

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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May 24, 2023
Start: 10:25 a.m.
Recess: 11:40 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Justin L. Brannan
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Diana Ayala
- Charles Barron
- Gale A. Brewer
- Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
- David M. Carr
- Amanda N. Farías
- Kamillah Hanks
- Crystal Hudson
- Farah N. Louis
- Francisco P. Moya
- Chi A. Ossé
- Keith Powers
- Pierina Ana Sanchez
- Althea V. Stevens
- Marjorie Velázquez
- Nantasha M. Williams
- Julie Won

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

Henry Garrido

Executive Director at District Council 37

Pat Kane

Executive Director at New York State Nurses
Association

LeRoy Barr

Secretary for UFT

James Davis

President of Professional Staff Congress CUNY

Shirley Aldebol

Executive Vice President of SEIU 32BJ

Henry Rubio

President Council for School Supervisors and
Administrators

Jo-Ann Yoo

Executive Director of Asian American Federation

Lisa Rivera

President and CEO at NYLAG

Nora Moran

Director of Policy and Advocacy at United
Neighborhood Houses

Theo Moore

Vice President of Policy and Programs with New
York Immigration Coalition

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

Alice Bufkin

Associate Executive Director of Policy at
Citizens Committee for Children

Randy Levine

Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New
York

Gregory Brender

Daycare Council of New York

Musa King

NYSNA Local Bargaining Vice President Lincoln
Hospital Bronx

Marion Perkins

NYSNA Member

Shaiina Marston

NYSNA

Sarah Dowd

NYSNA Kings County

Verman Pierre

Henry J. Carter Hospital

Doctor Jeanine Costley

Senior Vice President Transitional Services at
Institute for Community Living

Eric Lee

Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless
Services United

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

Chris Mann
WIN Director of Policy and Advocacy

Donald Nesbit
Vice President of 372

Dilcy Benn
President of Local 1505

Joe Puleo
President of Local 983

Carmen De Leon
President of Local 768

Robert Ramos
President of DC37 Local 205

Olivia Duong
President Local 3778 DC37

Rafael Espinal
President and Executive Director of Freelancers
Union

Sheila Lewandowski
Executive Director and Cofounder of Chocolate
Factory Theater

David Freudenthal
Carnegie Hall

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

Lisa Gold

Executive Director of Asian American Arts
Alliance

Charlotte Martin

Intrepid Museum

Chris Durosinmi

Director for Government and Community Affairs
for Wildlife Conservation Society

Lucy Sexton

New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Kate Madigan [sp?]

Public Theater

Annie Minguez

Vice President of Government and Community
Relations at Good Shepherd Services

Susan Lerner

Executive Director of Common Cause New York

Tydie Abreu

Senior Director for Policy and Social Impact at
Hispanic Federation

Andre Ward

Associate Vice President of David Rothenberg
Center for Public Policy at Fortune Society

Obi Afriyie

Legal Defense Fund

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

Alli Finn
Surveillance Resistance Lab

Michael Sisitzky
New York Civil Liberties Union

Darren Mack
Freedom Agenda

Sophie Anderson
Center for Justice Innovation

Janine Guzzone
Crime Victims Treatment Center

Jorge Munos Reyes [sp?]

Tanesha Grant
Executive Director of Parents Supporting Parents
New York

Leonie Haimson
Executive Director at Class Size Matters

Betty Garger
Junior Achievement New York

Michael Rance
Class Size Matters

Teri West
Director of Government Contracts and School
Partnerships at New York Edge

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

Adam Ganser

Executive Director New Yorkers for Parks

Alia Soomro

New York League of Conservation Voters

Emily Walker

Senior Manager of External Affairs of the
Natural

Sarah McCollum Williams

Executive Director Green Guerrillas

Ryan Mahoney

President and Principal Biologist Gotham Bat
Conservancy

Adriana Vink

Sunrise Movement NYC

Jen Gaboury

Hunter College Teacher at PSC CUNY Chapter Chair

Keila Ottero

CUNY Central Office of Veterans Affairs

Anna Kril

President of Astoria Queens SHAREing and CAREing

Jamell Henderson

Citizen Action of New York

Eileen Maher

Vocal New York

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

Na'ilah Amaru

Director of Policy and Campaigns at Human
Services Council

Linda Hoffman

President of New York Foundation for Senior
Citizens

Brianna Paden-Williams

LiveOn New York

Lauren Schuster

Vice President of Government Affairs at Urban
Resource Institute

Leonard Williams

President of Vietnam Vets of America Chapter 32

Anna Lilia Araiza

Director of Youth Leadership at Community Food
Advocates

Eliza Porsella [sp?]

Youth Food Advocates

Joshua Fann [sp?]

Youth Food Advocates

Faith Jones

Youth Food Advocates

Wesley Wu [sp?]

Youth Food Advocates

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

Suryani Dewa Ayu
Urban Planner

Yasmine Bonilla
Student

Rameen Khan [sp?]
Youth Food Advocates

Yoo Sin Liu [sp?]
Youth Food Advocates

Anthony
Youth Food Advocates

Marg Curran
Center for Urban Community Services

William Quinones
CASES

Chan Henry
Urban Pathways

Leslie Segars
Urban Pathways

Lorenzo Brooks
Urban Pathways

Nicole McVinua
Director of Policy at Urban Pathways

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

Teal Inzunza
Urban Resource Institute

Nathalie Interiano
Care for the Homeless

Salimatou Doumbouya
University Student Senate CUNY

Jonathan Hanon
University Student Senate CUNY

Boris Onyekaba
University Student Senate CUNY

Miguel Arias
University Student Senate CUNY

Ja'Quan Brown
CUNY Undergrad Student Government

Aliyah Malik
School Food Advocate

Nadia Narcisse
Youth Food Advocate

Sabrina Bennett
Party March Act

Angela Simms
Professor at Barnard College

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

Edwina Archer [sp?]
Pray March Act

Larry Wood
Director of Advocacy at Goddard Riverside

Alexander Parks
Goddard Riverside Housing Outreach Specialist

Ruben Argueta
Goddard Riverside Social Worker

Kimberly Blair
NAMI NYC

Joneé Billy
PowerPlay NYC, STARS CGI

Scott Daly
New York Junior Tennis and Learning

Kevin Jones
Associate State Director for Advocacy AARP NY

Tanya Douglas
Director of Veterans Justice Project at
Manhattan Program of Legal Services

Andrew Diskin
Case Worker at Urban Pathways

Lisa Jones
Case Manager at Urban Pathways

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

Debra Corika [sp?]
Urban Pathways

Pete Graves
University Settlement Education Supervisor of
Adult Literacy

Mary Cheng
Chinese-American Planning Council Director of
Childhood Development Services

Jeff Lau
Chinese-American Planning Council Program
Director of Childhood Development Services

Farris Albokhiti
Chinese-American Planning Council

Dan Kroop
President of New York City Council Association
of Legislative Employees

Vinuri Ranaweera
New York City Council Association of Legislative
Employees

Matthew Malloy
New York City Council Association of Legislative
Employees

Hannah Wade
NYU Langone Health Cohen Military Family Center

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

Marie Mongeon
Community Health Care Association of New York

Sarah Wilson

MJ Okma
SAGE

Matthew Bernardo
Housing Works President

Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo
Equity Advocates Policy Manager

Shaun Kennedy
Urban Outreach Center NYC Director of Programs
and

Karim Walker
Organizing Outreach Specialist Safety Net
Project

Francis Simms [sp?]
Renaissance Men's Shelter

James Kushner [sp?]
Disabled American Vets

Rabba Belcar [sp?]
Disabled American Vets

Peter Kempner
Legal Director of Volunteers of Legal Service

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

Joe Bello
Former Veterans Director

Dondi McKellar
LGBTQIA+ Disabled Veterans Street Vendor

Paula Segal
TakeRoot Justice

Julie Bowen

Mik Kinhead
NYC Jails Volunteer

Jessie Spellman

Christina Rodriguez-Hart
Democratic Socialists of America Racial Justice
Working Group

Clea Hazizi [sp?]

Maurice Medina [sp?]

Michelle Keller
DC37

Griffin Jones

Kimberly Bernard
Co-founder Black Women's March

Derrick Ingram
Warriors in the Garden, May Days

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

Na Lekan Masego
For Our Liberation

Wendy Barnes

Charlette Lopez
Program Director of WIN

Hennesy Garcia

Hannah Tayger
WIN Policy Analyst

Nicky Besuden

Bex Goolsby
Community Organizer

Amalie Avita [sp?]

Alvin Dan
Crown Heights Care Collective

Mayla [sp?]

Valeria Sansosa [sp?]
Uptown Free Store

Sidar Scarlours [sp?]

Walter Masterson

Sophia Costanzi [sp?]

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

Isabelle Leyva
NYCLU

Christopher Leon Johnson
Community Board Eight

Callan Ditmyer [sp?]

Ciera Cozior [sp?]

Shanelle Bueno [sp?]

Amy Wagner
Ya-Ya Network

Aya Aziz
Ya-Ya Network

Brittany Spalding [sp?]

Kanene Ayo Holder
Educator and Diversity Expert

Braden Holiday [sp?]

Anooj Bhandari
Restorative Justice Initiative

Madeline Borelli
Teachers Unite

James Collins
HRA Retiree

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

Martin Urbach
Restorative Justice Coordinator

Jeanette Estima
Citymeals on Wheels

Milena Luna
Dance NYC

Cheryl Warfield
Opera Singer

Francine Garber-Cohen
President of Regina Opera Company

Nat Cabrera
CASES

Elana Paulino
CASES

Toph

Claire Tondreau

Peter Tarson [sp?]

Sergio

Alex Baldwin

Silas

Olive Harbor

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

Ligia Guallpa

Workers Justice Project

LoriKim Alexander

Meryl Ranzer

Adjunct Professor

David Jenkins

Carol Yu

Rasheedah Brown-Harris

Noeline Maldonado

Executive Director of Healing Center

Sonni Mun

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and
3 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing
4 Fiscal Year 2024 with the Committee on Finance. At
5 this time, please silence all cellphone and
6 electronic devices. If you have testimony you wish
7 to submit for the record, you may do so via email at
8 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is
9 testimony@council.nyc.gov. At any time throughout
10 the hearing council staff or members of the public,
11 please do not approach the dais. We thank you for
12 your cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you,
14 Sergeant. [gavel] Okay, good morning. Welcome to the
15 12th and final day of FY24 Executive Budget hearings.
16 I'm Council Member Justin Brannan, Chair of the
17 Committee on Finance, and today, the entire day will
18 be given-- directed towards public testimony which we
19 look forward to. I just want to start. We've been
20 joined by Council Members Marte, Ossé, Hudson,
21 Powers, Louis, and Schulman, as well as Lee and Carr.
22 Since Monday, May 8th, this committee has conducted
23 more than 67 hours of financial oversight hearings,
24 over 11 days in partnership with colleagues on 21
25 committees taking testimony from over 30 municipal

1 agencies, offices, departments, and boards. We've
2 exercised our oversight of the Mayor's Proposed
3 Executive Budget for the next Fiscal Year,
4 scrutinizing how it would allocate your tax dollars
5 to ensure that your city remains a place that
6 supports all New Yorkers as they live and work.
7 We've evaluated this document to determine if it will
8 best position ourselves for the times ahead while
9 holding true to the principles and values which set
10 us apart from anywhere else in the world. Both the
11 Speaker and I recognize the critical moment for our
12 city. As we turn to budget negotiations over the
13 next month, the Council requires a budget that meets
14 the needs of New Yorkers and protects against future
15 risks both. The City can't work with anything less.
16 I want to take this time to again express my sincere
17 thanks to every last member of the Finance Division
18 for the long days and serious work put into every
19 report, every question, every briefing for this
20 hearing process. I want to thank as well to the
21 Sergeant at Arms and the IT Division for making these
22 council moves smoothly every day and who work hard
23 behind the scenes to keep things moving smooth.
24 I'll now turn to Committee Counsel Mike Twomey for
25

1
2 some logistics, and then we're going to begin calling
3 up panels. Thank you all for joining us today.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning and
5 welcome to the public portion of the Fiscal 2024
6 Executive Budget hearing. I am Mike Toomey, Counsel
7 to the Finance Committee. We have nearly 300 persons
8 signed on to speak today. To assure that everyone
9 gets to be heard, we will be limiting spoken
10 testimony to two minutes per person. For in-person
11 testimony, the bell will sound notifying time has
12 elapsed, and for remote testimony, the Sergeant at
13 Arms will let you know when time has elapsed. We
14 will begin with in-person testimony until 1:00 p.m.,
15 after which we will alternate between one panel of
16 in-person testimony and one panel of remote
17 testimony. For people testifying in-person, please
18 fill out a witness slip from the front for the record
19 and hand to the Sergeants. If anyone needs
20 translation services, please inform the Sergeants
21 before speaking. We will also accept written
22 testimony to enter into the record for up to 72 hours
23 after the hearing has concluded. Written testimony
24 may be submitted to testimony@council.nyc.gov and may
25 be as long as you wish. We'll now begin the first

1
2 panel of witnesses. First panel will be Henry
3 Garrido, Pat Kane, LeRoy Barr, Henry Rubio, James
4 Davis, and Shirley Aldebol. You may begin when
5 you're ready.

6 HENRY GARRIDO: good morning. I'm Henry
7 Garrido. I'm the Executive Director of District
8 Council 37, the largest municipal union in New York
9 City representing approximately 150,000 city workers
10 and close to 100,000 retired workers. I wanted to
11 come here today in addition to what we submitted in
12 written testimony to ask for your help, and to plead
13 for your intervention. As of last week, we have
14 25,000 vacancies in the City of New York, many of
15 which are in critical conditions, in the same
16 positions that we were touting workers to be
17 essential. So today, for instance, on my way here,
18 we got notified that the New York Police Department
19 tends to eliminate 500 crossing guards from this
20 budget out of 2,000 that exist now. That is not only
21 one of the lowest paid positions in the City of New
22 York, but also they provide an important service for
23 your constituency and I think part of the problem we
24 have is the way the approach the Administration has
25 had to get to a reduction on the budget, i.e. a PEG

1
2 program. We learned a second round of PEG was
3 announced by the Director of OMB touting the
4 collective bargaining agreement recently reached by
5 DC37 and also the influx of migrants here to the City
6 of New York. And while we respect the position from
7 OMB, I want to remind folks that it is our DC37
8 members who are providing services to those migrants.
9 So we were surprised to hear of the many cuts. We're
10 here to talk about libraries. We're here to talk
11 about healthcare workers. We're here to talk about
12 people who work in the hospitals, in the parks. We
13 cannot continue with this level of shortness. And I
14 want to conclude by talking about revenue-producing
15 titles that we have in the Department of Finance and
16 elsewhere. There was always an adage that you don't
17 reduce those because it's the equivalent of cutting
18 your nose to spite your face. Right now we have
19 approximately 15 percent vacancies on DOB, workers
20 that could be generating permits. We have about 20
21 percent vacancies in finance for tax collectors, tax
22 auditors. People are generating revenue by doing the
23 work. We have the same issue in the Sheriff
24 Department. This is not good practice because we're
25 losing millions of dollars in revenue that the City

1 could be using for the work flow [sic] projects.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the rest of the members
3 of the committee for your attention today.

4
5 PAT KANE: Good morning. My name is Pat
6 Kane. I'm a Registered Nurse and I'm the Executive
7 Director of the New York State Nurses Association.
8 NYSNA members who work in our city's 11 public
9 hospitals and for our mayoral agencies are fighting
10 for a fair union contract to stop the crisis of
11 understaffing and high turnover that harms care for
12 New York City's most-vulnerable patients and care
13 also for our first responders in the case of the
14 Mayoral agencies. Our public hospitals and clinics
15 are the backbone of healthcare in New York City.
16 They represent one-fifth of all in-patient beds, half
17 of all level one trauma care, and almost half of all
18 in-patient psychiatric beds. Our public sector
19 nurses got this city through the pandemic, treating
20 the largest share of COVID patients, providing 1.75
21 million COVID vaccines, and preventing thousands of
22 hospitalizations and additional deaths. No private
23 system was remotely capable or prepared to implement
24 the public health infrastructure that saved New York
25 when compared to New York City Health + Hospitals.

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2 Our public hospitals and clinics also lost the most
3 nurses and healthcare workers to COVID. One out of
4 every two health and hospital nurses got sick at
5 work. In the early months of the pandemic, the
6 majority of NYSNA members who died of COVID-19 on the
7 front lines were from the public sector. Although H+H
8 and mayoral members represent 35 percent of New York
9 City members, they accounted for 53 percent of the
10 deaths that we experienced in our union. And we all
11 got out there and banged pots and pans for our nurses
12 and all the essential workers and called these people
13 heroes, but New York City clearly is not treating
14 them like heroes right now. Nurses in the public
15 sector and by extension the patients in the
16 communities that they serve are under-resourced,
17 under-staffed, and under-paid. We call on the
18 Administration to fully fund H+H nurse staffing in
19 its budget. We're hemorrhaging nurses. At least 40
20 percent quit before even making it one year on the
21 job and go to the private sector where they can earn
22 \$19,000 a year more. Public sector nurses care for
23 our most-vulnerable patients who are mostly black and
24 brown and low-income, and the high turnover and
25 crisis in understaffing is making it harder for them

1
2 to serve these communities and give these people the
3 care that they deserve. We're just not doing enough
4 to recruit and retain experienced nurses. There is a
5 simple solution. That solution is pay equity for our
6 public sector nurses. Pay equity is an issue of
7 healthcare, equity and racial justice. New York
8 City's public sector nurses need pay equity to
9 recruit and retain enough experienced caregivers to
10 provide the best care for our patients and first
11 responders. But instead of raising pay for these
12 nurses, New York City is spending \$1.2 million
13 dollars a day on temporary travel nurse contracts to
14 fill these staffing gaps. Last year, the City spent
15 over \$549 million dollars on agency contract nurses,
16 three times what it would cost to bring our public
17 sector nurse wages to parity with the private sector.
18 We're spending more money on keeping these wages low
19 on travel nurses than it would cost to do what it
20 takes to take proper care of these nurses and the
21 patients that they serve. We have over 2,000
22 vacancies in the public sector. We've just been
23 unable to fill because of the low pay, much lower
24 than the industry standard. This is the number one
25 way to ensure safe staffing, and instead of spending

1
2 on temporary travel nurses who make up 25 percent
3 right now of the nursing workforce, the city can
4 raise pay of the staff nurses for a fraction of that
5 cost, staff our hospitals safely with local New York-
6 based nurses that care for their neighbors and
7 protect our city's essential public health system and
8 workers.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Pat, I just need
10 you to wrap.

11 PAT KANE: Sorry?

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I just need you to
13 wrap up.

14 PAT KANE: Oh, sure. We can't have
15 health equity for our public hospital patients
16 without the pay equity that we need to keep nurses at
17 the bedside. We do have a clause in our contract
18 that's been inactive for a number of years. We need
19 to active that clause now. We've been saying that for
20 many years, and you know, saw this impending crisis
21 on the way, but we're in a crisis situation right now
22 with the shortage and all the money that the City's
23 spending on travel nurses. Thank you very much.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.
25

1
2 LEROY BARR: Good morning. My name is
3 LeRoy Barr and I have the privilege of serving as the
4 Secretary for the United Federation of Teachers.
5 Thank you Finance Chair Justin Brannan and thank you
6 to the Finance Committee members. First, let me
7 thank you for your advocacy on behalf of the City's
8 educators and for your determination to fund our
9 public schools and protect them from any unnecessary
10 and disruptive classroom budget cuts. As everyone in
11 this room knows, we cannot have a repeat of this past
12 September. When three-quarters of our schools saw
13 their individual budgets cut. I was heartened to hear
14 Chancellor Banks say earlier this week that this fall
15 schools will be held harmless for their initial
16 budget allocations compared to this year so that no
17 school would get lower initial allocations. We are
18 here today to call for that promise to be extended to
19 the full 2023-24 school year and not have schools
20 face mid-year adjustments that mean enrichment, the
21 arts, and supports for newcomers get cut. We are here
22 today to call for the hold harmless promise to be
23 extended for the full school year so that schools are
24 not forced mid-year to share classroom teachers,
25 collapse classes, and increase class sizes.

1
2 Educators, parents, and advocates fought for decades
3 for the class size reduction law that Albany recently
4 passed. This September, the first 20 percent of New
5 York City's classrooms are required by law to meet
6 the new small class size thresholds. By DOE's own
7 estimates 39 percent of classrooms can today, this
8 minute, meet those thresholds. We need to preserve
9 and build on that. Albany has done the right thing
10 and increased its funding for New York schools to pay
11 for the law that they passed. We are here saying we
12 stand with you as you work to make sure New York City
13 does right by its public school students and
14 educators and does not cut school funding at any time
15 next year. Thank you for your time.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

17 JAMES DAVIS: Good morning. I'm James
18 Davis, President of the Professional Staff Congress
19 City University of New York. First, thank you Chair
20 Brannan for the opportunity to speak and thank you
21 Council Members for your hard working during
22 challenging budget negotiations. I'm here to ask you
23 to invest in the City University and to oppose the
24 budget cuts that have been proposed by the Executive.
25 We represent 30,000 faculty and staff at CUNY at 18

1 colleges and six graduate and professional schools,
2 and right now, public higher education, a historic
3 system in the City is at serious risk. The recently
4 finalized state budget includes \$103 million in new
5 operating dollars. Most of that will benefit the
6 senior colleges. Budget cuts by the City would
7 undermine the state support that CUNY received, and
8 hurt the community colleges the most. As you know,
9 investment in CUNY yields immense dividends, not only
10 in the tax base and the earning potential of the
11 graduates, but also in the generations that follow in
12 the families and the communities. The federal
13 pandemic relief funds for CUNY are about to expire.
14 So the cuts in the PEGS are really excruciating.
15 After multiple PEGS, CUNY's cumulative budget
16 reduction from the current and prior financial plans
17 totals over \$60 million dollars, and that means the
18 elimination of 363 civilian and pedagogical
19 positions. Without operational support, vacancies
20 for fulltime faculty, advisors, mental health
21 professionals, and others won't be filled. Students
22 will receive severely diminished support towards
23 their degree progress. Now, the CUNY Administration
24 has responded with a directive that each campus carve
25

1 out five to seven percent from its Fiscal 2024
2 budget. That means hiring freezes, a central vacancy
3 review board. So you have PSC's updated priorities
4 in my written testimony. They highlight student
5 supports and advising services, and this is one
6 reason why we're really thrilled to see the Council
7 for \$35.5 million dollars in funding for academic
8 advisors. Thank you for that. That's going to be
9 essential to the success of the initiative that
10 Speaker Adams began with CUNY Reconnect. We're
11 gratified to see that the mayor has now also
12 supported CUNY Reconnect. So we really are urging
13 you to remain bold during the budget negotiations for
14 historic investments in academic advising. I think I
15 don't need to repeat the fact that only eight percent
16 of CUNY's buildings are in a state of good repair.
17 So we also strongly support the university's capital
18 budget request for \$22.5 million dollars. So, in
19 closing, over the next few months, tens of thousands
20 of CUNY students are going to be graduating from our
21 community colleges all the way to graduate schools,
22 and they're going to enter the workforce and enhance
23 their communities. We are calling on you to honor
24 their tenacity during these unprecedented times and
25

1 invest in the next generation of CUNY students.

2 Thank you.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [off mic]

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, James.

5 Go ahead.

6 SHIRLEY ALDEBOL: Good morning, Chairman
7 Brannan and members of the Committee. My name is
8 Shirley Aldebol and I'm Executive Vice President of
9 SEIU 32BJ. As you are aware, 32BJ's the largest
10 property services union representing service workers
11 across the east coast with over 85,000 members in New
12 York City. I am speaking to you today on behalf of
13 5,200 cleaners and handypersons employed by New York
14 City School Support Services to call on City Council
15 to fully fund our city schools, including funding for
16 schools' cleaning and maintenance. Since the outset
17 of COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the importance of
18 the vital services that these workers provide to our
19 city has been apparent, more apparent than ever.
20 These workers were on the front lines and put
21 themselves at risk in order to keep students and
22 staff healthy. While schools were closed during the
23 pandemic, they became resource centers, childcare
24 centers for children of first responders, food
25

1 distribution hubs, COVID testing sites and more. The
2 Schools facility staff made sure that the schools
3 could remain healthy and safe places for the
4 community at-large. As we continue to emerge from
5 this global health emergency, school's cleaners
6 continue to play a crucial role whenever school
7 spaces might be utilized to help confront unforeseen
8 challenges that we face, including sheltering
9 migrants in their desperate time of need, and we
10 think that-- we think about the year ahead, spending
11 to ensure that New York City's Public School
12 buildings are clean and safe must be a top priority.
13 The Administration commitment to reading and other
14 education fundamentals can only be achieved in a
15 clean and safe environment. While there are no
16 proposed cuts in the mayor's budget for the next
17 Fiscal Year, there remains a significant gap from the
18 current funding level to what a fully-funded facility
19 budget should be. If this gap is not closed now, it
20 will continue to grow every year and school
21 facilities may face cuts in the future. Cuts in
22 facilities maintenance budget would have a
23 detrimental impact on student learning and would
24 impact the ability of staff to provide a clean and
25

1
2 safe environment for New York City school students
3 and faculty. We believe that this year we have an
4 opportunity to fix this problem and to make sure that
5 New York City students continue to be educated in a
6 clean, safe, and healthy environment. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

8 HENRY RUBIO: Good morning. Good morning
9 Chair Brannan and distinguished members of the City
10 Council. Thank you for conducting such an important
11 hearing today. I am Henry Rubio and I have the
12 privilege of representing, serving as the President
13 of the Council for School Supervisors and
14 Administrators, and on behalf of the 17,000 school
15 principals, assistant principals, education
16 administrators, and Early Childhood directors, we
17 thank you for the opportunity to speak today. now,
18 given the monumental needs of our city's schools
19 either due to the pandemic learning loss, the need
20 for greater mental health services, enrollment
21 declines, and the critical needs of our asylum-
22 seeking students, and the investments that we need to
23 begin to make now in order to ensure compliance with
24 the state's new class size legislation, we should be
25 investing one billion dollars into our school system

1 and not entertaining cuts. We have several concerns.
2 You can find them in detail in our written testimony.
3 However, chief among our concerns is a foundational
4 issue. It's a foundational issue regarding pay parity
5 for our Early Childhood Directors. As we all know,
6 Early Childhood Directors do a vital job in preparing
7 our children for kindergarten. It lays the
8 foundation for their entire education, and by
9 extension, their entire career. And for every dollar
10 we spend on Early Childhood education, we are, you
11 know-- getting gains [sic] so many more in the
12 future. The success of the City's Pre-K and 3K
13 initiatives are dependent-- they are dependent on the
14 CBO directors who work tirelessly as the city faced
15 COVID-19 pandemic, and since March of 2020, the New
16 York City Early Childhood Education programs have
17 been a lifeline of our City's families. They served
18 our communities as essential workers, and often
19 worked 10-hour days in-person and provided the city,
20 the city's youngest and most-vulnerable with the
21 much-needed sense of normalcy during a very difficult
22 time. As it stands now, a City-funded salary for a
23 professional is less than half. Yes, less than half
24 of what the Department of Education pays their
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1
2 colleagues in the DOE, and 90 percent of these
3 members, these professionals, are black and brown
4 women of color. This is egregious. It's an
5 egregious disparity that exists in our system that we
6 must end today and now is the time and now is the
7 place to ride this problem once and for all. In the
8 City Council's response to the Mayor's Preliminary
9 Budget, the Council advocated for \$46 million dollars
10 toward pay parity. We are deeply, deeply grateful
11 for that, the Council-- for the Council calling for
12 that, to right that wrong just as you did last year.
13 Unfortunately, the Council was unable to secure the
14 funding during the final budget negotiations last
15 year. We ask you today, we implore you, that you
16 ensure this funding is finally included in the budget
17 to support these incredible CBO leaders, who we at
18 CSA and their communities believe they are heroes.
19 Thank you for your time and attention. We look
20 forward to working with you, and thank you very much.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all.
22 We've also been joined by Council Members Moya,
23 Ayala, Fariás, and Joseph, as well as Nurse. And we
24 have some questions from my colleagues as well. I
25 just first want to ask Mr. Garrido, what in your

1
2 opinion do you think the City could be doing better
3 to fill some of those va-- those 20,000+ vacancies?

