and continue to innovate to meet these emergent needs.

UnLocal provides many high-quality legal services for our most vulnerable immigrants. Last year, we handled 1200 matters for immigrant New Yorkers who are seeking not only asylum but DACA, SIJS, lawful permanent residency, work authorization and much more.

Our Queer Immigrant Justice Project, which receives support from the City Council LGBT Caucus, works with LGBTQIA+ immigrants and our QIJP Ambassador Program provides current and former clients with opportunities to develop leadership skills and connect with other queer-identified immigrants. We also specialize in providing community education for immigrants from all walks of life and conducted 77 presentations last year. We are seeking support from the Council to become a provider under the City Council's DOVE program given how many survivors and victims of gender-based violence we represent every day.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss more of these programs with the Council and thank you for the time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Terry for your testimony. I will now turn to Beatriz Diaz Taveras for testimony. Over now to Beatriz.

BEATRIZ DIAZ TAVERAS: Thank you Speaker Ayala and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York. A federation of 90 contracting agencies and providers of social

services. I am Beatriz Diaz Taveras, the Executive Director of one of those agencies within the federation, Catholic Charities Community Services.

In the effort of time, I'm just going to echo many of what my colleagues have already mentioned. I know my colleagues on the Hunger program did talk about our food insecurities. And again, Catholic Charities has distributed over eight million meals last year. We have over 40 ongoing food programs but the cuts in the SNAP benefits really will be devastating to our community. We have already seen increasing's in our lines and what's most disturbing is to see the seniors on those lines. It is really they who are suffering the most and we would like to see if there is any way we can increase our food portion of the funding for the seniors.

We look at our day laborer's program. Our program has been stretched to the max this year. With the increase of the asylum seekers, so many of them are looking for OSHA classes and other necessary licensing. We are at capacity but so are all of our fellow providers such as NICE and La Colmena. So, we need and continue enhancement to continue to provide

these courses for all of those who are seeking work in New York City.

I echo my colleague on the ICARE as a member of the ICARE Coalition. We continue to support undocumented unaccompanied minors. I also do want to stress the importance of English as a second language and the Adult Literacy Initiative. We do request the renewal of the \$4 million discretionary initiative, really doubling the funds. Again, the asylum seekers are seeking this essential services and funding for it is most necessary.

So many of my colleagues have spoken so eloquently but I just wanted to add our thoughts on that. So, again, thank you so much for this opportunity and for all the services that you do support and advocate for.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Beatriz for your testimony. I will now turn to Doreen Thomann-Howe. Over now to Doreen.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: If we can have a member of our staff unmute Doreen.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: It's showing that Doreen is still unmuted. Perhaps we are having some technical difficulties.

Doreen, on your end, you will get a prompt to unmute. I believe we just -- Doreen just logged off, so we will move on now to Eric Lee and circle back to Doreen if Doreen rejoins. Over now to Eric Lee.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ERIC LEE: Hi good afternoon.
My name is Eric Lee,
I'm the Director of policy and planning at Homeless Services United. Thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee for allowing me to testify today. I will summarize my written testimony for the sake of time.

The number one need for homeless services, this homeless services safety net is comprehensive wage reform for all city contracted human services workers. Establishing wage parity with city employees and a minimum of a 6.5 percent COLA for all city contracted human services staff but ideally a COLA equivalent to the collective bargaining agreements secured by city workers.

City contracted nonprofit staff deserve equal pay for equal work and we welcome the Council's support in advancing systemic reform to how salaries are set in city contracts. Homeless service providers will continue to struggle to fill and retain staff if and until those wages reach parity with the equivalent positions at city agencies.

To address increase numbers of households at imminent risk of eviction, we urge the city to commit an additional \$90 million to homebased providers from its allotment of federal home ARP funding to increase wages to close vacancies and retain staff as well as to expand the overall headcount at homebase programs to expand capacity to the communities they're serving.

To better serve households at less imminent risk of eviction to resolve their housing instability, we propose that HRA create a new RFP for CBO's to offer in community rental assistance applications and housing search services paired with under care for public benefits maintenance.

Similar to how the old FHEPS CBO contracts were modeled to proactively address public housing instabilities further upstream.

We also ask that the Council ensure that the FY24 budget contains sufficient funding to carry out legislative mandates championed by the Council, including prevailing wage requirements and training for DHS shelter staff given the shelter census has had to grow and to meet the needs of asylum seekers, as well as funding for comprehensive salaries to hire mental health professionals in family shelters and DHS.