4 HENRY GARRIDO: thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 As you know, District Council 37 launched a
6 partnership with the Department of Citywide
7 Administrating Services and City Hall to promote
8 hiring hauls, and they've been extremely successful.
9 We've had it in several of your colleague's district.
10 And we average about 2,000 people coming to those
11 hiring hauls, and in many instances we have to turn
12 people away. So I don't think it's really an issue
13 of people not wanting to work. We've seen that
14 demonstrated in the lines that show up to all these.
15 We've had nine so far. As a matter of fact, this
16 afternoon we'll be holding one in Flushing. I think
17 that we got all be on the issue of what impacts
18 people can look in. I think we have negotiated a
19 salary suppression. You've heard from my colleagues
20 here how salaries is a big issue. We're currently
21 negotiating a remote work policy that allows us for
22 flexible work. Look, the world of work has
23 completely changed. This 9:00 to 5:00, 40-hour work
24 week doesn't work anymore. We have to figure out how
25 do we implement flex schedules to allow people to

1
2 have more time for their families. We started in
3 this collective bargaining agreement, the Childcare
4 Fund that was negotiated, but that's coming from
5 negotiations. The City needs to do more in trying to
6 recruit and retain folks by looking at childcare as a
7 main issue, especially when you have a lot of
8 industries where you have single women first
9 responders. And then lastly-- look, the issue
10 between flexible work scheduled, remote work, paying
11 folks better, childcare, I think there's also has to
12 be a push from this Council the process between by
13 which the agency referred positions to OMB and then
14 OMB rejects them back, constantly. Whether it's
15 because of salary requirement-- that is not the way
16 of moving forward in staffing those positions. You
17 need to make sure that-- you know, like a budget is a
18 statement of values. If you think-- if you appreciate
19 education, you're going to make sure that education
20 is funded. If healthcare is your concern, you're
21 going to make sure that healthcare is funded, and I
22 believe we haven't followed that principle in this
23 budget.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Pat, could you give
25 us an update on Elmhurst Hospital?

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2 PAT KANE: Are you talking about the
3 resident strike?

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah.

5 PAT KANE: We've been out there with the
6 residents. I don't have an update today from the--
7 from the CIR. You know, we're very concerned
8 obviously about the situation, and quite honestly are
9 a little bewildered. You know, in other places,
10 they've been able to do that. I think everyone saw
11 what we were able to do in the private sector, and
12 then you know, all of us kind of raising people up
13 especially at this time that was really critical to
14 keep people in the healthcare workforce. I mean,
15 it's really sad to see. And from our perspective,
16 you know, when you see-- and a lot of my colleagues
17 here, and I'm a CUNY graduate-- you know, you see
18 folks go to school, in many cases, you know,
19 especially in the professions that we're dealing
20 with, you know, really raising up-- it raises
21 everyone up, right, their family, their community,
22 and then to see people face these kind of challenges.
23 You know, when it comes to being able to make a
24 decent living and not being treated the same, you
25 know, I think we can't talk about an equitable

1
2 recovery without really, you know, addressing these
3 issues. Because when we're undervaluing the workers
4 that we're talking about, we're really undervaluing
5 the communities that they serve, right? So we are
6 very concerned about it and just really hope that our
7 siblings are able to go back to work. That's what we
8 all want to do. You know it takes a lot for
9 especially healthcare workers to be outside the
10 building and withholding their labor. It really
11 takes a lot.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And what's the
13 latest at Methodist?

14 PAT KANE: So, Methodist which is now, as
15 you know, part of the Presbyterian system. We are
16 having a problem bringing that to settlement. We
17 have not served notice on the employer there. We
18 actually have bargaining tomorrow. We're hoping
19 that, you know, we see-- we definitely see a path
20 forward there. And like I said, it's kind of no
21 mystery. You know, I think from the beginning of the
22 year we've seen what has to happen to keep our
23 healthcare workforce strong and retain these
24 experienced nurses. You know, and that's a facility
25 again when it comes to psychiatric services. They've

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2 only reopened half of those beds. They haven't
3 opened-- reopened the rest of the, you know, for the
4 in-patient psychiatric services. And you know,--
5 and I know some of my colleagues here I've worked
6 with on hospital pricing. That's a situation where
7 we see the same prices in the Manhattan hospital as
8 in the Brooklyn hospital, and when you go to those
9 resources and look up the pricing. So to think that,
10 you know, the prices are the same, but you're going
11 to undercut the staff, not provide the same kind of
12 staffing, not provide the same kind of wages. You
13 know, honestly, that doesn't seem fair not just to
14 the workers, but to the patients as well.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Henry, could you
16 talk a little bit about last year at the FY23 budget
17 the Council fought for \$46 million dollars for
18 increased wages for pre-k and daycare workers,
19 Special Ed. Could you talk a little bit about the
20 importance of pay parity for your Early Childhood
21 work?

22 HENRY RUBIO: Thank you, Chair. It is
23 extremely important. In our Early Childhood system,
24 our CBOs are having difficulty retaining teachers and
25 supervisors. At this point right now, our

1 supervisors are actually earning less money than the
2 teachers they supervise. To add insult to injury,
3 the contract that we last negotiated for those
4 supervisors allowed the City to pay them six percent
5 above the teachers and the City won't even do that.
6 Our Early Childhood Directors are holding on waiting
7 for this Council and this Mayor to make a move. Many
8 of them could resign today and go teach in a
9 classroom and make more money, but they don't want to
10 do that. They're happy leading their communities.
11 They're sponsoring board and their CBOs are happy
12 with them, and it's very difficult for them to earn a
13 living. And our CBO partners know that they're
14 having a difficult time both recruiting and retaining
15 folks. And often when there's a position open in the
16 DOE, they leave and then go to the DOE to make twice
17 as much money.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: James, what's the
20 cumulative amount of cuts being threatened to CUNY?

21 JAMES DAVIS: Cumulative is \$61.5 million
22 between the rolled over PEGs and the proposed PEGs.
23 So, as I said in my testimony, it's about 360
24 civilian and pedagogical positions in total that are
25 being eliminated through the vacancies.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I want to
3 turn to my colleagues for questions. We have a long
4 day. Starting with Council Member Ossé followed by
5 Schulman.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair.
7 I want to start with the question about the cuts to
8 CUNY, so you, Doctor Davis. I know that the Mayor's
9 proposing millions of dollars of budget cuts to our
10 community colleges. How do you see that affecting
11 some of our students, most especially admissions to
12 students knowing that CUNY is one of our greatest,
13 you know, systems to adding to the citywide workforce
14 that we see here in New York.

15 JAMES DAVIS: Thanks for the question,
16 Council Member. You know, I'm so proud of the work
17 that my members do, and as somebody who taught for 18
18 years before I came into this position is
19 extraordinary, what happens at CUNY every day. But
20 it takes resources, and the community colleges are
21 cut to the bone right now. You know, just for some
22 examples, your point. The investment in CUNY
23 Reconnect has been really dramatic, right? It's
24 brought some 16,000 students how have college credit
25 back to the colleges, not only to the community

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2 colleges, but it's especially beneficial for
3 community colleges. And the question really is what
4 kind of schools are they going to come back to,
5 right? Are they going to be retained or are they
6 going to stop out? Are we going to support them to
7 graduation? That takes additional investment. So,
8 just to put it concretely, you know, it's very stark.
9 Is the library going to stay open for the students
10 who can only attend on the weekends or the evening?
11 Will they have access to computer centers? Will they
12 have academic advisors, mental health supports? I
13 mean, just all of the supports that it actually takes
14 out of the classroom to move someone through. Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you. And Mr.
17 Barr, what are you seeing in terms of the State
18 financial support compared to the City's support?

19 LEROY BARR: Thank you, Council Member
20 Ossé. Here's what we know to be true: The state has
21 increased its share of support for the City public
22 schools. Unfortunately, the City of New York, its
23 share has decreased. The City is not passing it all
24 onto our schools citywide. So the State's share, the
25 State's share of the budget, New York City's budget,

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2 went from 37 percent in Fiscal Year 2021 to 42
3 percent in Fiscal Year 2024 in the Executive Budget.
4 The City's share dropped from 52 percent in Fiscal
5 Year 2021 to 45 percent in 2024 in the Executive
6 Budget. Just by those numbers alone, they're getting
7 more funding from the state, but giving less funding
8 to our schools.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And this has been
10 happening under this new Administration?

11 LEROY BARR: Yes, sir. So what we're
12 asking is that at the very least-- at the very least,
13 the extra money that we're getting from the State
14 should be passed on to our schools for the people who
15 are doing this work, for the children who need this
16 to deal with the learning loss that has taken place
17 for the last two or three years, and all of the
18 things that we all know go into making sure that our
19 schools work well such as lower class size, right?
20 The campaign for fiscal equity money is a fight that
21 took place at the state for over 20 years. The state
22 finally funded that, alright? What we're asking is
23 that for all those funds, all the funds that the
24 state is now sending to the City to be passed onto
25 our schools as well.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, and
3 thank you, Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Member Schulman
5 followed by Hudson.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I have a
7 statement and a question. So, first, I want to thank
8 all of you and your members for the excellent that
9 they do for our city, and I also want to tell you
10 that in the last two weeks of budget hearings of
11 which I participated in, in all of them, the
12 Council's been relentless on the staffing levels.
13 We've been relentless on the budget, you know, the
14 budget shortfalls, and we've been relentless in
15 challenging the budget projections, because the City
16 projects much less revenue than the Council does.
17 One of the questions I want to ask each of you is
18 what kind of participation in terms of a budget issue
19 do the asylum-seekers, the migrants coming in,
20 present to all of you? Because that's been brought
21 up to us on a consistent basis, so we want to put
22 this on the record for you.

23 HENRY GARRIDO: Well, I'm sure LeRoy will
24 want to talk about the schools, but I could tell you
25 that we have gone beyond the proverbial taking Peter

1
2 to pay Paul. Like, that we're taking staffers that
3 are working in City shelters to staff some of the new
4 migrant centers. Staffers are working in HRA
5 processing. You know, New Yorkers were here prior to
6 the migrants coming in. There's a huge waiting list
7 on services, right? On social services we have more
8 than 25,000 cases of backlog, everywhere from the
9 healthcare facilities to the schools, to the-- even
10 the libraries, right? We're stretched too thin.
11 This was-- the vacancies that we were talking about
12 was without that number increasing exponentially.
13 We're hurting, Councilwoman. I don't know how else
14 to say it. I went to an agency three days ago where
15 folks are sick and tired of being mandated to work
16 overtime. And it was a young woman who said to me I
17 haven't seen my child in a week. Mandatory overtime
18 is rampant, and there's a cap on how much you can do
19 in your pension. So you're forcing people to do two
20 and three jobs. This needs to stop. It's putting our
21 New Yorkers at risk, you know, and we need to do
22 something to push back and get those agencies
23 staffing back up.

24 PAT KANE: That's okay. I just-- just
25 real quick. It's obviously-- it's putting a strain on

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2 the public health system in a big way as if it wasn't
3 already strained enough, right? Obviously, this is
4 the safety net for New York City, the system that
5 takes care of everyone regardless. It is putting a
6 big strain on the system and on our staff as well.
7 And as Henry talked about, between overtime, the
8 short staffing, and just you know, trying to manage
9 all this temporary staff. It's an additional strain
10 on our workers and really puts a strain on the newer
11 nurses that we want to support as well.

12 LEROY BARR: I want to start my comments
13 by saying that we take great pride in the fact that
14 this is a city where people are welcomed from all
15 over the world who take pride in the fact that we sit
16 in a city where in our harbor is a statue that is
17 dedicated to the open arms, and we accept the
18 responsibility of having the families and their
19 children come into our city and into schools. but
20 with that comes along a responsibility of the City of
21 New York to make sure that our dedicated teachers who
22 regardless of when children come into their
23 classrooms and where they come from, they become
24 their kids, and they want to do everything absolutely
25 possible to make sure that they get all the teaching

1 that they're supposed to have and give them what they
2 need on a daily basis. When you have an influx of
3 children coming into your schools, coming into your
4 classroom mid-year, you have to then provide the
5 resources that go along with those kids as well. You
6 have to provide the resources to the families that go
7 along where those kids because if they're not
8 stabilized at home, then they're not stabilized in
9 school buildings. You can't just have a plan to put
10 families into a gym and not really talk about how
11 that's going to work in terms of the coordination
12 with the school that's there. There's so much
13 planning that needs to go into making sure that we do
14 this right, that we do this right for-- on behalf of
15 those families who have a right to come to this
16 country, and we celebrate all of that, but we have to
17 do this in a collective way to make sure that we're
18 meeting the needs of those families and more
19 specifically for us, the needs of those children and
20 the people who serve them every day, and we're not
21 doing that well.

22
23 JAMES DAVIS: I would just add a couple
24 of brief things in relation to CUNY. I mean,
25 immediately I believe that CUNY has resources that

1
2 can be helpful, and you said-- obviously hear from
3 the CUNY administration about this, but I think in
4 terms of space, I believe there's conversations with
5 the City about CUNY helping to furnish some badly-
6 needed space for people to stay. We have obviously
7 CUNY Citizenship Now program. We have immigrant
8 students support services. But I also would take a
9 step back echoing what LeRoy just mentioned, you
10 know, CUNY was-- CUNY was started in 1847 and the
11 number of immigrants of all kinds who have come
12 through the doors of the City University is in the
13 millions. Right now, over a third of the students at
14 CUNY were born in other countries. So I know we're
15 speaking here specifically about the challenge of
16 asylum-seekers, and that's a real challenge on the
17 City's resources and infrastructure. In the long
18 term, just would want to see those students, the
19 young people who come whatever their documentation
20 status may be, whatever the outcome of their asylum
21 cases may be. I know that just as the K12 system
22 wants to embrace them, we want to see them in the
23 CUNY classrooms as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: LeRoy, in the
25 hearing with DOE they mentioned that the funds that

1
2 the City got from the state, that there's limitations
3 on what they could use that for. Could you speak to
4 that?

5 LEROY BARR: I'm not really sure what
6 they testified to, but I just gave figures clearly
7 about how they're not sending all those funds that
8 they're getting from the state into the classrooms.
9 And they're earmarked for that, so I can't really
10 speak about what they testified to. I can tell you
11 what they've done compared to what they're currently
12 doing, and percentage--

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] So, if
14 not going to the classroom, where is it going?

15 LEROY BARR: I don't have the budget in
16 front of me. I can't tell you exactly what-- because
17 look, there's-- as you all know, there's lots of ways
18 that you can fund this thing, right? It can go into
19 a general fund. It could be earmarked specifically
20 for certain things. What we know for a fact are the
21 percentages that I just gave you, right? And that is
22 a shortfall in the funding that the State is clearly
23 sending to our schools specifically. So, if at the
24 very least they would just match what the state's
25 doing, then we would be better off, but that's a

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2 really good question that I think that we should ask
3 them in terms of where those funds going, because we
4 want to know the same exact thing. Where are those
5 funds going? If the State is saying we want to meet
6 our responsibility and send increased funding to the
7 City of New York on behalf of school buildings, why
8 is that money not reaching the school systems? That
9 is an excellent question, but I think that he people
10 that you asked that question to may not be here at
11 this point in time.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Okay,
13 we're going to give it to Hudson followed by Farías
14 for questions.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Chair, I just
16 want to say that I just got a text CIOI [sic]. The
17 contractor settled with Mount Sinai, and they're
18 going back to work 7:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Hudson followed by
20 Farías. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so
22 much. Mr. Garrido, I'm concerned about the school
23 crossing guards that you referenced in your
24 testimony. I actually just had a student in my
25 district that was hit with a car. Thank God she's

1
2 okay, but it was certainly a harrowing incident. So,
3 what's the contracted salary you won for school
4 crossing guards in this contract?

5 HENRY GARRIDO: So, we were-- thank you
6 for your question. We were fortunate to raise the--
7 you know, they were minimum wage, right, \$15.45. We
8 created a supervisory title-- didn't exist before--
9 that allowed to streamline the use and the deployment
10 of guards across the City of New York because we have
11 deserts in which we have differences between the
12 schools and the key crossings. The evidence is clear
13 that in the absence of a guard in high-volume
14 intersections, there's where you have the most
15 accidents, and DOT has clarified that. To cut 500
16 out of 2,000, that's 25 percent. The memo for the
17 patrol says 18 percent, but in reality that's-- it's
18 more, it's taking more. So they say that they want
19 to eliminate vacancies, and the truth is vacancies
20 because people don't want to apply, right? And then
21 that's-- that hasn't been our experience. We had a
22 hiring hall for crossing guards and we had over 900
23 people showed up in one single day. So, so much for
24 people not wanting to apply. I think it's going to
25 put kids at risk, period, and parents and families,

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2 and that is not-- they cost so little that it's not
3 the kind of budget exercise where you want to cut
4 from.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. And
6 Mr. Davis, you referenced this specifically, or at
7 least in the talking points document that I have,
8 maybe not in your oral testimony, but-- and this is
9 open also to anybody else who this might be relevant
10 to, but I'm just curious to know about food
11 insecurity. It's a big, big issue across the City,
12 and so with some of the proposed cuts, how will that
13 impact your students and, you know, member of some of
14 your other unions in terms of accessing the food that
15 they need, themselves and their families?

16 JAMES DAVIS: Yeah, thank you for the
17 important question, Council Member. It's shocking to
18 actually learn and to speak to students at CUNY about
19 the degree and the extent of food insecurity that
20 they experience, obviously the stigma attached to
21 that, but when surveys are done, the rates are
22 shockingly high, and I give a lot of credit again to
23 my colleagues on the campuses, especially during the
24 pandemic who manage to keep some of the food pantries
25 running. But they're already running out of

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2 resources in order to keep the food pantries up and
3 running, and so you know, in the same vein as trying
4 to assist with the housing insecurity, the mental
5 health issues that the pandemic has exacerbated, I
6 think it's a really important time now to look
7 closely at, you know, where resources should be
8 invested, actually make sure students can get through
9 their education and reach their aspirations. Thanks.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

11 Thanks, Chair.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We've been joined
13 by Council Members Brooks-Powers and Won, and now we
14 have a final question from Council Member Farías.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Thank you, Chair.

16 Hi everyone. Good morning. I've been talking about
17 this the entire budget cycle, so I'm sure you're
18 probably flagged already about what I want to ask
19 regarding our DOE and DOH school nurses, and the pay
20 parity issues that we have. We know contract
21 negotiations are key critical point and just, you
22 know, dismantling some of the pay parity issues we
23 have. can you talk a little bit about that, talk
24 about what we're doing for, or at least what, you
25 know, what we're attempting to do for the school

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2 nurses and how we can solve that pay parity issue in
3 lieu of the amount of students that we're receiving
4 along with what we know with summer school and the
5 lack of school nurses we have around the City.

6 HENRY GARRIDO: Yeah, thank you. So we
7 are approximately 200 positions-- 200 vacancies in
8 the school nurse program. DC37 represents about half
9 of the school nurses. UFT represents the other half.
10 There are substantial differences between the two in
11 salary. We've made some progress in the last round
12 of negotiations. We were able to fix an equity
13 issues of nurses in the Bronx, for instance. We were
14 able to raise salaries at the rate of \$10,000 because
15 the vacancies were so high in the Bronx. We're
16 having similar problems in pockets of the City in
17 Queens now. We're not able to recruit and retain
18 because, you know, if you have the same credentials,
19 you go work for the position represented by the UFT.
20 You're going to make \$18-20,000 more, plus your
21 Master's is going to mean more financially, plus you
22 can get longevity. And then adding to the problem is
23 the fact that DOHMH has been also-- during the
24 pandemic coach a lot of the nurses to send them to
25 DOE COVID-related stuff. It was a crisis, we

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2 understand that. But that would put additional
3 strain on the nurses that we have. We are losing.
4 The good news is that the City did in this round of
5 negotiations with the union, we did negotiate an
6 equity fund that allows the nurses to apply for an
7 equitable distribution. This was in addition to the
8 raises and the signing bonus that you probably heard
9 about. So the school nurses are in that group that
10 we would like to consider because of the huge
11 recruitment problems that we're having in some parts
12 of the City.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Okay, and then in
14 terms of the contract negotiation with the Admin, was
15 this brought up and were there any discussions around
16 trying to bridge that gap for school nurses?

17 HENRY GARRIDO: Yes, DOHMH was part of
18 the negotiations, brought this issue. We have a
19 series of ideas that we'd like to present including
20 the training and professional development to develop
21 more nurses and tie them for CUNY to the school
22 system. There's a pipeline in there that we believe
23 would be very helpful, right? But I think the issue
24 of parity parity and paid equity, even with this pay
25

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2 equity fund that we created is going to be hard to
3 reach because the differences are so high.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Sure.

5 HENRY GARRIDO: Especially in some of the
6 private school nurses that we provide also services
7 to.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Okay, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: LeRoy, something we
10 should follow up on. \$500 million dollars that the
11 City got from the State for smaller class sizes, we
12 should make sure we know where that money's going.

13 LEROY BARR: Yeah, so--

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] We're
15 with you on that.

16 LEROY BARR: Thank you. And just to
17 reiterate the point, really, you know, it's a five-
18 year plan, right? It's a five-year plan to reduce
19 class sizes to a level that we all agreed upon. We
20 know that the City of New York, next year, this
21 coming year, has over 39 percent class size spaces
22 where they can actually reduce class sizes without
23 doing much, right? It's really a question of what
24 happens in the outer years, in the second year, the
25 third year, and the fourth year. that doesn't mean

1
2 that we shouldn't be making extensive plans right now
3 and looking to still reduce class sizes even though
4 you'll meet the limits of the law, because it's not
5 really about what you can do right now. It's all
6 those places where we know that class sizes are a lot
7 higher than they need to be for our kids to actually
8 maximize learning today, alright? So why wait? So,
9 I think that we can use some of those funds even
10 though they can probably meet some of the needs in
11 the first year without doing much. We should still
12 be doing everything we can immediately because our
13 children deserve better. That's the point that we
14 really want to make about that.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, well, on
16 behalf of, you know, the hundreds of thousands of New
17 Yorkers that you all represent, we appreciate your
18 partnership in this budget, and we appreciate your
19 time today. Thank you.

20 LEROY BARR: Thank you.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you very much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Following up with the
23 second panel. Jo-Ann Yoo, Lisa Rivera, Theo Moore,
24 Alice Bufkin, Gregory Brender, Randi Levine, Nora
25 Moran.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

JO-ANN YOO: Good morning Council Members for giving the Asian American Federation an opportunity to testify. I'm Jo-Ann Yoo, the Executive Director of the Asian American Federation where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70-member nonprofits serving 1.5 million New Yorkers. As we look at the City's Fiscal Year 2024 budget, the Pan-Asian community continues to face a number of challenges from a slowing covering-- a slow recovering economy to continued anti-Asian hate. Yet, our member organizations have led the way in numerous service sectors and program organized and led by Asian American Federation, and we are here to ask for your help. We will send a detailed budget request, but I want to share some numbers with you. with our-- in our partnership with our member organizations, our mental health programming resulted in 18,000 Asian New Yorkers gaining access to language-accessible and culturally competent mental health services. Last year, we released the first-ever online mental health provider database that prioritizes providers that speak Asian languages and understand Asian cultures. There are now over 200

1 providers, and we continue to update that directory.
2
3 As all of you know, New York has the highest rate of
4 Anti-Asian violence in the country, and many of you
5 have been our biggest allies and our champions. In
6 the first year of our flagship anti-- Hope Against
7 Hate, we have touched thousands and thousands of
8 Asian New Yorkers. We have distributed over 10,000
9 in-language booklets, reached over 50,000 people with
10 our safety videos and booklets, connected 36 clients
11 to victim support services and trained over 2,000
12 community members in de-escalation safety awareness
13 and physical self-defense and virtual, and in-
14 language workshops along with the development of safe
15 zones. On the small business front, our small
16 businesses constantly being contacted by small
17 business owners from every community who need help
18 navigating the lack of the information, hostile
19 inspection practices, and inaccessible assistance
20 programs. Our Small Business Assistance Program is
21 buckling because of the sheer volume and--

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
23 expired.

24 JO-ANN YOO: We are grateful for your
25 ally-ship and we ask that you continue to support the

1
2 Asian American community, and like I said before we
3 will submit our detailed request, and I look forward
4 to continuing to work with you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Red light's on.

6 LISA RIVERA: Hello? Alright, there we
7 go. Good morning everyone. Thank you so much for
8 the opportunity to testify today. I'm Lisa Rivera,
9 President and CEO of NYLAG, the New York Legal
10 Assistance Group. NYLAG's staff are amongst the many
11 legal and social service providers that are doing the
12 essential work to support our communities, work that
13 as you know in many instances only exists because of
14 the inequities, disparities and obstacles that exist
15 throughout the systems that our clients encounter.
16 We know that you have engaged in many Executive
17 Budget hearings over the past months amid other
18 challenges impacting the City's finances, such as the
19 late state budget, city staffing shortages, and the
20 continued influx of migrants from the southern
21 border. Despite these challenges, we want to thank
22 you for continuing to advocate for investment in
23 legal services. Today, I'm asking the City to
24 increase that investment and address policies that
25 are designed to help our clients, but are becoming

1
2 increasingly difficult to access. Many times you've
3 heard me and my colleagues speak about the systemic
4 inequities and failures that leave our communities
5 and our clients with disparate access to justice. We
6 connect people to life-saving benefits such as
7 housing, food, educational opportunities. We defend
8 people against deportation, eviction, family
9 separation, and we support families and clients
10 leaving abusive partners and help individuals facing
11 crushing debt from predatory loans. We are a
12 lifeline to New Yorkers in need. The legal services
13 and social services community who've been really
14 sounding the alarm this year, because we are in a
15 dire funding and contracting crisis. We need the
16 City's help. A budget, as you all know, is a
17 reflection of our values. As such, the City needs to
18 invest more, not less, in initiatives that uplift and
19 invest in communities that are in need of most. Now
20 is not the time to pull back. Instead, a focus on
21 meaningful access to programs that defend and
22 sustains one ability to access food, stable housing,
23 safety, and ability to work and receive a proper
24 education is needed to address rising inequality and
25 poverty in New York. Investment in legal services

1
2 and social services is an investment in New York City
3 and address public safety. We are asking that you
4 uplift communities and families that are bogged down
5 in bureaucracy because agencies are woefully
6 understaffed, and they do not provide families what
7 they need to survive. I'm calling on the City to
8 invest in legal services. These asks include: A 25
9 percent increase in personal budgets on our baseline
10 contracts so better advocates can afford to live in
11 the City that they work for every single day; funding
12 that includes our costs for benefits in OTPS that
13 rise, even though we have flat baseline contracts;
14 continuation of the Workforce Enhancement Initiative
15 on our baseline contracts, that you include workforce
16 enhancement on city discretionary contracts; an
17 increase to legal services for low-income New Yorkers
18 initiative; \$351 million dollars for Right to
19 counsel; and lastly, but not least, further
20 investment in immigration legal services that address
21 both the short-term and long-term needs of asylum-
22 seekers in New York. Creation of programs that
23 center community education screening and pro se
24 applications are only the first step. We need a deep
25 commitment for full representation for immigrants in

1
2 New York. These programs can be funded through a
3 variety of city-based programming that already
4 exists, IOI, Action NYC, Rapid Response Legal
5 Collaborative, or even new initiatives that really
6 focus on the community. A robust response must also
7 include legislation that allows full representation
8 at all levels when someone's facing court without an
9 attorney. Thank you for the opportunity.

10 NORA MORAN: Good morning. My name is
11 Nora Moran. I'm the Director of Policy and Advocacy
12 at United Neighborhood Houses. We work with New York
13 City Settlement Houses. Our written testimony has a
14 lot of information and detail, but I'm just going to
15 highlight a little bit in this portion. So we're
16 deeply concerned about a lot of things in this
17 budget. We have four main areas of concern. First
18 three are around cuts that the Mayor proposing.
19 First, there's a \$38 million dollar cut to the
20 Department of Youth and Community Development, which
21 includes the Summer Youth Employment Program. In the
22 Department for the Aging there's a \$12 million dollar
23 cut to senior meal programs. On the DOE's Early
24 Childhood Division, there is the rollback of the 3K
25 expansion, as well as a lack of salary parity for

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2 Early Childhood educators and directors. All of the
3 PEGs are being justified as underspending or
4 underutilization, but the Mayor's Management Report
5 actually cites increasing utilization over the past
6 few years across many of these programs. And we know
7 from the providers that we work with that late
8 payments, low wages to staff, are really making it
9 hard for providers to maximize their programs and
10 maximize their budgets. And really, you know,
11 intentionally starving these programs to then take a
12 savings is very short-sided, and we really urge the
13 Council to look at community need, look at
14 utilization, and really push back against these cuts
15 to make sure that we're not prematurely taking
16 resources out of communities. The last thing I'll
17 say is that our last concern is around a COLA for the
18 human services workforce. I echo the concerns of the
19 Just Pay Campaign, calling for a 6.5 percent COLA for
20 human service workers. Those low wages are
21 exacerbating a lot of the challenges that we see
22 around, you know, vacancies and programs.
23 Organizations just cannot find the staff in order to
24 keep classrooms open, run afterschool, run senior
25 centers, and things like that. The last, last thing

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2 I'll say is that we really want to push back against
3 the dynamic that this budget is about supporting
4 asylum-seekers or funding anything else. We are
5 seeing that asylum-seekers are utilizing Early
6 Childhood programs and are coming to afterschool
7 programs. They need a lot more than just housing and
8 cutting other social service and safety net programs
9 is only going to help-- only going to keep these
10 folks, you know, from advancing and getting settled,
11 and you know, getting jobs and things like that. So,
12 thank you.

13 THEO MOORE: Good morning. I'm Theo
14 Moore. I'm the Vice President of Policy and Programs
15 with the New York Immigration Coalition. So it seems
16 that New York is at a crossroads and how and who it
17 chooses to prioritize when budgets are concerned.
18 Unfortunately, it appears that the Administration is
19 choosing to follow the path of many of the worst
20 executives around the country using fake scarcity to
21 put austerity measures in budgets that harm the most
22 vulnerable communities, particularly black, brown,
23 immigrant, and LGBTQI communities across the City.
24 Not only does this budget target and punch down on
25 those communities, it seems to want to one-up the

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2 worst policies coming out of places like Texas and
3 Florida. It's like, Florida bans books, so the
4 Mayor's like, I'll do you one better, I'm going to
5 cut budgets to all of libraries. And these libraries
6 are essential. They are our pillars to our
7 communities, and they are where many of our essential
8 services like adult literacy, ESOL classes, digital
9 literacy classes, and programs which we-- which were
10 also severely cut in the budget are housed. We also
11 partner with libraries for our own program called Key
12 to the City, and quite frankly, we need libraries for
13 those services, because we won't have any other place
14 to house them if they have to close their doors.
15 Another example of doubling down on terrible policies
16 is with public education. We see across the country
17 the fight, you know, about Critical Race Theory, and
18 we know that the goal is really to render black
19 people invisible, and it seems like the Mayor once
20 again decided that he wouldn't just ban curriculums
21 but really cut education so severely that they can't
22 even proper functionally-- functionally properly, and
23 our children would be left without viable options.
24 So we need to fully invest in public schools and
25 CUNY, restore previous cuts from last year, and

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2 invest in the expansion of ELL transfer schools that
3 specifically support new-comer asylum-seekers across
4 the City. We also need to restore the cuts to 3K and
5 Pre-K programming while also funding programs like
6 the Life Project which help families navigate the
7 overly-complicated enrollment system. we found that
8 80 percent of families who use the Life Project said
9 that without that they would not have been able to
10 enroll their children into 3K and Pre-K which means
11 that when we talk about the amount of open slots,
12 it's not because people don't need them, it's because
13 they can't actually navigate the system to enroll
14 their kids in 3K and Pre-K. I also want to talk
15 about, you know, as children continue to readjust to
16 in-person schooling, we must acknowledge the
17 difficulty and the trauma that folks are feeling. We
18 have to equip all schools with the proper needs, and
19 that means putting social workers in all the schools
20 so that they can better identify and address issues
21 before the NYPD is needed, and we need preventative
22 human-centered, life-affirming programs instead of
23 reactionary measures that are lot cheaper quite
24 frankly than cops and jails, and heal instead of
25 causing additional harm. Unfortunately, none of

1
2 these things can be accomplished by choosing budget
3 austerity over meeting the needs of all New Yorkers.
4 We understand the need to be responsible and prudent,
5 but we have an opportunity to help New York fully
6 recover from the pandemic in a way that not only
7 provides a way forward, but also is a model for the
8 rest of the country and how we move forward. In order
9 to meet the overwhelming and unmet needs of New
10 Yorkers, whether they've been here for 50 years or 50
11 days, we must act strategically and not in a
12 reactionary manner. Thank you for the opportunity to
13 testify.

14 ALICE BUFKIN: Good afternoon Chair and
15 Members of the Committee. Thank you for holding
16 today's hearing and for the Council's support of so
17 many important issues for children and families in
18 the budget. My name is Alice Bufkin. I'm the
19 Associate Executive Director of Policy at Citizen's
20 Community for Children, a multi-issue children's
21 advocacy organization. We'll be submitting written
22 testimony, but in the time I have today I want to
23 emphasize a few urgent issues impacting children and
24 families in New York. First, I want to reiterate
25 what so many before me and so many after me will say

1
2 which is that the PEGs from the November
3 modification, those cuts proposed in the Preliminary
4 and Executive Budget will cause serious and deep harm
5 to the systems that serve the most marginalized New
6 Yorkers. Already understaffing at HRA has resulted
7 in families unable to access food stamps, cash
8 assistance or housing assistance on time. On top of
9 that, nonprofits across the City, particularly those
10 in the early care and education space are waiting
11 multiple months to be paid for services already
12 rendered. The City's focus should be on filling
13 vacancies rather than limiting them, on advancing a
14 6.5 percent COLA for the human services sector, and
15 ensuring timely payment of nonprofit contracts so New
16 York families can receive the essential services they
17 need. My remaining time I want to highlight several
18 other pressing issues. First, we strongly support
19 desperately-needed mental health supports for young
20 people, including through baselining the mental
21 health continuum, increasing funding for existing
22 school-based mental health clinics, and supporting
23 very important existing City Council mental health
24 initiatives. Additionally, I don't need to tell you
25 that New York is facing a staggering housing crisis.

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2 At a minimum, our city must restore and baseline \$118
3 million dollars in rental assistance funding,
4 eliminate the 90-day shelter stay rule which I know
5 this council strongly supported, and create
6 additional beds for runaway and homeless youth among
7 other investments. To address the needs of young
8 children and working parents, the City must reverse
9 the Mayor's proposed cuts to 3K, focus on converting
10 school day, school year ASE seats to extended-day
11 year-round options across age ranges, and baseline
12 \$20 million dollars for Promise NYC to allow
13 childcare access for undocumented families. And
14 finally, our city must support all the city students
15 including by baselining \$5 million dollars to
16 guarantee bus services with comparable transportation
17 for students in foster care. Thank you for your time
18 today, and please see my written testimony for
19 additional details and additional accommodations.
20 Thank you.

21 RANDI LEVINE: Thank you for the
22 opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi
23 Levine. I'm Policy Director of Advocate for Children
24 of New York. At a time where there are significant
25 unmet needs for students, we are deeply concerned

1
2 that the Executive Budget would cut hundreds of
3 millions of dollars from the New York City Public
4 Schools budget, including through a PEG of \$305
5 million dollars described as a re-estimate of fringe
6 benefits, but which reflects a pot of funding that
7 DOE has been using for a variety of purposes. We are
8 particularly concerned that the following three
9 programs included as priorities in the Council's
10 response to the Preliminary Budget are on the
11 chopping block with funding that will expire in June
12 unless extended in the FY24 Adopted Budget: \$5
13 million dollars for the mental health continuum, the
14 first-ever cross-agency partnership to help students
15 get access to expedited mental healthcare in school;
16 \$4 million dollars to help immigrant families get
17 important information about their children's schools
18 through phone calls, hard copy notices, and
19 information campaigns; and \$20 million dollars for
20 Promise NYC so children who are undocumented can
21 access early learning programs. With the youth
22 mental health crisis and the increase in newly-
23 arrived immigrant students, the need for these
24 programs has only grown. The council played an
25 instrumental role in securing funding for them last

1 year, and we can't eliminate these programs now.
2 Instead of cutting funding, the City should be
3 investing to address pressing needs of students.
4 Three million dollars to bolster the six new English
5 language learner transfer school programs ensuring
6 they can support recently-arrived immigrant youth;
7 \$85 million dollars to expand school-wide restorative
8 justice practices to reduce the use of suspensions,
9 address students underlying needs and keep them in
10 school; \$5 million dollars to guarantee appropriate
11 transportation for students in foster care so
12 students are not forced to transfer schools when they
13 are removed from their homes and families; and \$50
14 million dollars to provide preschoolers with
15 disabilities with their legally-mandated services,
16 given that 10,000 preschoolers went the entire year
17 without receiving at least one of their mandated
18 services such as speech therapy. Our written
19 testimony has more information about each of these
20 priorities. Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

23 GREGORY BRENDER: Thank you so much for
24 the opportunity to testify and for everything that,
25 Council Members, that you've been doing to support

1
2 Early Childhood education to New York City. My name
3 is Gregory Brender. I'm here on behalf of the Daycare
4 Council of New York. We are the membership
5 organization of New York City's Early Childhood
6 provider organizations and we have over 200 sites
7 throughout the City in every neighborhood where our
8 organizations are providing high-quality Early
9 Childhood education. We are deeply dismayed that
10 this budget takes a big step backward for Early
11 Childhood education in New York City, especially at a
12 time when New York City has the capacity and the
13 moral imperative to do the right thing for New York
14 City's children. We strongly support the seven
15 proposals put out by the City Council's Black,
16 Latino, and Asian Caucus in a February 28th letter
17 signed by 31 of the City Council Members to reform
18 the system. And I wanted to highlight a few of the
19 key aspects we believe need to be addressed in this
20 budget. First, we need to pay providers on time.
21 Early Childhood providers are continually not being
22 paid on time and just this week we've heard from
23 several organizations who've missed payroll.
24 Hardworking people who are coming in every day caring
25 for New York City's children are simply not being

1
2 paid for the jobs that they're doing. This can be
3 addressed, we have in our written testimony several
4 way to improve this, including increasing the advance
5 to 75 percent which is the amount providers are
6 allowed to their contracts, and improving the systems
7 for invoicing, moving over to the City's HHS
8 Accelerator System. Second, it is time we move to
9 salary parity for the Early Childhood workforce.
10 Early Childhood workers, directors, teachers, support
11 staff, they're all paid significantly less than their
12 counterparts in public schools, and their
13 underpayment has a legacy of discrimination against
14 work that is-- has been historically performed by
15 women and in still New York City performed primarily
16 by women and women of color. The collective
17 bargaining agreements for teachers, directors, and
18 support staff have all expired, and in this budget,
19 the City must take action to fund collective
20 bargaining agreements that bring the benefits and
21 salaries of the workforce in Early Childhood programs
22 to parity with the public schools including longevity
23 increases and other benefits that many Early
24 Childhood staff miss. Finally, we need to make it
25 easier for families to access childcare. Families

1 trust community-based organizations who they work
2 with, and they are unable to access the programs that
3 they are eligible for just by going to community-
4 based organization. We need to make these reforms
5 including restoring Promise NYC so that undocumented
6 children can access childcare and making it-- going
7 to the full extent of what the State will allow in
8 order to allow families to access extended-day,
9 extended-care. Thank you so much for all you've done
10 for Early Childhood. We're really counting on the
11 City Council's leadership to make this a better
12 budget for New York City's children.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Joined
15 by Council Member Brewer, and we have questions from
16 Council Member Joseph.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, and
18 good morning to you all. Just two questions. Wanted
19 to find out and let everyone else know, how important
20 is it for the programs that are about to be sunset to
21 be baseline in the budget?

22 RANDI LEVINE: It's extremely important.
23 The need for these programs has only grown. At a
24 time when there's a youth mental health crisis, we
25 can't afford to eliminate a key program that is

1 supporting students and helping them the access to
2 expedited male care in 50 high-needs schools. Staff
3 has been hired and baselining the program is
4 essential to ensuring its long-term success and
5 stability. And then I'll just say quickly, we also
6 have seen an increase in the number of newly-arrived
7 immigrant students and families. We've had more than
8 15,000 immigrant students enroll in our City schools
9 new this year. And so this is certainly not the time
10 to be cutting funding for the DOE's immigrant family
11 community and outreach programs. If anything, we
12 should be baselining and it expanding it. And
13 Promise NYC for the first time providing access to
14 all of the city's Early Childhood education programs
15 for children who are undocumented. We need \$20
16 million dollars just to maintain the current
17 capacity, not to mention serving additional children.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Anyone else? No?
19 And on the grounds for our students with
20 disabilities, what are the issues they face with
21 busing, especially our students in foster care?

22 RANDI LEVINE: We've heard from families,
23 hundreds of families this year, about challenges with
24 bus service, and that really spans a wide range of
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2 issues for all students, for students with
3 disabilities, for students who are homeless, for
4 students in foster care. We and our coalition
5 partners are focused this year on pushing for an
6 additional resource and additional investment for
7 transportation for students in foster care in
8 particular, because that is an area where the City
9 does not yet guarantee bus service or other door-to-
10 door transportation. The law says that the City has
11 a legal responsibility to provide transportation so
12 that students in foster care don't have to change
13 schools when they are placed in foster care or moved
14 foster homes, but right now, you can read it right on
15 the DOE's website. It says we will either give
16 students in foster care a bus or a metro card. For a
17 second grader who's been placed in foster care, a
18 metro card often is not sufficient to allow them to
19 continue going to their school.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
22 Brewer followed by Lee.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I've
24 been listening, so I appreciate everybody's
25 testimony. I have two questions. Number one, we're

1
2 constantly hearing from the Administration that, you
3 know, the Pre-K is not populated, therefore we have
4 to cut. So I want to get your comments on that
5 because it doesn't compute for me. Of course, if you
6 don't tell people, they don't know about it and then
7 they're not going to enroll. So I want to hear about
8 that. And then second, some of you talked about the
9 housing. I know there'll be others, but I am
10 concerned. I want to second what Christine Quinn has
11 been stating over and over again, we need, of course,
12 the 90-day rule which the City Council has supported
13 to go away. But also we need, I think, the vouchers
14 to be increased. I think that would take care of a
15 major housing challenge. Those are my two questions,
16 the vouchers, and the lack, supposedly, of persons
17 participating in the Early Childhood and what you
18 experienced.

19 GREGORY BRENDER: I'll start with the
20 Pre-K question. Then I imagine a few of my
21 colleagues will have comments on that as well. So
22 the under-enrollment is really because the enrollment
23 procedures and enrollment process are broken. The
24 City has stopped its outreach, closed its outreach
25 teams that were doing intensive outreach, and there

1
2 really needs to be a multi-lingual community targeted
3 approach so that families in every neighborhood of
4 the City know what they're eligible for. We also
5 need to make the process of enrolling easier. We can
6 start doing that by allowing community-based
7 organizations to directly enroll families, because
8 there are families who have more trust for community-
9 based organizations that they've had long
10 relationships with, and you know, they see a sign and
11 a wonderful childcare center or a family childcare
12 home, and they say I want to put my kid there, and
13 it's a lot easier than going through a process with
14 the centralized enrollment system. So if we increase
15 outreach, and if we make it easier for families to
16 enroll and go through process to be deemed eligible
17 for extended-day programs, I think you'll see a lot
18 more of where that need is.

19 NORA MORAN: And just one piece to add on
20 that. I fully agree with everything Gregory said
21 about enrollment procedures. Part of the equation is
22 also staffing. So we have providers in our network
23 who cannot open classrooms because they do not have
24 the staff in order to do it safely and to meet ratio.
25 And so on paper, it looks like, oh, no one wants this

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2 3K service, but in practice people do and the
3 providers cannot operate. We see the same dynamic
4 happening in youth programs. On paper it looks like
5 there's no demand for afterschool, but in practice
6 it's that the wages for afterschool staff are often
7 minimum wage. You can make a lot more working in jobs
8 that are a lot less labor-intensive than taking care
9 of children, and so it's very hard to hire
10 competitively, and it looks like, you know, parents
11 don't want or need afterschool when we know that's
12 not the case, simply that we need to open these
13 programs safely with the right amount of staffing,
14 and that's been very, very difficult to do lately.

15 THEO MOORE: Let me just add in-- so for
16 our community it's especially hard navigating New
17 York City system. You know, there are language
18 barriers. There are cultural barriers, and quite
19 frankly, New York City is a whole lot for someone
20 especially when they just arrive into this country.
21 so there is extra care and time needed to really
22 helping families and individuals navigate the system,
23 you know, a system that quite frankly if you're a
24 born and raised New Yorker, you start trying to
25 figure out 3K and Pre-K as soon as your child is

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2 born. And for folks who have just newly arrived,
3 like they have not had that time, they have not
4 really adjusted. So you need extra care, and then
5 quite frankly, you need the involvement of the
6 community-based organizations that are trusted in the
7 neighborhoods to really be involved in helping to
8 navigate and enroll that system. And that's why, you
9 know, programs like the Life Project and other
10 programs are extremely effective and needed.

11 LISA RIVERA: With respect to your
12 question about CityFEPS and other benefit programs,
13 our clients are struggling to access benefits that
14 they need, quite frankly, including one-shot deals,
15 CityFEPS and cash assistance. We have seen with our
16 clients HRA is systematically failing to process
17 applications, re-certifications, failing to conduct
18 eligibility interviews, either by failing to reach
19 out to clients or maintaining a phone system that our
20 clients can use to call them back, failing to index
21 documents submitting by our clients and social
22 service providers that result in delays, wrongful
23 denials, and in adequate benefit levels. CityFEPS
24 needs to be increased. It has to be something that
25 the City prioritizes. Investing in systems and

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2 personnel to actually process applications to meet
3 with our clients is needed to address the delays and
4 failures. Expanding eligibility for programs like
5 CityFEPS is obviously very critical as the City
6 grapples with increasing homelessness and lacking
7 shelter capacity. Someone mentioned earlier about
8 eradicating their 90-day rule. Obviously, that is
9 something that seems like a common sense solution for
10 folks that are looking for stability and have a
11 pathway. They've already been found eligible for
12 temporary housing in DHS. There's no need for them
13 to wait 90 days for them to be able to look for
14 permanent housing. To that same effect that they are
15 also rules within the shelter system that makes
16 families have to re-certify every 10 days. There was
17 a COVID easement that allowed folks to make a very
18 simple phone call, but now that COVID easements have
19 ended, they now need to go back in-person, which
20 means that our clients now have to take off a day of
21 work, take their kids out of school because they will
22 be there all day and will not be able to pick up
23 their children at the end of the day. And so there
24 are common sense solutions for a lot of the issues
25 that our clients are facing, but it does go back to

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2 the city agencies are not staffed enough, and they
3 really need to be able to go through the backlog of
4 cases and then address the dire need of the folks
5 that are now accessing benefits and never thought
6 that they needed to before.

7 ALICE BUFKIN: Would I be able to add one
8 additional point, if that's okay?

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, go ahead.

10 ALICE BUFKIN: I'll just say our
11 organization recently did a study where we spoke
12 directly with families about their early care and
13 education needs, and speaking directly to them it is
14 clear the need is there, but as everyone has been
15 saying, it's a desire for childcare that meets their
16 specific needs whether it's extended-day full-care,
17 it's needing information about what's available, and
18 it's simplifying the process for actually accessing
19 these services, whether that's outreach or sort of
20 the simplification of de-centralizing enrollment, all
21 these other solutions that people are proposing. So
22 I think it's very clear when we talk to families what
23 their needs are. and I'll say one piece on the
24 housing is that in addition to what was previously
25 said, there are other ways to totally agree on

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2 increasing the eligibility criteria around federal
3 poverty level, but we also have things like
4 requirements around chronicity requirements around
5 having a Housing Court eviction proceeding before you
6 can enter and get CityFEPS. We have issues like you
7 need to come in through DHS in order to get CityFEPS,
8 but we have lots of young people included, but also
9 families who may be coming in through as domestic
10 violence survivors, maybe entering HPD, and that
11 pathway is not as accepted as coming through DHS. So
12 there are some other things we can do to look at the
13 pathways in which families and individuals can access
14 CityFEPS better.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
16 much. You're awesome.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member Lee
18 followed by Louis.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Comment and then
20 question. So, I just first wanted to say coming from
21 the nonprofit side of things, working with you guys
22 for many years, I just want to for the room for folks
23 that already know, but we need to highlight again the
24 important work you guys are doing to really serve our
25 city, the most vulnerable populations in our city,

1
2 and you guys are really doing such incredible work on
3 the ground and doing more with less, which shouldn't
4 be the case. And so we, you know, have-- it's our
5 goal to help you guys as much as possible, and we
6 understand a lot of the challenges that you face, and
7 one of the challenges-- and this leads into my
8 question that I want-- I sort of know the answer, but
9 I want you guys to state it for the record, and also
10 to talk a little bit about your coalition and your
11 organizations around the issues with the timing of
12 the contracting piece, because I also think that's a
13 huge issue for a lot of nonprofits, especially the
14 smaller ones that serve very specific, culturally,
15 linguistically sensitive communities that don't
16 necessarily have funding to float. And so if you
17 could speak to the average time length of how long
18 some of these contracts get delayed in terms of
19 registration, as well as payout, and how many of
20 these organizations struggle to pay staff. In a
21 world where we know already like you guys are saying,
22 staff are underpaid, and then for them not to get
23 paid on time is an even bigger issue. If you could
24 speak to that a little.

1
2 NORA MORAN: So, you know, in terms of
3 registration, contract registration and payment, it
4 depends a lot on the agency. I will say in our
5 experience we've seen things get slightly better with
6 registrations with agencies like DYCD, DFTA, or NYC
7 Aging. Big challenge areas remain, Department of
8 Education and DHS. And then in term of payout, wide
9 range. We, and I know Gregory alluded to this, we
10 know providers in the Early Childhood space as well
11 as community school providers who contract with the
12 DOE who sometimes have been waiting for a year on
13 payment, which is a very long time, and if you are a
14 single-issue organization, you're just doing ECE, you
15 know, that can really impact your payroll and ability
16 to pay folks. So, you know, we've certainly seen I
17 would say generally some improvements outside of the
18 DOE. We still have a lot of challenges with the DOE
19 both in Early Childhood and other DOE-contracted
20 services, but I'll let colleagues speak to other
21 agencies I'm less familiar with.

22 JO-ANN YOO: Council Member Lee, I'd like
23 to add-- this is Jo-Ann. I apologize that I couldn't
24 be there in-person. As you know, many of the
25 nonprofit organizations that we work with are small

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2 and so they don't have any reserves. So, if they
3 don't get paid, they-- you know, if they get the
4 funding, they don't get to pay their staff. Yet,
5 they continue to perform the services. So, it really
6 is-- that is one common feedback that we do get from
7 our members, that we need to get the funding faster,
8 the contract comes late. Oftentimes, even with our
9 own experience, the contracts come as the year is
10 ending. And so it's a real challenge for us to be
11 able to stay on top of all the requests, the work.
12 Many of our nonprofits are small. There is no way for
13 them to continue the work, but yet, you know, they're
14 not equipped to be able to have finance-- you know,
15 fiscal staff who can constantly talk to the City.
16 And so many people are wearing many different hats,
17 and that's a huge challenge for our community, and I
18 think that's something that I would appreciate you
19 answering that question. And I did want to-- my
20 camera-- a little sound problem, but I did want to
21 ask-- address the question about baselining some of
22 the services. You know, for many communities-- you
23 know, for instance on mental health, this is all new
24 issue for our communities. It's not the fact that
25 the issue hasn't existed, but we've been written out

1 of the funding. We've been written out of having
2 access to resources. And so for many of our
3 communities, especially communities of color, getting
4 even a small grant, even a small amount of funding
5 from the Council is a huge deal to us, and it really
6 is a life-saving pipeline for us to do programming
7 work. The City has the-- our mental health database,
8 our mental health work is funded out of private
9 dollars, but it would be great to be able to have
10 funding from the Council to be able to-- and baseline
11 it, sure, that's a pipedream for communities of
12 color, but it'd be great for us to be able to get
13 funding to even launch a program, because as one of
14 my colleagues said, our communities will go to their
15 trusted nonprofits to be able to access services.
16 The language access is a real issue, and the reality
17 is that our communities will-- community members will
18 always go to their nonprofits for the information,
19 and so we need to figure out how do we fund all the
20 people who are actually providing the services, not
21 just providing nonprofit services, but doing the
22 service of the government. That's what we need to
23 talk about.
24

1
2 THEO MOORE: I just want to provide just
3 one example of how difficult it is, you know, running
4 a program and actually getting paid or reimbursed.
5 Aside from all of the other work we do, we were the
6 main organization that was funded for the Ukraine
7 Response Initiative, URI, along with NYLAG. This is
8 a program that we started. You know, we hear a lot
9 about asylum-seekers coming from the southern border.
10 You know, depending on who you talk to, 75-90,000
11 individuals who have come to New York from the
12 southern border since last year. We've gotten over
13 20,000 folks from the Ukraine in New York City since
14 the invasion last year. We've been servicing those
15 communities as well. We started along with NYLAG
16 this program last April, and have yet to receive any
17 funding for our work. So that is over a year since
18 the program started, and that is like indicative of
19 quite frankly of how funding roles with, you know,
20 pretty much any program whether it's the Mayor side,
21 the Council side, DOE, DYCD. Like, you can pick the
22 agency and quite frankly, you know, the organization
23 are really debt funding. And as an executive at an
24 organization, I have to make the decision whether I
25 provide the services or what I do internally around,

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2 you know, hiring, providing raises, promotions, like
3 what we do for our own staff, you know, as far as
4 like the trauma that we're dealing with, you know,
5 because we have to be out there in the community, and
6 we have to make those decisions on a daily basis and
7 quite frankly, usually we decide to provide the
8 services to the community, and it's really at the
9 detriment of the internals of the organization
10 themselves.

11 GREGORY BRENDER: I just echo that
12 specifically in Early Childhood we really have
13 reached crisis proportions with the late payments.
14 This is part of what led to the closure of Sheltering
15 Arms, and here we are almost at the end of Fiscal
16 Year 23 and there are providers who are months and
17 months behind. There are even some providers trying
18 to get payments from Fiscal Year 2022. So, it really
19 has hit a level that it's affecting the quality of
20 programs and their ability to stay open.

21 LISA RIVERA: What we see sometimes is
22 quite frankly some contracts that are registered
23 timely, but then payment after that 25 percent
24 allowance is not-- does not happen, and so then we
25 are trying to then provide services for nearly over

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2 year, one Fiscal Year into another Fiscal Year,
3 trying to still catch up, and then a new 25 shelter
4 allowance, and so then what are we doing here? And
5 so what the resulting factor, as everybody else is
6 speaking on this panel, is we have to make really
7 hard decisions, and for NYLAG we're taking out loans
8 to make our payroll. We have to make these tough
9 calls each and every time, trying to see whether or
10 not we will get our invoices approved, even after
11 registration, and the back and forth that's necessary
12 even to get that moving is quite onerous on our
13 staff. We have to build our Finance Department just
14 to keep on track of billing and invoicing. The hours
15 that they have to spend going back and forth on
16 documents that we've already submitted months ago,
17 but now there are questions. It does feel like there
18 are tactical delays within the City. Agencies do not
19 pay us on time because of their-- perhaps, their cash
20 flow issues as well, but us as providers are now
21 faced with issues of do we have to cut back services.
22 Because we may not be able to keep taking out loans
23 to keep fronting the City for the very programs that
24 we are mission-centered and want to keep providing.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Thank you for
3 sharing the very real examples that you guy struggle
4 with every day and this along with parity and are two
5 the biggest ones that we need to try to fight for, so
6 thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
8 Nurse?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair.
10 I actually had many of the same questions as Council
11 Member Lee and Brewer, so I'll yield my time.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Greg, I wanted to
13 ask, the DOE stated that there are thousands of
14 extended-day and extended school year seats that are
15 unfilled throughout the City, and because of that
16 they're scaling back seats. Do you think that's a
17 wise move?

18 GREGORY BRENDER: I don't think so,
19 especially as there are opportunities with outreach
20 to fill these seats, and there is an increased state
21 funding for extended-day/extended-year. We are at
22 risk of turning money back to the state when there
23 are families who are really desperate for care. So I
24 think increased outreach, improving our ability to--
25 improving the process to check families for

1
2 eligibilities and enroll them more quickly, allowing
3 presumptive eligibility where a family can be in
4 childcare while they're waiting for their eligibility
5 check will all help to fill these seats. It would be
6 a huge problem and a real step backward for the city
7 not to have these longstanding organizations
8 providing the childcare that we know so many families
9 need.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

11 GREGORY BRENDER: [inaudible]

12 : I'll just say again, I'll reiterate,
13 when you talk to families and you ask them what they
14 need, they say we need slots that work for me. And
15 so I-- you know, this disjoint between what the
16 Administration is saying, it doesn't match what we
17 hear directly from families, and I think many of us
18 do, and you know, echoing everything Gregory said in
19 terms of increasing the ability to get-- you know,
20 let families know about what's available and get them
21 into services. You know, again, I just think that's
22 out of sync with what we're seeing from families on
23 the ground.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: thank you all very
25 much for all your work. Thank you.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Calling up the third
3 panel, Marion Perkins, Verman Pierre [sp?], Sarah
4 Dowd, Cheyanne Morrison, Musu King.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, begin.
6 Whenever you're ready, you can begin.