And we could also use the Council's support in urging DSS to adopt cost neutral fiscal policies to grant DHS and HRA contracted providers needed flexibility to close immediate gaps and create an opportunity to for more long term comprehensive investments, which we detailed in our written testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And thank you Eric for your testimony. We will now return back to Doreen Thomann-Howe. Doreen over now to you for testimony and you will have to on your end unmute once staff give you permission to so. Over now to Doreen.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Doreen, you're probably receiving a prompt on your end that would ask you to unmute. Alright, we may have to circle back again to Doreen. I'm now going to call on the next panel. The next panel will in the following order, a remote panel. And the panel will be Joseph Toles, Nickesha Francis, and Nia Meeki(SP?). And I'm sorry if I mispronounced your name. And I think we're just going to take one pause because I believe we're having a technical difficulty right now. [5:48:17-5:48:46]

Alright, we apologize for that momentary difficulty. We are now going to go back to the panel that I just called. Before we do, I'm going to ask Doreen Thomann-Howe again to see if there's a possibility that you can unmute on your end. If we can unmute Doreen.

DOREEN THOMANN-HOWE: Hello, can you hear me now?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you, wonderful. You can begin your testimony.

DOREEN THOMANN-HOWE: Thank you so much. My name is Doreen Thomann-Howe and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Project Renewal. A New York City homeless services nonprofit agency. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I am grateful to Chair Ayala and entire City Council for your support of our programs, which provide shelter, housing, health care and employment services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Most of Project Renewals 950 employees, our human service workers on the frontline of our city's homelessness crisis.

Despite doing some of the most important and challenging work, these frontline workers like the rest of the human service workforce are some of the lowest paid workers in our city. Unfortunately, the hands of human services nonprofits like project renewal are tied. The government contracts we rely on either directly set low salary levels or do so indirectly by establishing low rates for services along with required staffing levels on a contract. Project Renewal is grateful for the Council's advocacy through the Just Pay Campaign to ensure that funding is baselined in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget for human service workers but that should just be the first step. We must go further by establishing a 6.5 COLA.

Human Services workers are crucial to the success of mental health and substance use programs. The

Mayor's new mental health plan outlines the need to reach New Yorkers with serious mental illness and to address the overdose crisis. So, today, I would like to highlight a program already in assistance that addresses these priorities, Project Renewals Support and Connection Center.

In partnership with DOHMH, the Center provides stabilization and treatment services for adults experiencing mental health and/or substance use crisis. It opened in 2020 as the first program of its kind in the city. The centers guests are referred by the NYPD and other sources as an alternative to arrest, summons or the emergency room. We serve up to 18 guests at a time for stays of up to five days, which can be extended to ten days with permission from DOHMH.

Guests have access to an interdisciplinary team of peer counselors and providers including a psychiatrist and occupational therapist in addition to meals, showers and laundry. We have served over 650 New Yorkers at the center. Over 50 percent of the centers guests have chosen to stay engaged with our aftercare services, which include connections to community services and longer term support.

We applaud the Mayor, DOHMH and the New York City Council for prioritizing mental health. Supporting the Human Service Workers who make the difference on the ground every day and expanding models like the Support and Connection Center could make a difference in the lives of the hardest to reach New Yorkers. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Doreen for your testimony. I will now turn to the next panel. The next panel will be comprised of Joseph Toles, Nickesha Francis, and Nia Meeki. Over now to Joseph Toles.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JOSEPH TOLES: Thank you Chair Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Joseph Toles and I am the Senior Director of Family Permanency Services at You Got to Believe. A foster care and adoption agency that believes life long committed familiar relationships is the answer to kids aging out of foster care.

YGB has received support from the City Council since 2015 to support our Nobody Ages Out program and our efforts to provide wrap around services for transition age foster youth. We submitted a request

for continued support of those programs, as well as for mental health services for LGBTQ youth and families that serve our youth.

In addition and based on our experience in congregate care facilities, we are seeking to expand our services to include restorative justice workshops and supports. For 27 years, YGB has focused on finding loving unconditionally committed permanent families for kids in foster care, who would otherwise age out alone.

Everyone on our team is a credible messenger. I personally have adopted eight young men from the foster care system after spending my entire childhood in care. These experiences give us a unique advantage to provide the highly specialized support of youth and families need. We recently launched a mental health program that allows us to provide adoption competent and trauma informed therapy to our families free of charge for as long as they need it.

WGB primarily serves Black and Brown youth between the ages of 10 and 24. We also focus on serving LGBTQ youth because like our Black and Brown children, they are over represented in the system. 25 percent of our youth and 15 percent of our parents

1 identify as LGBTQ. Youth don't stop needing family
2 support at age 21. Just one preliminary data point
3 indicates that youth who age out of the New York City
4 foster care system without a family are more than
5 twice as likely to be incarcerated than youth we have
6 placed with permanent families.
7

8 On the national level, youth who age out alone
9 are more than ten times as likely to be incarcerated
10 than youth placed with permanent families. YGB needs
11 your support, the support of the City Council because
12 our staff is at capacity and our children's needs
13 have not diminished. We are relying on you to help
14 us scale up so we can reach more foster youth with
15 our proven model. We need your help to increase our
16 impact and prevent more kids from aging out of foster
17 care without a permanent loving family. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Joseph for your
19 testimony. We'll now turn to Nickesha Francis.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 NICKESHA FRANCIS: Thank you Chair Ayala and the
22 Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to
23 testify. My name is Nickesha Francis and I am the
24 Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd
25 Services.