7 MUSU KING: Good morning. Thank you for
8 having us. My name is Musu King. I am a Registered
9 Nurse at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. I am also
10 the NYSNA Local Bargaining Vice President at Lincoln
11 representing my amazing and courageous nurses. We
12 are fighting for a fair union contract that stops the
13 crises of understaffing and high turnover at our city
14 public hospitals. H+H confirmed that they spent over
15 half a billion dollars on travel nurses in 2022.
16 That's more than three times what it will cost to
17 bring our wages to parity with the private sector.
18 Each day that goes by the City is losing money from
19 keeping our pay so low, and every day our patients
20 are suffering the consequences. I work in the
21 Emergency Department. A typical day is very hectic
22 because there are never enough nurses to do all the
23 work that needs to be done. In the Critical Care
24 zone of the Emergency Department we have five nurses-
25 - we should have five nurses so each nurse can simply

1 care for two critically-ill patients. But usually,
2 each nurse has six or seven patients instead. That's
3 not safe. My number one concern is safety for our
4 patients and safety for our nurses. When patients
5 get frustrated with long wait times or delays in
6 care, they take it out on us. We are trying to take
7 care of every one at the same time and that's
8 impossible. As the number one level trauma center in
9 the Bronx, we have ambulances bringing people in all
10 day and night. Nurses try to cover each other's
11 patients and fill in all the holes, but it can feel
12 impossible. I have seen very ill patients get fed up
13 and walk out of the emergency room. Short staffing
14 leads to a cycle of frustrated nurses who quit
15 because they can't give patients the care they are
16 trained to give. Every week we have nurses quit.
17 It's not sustainable. Right now we have more
18 temporary agency nurses than regular staff nurses
19 than in my emergency Department. More full-time
20 staff nurses are leaving, more than before. Since
21 the pandemic, this is the worst I've seen it. During
22 the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were days
23 that I was scared to come home after my shift,
24 because I was afraid to get my family sick,
25

1
2 especially my youngest daughter who was only one and
3 a half years old with multiple heart defects. I was
4 only-- after all that we have gone through, it's
5 shameful that the City isn't paying us enough to keep
6 qualified nurses on the job. I am tired and I am
7 concerned. I care about my community in the Bronx
8 and want to deliver the best care, but I feel like we
9 are at a breaking point. Health + Hospitals need to
10 come to the table and deliver a fair contract that
11 will retain and respect nurses. They need to pay us
12 fairly. We work just as hard as the private hospital
13 nurses, and we need to earn a respectable salary that
14 helps support our families without having to work two
15 or three jobs, which is not an option for me because
16 I have a sick child at home. We need to add enough
17 that nurses don't leave after six months or a year.
18 It's costing New York City too much to keep nurses'
19 pay so low. Thank you.

20 MARION PERKINS: good morning. My name
21 is Marion Perkins. I am a Registered Nurse at Harlem
22 Hospital and a member, proud member of the New York
23 State Nurses Association. I want to thank the
24 council for taking the time to hear from me today. I
25 strongly encourage the City to direct more funding

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2 toward New York City H+H. We are in a staffing
3 crisis. The worst of the COVID-19 pandemic has ended,
4 but heavy patient loads continue. Staffing is the
5 worst that I have ever seen in my time as a nurse.
6 We have more agency nurses working in our hospital
7 than staff nurses. We hire new nurses but they leave
8 quickly for higher salaries and less stressful work
9 environment. At city hospitals, not in enough staff
10 means worse care for our patient. There are long
11 waits, our emergency department is swamped.
12 Sometimes patients choose to leave before receiving
13 the care they need. On our med surge, four of the
14 nurses have to scan the patient, do all the
15 bloodwork, and handle emergencies. We are doing the
16 work of nurses and ancillary staff. Medication
17 orders must be confirmed before they come back to us
18 incorrectly. During the height of COVID, travel
19 nurses were brought in, but not trained to provide
20 proper care. This doubled the workload on our staff
21 nurses. There are times when staff nurses care for
22 30 patients at a time. There is no acknowledgement
23 that we are working understaffed. Management is
24 disrespectful when dealing with staff. To provide
25 safe quality care to New York City, we need enough

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2 nurses at the bedside. We need permanently trained
3 staff, not expensive short-term travel nurses that
4 cost the City too much. Just last year, New York
5 City spent a shocking half a billion dollars on
6 temporary travel nurse contract. They're three times
7 that-- what it would cost to raise our wages to be
8 competitive with the private sector. New York City is
9 bleeding money while our public hospital hemorrhage
10 nurses. There is a simple solutions to stop this
11 crisis: pay parity now. It's not only the right
12 thing to do for nurses and our patient, it's the
13 fiscally responsible thing to do for New York City.
14 Pay parity and fair working condition are both vital
15 for recruiting and retaining nurse from the
16 communities we serve. Our patients can't afford for
17 New York City to delay [inaudible] in a fair contract
18 for nurses. Thank you for your time today.

19 SHIANNA MORRISON: Hello, good morning.
20 Thanks to the Council and the Chair for hearing from
21 us today. My name is Shianna Morrison and I'm a
22 Registered Nurse and a proud member of NYSNA. I work
23 at Rikers Island Correctional Health for over five
24 years. Today, I want to share my testimony about the
25 challenging conditions that nurses currently face at

1 Rikers Island due to the shortage of nursing staff.
2
3 As we speak, the nursing shortage at Rikers Island is
4 at an all-time high, and it is creating unbearable
5 working conditions for us nurses. We're constantly
6 overworked, overstressed, and under-supported. We
7 are stretched to the limits and it's affecting our
8 mental and physical health. Working at Rikers Island
9 is challenging to say the least. The lack of nurses
10 means that we have to work in extremely stressful and
11 unsafe conditions. We are fore dot take on more
12 patients than we could handle which meant that we
13 have to rush through our work and cannot provide the
14 care that our patients need in a timely manner. We
15 are also constantly worried about making mistakes or
16 missing something important which puts our patients'
17 lives at risk. We are expected to provide care for an
18 overwhelming number of inmates, some of whom have
19 serious medical and mental health conditions that
20 require constant attention. We have at times one
21 nurse covering two mental health units, totaling over
22 50 patients. We have one nurse working in our
23 clinics at time, caring for medications, narcotics,
24 responding to medical emergencies, performing wound
25 cares, administering injections, performing lab work

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2 and vital signs, attending to admissions and
3 discharge, supervising an unlicensed staff, expected
4 to answer all phone calls, create patient medication
5 call-down lists, expected to assist medical providers
6 at every beck and call, and expected to complete all
7 documentation in real time. We're expected to work
8 12-hour shifts without breaks at times. Sometimes
9 for several days in a row which makes it challenging
10 to provide quality care. Despite all these
11 challenges, we continue to do our best to provide or
12 care for our patients. We are committed to our work,
13 and we want to make a difference in the lives of
14 these inmates, but we cannot continue to work under
15 these horrid conditions. The lack of nurses also
16 means that we are often asked to work overtime,
17 sometimes several days in a row. This situation
18 makes a work/life balance extremely challenging. As
19 many of us suffers from burn out and exhaustion. It
20 is time for the City to take action and address the
21 nursing shortage at Rikers Island. We need more
22 nurses, more resources, and better working
23 conditions. We need to be supported and valued for
24 the work that we do. We cannot continue to work
25 under these inhumane conditions, and we deserve

1
2 better. We deserve safe staffing ratios. We deserve
3 pay parity between the public and private sector. We
4 know that the City can afford pay parity for public
5 sector nurses. They spent more than three times what
6 our raises would cost on temporary travel nurses last
7 year, over half a billion dollars. It feels like the
8 City is robbing from Peter to pay Paul. Nurses
9 deserve better, and our patients deserve better.
10 Thank you.

11 SARAH DOWD: Good morning. My name is
12 Sara Dowd. I'm a Nurse Practitioner at Kings County
13 Hospital. I'm a member of the New York State Nurses
14 Association. I've been working for Health +
15 Hospitals since 2017, first as a bedside nurse and
16 now as a Nurse Practitioner. The nurse understaffing
17 crisis puts care for my patients at risk. If we have
18 a patient that needs an immediate therapy requiring
19 one-to-one nurse-to-patient ratio, that care
20 sometimes gets delayed because we don't have enough
21 nurses. I've seen a patient in acute renal failure
22 who emergently needed dialysis, but there weren't
23 enough nurses to that dialysis treatment had to be
24 delayed. This is not a theoretical issue. That
25 patient could have died from having their treatment

1
2 delayed. You could take a minute and think about
3 yourself in that situation as the patient, because
4 that may one day very well be the case, and this is
5 all because we don't have enough nurses. It creates
6 a moral crisis when you have to choose which patient
7 gets care, because there aren't enough nurses to meet
8 all of our patient's needs, when you never know if
9 your patients are going to get all of the care that
10 they need in any given day. It leads to burnout
11 among nurses in an unending cycle of understaffing
12 and high turnover. We need a fair contract now that
13 includes pay parity with the private sector. New
14 York City can afford to give us raises. They're
15 spending more on temporary travel contracts to fill
16 staffing gaps than it would cost to give us raises we
17 need to retain staff nurses. Nurses are leaving our
18 public hospitals in droves to work in the private
19 sector where they can make \$20,000 a year more in
20 their first year and work in hospitals with better
21 staffing and more resources. Why would anyone choose
22 to stay in a higher-stress job for less money when
23 they have other options? That's why nurses don't
24 stay with us. Over 40 percent leave before they even
25 finish their first year. last year, as my colleagues

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2 have said, the City spent over half billion dollars
3 on temporary travel nurse contracts, and that's more
4 than three times what it would cost to make our wages
5 competitive with the private sector so we could fill
6 the staffing gaps ourselves with nurses who want to
7 live and work in our communities for the long-run.
8 This is about funding healthcare by New Yorkers for
9 New Yorkers. it should be a no-brainer that our
10 system should be funded in a way that's self-
11 sustaining in a way that will enable New Yorkers to
12 live and be healthy, where staff can work without
13 getting burned out and quitting after six months,
14 where patients can heal without falling victim to the
15 public health crisis that is short-staffing.
16 Frankly, it's disgraceful, after how many bodies we
17 bagged during COVID, after how many lives we saved,
18 that New York City doesn't treat its nurses better
19 than this. We need pay parity now for nurses, for
20 our patients and for New York City. Thank you.

21 VERMAN PIERRE: Good morning. My name is
22 Verman Pierre. I'm a member of the New York State
23 Nurses Association and a Registered Nurse at Henry J.
24 Carter Specialty Hospital where I've worked for a
25 year. It is a nursing home for patients that need

1 highly-specialized care. I'm here today to implore
2 the City to direct more funding toward NYC H+H. We
3 are in a serious staffing crisis, one that is made
4 worse because we cannot retain nurses. I, myself, am
5 trying to hold out as much as I can, but I love my
6 job. I'm a dedicated-- I'm dedicated and care about
7 my patients. I'm a nurse by choice. This was a
8 calling. Working at a public facility in itself its
9 calling because we believe that everyone should have
10 access to quality care no matter their ability to pay
11 or who they are. Right after I accepted the job at
12 Carter, I was offered a job at Montefiore. The
13 salary was considerably more. I turned it down
14 because I had already accepted the offer to work at
15 Carter where I knew that I had a real opportunity to
16 make a difference. I took pride in the fact that the
17 CNO [sic] that hired me said that they needed a nurse
18 like me to be a Charge Nurse on the vent floor. I was
19 told recently by my supervisor that they were proud
20 of me that I survived a whole year here. Let that
21 sink in. What that means is that hardly anybody
22 makes it a year. Many don't get that much further
23 than their initial orientation. As soon as they see
24 what the job really entails, they leave. It was
25

1 chaos from day one. I was expected to cover 32
2 patients with one other nurse and two CNAs. Imagine
3 the number of vents going off at the same time and
4 needing immediate attention. Then on top of it,
5 you're being called to float to other floors to
6 handle admissions that take a lot of time and
7 documentation. We also need to be there for the
8 families of our patients who are advocating for their
9 loved ones whom they want to see get the best
10 possible care. I know I would want the same. But
11 what can you do in a situation where you have half of
12 the workforce you need for things to run the way they
13 should? It's really hard to have to apologize all
14 the time to patients and family members. Even with
15 forgoing my breaks, it's just impossible to get
16 everything done by the end of the shift. There are
17 wonderful nurses that have been berated and
18 investigated because our short staffing prevented
19 them from being able to attend to an issue when they
20 were dealing with five other ones at the same time. I
21 believe in the mission of H+H, but it's getting
22 harder and harder for me to sustain my physical and
23 mental health. We are nurses who are-- who care a
24 lot, but we don't want to be martyrs in a system that
25

1
2 is broken. Our loyalty to H+H needs to be met with
3 dignity and respect. Pay parity is essential to
4 retain enough experienced nurses. We should be able
5 to take care of our families while caring for yours.
6 H+H nurses are mostly black and brown like me. I
7 love my community and want to serve it. I see myself
8 in my patients. I don't care where they come from or
9 what language they speak. This is an economic
10 justice issue and a racial justice issue. If New
11 York City truly cares about racial and economic
12 justice, you will do the right thing and give public
13 sector nurses pay parity now. Thank you for your
14 time today.

15 [applause]

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all so
17 much. Thank you for your testimony today. Thank
18 you. We've also been joined by Council Member
19 Krishnan.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'll now call up the
21 fourth panel, Chris Mann, Eric Lee, Joelle Balanshwan
22 [sp?], Ruth Lowencrown [sp?], Terry Troya [sp?], and
23 Doctor Jeanie D. Costley. You may begin when you're
24 ready.

25

1
2 DOCTOR JEANINE COSTLEY: Good morning to
3 the Council and specifically to Chair Holden and
4 members for the Committee on Veterans. Thank you for
5 the opportunity to testify. My name is Doctor Jeanine
6 Costley. I'm the Senior Vice President for
7 Transitional Services at the Institute for Community
8 Living, better known as ICL. ICL helps New Yorkers
9 with behavioral health challenges live healthy and
10 fulfilling lives by providing comprehensive housing,
11 healthcare, recovery services, and shelter services
12 to some of the most vulnerable members of our
13 community. First, thank you to Chair Holden for his
14 support of ICL Borden Avenue Veterans Shelter. It's
15 the only veterans' residence dedicated to veterans
16 experiencing homelessness. It's the largest in the
17 northeast. Chair Holden's leadership with the
18 Department of Veterans Services has helped us secure
19 upgrades to sleeping arrangements across the facility
20 and has helped us to establish meaningful
21 relationships with our community partners at Grub
22 Hub. ICL has moved over 100 veterans into permanent
23 housing in Fiscal Year 2022. Over 115 veterans in
24 supportive and independent housing in Fiscal Year
25 2023 thus far. And our newest supportive housing

1 development includes 20 units for veterans. But so
2 much more needs to be done. According to the D--
3 according to DHS, the New York City shelter census is
4 higher than it has been in decades. Many veterans are
5 among them, and despite this great need, the Mayor's
6 Executive Budget proposed \$2.5 cut to DHS and DSS.
7 The cuts would cause devastating impacts to critical
8 services like mental healthcare, substance abuse
9 care, and job training, and this is unacceptable.
10 Additionally, the human service workforce,
11 particularly front line workers in our shelters, are
12 woefully underpaid. As a result, the turnover levels
13 are astronomical and we struggle to hire staff, and
14 we struggle to maintain staff. The Mayor's Executive
15 Budget did include flexibility for providers to
16 adjust salaries, but it did not include a much-needed
17 6.5 COLA increase percent-- excuse me, 6.5 percent
18 COLA increase for human service workers. We urge the
19 City Council to support shelter programs like ICLs
20 Borden Avenue Veterans Residence and to strongly
21 oppose the cuts to DHS and DSS, and to invest in
22 human service workforces to get our veterans off the
23 street and homeless individuals into housing. We
24 need the Council and Mayor's support to do the right
25

1
2 thing by our veterans. And I just thank you for the
3 opportunity to today. Thank you.

4 ERIC LEE: Good afternoon. My name is
5 Eric Lee. I'm Director of Policy and Planning for
6 Homeless Services United. Homeless Services United
7 is a coalition of mission-driven homeless service
8 providers in New York City. Thank you for the
9 opportunity. HSU is extremely grateful to Speaker
10 Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and Chair Brannan, as
11 well as members of the Council for being stalwart
12 champion of homeless services safety net and
13 defending the right to shelter for families and
14 individuals. Thank you to Speaker Adams and Deputy
15 Speaker Ayala for your statements at the May 8th
16 General Welfare hearing. Faced with the crisis of
17 rising homelessness and an influx of asylum-seekers,
18 the City must do more to strengthen, not cut, the
19 homeless services safety net. The City rightly has a
20 moral and legal obligation to shelter everyone in
21 need, and the City must prioritize adequate resources
22 to the shelter system to fulfil these obligations so
23 that everyone has the choice to go to a safe place.
24 I urge the Council to not approve the DHS provider
25 flexible funding PEG in the Mayor's budget which

1 would cut 2.5 percent from all DHS and HRA contracted
2 shelters and programs. This cut would eliminate
3 vacant positions, thereby reducing services within
4 shelter, drive up higher caseloads for remaining
5 staff and just lower the level of services in
6 general. My written testimony has more detail on how
7 some of that would actually look within programs. I'm
8 extremely grateful to be joined today by a number of
9 staff from HSU member organizations like ICL and
10 Chris-- he'll be speaking next. We need a minimum of
11 6.5 percent COLA for city-contracted homeless
12 services and human services providers within the FY24
13 budget, given that our programs are struggling with
14 record-high turnover and vacancy rates. And we would
15 also like to see parity between city employees and
16 city contracted DHS and HRA nonprofit staff. HSU
17 also endorses the rental assistance package that's
18 comprised of Intros 229, 878, 893, and 894 which
19 would taken together would help more households avoid
20 shelter as well as quickly exit shelter into
21 permanent housing, which could create more shelter
22 capacity to assist asylum-seekers. By preserving
23 service-rich shelters, investing the nonprofit
24 workforce and strengthening rental assistance
25

1
2 programs, the City can be positioned to better assist
3 established as well as new New Yorkers in their time
4 of need. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

5 CHRIS MANN: Good afternoon. Thank you,
6 Chair Brannan and to the esteemed members of the City
7 Council Committee on Finance for the opportunity to
8 offer testimony today, and thanks to the entire
9 Council for your partnership. My name's Chris Mann.
10 I'm the Director of Policy and Advocacy at WIN, the
11 nation's largest provider of shelter and services to
12 families with children experiencing homelessness.
13 WIN operates 14 shelters and nearly 500 supportive
14 housing units across the five boroughs. Last night,
15 6,500 people called WIN home, including 3,600
16 children. WIN is working tirelessly to contend with
17 the worst homelessness crisis since the Great
18 Depression; however, the homeless shelter system in
19 New York City is at its breaking point. In this
20 year's budget we're asking that you prioritizing
21 solving rather than just managing this crisis by
22 including funding for mental health services, family
23 shelters, increases in provider contracts and
24 salaries, additional aid for asylum-seekers, and
25 expanded access to vouchers, and obviously protecting

1 the right to shelter. This past year, WIN worked
2 alongside Council Member Eric Bottcher to help draft
3 and pass Local Law 35 mandating mental health
4 clinicians and shelters for homeless families with
5 children. Unfortunately, the Executive Budget only
6 included one million, far less than the estimated 12
7 million WIN believes it'll take to actually implement
8 the first phase of Local Law 35. We implore the City
9 to allocate the full \$12 million in this year's
10 budget to ensure effective implementation. WIN
11 provides wrap-around services that are only made
12 possible by a tireless crew of hundreds of essential
13 human services workers. Their pay is grossly
14 inadequate to the life-saving services they provide
15 to the City. WIN's a proud member of the Just Pay
16 Campaign and along with the folks here, we're
17 demanding a 6.5 percent COLA at an estimated \$200
18 million. And I've submitted written testimony with
19 far more, but I just want to conclude by saying we
20 fully support the CityFEPS bill package, look forward
21 to seeing that passed. And I just want to say it's
22 so critical that the FY24 budget invest in essential
23 services focusing on solving rather than just
24 managing the crisis. Thank you.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
3 much. Thank you. We've also been joined by Council
4 Member Sanchez.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'll now call up the
6 fifth panel: Donald Nesbit remotely, Dilcy Benn,
7 Carmen De Leon, and Joe Puleo.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Donald Nesbit?

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 DONALD NESBIT: Good afternoon. I was
12 actually trying to [inaudible] able to. Thank you
13 for the opportunity, Council. I'm Donald Nesbit,
14 Executive Vice President for Local 372, New York
15 [inaudible] education employees, District Council 37.
16 I'm here today to provide testimony on the mayor's
17 proposed budget on behalf of the approximately 24,000
18 members who represent our school children under the
19 leadership of Shaun D. Francois the first [inaudible]
20 to represent to perform essential services are to
21 provide assistance and services for our public school
22 children to make sure that they are learning-ready.
23 Our school crossing guards make sure that the
24 children cross the street safely in the morning and
25 afternoon commutes. Our school lunch employees

1
2 unload and serve food every day including the
3 summers. They continue to feed both students and the
4 community when emergencies arrive [inaudible] they
5 did during the pandemic. Our school aides are with
6 students all throughout the day [inaudible] engaged
7 in numerous activities to support our educational
8 development of our students and help the children get
9 to their buses at the end of the day. Our community
10 titles, parent coordinators, school neighborhood
11 workers, and paraprofessionals work with parents to
12 navigate the Department of Education and work with
13 the Department of Homeless Services to make sure
14 children get to school and have a place to sleep at
15 night. Our substance abuse prevention [inaudible]
16 mental health, and their mental health needs and
17 substance abuse, gun violence, and bullying, as well
18 gang prevention, and mediation. Many members of
19 Local 372 also are members of the community which
20 they work in. They are neighbors to our students and
21 their families, and some are parents to school
22 children themselves.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 DONALD NESBIT: I want to first say thank
25 you the Council and speak on [inaudible] retirement

1 and automatic enrollment. Currently our members are
2 not allowed to have an optional choice of joining a
3 pension system. Our members are 55 percent-- 55
4 percent of our members that actually join
5 [inaudible]. 71 percent are female, average age is
6 36 years old, and average salary is \$31,000 or less.
7 New York City should offer automatic enrollment to
8 the Board of Retirement System due to these
9 [inaudible] it's actually good for the City as
10 [inaudible] when these same employees decide to
11 retire. Financing for this can be paid by the
12 actuaries report which shows there's an \$8 billion
13 dollar cliff that the City will not have to pay and
14 it gives income in the next 10 years, as investments
15 have been well-- have done well at the retirement
16 system. Today there was a report issued throughout
17 the NYPD that there should be cuts to-- I'm sorry if
18 I'm breaking up and I apologize. There was something
19 that was circulating throughout the NYPD that there
20 should be cuts of almost 500 school crossing guards,
21 and we push back at that, because they are a rarity.
22 More vacancies that need to be filled for the safety
23 of our children. School lunch employees, we're
24 asking that there's an increase of-- that there is
25

1
2 1,000 school lunch employees that are hired, as
3 school lunch employees--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
5 expired.

6 DONALD NESBIT: are already understaffed.
7 I have submitted the written testimony. I'm sorry
8 for my reception being shaky, but I've submitted the
9 testimony, written testimony, for the Council and I
10 thank you all for your time. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Donald.

12 DILCY BENN: Good morning, Chairman
13 Brannan and fellow Council Members. My name is Dilcy
14 Benn. I'm the President of Local 1505, a DC37
15 representing close to 1,000 City Park workers, also
16 known as CPWs, as well as seasonal workers who
17 primarily work at the New York City Parks and
18 Recreation Department in all five boroughs, perform
19 and clean up and conducting maintenance in all city
20 parks. I was here March during the Preliminary Budget
21 hearing, and I am back today requesting funding for
22 the 100 CPW staff positions in the Parks Department.
23 In my testimony at the Preliminary Budget hearing in
24 March I requested additional 1,000 junior entry-level
25 positions to be added to the Parks Department. These

1
2 positions could be a pipeline for many people to gain
3 full-time employment working for the City. The City
4 Council heard our request and included an additional
5 1,000 entry-level positions in Parks and in response
6 to the Mayors Fiscal Year 24 Preliminary Budget. It
7 was disappointing to see that the Mayor did not
8 include it in his Fiscal 24 Executive Budget.
9 Furthermore, we could not have-- we wouldn't have to
10 come back every year requesting the CPWs positions in
11 the Parks Department were funded at one percent of
12 the City's total budget. If this were to happen,
13 many of the budget requests would be fully-funded,
14 and we would not have to engage in this budget dance
15 every year. Now, the weather is beautiful outside
16 the parks are being heavily utilized. It is critical
17 to have City Park workers and seasonal workers more
18 than ever. There's plenty of work to be done to
19 maintain and clean these parks day-in and day-out.
20 On behalf of my members, I want to thank our partners
21 in the Play Fair Coalitions for always standing with
22 us and advocating alongside us for more funding for
23 Parks and pushing for the one percent for Parks. We
24 will not stop until we get there. Lastly, I would
25 like to thank the City Council for working with us to

1
2 restore our Parks workers' positions and recognizing
3 the hard work of my membership. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to testify today, and I would be happy to
5 take any questions if you have any.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

7 JOE PULEO: I guess I'll go next, okay.
8 Thank you City Council people for having this
9 hearing. My name is Joe Puleo. I am the President of
10 Local 983. We represent the Urban Park Rangers, the
11 Parks Enforcement Officers, the Associate Park
12 Service Workers, and all the City's seasonal aides.
13 Okay. For the last 20 years we've been advocating
14 one percent for parks. We're not there yet. We wish
15 to be there sooner than later. This would probably
16 alleviate a lot of the issues that we have here
17 today. We have a lot of park usage in parks for
18 various reasons, and I think all of you know why.
19 Our parks need workers. They need them now, okay?
20 The salaries that are out there are not as
21 competitive as they once were for our parks people.
22 You can work at Chipotle, you can work at Starbucks
23 for the amount of money that our members make. And
24 with the work that they perform, a lot of them
25 unfortunately would rather prefer to be in air

1
2 conditioned environment rather than be on the beach
3 and deal with crowds and things as such. Last week
4 alone we lost nine Parks Enforcement Officers. Why
5 did we lose them? Because the salary structure does
6 not permit them to stay. They are prequalified for
7 all sorts of other law enforcement positions. They
8 go to state police. They go to NYPD. They go to
9 Suffolk County. They go to Nassau County. They are
10 the pick of the bunch when it comes to law
11 enforcement. We need to keep them-- we need our
12 numbers to go up. We cannot have this skeletal crew
13 in our parks. Our Urban Park Rangers are always
14 subjected 'til the final moment for them, whether
15 they know they have a job or not for the next year.
16 We need the funding. We need the funding now, and we
17 appreciate all the efforts and help that you've done
18 in the past, but we need more now. Thank you again.
19 I appreciate your time.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Turn your mic on.

21 CARMEN DE LEON: Thank you. Good
22 afternoon City Council. Chairman Brannan, thank you.
23 My name is Carmen De Leon. I am the President of
24 Local 768 of the Professional in Healthcare Division.
25 I am a respiratory therapist and I am also a lifelong

1 citizen of New York City. I am here today on behalf
2 of the members of DC37, my Local as well. And I need
3 to I guess state here that we need pay parity. And
4 why do I say that? I say that not just for those in
5 the healthcare profession, but all across. My Local
6 is an eclectic local. When you go to sit down and
7 eat in a restaurant, my member has been there to
8 inspect it to make sure that it is safe for you to
9 eat. Your water supply is helped and maintained by
10 members in my Local. Rikers Island, we provide
11 mental health services through licensed creative arts
12 therapists, social services. So I'm here to say that
13 I am bleeding out members to the private sector. My
14 members-- I have dental assistants who received a pay
15 increase, but it is way below where they should be.
16 Their pay increase, I had looked it up. One of my
17 members is a dental assistant, went to \$45,000 from
18 about \$37-38. A single parent with two kids on that
19 salary, they're below the poverty level. And how do
20 we as a city say that these workers, my members, are
21 valuable if they are living below the poverty line.
22 I'm also concerned about the cuts to the City
23 Services because those things will impact my members.
24 Members of mine during the pandemic had to choose

1
2 whether they could stay and do mandated overtime or
3 whether they had to go and pick up their child
4 because the local libraries were not available to
5 them, because their kids after school who go there
6 until they come out from work or someone will come
7 and pick them up, or an afterschool program that
8 holds their child until 5:00-5:30. So these things
9 are important services, not just to the communities,
10 but to the workers of the City. They provide these
11 services that allow my members to be able to go to
12 work. Open schools that open early in the morning at
13 7:30 allow my members that have to be at work at 8:00
14 in the morning to be able to drop their kids off and
15 report on time. So these services across the board
16 are important. When you talk about cuts to CUNY,
17 those things will affect my members. There are only
18 two respiratory care programs, and they are BMCC and
19 Bronx-- sorry, Westchester Community College. So
20 when you talk about cuts to those programs, you talk
21 about the impact. That then overflows into the care
22 that one might receive at a hospital, because when
23 you put the burden on nurses to now become a
24 respiratory therapist or to have to clean a patient,
25 you increase their patient load and their time and

1
2 the quality care that you or your loved ones may
3 receive at the hospital. When you talk about social
4 services and my social workers that work in all
5 facets of the city, you're talking about mental
6 health services that may not be able to be given
7 promptly or properly, because they are overworked,
8 and when I say overworked, they're carrying caseloads
9 of 100 or 40. That's unheard of. So I'm asking you
10 here all today to please as much as you can fight for
11 the city workers, fight for the restoration of the
12 funding for these vital services. Thank you for your
13 time. I appreciate it.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We've
15 also been joined by Council Member Barron. Joe, how
16 many PEP officers do we have right now?

17 JOE PULEO: Probably 200 and something
18 now, because the numbers are drastically declining
19 and we're not able to hire them in time. The-- like
20 I said, the level of attrition has skyrocketed
21 because of all the other opportunities that are out
22 there and available for them. I mean, we're working
23 on a contract. We're trying to, you know, have some
24 city matching funds, which I hope OLR will allow us
25 to do. That'll help a little bit, but I don't think

1
2 it'll solve the problem. We need more people in the
3 parks itself, and I'll work on with City Council with
4 the OLR to see if we can, you know, at this next
5 contract get them some increments in the middle of
6 their careers, because that's when they usually
7 leave. They come on. They basically at \$50,000 but
8 they don't see any dramatic increases 'til later on
9 their career, and at that juncture they start to turn
10 around that age where NYPD won't take them anymore
11 and these other-- so I want to make it more
12 attractive to them. We appreciate any help that you
13 could provide with us on that. But definitely the
14 beaches are going to be crazy, you know, this summer.
15 We have all the influx of the migrants in our parks,
16 and we don't have the federal funding we had during
17 COVID. So that means we're going to be down a couple
18 thousand people that could have been available to us
19 previously. And with the influx of these new people
20 coming into our parks, you know, it's going to be a
21 real struggle to say the least.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.
23 Councilman Ossé?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you for your
25 testimonies. The only question I was going to ask is

1
2 how is the DC37 contract, that I think was recently
3 signed, how is that going to effect in the pay of
4 some of these Parks workers.

5 JOE PULEO: Okay, well, I was referring
6 specifically to the Urban Park Rangers PEP Officers.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Okay.

8 JOE PULEO: They're considered uniformed,
9 so they have a separate and apart contract from DC37.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Okay.

11 JOE PULEO: So we actually negotiate
12 directly with them as opposed to collectively with
13 all the other titles. So I'm hoping that OLR, you
14 know, will be receptive and allow what they do with
15 like the police officers and give us an extra
16 percentile or so, you know, to make it more
17 attractive and maybe even use some matching funds in
18 the percentages. So it would motivate them to stay
19 rather than leave. They all love the job. you know,
20 it's just that they see what's outside and what the
21 qualifications are, and the training that we provide
22 them, you know, makes them too attractive to other
23 people, you know, and they gobble them up. Because
24 they're basically pre-screened, you know, for other
25

1
2 jobs and they don't have to worry about, you know,
3 how they'll perform.

4 DILCY BENN: Contract benefitted my
5 members. My members are-- I have more members in
6 Parks than any other title. And we are the
7 maintenance and operations. The CPWs, are mostly out
8 there doing mostly the work alongside Joe members,
9 but they started-- my people started-- got an \$18
10 dollars an hour with the contract, so we appreciated
11 that, but it could never be enough. I have over
12 1,000 members. I have members that are homeless.
13 They work for the City of New York which I think is a
14 shame, okay? I've been here over 34 years. I made
15 \$46,000 last year. Okay? They don't pay us enough
16 to do what we do, but we do it. My members do it
17 every day, okay? And they do it and they come back
18 and they do it over and over again. But the contract
19 did raise the minimum wage to \$18 dollars a hour,
20 which is still not enough, okay? You got to remember
21 one thing, if you got a family, and I got people that
22 have families. I don't have-- my kids are grown, but
23 I have people that have families. How do you support
24 your family on \$46,000 a year? That's because I've
25 been here so long. My members that haven't been here

1 that long only make \$30-- something thousand. I
2 think it's like \$36-37. You know, it's sad that we
3 work for the City of New York and that we are
4 struggling like this and we have to struggle to get
5 to work. The childcare services, that was put into
6 the contract into the budget, I thank y'all for that,
7 because it really helps my members, but it can ever
8 be enough. \$18 an hour, people at McDonald's got more
9 than we got. And during COVID, everybody and their
10 kids ran to the Parks Department. Everybody was out
11 there. We had toilets overflowing. I had-- six of my
12 members had died, because we had no choice but to go
13 to work. We can't work from home. We are
14 maintenance and operations, but my people came out
15 here and did it every day, and I got to thank the
16 Play Fair Coalition, because I could show you the
17 garbage pile-up, the urinals that were piled up. I
18 could show you thousands of people in the parks. I
19 could show you the garbage that wasn't picked up.
20 This is what we do every day. Okay? I people out
21 here in 100 degree weather with lawn mowers, weed
22 whackers. Like I said, this is what we do every day,
23 and when the summer gets-- when it comes around, I
24 got more people coming out into the parks, so we need
25

1
2 the help. I got people 40, 50 years old shoveling
3 snow. Okay? This is what we do, but we're not
4 getting paid enough any way you cut this. I-- but I
5 do thank you for what you did for us in the budget.
6 I thank you for that.

7 CARMEN DE LEON: I'm sorry, I just want
8 to say one more thing. When we're also talking about
9 parity, we have to talk about parity with the private
10 sector, and the reason why that is, is because we're
11 losing a lot of city workers, workers that have been
12 generational. Their grandparents, their parents
13 themselves were told to come work for the City,
14 you're going to have a good job, okay? And I can
15 tell you right now, when I came in-- I'm a brand new
16 President. I'm two and a half years in, alright, and
17 I looked at the salaries of the City workers, and I
18 couldn't believe it. My first priority because I
19 knew what I knew from my profession was to get us as
20 close as we could to the private sector. The minute
21 I did that, the private sector got another raise. I
22 am bleeding out social workers. I am bleeding out
23 respiratory therapists. I'm bleeding out
24 exterminators who go do rat and mosquito abatement
25 for the City, okay? So when we don't have parity

1
2 with the private sector, you want-- these hiring
3 halls are great, but once people start to understand
4 that they can go make money somewhere else, they are
5 out the door. I have social workers in the hospital
6 who will stay a year, get that experience fresh out
7 of school, and then go to the private sector. I
8 can't keep up. I have HR Directors saying to me
9 please, can you look at hiring social workers, dental
10 assistants, and respiratory therapists. As of today
11 there's an expected shortage of respiratory
12 therapists until the year of 2025. If those programs
13 in CUNY get cuts for funding, that is going to lead
14 to even bigger shortages within my field, the nursing
15 field, and so forth. So we-- you know, we want to
16 run a good city. People come to this city. I have
17 immigrants who come from other countries to get
18 healthcare from our New York City hospitals, okay?
19 They will get the money together to fly to get
20 healthcare in New York City, and that says a lot, but
21 we're straining the system and we're not even going
22 to discuss the asylum-seekers who need all types of
23 healthcare. So I really am urging the Council and
24 the Mayor's Office to take a look at parity pay. You
25 know, we had an equity panel. I'm thankful that we

1 had that money come again to the City and to DC37.
2 But let me tell you what that parity pay is. A
3 respiratory therapists gave me, after I put my life
4 on the line during the COVID pandemic, during the
5 H1N1 pandemic-- I've been a therapist for 21 years.
6 They gave me \$685. That was it. That's not parity
7 for me. That didn't even-- that doesn't even cover
8 my groceries and some of my utilities now. When you
9 take a look at it-- based on the way price is, I
10 blinked, I went to the supermarket one day, stuff
11 that I bought was \$35 is now \$70. So we need to look
12 at this, and I understand that we're basing it on
13 inflation, and the inflation rate is going down, but
14 it's not enough. There's no recovery. And please
15 understand historically DC37 members have taken zeros
16 on our contract in order to be able to stay employed
17 and help run this city. And since that time there
18 has been no real catch-up. This is the first
19 contract that we've gotten that has gotten some real
20 catch-up, but it's not enough in today's given
21 economy. Thank you for the time.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Absolutely, and
24 thank you to the three of you for testifying. Not
25 only do we need to look at parity pay, but you know,

1
2 New York City alone, is a city of 112 billionaires,
3 right? There needs to be a wealth tax on those who
4 are using some of the public goods that you all, you
5 know, work with. And whether it's our parks, our
6 public spaces as a whole, you know, the money exists
7 here in this City. It exists here in the state.
8 You know, there's so much that, you know, we could do
9 but also our state partners can do in terms of
10 providing you all, your members--

11 JOE PULEO: [interposing] And the
12 federal. And the federal.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And the federal, of
14 course, the pay that you deserve. So thank you for
15 being here today.

16 CARMEN DE LEON: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all so
18 much.

19 JOE PULEO: Appreciate it.

20 DILCY BEEN: Thank you.

21 [applause]

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Going to call up the
23 next-- going to call up the next panel. Daniel Clay
24 [sp?], Robert Ramos, Oliva Duong, and Rafael Espinal.

25

1
2 ROBERT RAMOS: I'm going to try to do
3 this in two minutes. So just give me some leeway.
4 Thank you to the City Council Members for this
5 opportunity to speak on an issue that is dear to my
6 heart, education. My name is Robert Ramos. I am the
7 President of DC37 Local 205. I represent 3,000
8 daycare workers throughout the five boroughs. As a
9 product of the New York City Public School System,
10 and educator for 21 years, and a father of three
11 young men, I understand the impact of equality [sic],
12 Early Childhood Education and K-12 education can make
13 our people's lives, how it is an instrument for
14 upward mobility, how it can transform families and
15 communities for the better. With all the levels of
16 education under attack throughout the country with
17 teachers and schools being censored, New York City
18 must do better. We must increase Early Childhood
19 Education and K-12 funding so that our children can
20 learn to think critically, fight for social justice,
21 become our future leaders, and build a better
22 society. Finally, I want to ask the Mayor and the
23 City Council to honor Early Childhood Education staff
24 and educators who were deemed essential workers
25 during COVID and worked tirelessly to keep New York

1
2 City children safe while their parents helped to
3 fight COVID and keep the City running. Early
4 Childhood teachers and staff who are mainly women and
5 people of color are underpaid compared to their
6 counterparts in the DOE while working longer hours
7 all year round. We ask that the City Council
8 allocate increased funding for Early Childhood
9 Education into the budget, which the Mayor failed to
10 do so. This will allow the City to negotiate in good
11 faith a fair collective bargaining agreement that
12 includes pay parity for teachers, wage increases for
13 support staff, the reinstatement of longevity and
14 vacation days, as well as other important items who
15 will also honor Early Childhood Education teachers
16 and staff. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you

18 OLIVIA DUONG: Good afternoon Chair
19 Brannan and fellow Council Members. My name is
20 Olivia Duong and I am the President of Local 3778
21 representing-- DC37 representing 300 civilian NYPD
22 professional titles such as criminalists, City
23 research scientists, architects and engineers. I'm
24 here to highlight a group that doesn't get a lot of
25 spotlight, but has been providing essential public

1 safety services in the background for a long time,
2 the forensic scientists or criminalists working at
3 the NYPD Police Laboratory. The criminalists of the
4 Police Laboratory of the NYPD Detective Bureau are
5 forensic scientists who analyze different types of
6 evidence involved in an alleged crime such as drugs,
7 latent fingerprints, gunshot residue, firearms,
8 etcetera, using accredited scientific methods. We
9 provide investigative information to detectives and
10 our scientific findings to the Assistant District
11 Attorneys across all five boroughs, as well as the
12 Federal Government. Criminalists also testify in
13 court as expert witnesses to the results of our
14 analyses. Our testimony educated juries to make
15 informed and fair verdicts. Throughout the pandemic,
16 criminalists were deemed essential workers for our
17 role in public safety and we answered the call.
18 Council Members, there is an urgent need for a new
19 laboratory building. currently, there are just under
20 400 employees, forensic chemistry, firearms analysis,
21 crime scene departments that work out of a five-story
22 building in Queens built in 1930, originally a
23 department store refitted as a college university,
24 and most recently a chemical laboratory. The current
25

1 facility is outdated and in a state of constant
2 repair and disrepair. I believe testimony from our
3 former Chief of Forensic Investigations Division
4 given a few years ago mentioned how urgently we need
5 a new home. Millions of dollars have been put in and
6 continue to be put in just to ensure the roof does
7 not leak. Our operations have long outgrown the
8 space provided for our testing needs. For example,
9 we have analysts analyzing bulk controlled substances
10 in a small closet-size room for weeks at a time. We
11 have laboratory spaces where they're up to 20 people
12 in a room and constant traffic flow around fume hoods
13 where hazard chemicals are being used. Our lounges
14 are overcrowded, not able to accommodate staff having
15 lunch or breaks. No training and meeting spaces--
16 are difficult to coordinate. I ask the Committee to
17 consider my testimony for this item in the NYPD
18 Capital Budget on behalf of the civil servants who
19 are rarely seen or heard, but make a profound impact
20 to public safety in New York City. In spite of many
21 facility challenges we face, my colleague have
22 strived to maintain the highest quality and integrity
23 of their own forensic work for the citizens of New
24 York City every day. Chair Brannan, I will submit a
25

1
2 more-detailed version of my written testimony for the
3 record, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak
4 today.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

6 RAFAEL ESPINAL: Thank you, Chairperson
7 Brannan and Members of City Council, for the
8 opportunity to testify before you today. My name is
9 Rafael Espinal, and I'm a proud Brooklyn native and
10 the former City Council Member of the 37th District
11 which is now represented by the amazing Sandy Nurse.
12 I feel incredibly fortunate to speak before you today
13 as the President and Executive Director of the
14 Freelancer's Union, but before I begin, I just want
15 to express our solidarity with DC37 and all the
16 public service workers who are advocating for pay
17 equity and all of the necessary needs that they need
18 to provide quality work for all New Yorkers.
19 Freelancer's Union is the largest and fastest growing
20 independent work organization in the country. In New
21 York City which is our home, we represent over 50,000
22 freelancers working in a diverse number of essential
23 fields such as service providers, accountants,
24 healthcare workers, media workers, and artists. In
25 2019, in a survey conducted with the mayor's Office

1
2 of Media Entertainment we found that 30 percent of
3 New Yorkers were performing freelance work, offering
4 valuable skills, efficiency and on-demand labor to
5 New Yorkers, small businesses, and larger companies.
6 Currently, the number of independent workers is
7 rapidly increasing as more individuals are seeing the
8 benefits of the work. Let's not fail to mention the
9 immigrants like my parents or the asylum-seekers
10 arriving here every day who turn to freelance work to
11 help them assimilate to our city financially. The
12 street vendor, the domestic worker, the general
13 contractor, the small business owners in Bay Ridge
14 and in East New York. Independent work offers
15 individuals higher wages, schedule flexibility and
16 freedom of management. However, without the
17 necessary support or representation independent
18 workers face a myriad of challenges when creating and
19 maintaining a successful career. Freelancer's Union
20 with its nonprofit working today helps bridge this
21 vital gap and support and resources by providing
22 insurance benefits, legal training, advocacy, and a
23 community to these workers. Freelancers Union has
24 also fought for and won protections for freelance
25 workers like the nation's first Freelancers and Free

1 Act to protect folks from nonpayment right here in
2 the City. We're not stopping there. Our goal is to
3 create independent workers financial services team
4 that will be dedicated to providing free support for
5 freelancers in filing taxes and other financial
6 support needs. In addition, we intend to enhance the
7 safeguarding measures for our members through the
8 establishment of a legal services division dedicated
9 to addressing concerns, including contract matters,
10 licensing, copyright and nonpayment issues, and we
11 are kindly seeking the Council's backing in
12 facilitating the development of these initiatives.
13 We also run a freelancer's hub in partnership with
14 MOME [sic], which is a free co-working space in
15 Brooklyn that provides freelancers the opportunity to
16 book a free desk, be able to network, build
17 community, have direct access to our workshops and
18 legal and financial clinics. If the COVID-19
19 pandemic taught us anything, it's that now more than
20 ever independent workers need access to the support
21 and resources that can foster successful solo
22 careers. In order to meet growing needs of our
23 community, we turn to the City Council to provide
24 additional support for independent workers through
25

1
2 the low-wage worker support, legal services for the
3 working poor, and the job training and placement
4 initiatives. We are extremely grateful for the
5 leadership from the Council and the Speaker, and we
6 respectively urge for you all to support these
7 programs in Fiscal Year 2024. So thank you very much
8 for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the
9 Freelancers Union and New York's 1.3 million
10 freelancers. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all so
12 much. Thank you for your testimony.

13 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next panel is Lucy
15 Sexton, Lisa Gold, Charlotte Martin, Christopher
16 Durosini, David Freudenthal, Sheila Lewandowski, and
17 Roselyn Barber [sp?]. After which we will call up a
18 remote panel. The first remote panel will be Annie
19 Miguez, Alice Bufkin, Susan Learner, Shawn CT Young
20 [sp?], Tydie Abreu, and Andre Ward.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You can begin when
22 you're ready, whichever. Start left to right,
23 whatever you want. Sure, go ahead.

24 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Good morning. Not
25 anymore. Good afternoon. My name is Sheila

1 Lewandowski. I'm Co-founder, Executive Director of
2 the Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island City,
3 Queens in Council Member Wong's district. Thank you,
4 Council Member. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Chair.
5 I just want to start with I think austerity for me is
6 code for oppression, and I would like us to stop
7 using that term. I understand what it is to have to
8 live on a budget. I live on a budget. I grew up dirt
9 poor where we had no water and heat in New York City,
10 but I don't-- austerity is a way to oppress people. I
11 am here today with my colleagues to, you know, to ask
12 for-- the first time in history, adding \$40 million
13 dollars to the baseline funding for the Department of
14 Cultural Affairs, invest an additional \$10 million to
15 more equitably and fully-fund the City's cultural
16 ecosystem to be split equally between CIGs and the
17 CDF grantees. But I do want to come back to my words
18 about thinking about austerity. The moment now is
19 critical. The mayor and you are in positions of
20 power to define a narrative of New York City stands
21 for. It does for-- we further starve our economy and
22 our people. Starving the beast and oppression and
23 austerity all go together, and you guys know better
24 than I do the history of starving the beast and what
25

1
2 it means. Culture and its expression through the
3 arts is a way to build greater equity and shared
4 responsibility for the future of the City. We uplift
5 each other's stories, beauty, songs, dances, gardens,
6 and through that we keep transforming the City into
7 one where all, you know, all trickles up and not down
8 and throughout as opposed to trickling down like what
9 spills down. I don't need to get into more graphics
10 on that. Culture in New York City is one of the
11 major reasons hybrid and virtual workers will choose
12 to continue to live in New York City and have their
13 children be taught here in New York City and why
14 refugees and migrants come, many of whom we had at
15 the Chocolate Factory on Mother's Day who didn't want
16 to leave because we were their living room that day.
17 Culture is one of the main reasons they stay. We do
18 not ban books here. We do not ban dances. We do not
19 ban expressions, makeup. Anyway, I just-- please
20 fund culture. It is for all of us and it is why
21 people live and stay here. It's our economy, too. You
22 want to transform buildings into more housing, people
23 aren't going to live there if we don't have an
24 identity of the City. Thank you.

1
2 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Hello. Hi. Chair
3 Brannan, members of the Committee. I'm David
4 Freudenthal. I'm from Carnegie Hall. I'm here today
5 testifying on behalf of the Cultural Institutions
6 Group, and our Chair Coco Killingsworth. I just want
7 to start by saying Sheila said it, and there it is.
8 That captures our case. I want to thank you for your
9 past support for arts and culture across the City.
10 And the CIG joins with our cultural colleagues to ask
11 that your budget reflect the value that our
12 institutions bring to our city. As you heard, it's
13 all about the base. The \$40 million that was added
14 at adoption in 23, we urge that that be restored and
15 baselined, and the additional \$10 million to be split
16 evenly between the CIG and the program groups. This
17 is key to create more stability and equity within our
18 sector. We also urge the restoration of all the
19 Council initiatives. Please ensure that the
20 organizations can-- our organizations can develop and
21 maintain their workforces sustainably. Culture, as
22 Coco said, Coco-- culture is a very-- is the very
23 heartbeat of our city. We're community anchors for
24 employment, for commerce, for social connection.
25 We're the load start of our city's economic

1
2 revitalization, our continued growth. We are
3 essential human service providers with our partners
4 in government. Our ranks of the CIG include some of
5 the most vital cultural, science, and artistic
6 institutions in the world. We're the core of the
7 cultural economy and we make New York the greatest
8 city. The diversity of our offerings is our greatest
9 strength, and we strive to create equitable cultural
10 opportunities for New Yorkers in every borough.
11 There's no part of our city's life that we don't
12 impact, parks, schools, businesses. The return on
13 our institutions is outstanding. We hope to be able
14 to continue that work with your support. I have to
15 include how much our sector is struggling at this
16 point. We're not back to where we were in 2019, and
17 we face severe impacts to our programs and services
18 if this essential funding is left out of budget-- out
19 of your budget this year and we're left behind. We
20 stand ready to partner with you to meet the
21 challenges that our city faces. Thank you.

22 LISA GOLD: Okay. Good afternoon Chair
23 Brannan, Chair Ossé. Thank you. My name is Lisa
24 Gold and I'm the Executive Director of the Asian
25 American Arts Alliance, and we are a 40-year-old

1 nonprofit service organization that works to ensure
2 greater representation, equity, and opportunities for
3 AAPI artist and arts organizations across all five
4 boroughs of the City. I'm here because I want you to
5 know that I'm counting on you to ensure that arts and
6 cultural funding is included in the budget priority
7 list and that you champion a baseline increase of \$40
8 million dollars for the Department of Cultural
9 Affairs and allocate an additional \$10 million to
10 that baseline to stabilize our organizations. You
11 know, ensuring equitable distribution of DCLA
12 funding, to ensure that BIPOC organizations like
13 ours, disabled, LGBTQIA+, and older communities
14 historically underfunded organizations that comprise
15 and service these populations, they need to receive
16 the financial support administered by DCLA in an
17 equitable fashion. We all know that culture is the
18 envy of the world. Our culture is the envy of the
19 world, and it's a major economic driver for
20 generating thousands of jobs, and it is the engine
21 that powers the tourism in New York City. And we
22 know that the arts make a smart investment in our
23 city as they lead to improved outcomes in health,
24 mental health, physical health, education, and safety
25

1
2 for all of us. An example, like our community, the
3 AAPI community is under attack, I mean physically,
4 literally, and through the power of the cultural--
5 the Council of Cultural Immigrant Initiative, we were
6 able to give 30 artists micro-grants to present acts
7 of creative care for their community, empowering both
8 the artist and their communities. We reached more
9 than 50,000 New Yorkers through this program and it
10 was traditional folk songs, in-language videos, dance
11 workshops, working with senior communities. This is
12 the power of the arts. And so I want to thank you
13 for your continued support of A4 and the cultural
14 community, and all of our cultural workers, AAPI and
15 not, that contribute so much to our city. So please
16 ensure that the New York cultural sector continues to
17 be the envy of the world by funding DCLA at an
18 appropriate level for a world leader in culture.
19 Thank you.

20 CHARLOTTE MARTIN: Hello. Thank you for
21 holding today's hearing, Chair and Council Members.
22 My name is Charlotte Martin. I'm the Director of
23 Access Initiatives at the Intrepid Museum. In this
24 capacity I have the privilege of overseeing the
25 museum's Veterans Access Initiative that includes a

1
2 range of programs and resources for current and
3 former service members and their families. I want to
4 take a moment to acknowledge the general financial
5 support of the City Council Committee on Veterans
6 over the years through the Veterans Community
7 Development Initiative. I want to thank them for the
8 ongoing effort to connect veterans with one another
9 and with cultural resources like the intrepid museum.
10 At the Intrepid Museum, our mission is to advance the
11 understanding of the intersection of history and
12 innovation in order to honor our heroes, educate the
13 public, and inspire future generations. Centered on
14 a former Navy aircraft carrier, we have long-engaged
15 veterans through Veterans Day and Memorial Day events
16 such as Fleet Week happening right now, a robust
17 volunteer program, and free admission for veterans.
18 In fall of 2015 we also launched free family programs
19 that welcome active military families looking for an
20 opportunity to explore the City, recently returned
21 veterans looking for a way to spend time and
22 reconnect with family, and older veterans sharing
23 their experience with family members for the first
24 time. We started offering free tours for PTS support
25 group at the Bronx VA, and we now offer a free in-

1 person and virtual tours to any veterans'
2 organization. We soon expanded to offering Intrepid
3 After-hours which are evening programs exclusively
4 for current and former service members with behind-
5 the-scenes opportunities, veteran-led community
6 workshops, catered dinner, and plenty of bonding
7 across branches, service eras, and post-service
8 experience. Thanks to City Council funding we're
9 able to schedule these more regularly and bring in
10 high-quality veteran artists and performers and open
11 up to a wider audience. We also began offering
12 special Veterans Plus programs including film
13 screenings, performances, pride events, and others.
14 We've benefitted from special trainings from
15 community partners and the advice and feedback of our
16 Council of Veteran Advisors. We've also-- other
17 recipients of city funding including Stage Vets
18 [sic], [inaudible] projects and others have been
19 crucial partners and advocates for their
20 constituents. And as part of Fleet Week, we actually
21 have-- we're excited to offer premier performance of
22 Exit 12 Dance Company Truths Colliding that'll bring
23 together veterans, military family members and
24 refugees who've been shaped by experiences of war.
25

1
2 And our goal is to spon-- is to foster community
3 connection-- community and connection both in-person
4 and online among veterans including those who
5 frequently feel excluded from traditional veteran
6 spaces, including exploring narratives that we have
7 not previously been able to do such as their upcoming
8 program on the contributions and experiences of LGBTQ
9 service members and military children. The Veterans
10 Community Development Initiative has been crucial to
11 the growth and impact of the museum's programs for
12 veterans and their loved ones and respectfully ask
13 that the committee-- that Council advocates for the
14 continuation of funds for this initiative as it is
15 more important than ever. Thank you.

16 CHRIS DUROSINMI: Good afternoon,
17 Chairman Brannan and members of the Finance
18 Committee. My name is Chris Durosinmi, Director for
19 Government and Community Affairs for the Wildlife
20 Conservation Society and a member of the Cultural
21 Institutions Group. Thank you for the opportunity to
22 testify today. This budget season we've seen the
23 culmination of our increased activity and need for
24 our services grow by leaps and bounds during and
25 after the pandemic. I echo my colleague's request

1 that the \$40 million adopted in FY23 be restored and
2 baselined in FY24 and an additional \$10 million to be
3 split evenly between the CIG and our program group
4 partners to create more stability and equity within
5 the sector. Our 34 institutions alone employ over
6 11,000 full and part-time staff including 5,000 union
7 members. They live here, contributing to the
8 communities where they live and work. Include our CDF
9 partners and you'll see that every neighborhood in
10 New York City is impacted by the cultural and art
11 community that is asking for your leadership. Beyond
12 the economy, our ability to pivot and meet and
13 emerging needs quickly and skillfully when called
14 upon cannot be overstated, and that agility can only
15 be maintained with consistent and sustained funding.
16 We partner with the City time and time again during
17 crises, during the pandemic, during the creation of
18 IDNYC, and currently we're exploring ways to help
19 with asylum-seekers that are meaningful and
20 impactful. We provide an array of programs and
21 services with specific communities and demographics
22 through personalized institution-specific [sic] work.
23 One example: WCS led the effort to bring eight
24 science-based CIGs together forming Side [sic]
25

1 Network. The Council has enabled us to support teen
2 internships for youth with a focus on populations
3 historically under-represented in STEM-based careers.
4 Collectively we provide over 900 paid internships to
5 NYC youth and looking to increase that number to
6 1,200 by next year. 74 percent of our interns are
7 youth of color. We serve STEM career development
8 centers, supporting young New Yorkers as they build
9 their STEM skills, professional experience, and
10 social capital. This workforce development
11 initiative is the first of its kind in New York City
12 providing paid internships with wrap-around services
13 for thousands of youth throughout our city.
14 Personally, I'm a man from Brownsville and aspire to
15 become a public servant, but today, I serve in a
16 different purpose of great need, to ensure those who
17 look like me and you access the available resources
18 of renowned institutions that we thought we did not
19 belong in before. Now we are here ensuring access,
20 opportunity, and advocacy. Thank you for the
21 opportunity to testify and your leadership as the
22 City rebounds from the pandemic and rises to higher
23 heights.
24

LUCY SEXTON: Thanks. I'm Lucy Sexton.