Good Shepherd Services is a provider of residential Foster Care, Family Treatment Foster Care, Prevention, Close to Home, Fair Futures and the Family Enrichment Center model. My testimony will focus on the need to address the ongoing workforce crisis severely impacting the human services sector and specifically, child welfare agencies and our call for greater investments to create salary parity with ACS positions.

Child Welfare agencies are experiencing a staffing crisis and reporting a turnover rate of 49 percent for frontline staff and 24 percent for caseworkers across the state. For Good Shepherd Services, our overall turnover rate for FY21 was 27.09 percent and in FY22 it increased to 49 percent. As a city, we should be concerned about these rates as high turnover rates negatively impact outcomes for children and youth and especially, for youth in care. As the ACS Commissioner mentioned, they are hiring additional staff.

In fact, their latest Youth Development Specialist job posting, has a starting salary of \$47,393 and after five years that increases to \$60,031 along with a \$2,500 sign on bonus. As Chair

Ayala mentioned, non-Profits cannot compete with these offers because our contracts will not allow us to pay annual increases or bonuses. While we have seen workforce investments in the past two budgets, Mayor Adams' preliminary budget omitted a COLA all together. This is why the Human Services Council is asking for the Administration and Council to negotiate a budget that includes a 6.5 percent COLA of Living Adjustment, Cost of Living Adjustment.

I would go further and call for salary parity now. It is time for providers across New York City to be able to pay living wages to staff that are equal to the salary compensation and benefits available to city workers. I implore the Council to support the desperate need for the infusion of funding to raise salaries for the current workforce to provide equitable and competitive salary parity with the public sector, thus allowing programs to attract diverse, highly educated and trained candidates, to reap enormous benefits for the children, youth and families served.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Nickesha for your testimony. Now, I will turn it over to Nia Meeki and

I apologize if I mispronounced your name. I know I probably have. Over now to you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

NIA MEEKI: Hi, can you guys hear me?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

NIA MEEKI: Good afternoon Council. My name Nia Meeki Reynolds and I am an Independent Contractor and Youth Advocate with You Better Believe and I have worked here for six years now.

In addition, I have lived experience in the child welfare system as I was placed in care from the hospital at two weeks old. I tend to think that I was one of the lucky ones because I was adopted at the age of five but that somehow never took away the fact that I felt damaged and incapable of being loved.

For a system that is supposed to be designed to take a child's life and give them the optimal options to have a successful life, that is rarely ever the case. In my personal experience, we as alumni are plagued with so much trauma, mental instability, generational curses, poverty, housing instability, teenage pregnancy, and imposture syndrome, people pleasing and so much more. And no one ever wants to

ask us what happened to us or what made us this way. We are just viewed as delinquents without any fighting change of a "normal life."

But if we're being honest, we do have a fighting change. When genuine human connections are involved. If I leave you all with anything today, I want to leave you all with a quote that we like to share in our parenting classes, and that is that 100 years from now, it will not matter what your bank account was, the type of car you drive, but to the world, you may make a difference. Oh, sorry, excuse me. But the world may be different because you are important in the life of a child. You all have the power to vote on legislation and those choices effect our entire lifetime.

Working at You Got to Believe has opened up my voice and has made me understand that I am not just my story. I am more than my story and it has helped me to realize that this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. Be an advocate for youth who are in care and need their voices to be heard due to all of the trauma that being in the foster care system causes. I have had such a hard time with realizing who I am as a person not knowing my parents. Not

So, that is why I continue to do this work. I continue to advocate for all of the youth in care and I continue to believe that you got to believe version and the way that we do things here is extremely important and it is extremely in need of funding because we've been doing the work. We've been proving that our model works and with all of the people who are hired here and have lived experience, that lived experience is more than us just being credible messengers. It also just goes to show that this is life work, not just work that we're doing in order to get paid.

We're doing this work from our, both from our experience and that of the knowledge that we've acquired over the years as Joseph Toles mentioned and thank you all so much.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The best experience is lived experience. So, thank you and I can see why they hired you. You're a great representative. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

NIA MEEKI: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again for your testimony. At this point, if we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify in person, you can please visit the Sergeant at Arms table and complete a witness slip. And if we've inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify virtually and has not done so as yet, please use the raise hand function in Zoom and I will call on you in the order of hands raised.

Alright, seeing no one else, I would like to note that written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by the Committee staff may be submitted for the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing and you can submit that testimony by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

Deputy Speaker Ayala, we have concluded public testimony for this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and I want to thank all of the advocates that showed up today to testify. The city agency representatives and our team. And with that, this hearing is concluded. [GAVEL]

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 March 31, 2023