I am with the City's largest cultural advocacy coalition, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts. Chair Brannan, Council, we know that you are all dealing with so many critical issues in this budget, and we are here today to say that culture is also a critical issue. We have heard about the mental health crisis among our children, right? I'm going to reference one program, Queens World Film Festival in a public school in Queens dealing with a fifth grader who was selectively mute, and he not only engaged in the film program, he got up when it was time to show it and the talked on the microphone to his whole school. The principal burst into tears. She said in five years I have never heard him speak. So when we say that art helps with mental health, it is real. You talk about the migrant crisis. I ask you to look at organizations like the Clemente Center in the Lower East Side and many other organizations across the City who are not only providing clothing and other material goods for newly arrived migrants, but are also producing cultural programs by them and for them, because housing is super, super important and culture is what makes a community. Culture is what

1 makes it home. This is critical work. I also will
2 say that, you know, we know you're facing a tough
3 budget. We are revenue-generators. Broadway brings
4 in hundreds of millions of dollars, \$54 billion
5 dollars in tourism income. Broadway is one of the
6 leading attractors of that. No less than nine of the
7 shows on Broadway right now were generated from New
8 York's nonprofit theaters. The city needs Broadway
9 to bring in that money. Broadway needs the nonprofit
10 theaters to bring them the work, and the nonprofit
11 theaters need you to keep us going and to keep that
12 pipeline going, not only generating money, but
13 generating jobs for New York artists. I also want to
14 say that we are helpful to keeping the tax base here.
15 I lived through the 70s when the middle class was
16 leaving. Why are people going to live in here New
17 York City when they could work anywhere remotely?
18 They're going to live here because their kids can
19 take dance classes down the street, because they can
20 go see shows at night, because they can visit
21 fantastic museums and gardens and zoos on the
22 weekends. So, I ask you to invest in us to stabilize
23 our cultural ecosystem because we are critical to our
24 neighborhoods, to our communities, to our cities, to
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1
2 our economies, to our emotional health. The
3 baseline, I will add, has not been increased in a
4 decade. We can no longer live in this will we get
5 it, will we not? Will we be able to have this job
6 next year? Will we be able to fund this workforce
7 next year, or will it go away? Will that program for
8 kids who are street dancers and they had a program at
9 GIBNY [sic] across the street at GIBNY dance to train
10 them in how to do stage craft and how to learn how to
11 do, you know, lights and make their work for the
12 stage-- that program went away. Right? It was a
13 great program. It is exactly what we need to take
14 kids like Justin Neely and others dancing in the
15 subways and build them into the infrastructure of our
16 cultural economy. We need those programs and we need
17 them to be stable. Thank you so much.

18 KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon. Thank
19 you, Lucy, for your words. And my name is Kate
20 Madigan. I'm here on behalf of the Public Theater to
21 encourage you to make the arts in cultural funding a
22 significant priority in this budget. As Lucy said,
23 the baselining has not been increased in over a
24 decade. This is incredibly problematic as the cost
25 to provide services has steadily increased, as we've

1 said, and these include audiences are not returning
2 at the higher levels as they were before the
3 pandemic. Production costs are higher due to extreme
4 inflation and supply chain issues still. Lost
5 revenue due to pandemic-related cancellations and
6 postponements of engagements is high. Our commitment
7 to free programming relies on donors who are impacted
8 by the current economic environment as well. So the
9 public and others, CIGs and CDF recipients are part
10 of this reality. what is at stake is the survival of
11 our organizations and our programs such as the
12 public-- we produce free Shakespeare in the Park
13 which has been in production for the past 50 years--
14 60 years, severed millions of peoples with hundreds
15 of extraordinary productions featuring the greatest
16 artists of our time, all for free. The public's
17 downtown [inaudible] offerings include an annual
18 slate of new plays and musicals from dynamic artists
19 as diverse as the city we live in, that also go onto
20 Broadway, and countless community engagement and
21 emerging artists programs that serve seniors, youth,
22 and everyone in between in dozens of neighborhoods
23 scattered across every borough. These programs and
24 other colleagues' programs generate thousands of jobs
25

1
2 for cultural workers and serve almost half a million
3 New Yorkers each year. There's not a part of New
4 York life that CIGs do not impact, from our parks, to
5 our schools, to our businesses. Every part of our
6 City benefits from the work of the cultural sector.
7 The return on your investment in our institutions is
8 outstanding, and we hope to be able to continue our
9 work with your support. As a representative of the
10 CIG, I join with my colleagues and peers across the
11 City and respectfully but firmly ask that the budget
12 reflects the value of our institutions and our
13 partners at the Department of Cultural Affairs bring
14 to our city. Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair.
16 I know that the CIGs are the cultural institutions
17 and the cultural institution group stepped up during
18 the COVID crisis. How can culture continue to be a
19 partner in the City's response to the migrant crisis
20 that we're seeing right now?

21 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: I would say that the--
22 - as you heard, in all of our testimony, we-- it is
23 in our DNA to be partnered with the City in serving
24 New Yorkers, many of them in high-need situations
25 with free programs, with a whole host of services.

1 We are eager to be in that role with the City. Your-
2 - you know, your first mandate is, you know, is food
3 and shelter. There's a crisis with what is it, 600
4 people coming in a day. The scale of this is
5 massive, but there is a role for culture, for you
6 know-- for the-- you know, what do those parents do
7 with their kids? You know, to go to a-- you know, to
8 go-- there's-- to go to a, you know, to a garden on
9 their free day, to go to one of Carnegie Hall's
10 family Free Family Programs. It's really it's about
11 how we-- I think, how we package that, how we give it
12 to you to be communicating to-- as part of your
13 engagement with the asylum-seekers. We think that
14 there's lots of opportunity for us to be partners
15 with you in this space just as we did with COVID.

17 CHRIS DUROSINMI: And I just want to add
18 to that. You know, while the immediate need right
19 now is housing and food, we also must reckon with the
20 fact that they will be here for a long period of
21 time, and so their children will be going to our
22 schools. Their families will be coming to our
23 institutions. Their youth will be entering the
24 workforce in a couple of years, right? And so our
25 cultural institutions really serve at the precipice,

1
2 at the forefront of providing these opportunities for
3 these asylum-seekers.

4 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Can I just add one
5 thing?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Sure.

7 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: is-- we're using the
8 term CIGs, and the entire cultural sector responded
9 to the crises of the past few years as well as
10 currently. I mean, the Chocolate Factory is not a
11 CIG. I think of Queensborough Dance Festival in
12 Queens, Asian American Arts Alliance, and many of us
13 who are not CIGs, we also distributed food, clothing.
14 We have served, you know, done programs with and for
15 the different communities including the migrant
16 communities that are here now. So we're all working
17 together. I just want-- sometimes with language we
18 lose sight of everybody together.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And--

20 LUCY SEXTON: [interposing] I will just
21 add that when you talk mental health and my co-parent
22 is with the City's Be Heard Program, going out and
23 dealing with mental health crises all the time, and
24 she's said she has seen more and more mental health
25 crises in the newly-arrived migrants. These people

1
2 have been traumatized. They have been through hell,
3 excuse my language, and the things which connect you
4 with joy, with community, going to a place which is
5 playing music which is allowing you to meet your
6 community, meet people who already live here, that is
7 a critical part of keeping people sane and safe and
8 integrating them into our city.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And I know that the
10 cultural sector also provides thousands of jobs and
11 even good-paying union jobs for the people of our
12 city. I wanted to ask what impact would an increased
13 baseline have on your workforce?

14 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm going to jump in and
15 just back that up for one second. The sector right
16 now is in crisis. I am talking to large
17 organizations who are talking about cutting 25
18 percent of their workforce, I mean, cultural anchors.
19 I am talking to large theaters that are talking about
20 doing a third of the programming they were doing pre-
21 pandemic. I'm talking to everyone in the sector who
22 is facing deficits. You then have smaller groups
23 which were already fragile and not funded enough, and
24 they are really falling off the cliff. We had a
25 crazy CDF cycle this time. People got defunded.

1
2 People are ready to fall off that cliff. You know,
3 we have always said that recovery is going to be this
4 ramp, and relief has run out, and we are not up the
5 ramp yet. So we are going to start falling off that
6 cliff. And so yes, stable funding will allow us to
7 continue to build on what the funding you gave us
8 last year and allow us to keep some jobs, but believe
9 me, the sector is in crisis right now, and it's a
10 problem.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
12 Barron followed by Brewer.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you very
14 much. I'm a strong supporter of cultural
15 institutions. I believe culture is a weapon, and I
16 think it's a weapon for liberation and not just for
17 sustaining ourselves in this place here. And I also
18 want to say that, speaking truth to power, there's
19 too much racism that permeates all of our
20 institutions in New York City. So when we do fund,
21 we want to make sure that black, not diversity, not
22 minority, but black, black-- everybody say black.
23 Now, I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. I was--
24 you're not supposed to speak out. That's a mistake.
25 I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I get

1 carried away. But on a real side, you know, a lot of
2 our-- we had to start the theaters of color years ago
3 because we were not included in all of this, and then
4 the theaters of colors it has grown from 800,000 to
5 five million and eight to 54, but we have to maybe be
6 very, very mindful in each one of our groups. You
7 know, Carnegie Hall, BAM [sic] and even if you put a
8 black at the head of it, doesn't mean that all the
9 stuff on the bottom is coming to the black
10 communities. So we just got to make sure and be very
11 sensitive to that. Having said that, this city is
12 not in the economic crises it tells you it's in.
13 They have a surplus in this budget, not a deficit, a
14 surplus in this budget, and had enough to pay the
15 police four percent increase. They had enough money.
16 They had enough--

17 [applause]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: They had-- y'all
19 behave, 'cause you're going to get me in trouble.
20 No, I'm just kidding. Do what you want to do. On a
21 real serious side, this is a Republican austerity
22 budget, and there is \$106 billion dollars in the
23 budget. They have \$4.4 billion unexpected revenue,
24 and then they have \$8.3 billion in a reserve account.
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2 Cultural institutions, we need to double what you're
3 getting just to make up for what happened during the
4 pandemic and what needs to happen further. So, I'm
5 going to fight hard for it. I know the Council
6 Members up here, we going to fight hard for more
7 money, but put the pressure on your Mayor. Put the
8 pressure on the Mayor so that the Mayor can
9 understand that culture is a weapon. It's a weapon
10 for liberation. It's a weapon for economic
11 liberation. It's a weapon for cultural identity so
12 people can know who they are and where their place is
13 in society. So I'm going to support you a thousand
14 percent, and I'm-- let's just keep the struggle
15 going. Let's keep fighting for what we deserve. And
16 they're not doing you a favor. It's your money.

17 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you, Council
18 Member Barron. I just want to say quickly and lift
19 up the work of Museum U. Museum U examined all of
20 the cultural organizations of color across the City,
21 determined that it would take actually \$100 million
22 dollars to fund them accurately. We have been saying
23 for a long time, we need one percent of the City's
24 budget to go towards culture because it is a crime
25 that we still have a lack of funding to the

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2 organizations of color serving communities of color
3 that need it most. So, yes, please. Let's stop
4 talking about austerity and let's talk about one
5 percent of the budget going to culture. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
7 Brewer?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I
9 just want to check on the 40-- because that's what
10 you got last year. You need another 50, I understand
11 that. Just a couple of you, does that get you to
12 where you were last year? We always want more money.
13 I'm not going to deny that, but I'm also realistic.
14 So I didn't know between some of the larger or
15 smaller organizations if that is able to keep you at
16 least where you were last year. Not to say--

17 : [interposing] I think the critical
18 point is that the \$40 million be baselined, and I
19 know that you have limited power to do that, but
20 that's why we're fighting for it, so that we can
21 start--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] No,
23 I understand. When you're baselined, we don't make a
24 decision as to who gets it.

25 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you know that?

SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: no.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So when it's baselined, then the Mayor makes a decision as to who gets it. Right now, when we don't baseline it, the City Council decides. Just so you know.

SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you. And we have asked for \$10 million on top of that--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I'm aware of that.

SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: because we were quite clear that what the CDF granting this year showed was that we do not have enough to fund the whole sector. So that is a step in the right direction. It is not enough.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, I understand that.

SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: But we are stepping--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I've been around a long time, so I understand that. But I'm just trying to under-- so the 40 plus the 50 is baselined or not, is what you feel you could stay more or less

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2 what you were last year. Is that a correct
3 statement? Okay, thank you.

4 LUCY SEXTON: Just to jump in there.
5 Thank you for the clarity also. It will get us based
6 on public funding from the City to where we were last
7 year. It will not take care of all the private
8 funding or other funding that is-- right. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
10 much. Thank you for your time.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'll begin the first
12 remote panel. Annie Minguez, Alice Bufkin and Susan
13 Lerner, and Chauncy Young [sp?], and Tydie Abreu, and
14 then Andre Ward. After which we will call up the
15 next in-person panel. Sophie Anderson, Janine
16 Guzzone, Michael Sisitzky, Darren Mack, Alli Finn,
17 and Obi Afriyie. Remote panel, we'll start with
18 Annie Minguez. You can begin when you're ready.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

20 ANNIE MINGUEZ: Thank you for the
21 opportunity to testify on the Mayor's Executive
22 Budget. My name is Annie Minguez and I am the Vice
23 President of Government and Community Relations at
24 Good Shepherd Services. We operate 94 programs that
25 support over 33,000 children and families across the

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2 Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. Good Shepherd
3 provided testimony before the Contracts, Youth
4 Services, General Welfare, and Education Committees
5 during the Preliminary Budget process, and my written
6 testimony will capture all of our priorities in those
7 areas. We testified on procurement reform needs,
8 restoring the \$38 million dollar cut to DYCD,
9 ensuring youth experiencing homelessness and aging
10 out of care have access to CityFEPS, that runaway
11 homeless youth programs are fully funded, that DOE is
12 fully funded to address unmet needs such as
13 transportation for children in foster care system,
14 and to ask the Council to restore funding to 52
15 community schools in the amount of \$9 [inaudible] 16
16 million. Today my testimony will focus on the needs
17 for the Adopted Budget to include an investment in
18 the human services sector to address the staffing
19 crisis severely impacting our ability to support
20 children, families, and communities across New York
21 City. Child welfare agencies are experiencing a
22 staffing crisis and reporting a turnover rate of 49
23 percent of frontline staff, and 24 percent for case
24 workers across the state. During the General Welfare
25 Committee, I testified that the ACS had posted a

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2 position for Youth Development Specialist that the
3 starting salary was \$47,000 and after five years that
4 increases up to \$60,000 along with \$2,500 [inaudible]
5 bonus. We cannot afford this. The Department of
6 Education also posted a position where they were
7 paying social workers \$65,000 and after five years
8 that increased to over \$99,000. We call on the
9 Council to negotiate a budget that includes the Just
10 Pay priorities. Thank you for the opportunity to
11 testify.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next is Susan Lerner.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

14 SUSAN LERNER: Hi, good afternoon. Thank
15 you for this hearing. I'm Susan Lerner. I'm the
16 Executive Director of Common Cause New York, and I am
17 testifying today not in specific detail on particular
18 budget numbers, but with a message that it would be a
19 false saving and a disservice to the New York City
20 residents to cut the budget of the agencies which
21 provide oversight. It's an essential function to
22 have oversight over the executive, and historically
23 we know that various Administrations have tried
24 different attempts to limit oversight functions
25 either by firing inspector generals, but also by

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2 trying to consolidate oversight agencies, and most
3 specifically, continually trying to cut down on their
4 budgets. So we have grave concerns over the proposed
5 reductions and resources and personnel to the
6 Conflicts of Interest Board, the Department of
7 Investigation, the Office of the Inspector General
8 for the NYPD, and the Civilian Complaint Review
9 Board. Not only does weakening oversight really
10 undercut the public's trust in government, it is a
11 fiscally irresponsible effort because cutting down on
12 waste and on corruption in agency saves the City
13 money directly by ensuring the tax payer money is not
14 being wasted, and also in ensuring that there are
15 fewer lawsuits that the City has to defend and then
16 ultimately settle or pay out as we see repeatedly in
17 the lawsuits that are brought on the basis of really
18 questionable conduct on the part of the police. So,
19 it's a false savings. It undercuts the public's
20 confidence in the effectiveness of their government--

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
22 has expired.

23 SUSAN LERNER: and we urge you to ensure
24 that these oversight agencies are adequately funded.
25 Thank you.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll hear from
3 Tydie Abreu.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

5 TYDIE ABREU: Thank you chair Brannan and
6 all other committee members for the opportunity to
7 provide testimony. My name is Tydie Abreu and I am
8 the Senior Director for Policy and Social impact at
9 Hispanic Federation, a nonprofit organization seeking
10 to empower and advance Hispanic communities through
11 programs and legislative advocacy. As New York
12 responds to the influx of ICE asylees from the
13 southern border, we must ensure that the budget
14 includes culturally and linguistically responsive
15 supports to receive those newly arrived with open
16 arms. First, it is urgent for the City to invest in
17 hiring more staff for trauma-informed mental health
18 workers in schools. We ask that the budget includes
19 \$14.1 million for schools to hire additional social
20 workers and guidance counselors. We ask for
21 additional funding to ensure that these social
22 workers and guidance counselors are trained in
23 culturally-relevant and linguistically diverse
24 practices. Secondly, we ask that the budget includes
25 baselines of at least \$3.3 million dollars for

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2 shelter-based community coordinators at New York City
3 public schools. At a time when the number of
4 students living in shelter has grown, especially with
5 the surge of asylum-seekers, the City should increase
6 its efforts to ensure students in shelter can access
7 high-quality education. And lastly, we advocate for
8 the allocation of \$4 million dollars to support
9 outreach for immigrant families in ways that are
10 culturally and linguistically sustaining, as well as
11 the allocation of \$10 million dollars for the support
12 of Early Childhood Education and care for incoming
13 migrant students. Since August 2022 nearly 32,000
14 asylees have continued north from Central and South
15 America, and so you know, we're really hoping that
16 the City can provide additional materials, services,
17 and faculty that English language learners need for
18 academic success. We really think that these
19 investments will help all of our city students
20 including asylum-seekers enrolled in safe schools.
21 Thank you so much for your time.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: thank you. We'll now
23 hear from Andre Ward.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

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2 ANDRE WARD: Yeah, thank you Chair
3 Brannan and members of the Committee on finance for
4 the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name
5 is Andre Ward. I'm the Associate Vice President of
6 the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at the
7 Fortune Society. I've been around for about 55 years
8 offering re-entry services and providing-- doing
9 advocacy work for people that are impacted by the
10 criminal legal system. In FY2022 we served about
11 10,000 people across our problem, including 2,700
12 people held in our City jails, and every day nearly
13 1,700 people across 200 housing units in seven jail
14 facilities engage in our group sessions, ranging from
15 art, skills training, etcetera. And we also offer a
16 range of skills to support them with their successful
17 re-entry. Our staff are uniquely qualified to build
18 trusting transformative relationships, based not only
19 on their individual lived experience and training,
20 but also because they're employed by mission-driving
21 community-based organizations built on an ethos of
22 compassion and care. You know, Fortune analyzed all
23 individuals discharged from our city jails in 2022
24 that are eligible for transitional services and
25 discovered that those that we work with in the jails

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2 were five times more likely to enroll in services
3 after being released than those who did not. And
4 yet, when we think about this, and the DLC Executive
5 Budget hearing on May 19th, DOCs [inaudible] DOC is
6 looking to interrupt those programs by obviously
7 cutting those programs out. And so we know how very
8 important it is to make sure that the very people
9 that are servicing people in Rikers Island are
10 supported in the way that they need to by competent
11 people. We have people who have graduated from our
12 program successfully who went through our programs at
13 Rikers Island. They're now working. They're
14 employed, and graduated from colleges, etcetera. And
15 as we move toward the mandated closure at Rikers
16 Island in 2027, we must invest in the kind of program
17 services that would safely reduce our city jail
18 populations that includes investing in the workforce
19 that performs those vital functions that are on
20 Rikers Island.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

22 ANDRE WARD: So, thank you for this time
23 to testify, and you can have a more extensive
24 understanding what I've discussed in my written
25 testimony. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
3 Brewer?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: For Fortune
5 Society, as you know, the Mayor cut the \$17 million
6 for-- I think you referenced just now. And then we
7 were told that, you know, it's not a problem because
8 the persons who work for Correction can handle it.
9 So I know we're short on time here today, but I don't
10 feel that that's going to be a workable solution. So
11 I just want to know if you could say quickly really
12 specifically how your services are slightly different
13 than Correction. Obviously, lived experience, and I
14 could come up with some others, but the obviously
15 hope is that people don't return to Rikers and the
16 goal may be much better achieved with your workers, I
17 think, despite the good deeds of Correction workers.
18 Could you be specific?

19 ANDRE WARD: Yeah, Council Member, I
20 think-- Brewer, thank you for that question. You
21 know, I mentioned the example of one of the people
22 who have come through our program, in fact two of
23 them, one of whom now who is employed was working who
24 has housing, who is doing really well and living a
25 life of contribution, and then the second person who

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2 actually came through jail-based programs who is now
3 staff, who just recently graduated from NYU. Those
4 two examples taken together demonstrate the
5 effectiveness and impact that our staff who worked in
6 DOCs has on the people that we serve, and at the root
7 of all of it, I think Council Member Brewer you know,
8 it's about building this level of trust. And we feel
9 that DOC staff won't have that kind of capacity to
10 build the level of trust needed to get people to be
11 able to transform their lives and go back into the
12 world.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Oh, Council Member
15 Nurse, sorry.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Sorry, I just
17 wanted to clarify. With these cuts, is Fortune
18 Society now-- will not be providing-- will not be
19 contracted to provide any service on Rikers Island?

20 ANDRE WARD: That's exactly right,
21 Council Member Nurse. It's rather unfortunate and,
22 you know, we strongly believe that cutting those
23 programs will have a negative impact on the people
24 that we serve, and obviously the staff there don't

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1
2 have the kind of capacity to engage. But that's
3 exactly right, Council Member Nurse.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, thank you.
5 I just wanted to clarify.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: thank you all very
7 much.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now call up the next
9 in-person panel. Sophie Anderson, Janine Guzzone,
10 Michael Sisitzky, Darren Mack, Alli Finn, and Obi
11 Afriyie.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You may begin. If
13 you want to start from left to right, whatever you'd
14 like, go ahead.

15 OBI AFRIYIE: Is this on? Sorry, first
16 timer. Dear Chairperson Brannan and Council Members
17 of the Finance Committee. My name is Obi Afriyie. I
18 am an organizer with the Legal Defense Fund. On
19 behalf of the Legal Defense Fund, we thank the
20 committee for this opportunity to provide testimony
21 regarding New York City's public safety budget. We
22 submit this testimony to urge City Council to
23 eliminate funding for Strategic Response Groups and
24 invest increased funding into communities that have
25 been most negatively-impacted by policing practices

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2 in New York. We are deeply concerned by SRG group's
3 presence in New York City as a specialized unit that
4 notoriously uses forced arrests and dangerous
5 tactical strategies such as pedaling demonstrators as
6 they exercise their First Amendment rights. In New
7 York and elsewhere, specialized units like SRGs have
8 a history of discrimination, abuse of power, and a
9 lack of accountability. The human toll of this unit
10 measured by the trauma and physical injury afflicted
11 on demonstrators has been astronomical. As for the
12 financial cost, it is unacceptable that New Yorkers
13 pay hundreds of millions of dollars through the
14 budget as well as lawsuits to fund policing practices
15 that curtail and suppress their constitutional
16 rights. The NYPD estimates that it allocates \$68
17 million dollars of its budget towards SRG groups.
18 That number is strongly disputed by community
19 advocates who assert that SRGs consume an additional
20 \$65 million of centrally allocated expenses for a
21 total cost of around \$133 million dollars. In the
22 interest of justice and equity, SRGs should be
23 disbanded, and this funding should be directed
24 towards community-driven initiatives that actually
25 promote safety, health, and wellbeing for our people.

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2 The City Council should prioritize funding our youth,
3 replacing the \$250 million dollars that was taken
4 away from schools in the FY2023 budget. This should
5 include \$75 million to city schools to hire 500
6 community members into supportive positions including
7 youth advocates, parent coordinators,
8 paraprofessionals, and community outreach
9 coordinators. Y'all can read the rest of our
10 advocacy through our written testimony, because we
11 have a lot more to say. Thank you.

12 ALLI FINN: thank you so much. My name
13 is Allie Finn. I'm an organizer and a researcher with
14 the Surveillance Resistance Lab, a New York City
15 nonprofit that fights against corporate and state
16 surveillance systems as one of the greatest threats
17 to democracy, racial justice, economic, and migrant
18 justice. As the Mayor's budget cuts essential
19 services as we have heard all day, the budget also
20 represents an unacceptable increase in the NYPD's
21 budget and continuation of policies of
22 criminalization, including some of the units like the
23 SRG, most responsible for day-to-day violence and
24 discriminatory policing, surveillance, and
25 suppression of public protests. The City currently

1 spends at least \$29 million on the NYPD a day
2 according to NYCLU, and this budget will only
3 increase that. What does that reflect about our city
4 and who we are? I want to focus on some of the money
5 that could be redirected. There is a massive bloat
6 within the NYPD's budget and the 2024 budget
7 massively undercounts the NYPD's total funding for the
8 year. The CBC estimates that it undercounts the
9 budget by \$1.6 billion dollars for overtime and
10 raises that were agreed to by the City. This also
11 does not include federal counterterrorism grants from
12 the Department of Homeland Security, including
13 something called the Urban Area Security Initiative.
14 Our joint research last year exposed how these funds
15 expand militarized policing and fuel a massive influx
16 of surveillance equipment under a banner of emergency
17 response and counterterrorism into our city with
18 little public scrutiny. These numbers are not in the
19 Adopted and Preliminary Budget, hiding another
20 potentially over \$100 million dollars in funding for
21 the NYPD budget. In the past, these funds have gone
22 towards the domain awareness system, a 24/7 live feed
23 of surveillance data on New Yorkers across the City.
24 you can read more about the impacts of these
25

1 technologies in our testimony, but I just want to
2 call on the City to redirect this budget bloat to
3 true community safety solutions, reinvesting in
4 critical services and to strengthen its policies to
5 protect New Yorkers from ICE including passing
6 improved detainer laws that restrict cooperation
7 between city agencies and ICE, and restrict the mass-
8 extraction of New Yorkers' data that fuels by NYPD
9 and ICE's surveillance targeting and detention of our
10 communities. Thank you so much.

12 MICHAEL SISITZKY: Thank you. Good
13 afternoon. My name is Michael Sisitzky, Assistant
14 Policy Director with the New York Civil Liberties
15 Union. The NYCLU has repeatedly testified before
16 this Council as to the need to reduce our over-
17 reliance on and over-resourcing of the NYPD, and
18 we're here do that again today. rather than
19 committing the resources need for more robust
20 investments in homelessness, housing services, mental
21 health, education and youth services, our city's
22 library system, the Mayor's Executive Budget asks
23 these agencies to make do with less while largely
24 preserving the NYPD's bloated budget. As we heard
25 the FY24 budget projects \$10.8 billion dollars in

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2 spending on the NYPD which is an under-account as we
3 heard for the failure to account for overtime as well
4 as the recent CBA. So that translates to more than
5 \$29 million dollars a day in that \$10.8 billion
6 dollars figure that we're spending on the NYPD. This
7 budget funds involvement in areas that run completely
8 counter to achieving true community safety including
9 the Strategic Response Group, the Vice Enforcement
10 Division, the continued policing of New York City's
11 students, young people, unhoused New Yorkers, and
12 it's just not the right approach to actually deliver
13 real community safety that New Yorkers need. So, over
14 the past few weeks, the NYCLU did something a little
15 different. We launched the Museum of Broken Windows,
16 a pop-up exhibit and art space that asks New Yorkers
17 to engage with the toll of that \$29 million dollars a
18 day actually takes on our ability to deliver its
19 services that would lead to a safe and thriving city
20 that we dream of, and we encourage visitors to our
21 museum to write out our dreams for how to actually
22 achieve that. What are the services, what are the
23 supports they wanted to see that would actually make
24 them feel safe in their communities? We'll scan all
25 of these in and include them in our testimony, but

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2 these are the more than 560 cards that New Yorkers
3 filled out telling us how to better spend that \$29
4 million dollars a day. What would make them safe?
5 They told us it would be more funding for education,
6 for youth services, for support to actually keep
7 people in their homes, and get New Yorkers stable,
8 permanent, and affordable housing. They told us they
9 wanted to see increased investments in parks, in
10 community spaces that would actually make their
11 communities more livable, more sustainable. What
12 they told us by-in-large, though, was what not keep
13 them safe is our increased investment in and reliance
14 on policing. So, we'll send these in. We encourage
15 the Council to take a look at the dreams that are
16 contained in these postcards and really take them
17 seriously in negotiating this budget with the Mayor.
18 We don't need to keep increasing our investment in
19 and reliance on policing. Thank you.

20 DARREN MACK: Thank you, Chair and
21 Committee Members. My name is Darren Mack. I'm a
22 Co-director at Freedom Agenda, one of the
23 organizations leading the campaign to close Rikers. I
24 want to thank Speaker Adams and other Council Members
25 who have named the undeniable truth about Rikers. It

1 is not serving our city and it undermines public
2 safety. Between 1979 and 1980, incarcerated men at
3 Greenhaven Correctional Facility conducted research
4 that came to be known as the Seven Neighborhood
5 Study. It revealed that over 75 percent of New York
6 State's prison population came from seven New York
7 City neighborhoods, the South Bronx, Harlem, Lower
8 East Side, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New
9 York, and South Jamaica. That reality remained the
10 same in the 90s when I spent 19 months on Rikers
11 Island as a teenager, and it is still the same today.
12 Today, over 6,000 people are languishing on Rikers
13 Island, mostly from these same communities. These
14 communities have been historically deprived of
15 resources and then criminalized for trying to
16 survive. A recent report from the data Collaborative
17 for Justice showed that black New Yorkers are jailed
18 in New York City at 11.6 times the rate of white New
19 Yorkers, and the number of people in city jails with
20 a serious mental illness has increased 38 percent
21 since December 2021. Our members who have loved ones
22 at Rikers are often faced with the pain of watching
23 their physical and mental health deteriorate while
24 their cases drag on for years without resolution. It
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2 is past item to do something different. But instead,
3 the Mayor's trying to take us backward. New York
4 City spends 350 percent more per incarcerated person
5 than the jail systems in Los Angeles or Cook County,
6 Illinois, mostly because of unusually high staffing
7 ratios. And yet, people in DOC custody are subjected
8 to some of the worst jail conditions in the nation.
9 Still, the Mayor has resisted any vacancy reductions
10 among DOC's uniformed staff, while agencies that
11 provide housing, healthcare, youth services, and
12 education are all facing massive cuts. The
13 Administration has also proposed ending their
14 contract with outside program providers to save a
15 measly \$17 million dollars, less than they spent on
16 overtime just last month according to the Independent
17 Budget. And I conclude, there's no staff shortage at
18 Rikers, but there is an accountability shortage. New
19 York City has the only jail system in the country
20 with more officers than people in custody, but DOC
21 leadership has enabled officers to abuse sick leave
22 and refuse to work in the posts most necessary to
23 provide services to people in their custody. And
24 lastly I'll say this City Council should make sure
25 that in this year's budget we actually do what the

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2 Mayor says he wants to do, which is invest upstream
3 to address root causes. By doing that, we will make
4 our city safer. We will reduce the jail population,
5 and we will stay on track to close Rikers. Thank
6 you. And I'll submit my full testimony at some
7 point. Thank you.

8 SOPHIE ANDERSON: Thank you, Chair and
9 esteemed Council Members. My name is Sophie Anderson
10 and I'm here today representing the Center for
11 Justice Innovation, formerly the Center for Court
12 Innovation. Over the past month, my colleagues have
13 testified at appropriate hearings to discuss
14 necessary investments to improve the justice system
15 and the many sectors it intersects with from public
16 safety to mental health to housing security. I've
17 submitted my written testimony detailing the full
18 scope of our budget request, but I want to use the
19 brief time we have today to focus on the most urgent
20 issues. Looking ahead to 2027, just four years from
21 now, we've committed to safely closing Rikers Island
22 jail by reaching a daily population of 3,300, but
23 currently we've only been able to reach mid-5,000s,
24 and in Fiscal Year 24 that population is projected to
25 increase to 7,000. The Center has identified several

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2 modest investments to build trust with New Yorkers
3 around programs that reduce incarceration when
4 adequately resourced. Supervised release permits
5 appropriate defendants a chance to wait trial in
6 community while maintaining jobs and stability rather
7 than in jail simply because they cannot afford bail.
8 Compared to Fiscal Year 22, we've seeing Fiscal Year
9 23 contracts reduced by 10 percent while caseloads
10 for the most intensive group and category of cases
11 are already doubled the contracted amount. We ask
12 for restoration to those prior levels at a minimum.
13 We're also seeing increased referrals for defendants
14 who plea into alternatives to incarceration programs
15 across all five boroughs. ATIs can provide
16 accountability and supervision in contrast to time on
17 Rikers Island. The more expensive option where we
18 know that criminogenic risk factors grow. We request
19 expanded resources to sustain our success at these
20 prior rates and to deal with the incoming increase in
21 case volume as we try to lower the jail population.
22 Finally, many of these initiatives are supported in
23 their pilot stage by a \$500,000 innovative criminal
24 justice programs council award that allows us to
25 rapidly incubate and measure these approaches for

1
2 expansion or handle lengthy contract delays that we
3 experience with the City. This year, we ask Council
4 to expand this funding, an amount not raised in over
5 a decade despite the Center more than doubling in
6 size. Thank you for the space to give a global view
7 of the Center's priorities.

8 JANINE GUZZONE: Good afternoon
9 Committee, Chair Brannan and members of the Committee
10 on Finance. My name is Janine Guzzone and I work for
11 the Crime Victims Treatment Center. I appreciate
12 this opportunity to speak today on behalf of the New
13 York City Sexual Assault Initiative, a vital
14 collaboration between five diverse victim services
15 programs across New York City, including the Crime
16 Victims Treatment Center. CVTC has provided healing
17 services to victims of interpersonal violence
18 completely free of charge since 1977 and remains at
19 the forefront of this work. Partnering with the
20 organizations in the Sexual Assault Initiative
21 enables us to reach survivors across New York City
22 who face barriers to support regardless of which
23 borough they reside in. In Fiscal Year 24 we are
24 humbly requesting funding in the amount of \$2.5
25 million to be distributed equally between our five

1
2 programs. The Sexual Assault Initiative was first
3 funded in 2005 by the Speaker, and CVTC established
4 must needed programming for male survivors of sexual
5 assault, childhood sexual abuse, and intimate partner
6 violence. Before council funding, CVTC treated about
7 a dozen men per year. Now, male-identifying
8 survivors make up over 20 percent of our client
9 population which is far higher than the national
10 average for programs like ours. We offer individual
11 trauma-focused psychotherapy and four different
12 groups specifically tailored to male survivors,
13 including those who are incarcerated. Council
14 funding allowed us to create outreach materials
15 designed to lessen the shame that so often surrounds
16 male survivors, and our outreach efforts have been so
17 successful that the demand for our services continues
18 to increase. We recently took on statewide
19 coordination of New York's PREA [sic] program and
20 continued to build partnerships with correctional
21 facilities including NYC DOC and Rising Grounds youth
22 facilities in Brooklyn and the Bronx. We will
23 continue our efforts to build out infrastructure and
24 Council funding to support ongoing efforts to break
25 down existing barriers and provide these life-

1
2 changing services to individuals incarcerated in City
3 facilities. Funding from this initiative has also
4 allowed us to expand services to new hospital
5 emergency departments in Brooklyn and Queens, two
6 areas that are extremely underserved when it comes to
7 sexual assault intervention. We aim to use Council
8 funding to bring equity to the boroughs and ensure
9 that where you are assaulted does not dictate your
10 path to healing. Support through this initiative
11 does not only make a profound impact on the nearly
12 6,000 people who come to our offices each year, it
13 makes a profound impact on their families, friends,
14 and communities. It shifts policy. It shifts
15 system. This is how change happens. And funding the
16 Sexual Assault Initiative at \$2.5 million in FY24 is
17 how the City has a direct opportunity to be part of
18 it. Thank you for your time.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
20 Ossé?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair.
22 The first question I have is in regards to the SRG.
23 I forgot your name, but I'd love to ask this question
24 to you. Last week we had a Public Safety hearing and
25 the Commissioner was here and he stated that the

1 Strategic Response Group was a well-trained group
2 used to combat terrorism. In your experience and the
3 experiences of NYCLU legal observers, at what
4 gatherings do you typically see the NYPD dispatch the
5 SRG?
6

7 OBI AFRIYIE: I'll also allow-- also the
8 awesome people sitting up here with me to hop in as
9 well, but well-trained is laughable. Let's just get
10 that out of the way right now. When you think about
11 the Civilian CCRB complaints, SRG Officers receive
12 CCRB complaints at six times the higher rate than
13 normal officers, and of those complaints I think it
14 was the NYCLU data that pointed out from like 2015 to
15 2021, 66 percent of the people who submitted those
16 complaints were black. And if you think about the
17 areas that they're going to, it's not even that
18 they're just being used in protesting spaces, they're
19 being used to curb gun violence which does not make
20 any sense. It does not make any sense. They're
21 being deployed in areas designated as high crime
22 areas. These are lower socioeconomic black and brown
23 communities, and often times the-- the things that
24 they are actually arresting people for are
25 misdemeanors. This is Broken Windows policing. So,

1
2 no, the idea that these are well-trained groups that
3 are just being used to sporadically brake up harmful
4 protests is just a fallacy.

5 MICHAEL SISITZKY: I'll just add, I mean,
6 we've seen some of their training documents. They're
7 trained in violent, aggressive crowd control tactics,
8 and their training is biased at its core. Their
9 training talks about the types of violent versus non-
10 violent protestors, and all of the violent examples
11 its racial justice protestors, BLM protestors. They
12 don't-- they don't at any point mention white
13 supremacists, Proud Boys, any of that. It's all--
14 their focus is on suppressing First Amendment rights
15 and in particularly, targeting black and brown people
16 as evidenced in the misconduct data that we've seen,
17 the higher rates of complaints, the higher rates of
18 substantiated misconduct and the higher rates of
19 substantiated use of force misconduct in particular.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And what actions
21 have you seen on the ground that triggers the
22 dispatch of the SRG?

23 MICHAEL SISITZKY: The SRG is deployed
24 to, you know, what the NYPD will say, any kind of
25 large-scale gathering, but we've seen them deployed

1
2 to small-scale gatherings too, and we've seen
3 deployments that are, you know, from our perspective
4 and part motivated by the actual content of the
5 speech of the folks that there to protest. So we've
6 seen them show up at large-scale rallies. We've seen
7 them show up to smaller clinic defense protests.
8 We've seen them show up to actually be deployed to
9 enforce encampment sweeps of unhoused New Yorkers,
10 and actually arrest unhoused New Yorkers who are
11 being targeted by the NYPD during those encounters.
12 So they're deployed really whenever the NYPD wants to
13 really step up, escalate a response to the protestors
14 that they're there to police.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And if any legal
16 observers or any of you could speak to this. Have
17 you seen the SRG use any de-escalation tactics or do
18 they usually go straight to kettling?

19 MICHAEL SISITZKY: The SRG are
20 escalators. Whenever they show up at a protest, we
21 expect to see them make the situation worse, not
22 better.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: and the last thing
24 that I'll say is that, you know, we are seeing cuts
25 across many of our agencies, Department of Education,

1
2 our libraries are seeing a \$36 million dollar cut.
3 In this Public Safety hearing last week, you know,
4 the NYPD were asking for, I believe, \$32 million
5 dollars for two helicopters in capital funding.
6 After 2020, I feel like there's been a backlash. It
7 stems from the right and then also, you know,
8 moderate Dems obviously picked up these talking
9 points that fighting for any type of budget equity
10 meant defunding the police, and because of that I
11 feel like a lot of people have turned a blind eye on
12 doing the right thing and fighting against cuts and
13 continuing to allow money to be thrown at the NYPD.
14 So I please urge you all to continue to engage and
15 pay attention to this budget that's coming up. This
16 is a \$106 billion dollar budget, bigger than 47
17 states in this country, and we need folks to be as
18 civically engaged and involved and aware of what the
19 powers of our government are doing. Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We actually have
21 testimony from one more person for this panel. Jorge
22 Munos Reyes [sp?]?

23 JORGE MUNOS REYES: [speaking Spanish]

24 TRANSLATOR: My name is Jorge Munos Reyes
25 and my family has lived here for more than 30 years

1
2 working free in this land called Puebla [sic] York
3 which you call Sunset Park, Brooklyn. I have also
4 worked for more than 10 years as a speaker in your
5 bad criminal government. I have worked for City Hall
6 and also as a speaker of this municipal council, and
7 today I came to speak the pure truth. Today, we are
8 surrounded by friends, fellows, and yes, we have to
9 speak clearly between enemies, some racist criminals
10 that control this bad government, and which you as
11 legislators call Democrats you're protecting every
12 year in this municipal funding. You take away our
13 bread, our books, our education, and more to protect
14 the budget without limits for the violent police to
15 protect a gang dressed in blue that protects rich,
16 takes from the poor, and attacks the street vendors
17 that attacks-- and attacks those who sell to survive.
18 As Democrats you protect the violent police that
19 attacks black lives like Jordan Neely, young people
20 who dance in the trains to gather whatever they can
21 in order to eat and pay their bills at the end of the
22 month. Every day we use more than \$29 million
23 dollars of our public funding to criminalize the poor
24 communities, to criminalize communities of immigrants
25 like that of Sunset Park. This gang uses different

1
2 names. In English it can be NYPD, ICE, ATF, MTA,
3 DHS, DSNY, SRG, but all of them is the same racist
4 men that for centuries have wanted to kidnap and
5 imprison our people. What used to be of those
6 wearing white masks, now they do it even with black
7 faces and with guns from this government to maintain
8 this corrupt army. Last Easter, your bad government
9 brought an army of police that attacked us in Central
10 Park on the 9th of April, Sunset Park on April 9th as
11 they endangered mothers and children because they
12 wanted to say that a group together in the park
13 eating without permits from the government are
14 criminals. What we need to protect Sunset Park is
15 not additional police. It's freedom and the land to
16 live and make our homes. In order to protect that
17 corrupt police, the SRG, Strategic Response Group, or
18 any name that you want to use-- oh, sorry. Please
19 stop protecting that corrupt police called the SRG or
20 Strategic Response Group or any name that you want to
21 use, and please protect our communities like that of
22 Sunset Park within your budget.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Questions from
24 Council Member Barron followed by Nurse.

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I want to thank
3 all of you for your testimony. I couldn't agree with
4 you more. But I want to ask your opinion of our
5 bill. I have a bill out, the Community Power Act,
6 that's calling for the replacing of the Civilian
7 Complaint Review Board with an elected review board
8 coming from the people-- coming from the people.
9 What you feel about that. Also, we need an
10 independent prosecutor to prosecute police, not a
11 special prosecutor in Letitia James' office, the
12 Attorney General, who prosecutes no one. So, we need
13 to make sure that we fight for and independent
14 prosecutor and not a special prosecutor. Language is
15 important, because when you say special it gets into
16 this unspecial [sic] neighborhood called the Attorney
17 General's Office, and no one gets indicted. The
18 other piece is on Rikers Island. We got to make sure
19 that when we're talking about shutting it down that
20 it's not transferred to \$6 billion dollars' worth of
21 inner city prison, jails. Because in the last--
22 budget before last, I think it was \$6 billion dollars
23 to build four jails in the inner cities. The problem
24 on Rikers Island is not space. We don't have speedy
25 trials. If we had speedy trials, ROR, Release on

1
2 your Own Recognizance, no bail, no cash bail for
3 minor offenses, peaceful people who are pre-trial
4 detainees are not guilty. They're not-- they haven't
5 committed any crime. They pre-trial detainees. So
6 we got to transfer the folk on Rikers Island to their
7 homes. They need to be out of their pre-trial
8 detainees and they haven't committed a crime, and
9 bail is not supposed to be used as a punishment to
10 keep you in jail to make sure you don't commit
11 another crime when you didn't-- may not have
12 committed a crime in the first place. So I mean,
13 these are some very, very important issues, and yes,
14 we need to-- the Strategic Response Group has got to
15 go. It has got to go. It's violent. It's more
16 violent than the people on Rikers Island, and it has
17 to go, because that is a group that is terrorizing
18 our neighborhoods, and also the renamed Giuliani
19 Street Crime Unit, that has to go too. The same
20 unit, different name, same game. So, we have to make
21 sure that these things are taken care of, and I
22 couldn't agree with you more on your positions on
23 social justice.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair,
25 and thank you panelists. One, I just want to

1
2 congratulate NYCLU on the museum. That was really
3 great, and I wish it was able to stay open longer.
4 In this role, what I've seen is that we often are
5 relying on organizations like you who are doing that
6 research to help us fill in the transparency gaps.
7 When PD comes here we ask questions, particularly
8 about the surveillance piece. We can never seem to
9 get fully dollar amounts, activities and even within
10 our Council's budgeting process it's very opaque. So
11 can-- I have two questions, but the first one is can
12 you-- can you kind of expand on how much resources it
13 takes your organizations to help fill in these gaps
14 for us.

15 MICHAEL SISITZKY: I can start, and maybe
16 if Alli you want to jump in as well. It takes a lot.
17 I mean, you know, we do a lot of work with FOIA
18 requests that often get denied by the NYPD which
19 leads to appeals, which leads to litigation, which is
20 a lot of expense and can take years to actually force
21 the disclosure of some really basic information. And
22 there was an entire effort in the City Council to
23 make this easier. The Council passed the Post Act back
24 in 2020 to require the NYPD to actually disclose its
25 full surveillance arsenal, what tools it has, how

1
2 much they cost, what information is being collected,
3 and their compliance thus far has been laughable.
4 They've really defied the core language and spirit of
5 the post act and are still withholding a lot of that
6 information. So it's still back to us to continue to
7 try to force the issue and come back to the Council
8 and hopefully see if there are ways that we can
9 complete some of those data gaps and actually hold
10 the NYPD accountable to the laws that this body has
11 passed.

12 ALLI FINN: Yeah, thank you so much,
13 Council Members, also for your continued work to
14 support these efforts. I think, Michael, you put it
15 so generously and diplomatically. Feels like all the
16 resources in the world are not going to force the
17 NYPD to be truly transparent or even to approach an
18 iota of accountability, and I would rather see, you
19 know, our city resources devoted to the services that
20 hundreds of people have been speaking today that they
21 need. I also just want to highlight that so much of
22 this happens within the budget, but so much of it
23 also happens outside of the budget, especially with
24 the acquisition of surveillance technologies, and as
25 we push for transparency within the budget, I

1
2 encourage us to also push for legislation and other
3 policies that will prohibit the use of these
4 technologies regardless of how they are acquired. We
5 see corporate partners to the NYPD, like Clearview
6 AI, like Amazon's Ring providing free access to our
7 most intimate information. The New York Police
8 Foundation, a private entity, we don't know the scope
9 of how much money they given to the NYPD for
10 surveillance technologies. So just as we push for
11 this transparency that will never come from the NYPD
12 within the budget process, we need to actively,
13 proactively legislate for policies that prevent this
14 use and prevent the mass extraction of New Yorkers'
15 data by entities outside the NYPD, the corporations
16 that work in partnership with the NYPD, but also
17 other city programs and private vendors that are part
18 of the surveillance web, even though we might not see
19 them to be. Thank you.

20 MICHAEL SISITZKY: I apologize. I just
21 wanted to briefly answer, Council Member Barron, your
22 question that you had proposed about the CCRB just
23 really quickly, and just wanted to highlight that
24 while a civilian-elected CCRB would be a powerful
25 statement, it means nothing if the NYPD has the

1
2 ability to ignore those recommendations like it does
3 for 90 percent of CCRB recommendations.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I agree. I agree,
5 and I think that--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: [interposing]
7 Well, let me just-- sorry, just real quickly, that's
8 not in our bill. If you read our bill, it doesn't go
9 back to NYPD. They have the prosecutory [sic] power,
10 investigatory and prosecutory power. It's not like
11 the Civilian Complaint Review where it goes back to
12 the Commissioner.

13 MICHAEL SISITZKY: I understand and thank
14 you for that, and I just wanted to highlight because
15 a lot of the city agencies that have been used to do
16 that kind of accountability like the DOIs OIG who
17 recently released a report on gangs policing
18 highlighted overwhelming racial disparities and then
19 pointed as a recommendation that they did not find
20 any of these to be harmful to these communities.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yeah, I
22 understand that. But don't confuse it with our bill.
23 That's what they do. The bill that we're talking
24 about is independent from that. It has an
25 independent prosecutory office and it has an elected

1
2 Civilian Complaint Review Board with all the power in
3 that board to prosecute and investigate, and then
4 independent office board when it's higher than the
5 lower crimes. So it's different than anything that
6 exists.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Well, hopefully we
8 can have a hearing on it. I would just like to finish
9 my line of questioning. But yes, we agree, it's
10 embarrassing that the Council has no ability to call
11 into question and get the transparency it needs on
12 how our public dollars are being spent to surveil us,
13 and then at the same time we have to fund these
14 organizations to do the research to fill in the
15 transparency gaps. So we have this really bad
16 circle. Based on your research, can you share if you
17 know or have any idea what percentage of the entire
18 surveillance network and apparatus that is here is
19 looking at or focused on white supremacists, white
20 Christian nationalists, fascists, or other hate
21 groups? Because again, it seems like we're relying
22 on you all to be tracking these groups and their
23 prevalence and growth here in the City. So if you
24 have any information you could share on that.

1
2 ALLI FINN: I don't have an exact answer
3 to that, but that is not the trend that we see.
4 Looking at both NYPD and other agencies as well as,
5 again, their corporate surveillance tech and big tech
6 partners, they focus on who they perceive to be a
7 threat, right? And that has changed over time. The
8 founding of the Department of Homeland Security after
9 9/11 funneled billions of dollars into the
10 surveillance and policing of particularly Muslim,
11 Arab, and South Asian communities. That was
12 particularly and continues to be particularly hard
13 for New York City. Black and brown neighborhoods
14 across the City, low income neighborhoods, queer and
15 trans people, racial justice protestors, these are
16 who are being targeted. I don't know the exact
17 numbers. That's not something we've looked into
18 exactly in terms of white nationalists and white
19 supremacists, but my educated guess is that it is
20 very, very little again, because who is perceived to
21 be a threat and who is not.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Councilman Ossé?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Sorry, I just have
25 on more question. Last week again at our hearing

1 with the Commissioner, the Commissioner was proudly
2 boasting about how the NYPD is making some headways
3 on investing in new technology for surveillance. So,
4 the robo dogs, the rocket ship type things. In your
5 research have you-- I know there was some talk about
6 some potential violations of surveillance law with
7 these new technologies. Can you speak to any of that
8 if there's any research on your end?

10 ALLI FINN: Sure. So, the Post Act has
11 been mentioned. That requires disclosure and impact
12 in youth policies of surveillance technology used by
13 the NYPD. They have routinely violated the spirit
14 and letter of the Post Act for these "newer"
15 technologies like the robot dog. You know, this has
16 not been issued. But overall I would say we have an
17 extreme lack of regulation across the board at the
18 local, state, and federal levels around the use of
19 surveillance tech. It's not only about transparency.
20 We need to actually limit and prohibit the use of
21 these technologies and the Post Act does not-- it was
22 an incredibly important step, but it does not go that
23 far. So there is very little structure to hold the
24 NYPD and other agencies and private actors to account
25 for deploying these technologies. The last thing

1
2 I'll say is a lot of these technologies are actually
3 procured or tested through measures that bypass
4 public oversight. Shot spotter, the so-called
5 gunshot detection technology which increases over-
6 policing in black and brown communities, was brought
7 to the City through a demonstration project rather
8 than a more traditional procurement process that
9 would have allowed for public and City Council
10 oversight, and that's just one example.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you. Thanks,
12 Chair.

13 MICHAEL SISITZKY: And I'll just add, you
14 know, on the Post Act piece, I mean, the rollout of
15 the Digi Dog, the new K5 robot, that is something
16 that the NYPD what they should have done under the
17 law was actually give a substantial amount of public
18 notice before those actually got rolled out and put
19 draft policies up on their website that, you know, we
20 can review, we comment on. They're supposed to
21 respond. Doesn't prevent them from actually rolling
22 forward with it, but even that minimal step of basic
23 notice and transparency is something that the
24 Department just turns their noses up at. So it is--
25 I just want to echo the call that Alli made earlier,

1
2 you know, the transparency piece, it is important.
3 They should be following those laws, but we do need
4 to shift the conversation more towards taking away
5 these tools entirely, putting in place bans, banning
6 technology like face recognition which we know the
7 Department has operated for years that is biased.
8 It's flawed. It has no business being used by law
9 enforcement or any other government agency. These
10 are the actions that we actually need to start taking
11 to take away the actual power itself from these
12 agencies.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
14 Cabán? Okay, thank you all so much.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to begin
16 with our next remote panel: Tanesha Grant, Arcilla
17 Young [sp?], Leoni Haimson, Michael Rance, Oygia
18 Miseli [sp?], Betty Garger, and Teri West.

19 TANESHA GRANT: Hello, my name is Tanesha
20 Grant. I thank the Finance Committee for having this
21 very important hearing. Again, my name is Tanesha
22 Grant and I am the Executive Director of Parent
23 Supporting Parents, New York, PSPNY. It's a social
24 and racial justice grassroots organization. Most of
25 our funding comes from the community we serve. I am

1 here to speak on behalf of the community that-- on
2 behalf of the community that, again, my organization
3 serves. When we talk about the proposed budget for
4 Fiscal Year 2024, we have more cons than pros. We
5 are concerned about the cuts of funding to public
6 education, CUNY, Pre-K, adult literacy services,
7 libraries, social services, healthcare services,
8 mental healthcare services, and housing services. I'm
9 sure that I have missed a couple of one, but you get
10 the gist of what I'm saying. For years, we have
11 heard that New York City does not have the money.
12 Every year is a new word. This year it's PEGs and
13 fiscal cliff. We know for a fact that New York City
14 is one of the richest cities in the world, not in the
15 country, in the world. It is a staple of the whole
16 world, alright, a financial base for a lot of things.
17 So it is very confusing to the community that I serve
18 that we don't have the resources to fund everything
19 that I just said and more. Instead, we have an
20 Administration that is adamant of cutting services
21 that people vitally need. If the pandemic has taught
22 us anything, if anything good has come out of the
23 pandemic, it has taught us how under-served our
24 community really is. We ask that you really fund
25

1
2 community-based organizations, because a lot of
3 people call themselves community-based organizations,
4 but are not community-based organizations. We ask
5 that you stop Mayor Adams for cutting all these--

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
7 expired.

8 TANESHA GRANT: vital services to our
9 community, and we ask that you hold them accountable
10 for all the mismanagement of funds that is happening
11 every day. And lastly, I will say that we are
12 hundred percent behind on Councilman Charles Barron
13 bill, the Community Power Act. We need that now. We
14 need the power to be put back into the hands of the
15 community when it comes to the police, and we need
16 them defunded and resources straight to our
17 community. Thank you for listening to me.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
19 Arcilla Young [sp?].

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Arcilla Young? Okay,
22 we will come back. Next is Leonie Haimson.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 LEONIE HAIMSON: Thank you for holding
25 these hearings today. We have concerns about the

1
2 proposed budget cuts and those already made, though
3 we're relieved that there are supposed to be no cuts
4 to school's initial budgets next year according to
5 the DOE. Mid-year adjustments, i.e. funding give-
6 backs may be required. Some of those funding streams
7 may prevent schools from hiring the teachers they
8 need to lower class size or keep class sizes low.
9 For example, not a penny of the additional 500
10 million in Contracts for Excellence Funds will be
11 dedicated specifically towards class size reduction,
12 but instead is supposed to provide teacher training
13 and expand the number of ICT classes. There's also a
14 proposed \$24.5 billion cut for vacancy reduction that
15 will likely lead to a further loss of K-12 teachers.
16 Already we've lost over 4,000 teaching positions,
17 full-time K-12 teaching positions over the last four
18 years, and we don't want this trend to continue
19 especially given the new mandate to lower class
20 sizes. After the Council voted to approve the budget
21 last June, many members realized the severity of the
22 cuts and their devastating impacts on schools, but
23 now the Council has an opportunity to make things
24 right by restoring the cuts made to schools in next
25 year's budget. We also are especially concerned to

1
2 the huge cuts to the Capital Plan. According to the
3 City's class size reduction plan, it'll cost 30-35
4 billion in new capital funding to provide sufficient
5 space for smaller classes. We believe this estimate
6 is vastly inflated for reasons that I go into detail
7 in my written testimony, but there's no doubt that
8 more space will be needed to lower class size,
9 especially in the most overcrowded neighborhoods and
10 district like yours, Chair Justin Brannan. And yet,
11 rather than increasing the funding for new schools,
12 the School Construction Authority's proposed cutting
13 about \$2.3 billion dollars and over 22,000 seats out
14 of the plan compared to the plan approved just in
15 June 2021. Nowhere in the--

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
17 expired.

18 LEONIE HAIMSON: nearly 900 pages of the
19 capital plan is the new law ever mentioned. Thank
20 you for your time today. I hope you will work hard to
21 make sure that this Capital Plan is expanded.
22 Otherwise, we may be forced to put in trailers, which
23 I think is the last thing that anyone wants at this
24 point.

25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
3 we'll hear from Michael Rance.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 MICHAEL RANCE: Great. Thank you all so
6 much. And I'm also with Class Size Matters. To
7 piggyback off of what Leonie was saying, the cost of
8 meeting the class size caps in the new law would be
9 considerable less and the speed greater if the DOE
10 accelerated the rezoning of elementary schools, and
11 revamp the admission process in middle and high
12 schools more equitably allocate enrollment across all
13 schools. This would also likely create more
14 diversity across schools and enable currently under-
15 enrolled schools to have a more sustainable budget.
16 Apparently, the DOE is not considering this option.
17 Again, we urge the City Council to reject any capital
18 plan that fails to include expanded funding for new
19 capacity so that schools in the most over-crowded
20 communities meet the new caps within the timeframe
21 mandated by the law. Finally, so that no one is
22 again misled or confused about the potential level
23 and future impact of the DOE overall budgets and
24 school level funding, we urge the Council to require
25 more transparency from now on in budgeting and

1 reporting, including two new units of appropriations
2 that reflect school level funding as a subset of the
3 existing general education and special education
4 [inaudible]. Otherwise, it will continue to be
5 impossible to know in advance how much the proposed
6 cuts will affect school budgets, staffing, and
7 programs. Now, again, thank you all so much for the
8 ability to testify today. A one-pager [sic] follows
9 with our budget priorities on the written testimony
10 sent to you signed onto as well by New York City Kids
11 [sic] Pack [sic], the Alliance for Quality Education,
12 and [inaudible] Parent Advisory Council which
13 represents all the PTAs in New York City. Thank you
14 so much.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
17 we'll hear from Wagaye Mesele.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: time starts now.

19 WAGAYE MESELE: I'm just here with some
20 of our youth food advocates who will be testifying
21 virtually a little bit later, so I will not be
22 testifying today. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. Next we'll
24 hear from Betty Garger.

1
2 BETTY GARGER: Hi, everyone. I'm with
3 Junior Achievement of New York and we are the largest
4 nonprofit organization in the Greater New York area
5 dedicated to creating pathways to economic
6 empowerment for young people from kindergarten
7 through 12th grade. Our mission to educate and
8 inspire young people helps them understand the
9 economic world around them, plan for their financial
10 futures, and make the most of their potential. We
11 provide tens of thousands of student learning
12 experiences each year, and most importantly at no
13 cost to students or schools, and we are seeking to
14 expand our impact to ensure that our programming is
15 accessible to more students, primarily in low and
16 moderate income school communities throughout the
17 five boroughs. When we had the pandemic we acted
18 swiftly to redesign our options which included
19 virtual delivery. We've now returned to in-person
20 activities, but we used what we learned, and we
21 continue to offer virtual program options such as JI
22 Inspire [sic] Virtual which is a career fair, and we
23 can reach more students than ever. We also just this
24 two months ago opened a permanent site-based location
25 in Brooklyn for our JA Finance Park which helps

1
2 really understand-- students understand budgeting,
3 credit scores, everything that they need to really
4 gain their own economic empowerment. We really thank
5 the City Council for their support and we ask for you
6 to continue supporting us so that we can offer more
7 programs like these to students throughout the City.
8 financial literacy, entrepreneurship, workforce
9 readiness are not part of the required curriculum in
10 New York State schools, and especially for students
11 in underserved and high-need communities, this lack
12 of exposure to basic sound financial information can
13 compound existing barriers to success. At Junior
14 Achievement we work to empower these students by
15 helping them develop responsible--

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
17 expired.

18 BETTY GARGER: Alright. And I just want
19 to thank you all for your support and actually urge
20 the Council respectfully to continue to expand these
21 allocations for Fiscal Year 24 on behalf of the more
22 than 50,000 students we serve every year. Thank you
23 for this opportunity.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
25 we'll hear from Teri West.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

TERI WEST: Good afternoon Chair Brannan and members of the Finance Committee. My name is Teri West. I'm the Director of Government Contracts and School Partnerships at New York Edge. I'm here today to ask that you prioritize New York Edge's Fiscal 24 citywide funding requests. We are seeking for the first time \$250,000 under the Councils Social and Emotional Supports for Students Initiative. We're also seeking \$1.2 million dollars under the Council's Afterschool Enrichment Initiative, an increase of \$200,000 over last year. This would be our first increase in 15 years. New York Edge is the largest provider of school-based afterschool and summer programming in New York City, serving 30,000 students in over 100 schools throughout the five boroughs and employing 1,500 educators, artists, sports specialists and more. The overwhelming majority of our employees reside in the communities they serve. Social/emotional learning is integrated into every element of what we do and we have been recognized as the largest afterschool provider in the nation offering social/emotional learning supports. Council citywide funding enables us to enrich and

1
2 expand our school year and summer programs and has
3 allowed us to develop and implement new unique and
4 engaging programs for our students. In the past,
5 sustained Council funding enabled us to become one of
6 the City's largest providers of College Access
7 programs. New York Edge, its students, its families
8 are extremely grateful for the Council's 30+ years of
9 support. The time has come, however, where increased
10 funding is vitally needed. Unlike our contracts with
11 DYCD and other agencies, our council discretionary
12 contracts are not and have never been eligible for
13 COLA increases. This is making it increasingly
14 difficult to attract and maintain quality staff and
15 to continue to offer the wide array of STEM, SEL,
16 visual and performing art--

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
18 expired.

19 TERI WEST: sports, health and wellness,
20 and college and career readiness programs that we are
21 known for students in under-invested communities
22 across the City. Your support, advocacy on behalf of
23 our FY24 citywide funding request is needed and
24 greatly appreciated. Thank you very much for this
25 opportunity to testify.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Final
3 call for Arcilla Young?

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we're going to
6 call up our next in-person panel: Adam Ganser,
7 Kierana Lane [sp?], Sarah Williams, Emily Walker,
8 Francine Rogers [sp?], Adriana Vink, Alia Soomro, and
9 Ryan Mahoney. Sir, you may begin when you're ready.

10 ADAM GANSER: Hi there. Hello. Thank
11 you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is
12 Adam Ganser and I'm the Executive Director of New
13 Yorkers for Parks. We co-founded the Play Fair
14 Coalition with the League of Conservation Voters and
15 DC37 which now stands at more than 400 organizations
16 across the City, all focusing on advocacy, advocating
17 for our city's parks. We're also behind the One
18 Percent for Parks Campaign. You've heard from DC37
19 about the on-the-ground reality of their work
20 conditions and how our parks are faring. I'm going
21 to put it a little bit more bluntly with some larger
22 context. The City support of our parks has been
23 abysmal for 40 years. We're talking about a 40-year
24 austerity plan. Some quick data points: New York
25 City spends less on our parks as a percentage of the

1 budget per capita and per acre than all other major
2 cities. This is the densest city in the United
3 States. What's more, the Parks Agency over the last
4 40 years has continued to see its share of the City
5 budget within the own city compared to other city
6 agencies. While NYPD, the Department of
7 Corrections, Sanitation, and Department of Ed have
8 all seen budget increases of 130 percent or more
9 since 1980, Parks have seen an increase of just 70
10 percent. More to the point, this year alone, the
11 City is spending more on NYPD overtime at \$670
12 million than it spends on our Parks system. What has
13 this resulted in? An inequitable park system. Parks
14 that rely on inferior maintenance and safety
15 strategies because the agency simply doesn't have
16 enough staff. The lack of funding has a
17 disproportionate and inequitable impact on the
18 millions of New Yorkers, voters, who can't afford to
19 live near parks like a private investment. It's time
20 to invest in forward-looking policy with our parks
21 that will make the City and its residents healthier
22 and safer rather than the annual budget crumbs at the
23 edge of the table. We're calling for a meaningful
24 investment. First and foremost, we're calling for
25

1
2 one percent of the city budget for Parks. More
3 specifically, we're looking for 1,000 baselined new
4 junior-level maintenance positions, more park rangers
5 and PEP officers, investment in natural areas and our
6 forests. Also, we're calling on the Council to
7 reinvest in the Play Fair positions that it used to
8 fund. This is 280 positions across lines that are so
9 critical when we're seeing PEG cuts year after year.
10 Just as an example, in the last year and a half we've
11 seen 500 positions eliminated in the Parks
12 Department. We are very appreciative of the
13 Council's support of our platform and we hope to see
14 that same from the Mayor. Thank you.

15 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is
16 Alia Soomro and I'm the Deputy Director for New York
17 City Policy at the New York League of Conservation
18 Voters. Thank you Chair Brannan and members of the
19 Committee on Finance for the opportunity to testify
20 today. NYLCV believes it is imperative that the
21 City's final FY24 budget prioritizes efforts to move
22 us towards park equity, zero waste, environmental
23 justice, reliable and affordable transportation and
24 more. Allocating sufficient funds towards these
25 initiatives as well as prioritizing and streamlining

1
2 agency staffing and hiring can help us to create a
3 more sustainable, resilient, and equitable future for
4 the City and its residents. We have submitted longer
5 comments, but I'm going to outline a few of our high-
6 level priorities. As Adam and members of DC 37
7 already outlined, we're co-founders of the Play Fair
8 for Parks Coalition and we stand with the rest of the
9 coalition to demand the City allocate at least one
10 percent of the City budget for parks for the
11 protection and maintenance, expansion and promotion
12 of the City's urban forest. Increasing our parks
13 budget is an issue that intersects with many issues,
14 equity, workers' rights, climate, environmental
15 justice, public health, and more. Additionally, as
16 members of the Forest for All NYC Coalition, we urge
17 the City to fully fund the urban forest for both
18 capital and operational expenses in this year's
19 budget. Next, for Sanitation. The City has been
20 behind schedule on meeting our zero waste goal of
21 reducing the amount of waste we send to landfills by
22 2030. So it is imperative that the City take bold
23 action. The City must allocate robust funding and
24 staffing for programs such as Citywide Curbside
25 Organics, commercial waste zone lot implementation,

1
2 citywide waste containerization, and recycling
3 programs. For Housing and Buildings Local Law 97,
4 the City must fully fund the implementation in DOB
5 staffing and hiring. We're also a member of the New
6 York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning, and we
7 stand with advocates calling for more funding for
8 agencies such as HPD and DOB to conduct inspections.
9 Next, we also just want to quickly highlight that for
10 transportation New York City must fund the New York
11 City Streets Plan. And then for NYCHA, the City must
12 prioritize finally bringing up NYCHA to the 21st
13 Century and prioritizing sustainability and
14 resiliency initiatives. Thank you and we look
15 forward to working with y'all.

16 EMILY WALKER: Good afternoon. My name
17 is Emily Walker and I'm the Senior Manager of
18 External Affairs of the Natural Areas Conservancy.
19 Thank you to Chair Brannan and the members of the
20 Committee on Finance for the opportunity to comment
21 on the proposed FY24 budget for NYC Parks. Our
22 natural forests and wetlands comprise 12,000 acres,
23 fully one-third of the City's park system and are the
24 only places where over 50 percent of New Yorkers go
25 to experience nature. Our forested natural areas

1
2 make up 24 percent of our city park land, totaling
3 7,300 acres, but in a report released this spring, we
4 found that only 0.07 percent of the expense budget
5 for NYC Parks has gone towards the maintenance of
6 these lands. To put it another way, imagine that all
7 of Central Park was forested. With this level of
8 staffing there would only be four people working
9 there. Today, we reiterate our support for
10 dedicating one percent of the City budget for Parks
11 and ask that the City Council and the Mayor commit
12 full funding for the Play Fair budget platform. We
13 are grateful to the City Council for calling on the
14 Administration to baseline the 2.5 million allocated
15 in the FY23 budget, but we want to recognize that to
16 properly maintain and care for our natural forested
17 areas and wetlands, we believe an investment of \$3.5
18 million is needed in the FY24 budget. We were
19 thrilled with the Mayor's recent \$2.4 million dollar
20 addition to the FY24 Executive Budget toward
21 connecting and formalizing over 300 miles of trails
22 in our parks. However, we know that this allocation
23 is a small proportion of the funding needed to
24 properly maintain, restore, and activate our natural
25 areas. Despite this new allocation, we want to note

1 that if the FY23 funding is not restored, the 44
2 seasonal staff that are currently funded to engage in
3 forest restoration, maintenance, and plantings will
4 be terminated at the end of June, and the work of NYC
5 Parks to manage forests across more than 35 parks
6 will come to a halt. The allocation of \$3.5 million
7 in FY24 would support the retention of these 44
8 seasonal staff as well as the addition of five
9 seasonal staff to support public access improvements
10 and wetlands resilience. We view this funding as a
11 critical complement to support the Executive Budget
12 trails funding allocation. It is imperative that the
13 FY24 budget includes \$3.5 million to continue care of
14 our natural areas, and we stand with our colleagues
15 today in strong support of Play Fair calling for the
16 full reinstatement of funds that were cut from the
17 Parks budget last year. Thank you.

19 SARAH MCCOLLUM WILLIAMS: Good afternoon.
20 I'm Sarah McCollum Williams, Executive Director of
21 Green Guerillas, a nonprofit that supports community
22 gardens and activates youth engaged in food and
23 environmental justice across the City. Special
24 thanks to Chair Brannan and all of the Committee
25 Members here today. in a 2018 study published in the

1
2 Journal of the American Medical Association,
3 researchers found that for people living near green
4 spaces, feeling depressed significantly decreased by
5 41 percent and self-reported poor mental health
6 showed a reduction of 62 percent. They included that
7 neighborhood physical conditions have been associated
8 with mental illness and may partially explain
9 persistent socioeconomic disparities and the
10 prevalence of poor mental health. Green spaces
11 provided by community gardens don't just beautify
12 neighborhoods, they have the radical potential to
13 create health, wealth, and resilience within them.
14 Community gardens provide some of the same benefits
15 as parks, but beyond that, they provide strong
16 additional benefits in the form of neighborhood food
17 sovereignty and education around healthy eating.
18 Despite these powerful benefits, community gardens
19 and the essential work undertaken within them are
20 underfunded and their potential as centers for
21 powerful systems transformation are often overlooked.
22 On behalf of community gardeners across the City, I
23 urge you to increase funding for Green Thumb by
24 investing \$4.8 million dollars to support a variety
25 of asks that I'll include in my written testimony.

1
2 We understand that the City is facing uncertain
3 economic times, but we urge the City Council to
4 priorities impactful programs and restructure
5 operations to preserve services. The long-term
6 health of New Yorkers will be severely compromised if
7 the City balances its budget by reducing critical
8 services unnecessarily. A recent report from
9 Comptroller Brad Lander shows that one area for
10 possible savings is reducing overtime work by the
11 City's uniformed employees. His report showed that
12 the City spent \$1.5 billion dollars on such overtime
13 last year, including 43 percent of that overtime
14 which went to the Police Department. Organizations
15 like the Citizens Budget Commission and the City's
16 Independent Budget Office have additional practical
17 ideas that could be implemented without stripping
18 core services from New Yorkers. We stand with our
19 colleagues in the Play Fair Coalition to urge Mayor
20 Adams and the City to make good on the commitment
21 that Mayor Adams made to fund NYC Parks with one
22 percent of the City budget. Our health depends on it.
23 Thank you.

24 RYAN MAHONEY: Hello, and thank you for
25 the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name

1
2 is Ryan Mahoney. I'm the President and Principal
3 Biologist at Gotham Bat Conservancy, a wildlife
4 conservation organization located here in New York,
5 and I'm here to speak on behalf of our organization
6 and as a member of the Forest for All NYC Coalition.
7 The Forest for All Coalition is dedicated to justly
8 and equitably protecting, maintaining, expanding and
9 promoting the urban forest within New York City. And
10 we at Gotham Bat Conservancy champion the
11 conservation and restoration of habitats in the wake
12 of environmental challenges. With deep commitment to
13 the natural world and a passion for preserving
14 biodiversity, it was just the other day International
15 Biological Diversity Day celebrated at the U.N. We
16 strive to create a brighter future for specifically
17 bats and the ecosystems that they inhabit here in New
18 York. First and foremost, I would like to urge the
19 Council to fully fund the urban forest in this years'
20 budget, both for capital and operational expenses.
21 The urban forest is a vital piece of public
22 infrastructure that plays a significant role in
23 enhancing the wellbeing of all New Yorkers. However,
24 it has been long over-looked and under-resourced,
25 perhaps for the entirety of most people here life

1
2 time, hindering its ability to equitably serve our
3 communities. The National Forest Service estimates
4 that New York City's urban forest is made up of about
5 seven million trees at various heights, health
6 statuses and life stages. The forest removes
7 approximately 1,100 tons of pollution from the air
8 annually in New York, stores 1.2 million tons of
9 carbon, and removes 51,000 tons of carbon from the
10 atmosphere here in New York annually. Our forest has
11 an estimated compensatory value of \$5.7 billion
12 dollars. In addition to all of these services that
13 the forest provides to us all, it also serves as an
14 invaluable habitat to wildlife including one of New
15 York City's most iconic animals, bats. As the Gotham
16 Bat Conservancy, we are particularly concerned about
17 the preservation of bat habitat within the urban
18 forest. Bats playing a crucial role in our ecosystem
19 as natural pest controllers and the unsung heroes of
20 nocturnal pollination. They contribute to the
21 overall health and balance of our environment, and
22 unfortunately the challenges that they face within
23 our region and within the urban forest are
24 significant. They have severely impact-- they've
25 been severely impacted by a fungal disease first

1 identified in the State of New York causing massive
2 population declines across the entirety of North
3 America since 2007. New York State has experienced
4 specifically some of the highest mortality rates, and
5 the urban forest that we have here in New York serves
6 as a critical refuge for these bats affected by the
7 disease. Furthermore, habitat loss and degradation
8 poses an additional threat to bat populations. As
9 urbanization continues to expand, natural habits are
10 being fragmented and destroyed, leaving bats with
11 limited spaces to roost, forage, and raise their
12 young. Our urban forest provides vital sanctuary for
13 bats in our region, offering diverse opportunities to
14 roost inside rich foraging grounds and important
15 breeding habitats. It's worth noting that New York
16 City's urban forest is not only a refuge for bats in
17 general, but specifically for endangered species of
18 bats, including the Northern Long-eared Bat which we
19 recently identified last week as being present in the
20 Bronx. Given the challenges that the critical role
21 that bats play in our ecosystem, it is imperative
22 that the City Council commits sustained funding to
23 the urban forest. Adequate resources will enable
24 comprehensive conservation efforts including habitat
25

1 restoration, public education opportunities,
2 community engagement, as well as pathways to
3 environmental and scientific employment opportunities
4 the City lacks. By investing in the urban forest, we
5 can support their recovery and long-term survival of
6 bat populations while also providing-- preserving the
7 ecological integrity of our city and enhancing the
8 valuable environmental services that we are provided
9 with every day. Thank you.

11 ADRIANA VINK: Hello. My name is Adriana
12 Vink. I'm a climate organizer with Sunrise Movement
13 NYC and a 17-year-old public high school student.
14 Education, policing, and the environment-- last year,
15 this City cut funding for two out of those three
16 things, and I'm sure we can all guess which two.
17 Mayor Adams and politicians like him who proselytize
18 about austerity argue that there simply isn't enough
19 money, but that is a lie. The DOE will receive an
20 extra \$493 million dollars next year from the CFE
21 lawsuit, and in addition the IBO has estimated that
22 New York City will end Fiscal Year 2023 with a \$4.9
23 billion dollar surplus. And as of early February,
24 the City's cash balance was at \$14.6 billion dollars,
25 including reserves. Last year, this governing body

1 cut funding for public education by \$215 million
2 dollars. My high school lost \$194,856 despite
3 increased enrollment. I was in the room with my
4 principal when she explained that we had to pinch
5 pennies and cut down on student-run clubs, one of few
6 things that bring us joy in the midst of an acute
7 student mental health crisis. The Parks Department
8 budget last year was below one percent of the total
9 budget commitment that the Mayor had made on the
10 campaign trail, and in fact, last year's budget
11 enacted three percent cuts across the board to almost
12 every city agency, except of course the NYPD. I am
13 here today to ask why is there always money for
14 violence and terror, but never for our communities,
15 never for our schools. Why does this city fund
16 unlawful units like the Strategic Response Group
17 which countered peaceful protests with deadly force?
18 Why does this city actively empower the police force
19 to abuse and assault black and brown New Yorkers, and
20 why does this city use our tax dollars to dole out
21 over-bloated over-time pay, a projected \$740 million
22 dollars this year, and spend unbelievable sums, \$121
23 million dollars last year in lawsuits resulting from
24

1
2 officers who simply couldn't keep their hands to
3 themselves?

4 [applause]

5 ADRIANA VINK: This city has the money to
6 restore the cuts made to essential services last
7 year, and this body has the power to do so. Budgets
8 are documents of morals and values, and I am here
9 today to ask where are yours?

10 [applause]

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Council
12 Member Krishnan?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Well, thank you
14 all so much as advocates for your testimony today.
15 That was both powerful and highlighting the clear
16 needs that we have here in our city, too. I would
17 like to also call special attention to the parks
18 groups that are here, both for your work every ingle
19 day to take care of our green spaces across our city
20 and to advocate for more funding. I just wanted to
21 be clear before asking my question, too. you know,
22 the-- as we stated in our Executive Budget hering and
23 Preliminary Budget hearings this year, last year, the
24 call for one percent for our budget for city parks
25 not only is something that is not novel or radical,

1 but it's catching us up to other cities across our
2 country. But on top of that, that is something that
3 this mayor explicitly campaigned on and stated the
4 importance of parks and taking care of our parks.
5 And so it is shocking that we still our fighting to
6 make sure that we are getting there. We had the
7 highest budget for parks last year, but it's nowhere
8 near what it needs to be, and we expect to see a
9 stronger commitment from this Administration when it
10 comes to taking care of our green spaces, a
11 commitment that is so far not materialized despite
12 the stated promises and commitments for several years
13 now. On that note, one question I have is our
14 Council budget response called for 1,000 city parks
15 workers which would be an investment as you all
16 testified to in our parks workers and the staff who
17 are the beating heart of our park system. and I just
18 open it to any of you all on the panel to just give
19 some testimony as to what would having a 1,000 city
20 parks workers for our Parks Department do to address
21 some of these disparities that we're talking about
22 here and to address the maintenance issues that we
23 see in our parks?
24

1
2 ADAM GANSER: Hi, Adam Ganser from New
3 Yorkers for Parks. There's a couple things that
4 really this starts to address. First, it's just a
5 general shortage of staffing. I think we heard
6 earlier in the testimony on the number of PEP
7 Officers which is now down close to 200. There's 200
8 PEP officers to monitor 30,000 acres of park land
9 across the City. The other thing is that over the
10 last 40 years, the Parks Department has gone from a
11 model where you had Parks workers stationed in each
12 park to mobile crews which means that groups of four
13 or five park workers are driving around the City to
14 multiple parks during their shifts getting there, and
15 not coming back for three, four days, or five days.
16 We're looking for more parks workers to be stationed
17 in parks which increases certainly their eyes on the
18 park for cleanliness, but also more engaged with the
19 communities that are surrounding those parks to be
20 responsive to the community needs and public safety
21 needs. And those are just two examples. I mean,
22 you're talking about levels of staffing now that are
23 thousands fewer than what they used to be in the 70s
24 and the 80s and we're playing catch-up both with the
25 numbers and with the models that they're using.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you,
3 Adam. And I just wanted to also acknowledge that the
4 Play Fair Coalition and the New Yorkers for Parks
5 have put out an excellent report highlighting these
6 disparities between parks investments by other cities
7 and how we in New York City have some of the least
8 amount of dollars spent in our park system in
9 comparison to other cities across the country. Adam,
10 isn't it correct too that over the last 40 years,
11 last year's budget aside, there's been a steady
12 decline in public dollars and public spending for our
13 city's parks?

14 ADAM GANSER: Yes, that is true. We, you
15 know, in the 70s we were funding parks at close to
16 1.5 percent of the city budget after the fiscal
17 crisis and into the 80s it went down to 0.5 percent
18 which is where it's hovered ever since, and it got
19 worse two or three years ago during the pandemic when
20 Parks Department was cut by \$85 million dollars and
21 our parks were in the worst situation that they've
22 ever been in since the Parks Department was recording
23 that. I think the issue here is that we're continuing
24 to negotiate based on last year's situation rather
25 than zooming out and saying what does the Parks

1
2 Department need, what do New Yorkers need. The One
3 Percent for Parks Campaign is exactly that. We're
4 looking at other city's models, maintenance models,
5 and just general common sense. Looking at how
6 inequitable the City's parks system is, where if you
7 live around the park that gets private funding, you
8 live in a beautiful park and that may be your
9 experience and you might think the rest of the City's
10 parks looks like that. But for the millions and
11 millions other New Yorkers that don't have that
12 luxury, that's not what they're experiencing.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And so isn't it
14 a fact in your testimony too that one percent of the
15 City's parks is not only catching up New York City to
16 other cities across our country, but it's actually
17 returning New York City to what invested in our parks
18 50 years ago at this point.

19 ADAM GANSER: That's exactly right, and I
20 mentioned in my earlier testimony that the Parks
21 Department is-- we've not just fallen behind other
22 cities. We've fallen behind our agencies. most of
23 the other agencies in the City have seen growth in
24 the last 40 years of above 130 percent whereas the
25 parks has just grown-- the budget has just grown by

1
2 70 percent. Parks Department is essentially a boots-
3 on-the-ground agency. You need people. You need
4 people to be in the places where they're working, and
5 we don't have that right now. Despite what the
6 Commissioner and the Mayor say, we just need more
7 people.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Absolutely. And
9 this-- it's shocking to think about how we're looking
10 at returning to the 1970 standard, and again,
11 highlighting how this is not maybe novel or radical,
12 but frankly bringing back Parks investments to what
13 they had. And wouldn't you also agree that as this
14 public spending has gone down over the last decades
15 or so, the importance of parks as essential spaces
16 for New Yorkers has only gone up especially in the
17 last several years given this pandemic?

18 ADAM GANSER: Absolutely. First of all,
19 you've seen the population of New York City grow by
20 many-- you know, a million people over that same 40
21 years. We haven't had a significant increase in the
22 number of parks over that same period of time, so
23 just generally there's more people in our parks.
24 During COVID you say exponential increases and that
25 hasn't petered off. We did a survey about six months

1
2 ago, park stewards were saying they're seeing, you
3 know, 10 to 20 percent more people in their parks
4 during busy season. But what is maybe surprising is
5 that's extending throughout the year. The city--
6 it's a warmer place. People are outside more during
7 the year than they used to be, and there's-- I mean,
8 frankly we're healthier people now than we were in
9 1970. We're not out smoking cigarettes on the
10 corner. We're in our parks jogging. And so I think
11 there's a real need that is not being met by this
12 city, and it goes directly obviously to the inequity
13 that we've talked about but it's just also quality of
14 life. What are we here for? We're here to be
15 spending time in culture as we've heard from other
16 advocates, but also being able to live and survive in
17 the City where greenspace is abundant and well-
18 maintained with our children, families and
19 communities.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And my final
21 question for the rest of the panel, too, whether it's
22 League of Conservation Voters, Forest for All
23 Coalition. We've talked about the importance and
24 this council has talked about the importance of a 30
25 percent tree canopy cover by 2035 and how crucial

1
2 that is, not only for making sure we have trees and
3 trade across our city, but for our climate, to combat
4 the urban heat island effect, and to address huge
5 disparities where many low-income communities of color
6 don't have the tree canopy or shade they need and it
7 results in a much, much hotter climate than other
8 wealthier parts of the City that have far more as far
9 as shade goes and cooler temperatures. Wouldn't you
10 say that if we have one percent of our budget for
11 City Parks that would go a long way helping to ensure
12 that we had a 30 percent tree canopy cover by 2035
13 and that we could maintain the trees critically, not
14 instead of just planting them, also maintaining them.
15 Wouldn't having that budget help with that, too?

16 EMILY WALKER: Thank you for the
17 question, Council Member. My name is Emily Walker.
18 I'm the Senior Manager of External Affairs at the
19 Natural Areas Conservancy. One thing I'd like to
20 highlight for the Natural Areas Conservancy, we have
21 obviously a very large interest in our natural
22 forested areas which, as I mentioned in my testimony
23 are 24 percent of the entire Parks portfolio. While
24 there, you know, are relatively small amount of maybe
25 city land relative to the rest of the built

1 environment. We've done research that has found that
2 69 percent of the carbon stored in New York City is
3 stored through our natural forested area, and yet,
4 the level of investment that we see in the care of
5 these lands is incredibly paltry. As Adam has
6 mentioned, the budget for Parks overall is like so
7 paltry to begin with. So to have such an
8 increasingly small amount going to the care of what
9 is a really crucial asset, and in an era of
10 increasing climate change, and we're seeing that, you
11 know, year over year these impacts in our
12 neighborhoods to not invest in protecting our forest
13 and our wetlands which we're losing six figures of
14 each year is really shocking. And you know, the
15 amount that we're asking for is pennies on the dollar
16 relative to the entire city budget to care for at the
17 very least our natural forested assets. I'm not
18 going to speak so much to street trees. That's now
19 our area of expertise, but as a member of the Forest
20 for All Coalition with many of my colleagues here
21 today, I know that reaching that 30 percent goal will
22 obviously include the public realm in our public
23 parks, but it will also require private land and I
24 think that's the challenge that, you know, the
25

1 Coalition is eager to work with the City Council.

2 And I'll turn it over to any of my other colleagues
3 who might want to add to that.

4
5 ALIA SOOMRO: Thank you. Alia Soomro
6 from the New York League of Conservation Voters. I
7 agree with everything they said, and I just want to
8 emphasize that it is so important to increase the
9 tree canopy coverage throughout the City because so
10 much research has shown the correlation of
11 neighborhoods that were previously redlined and the
12 tree canopy coverage throughout the City because so
13 much research has shown the correlation of
14 neighborhoods that were previously redlined and the
15 tree canopy coverage. So this is-- Forest for All,
16 you know, really tries to emphasize that this is an
17 equity and environmental justice issue and we want to
18 try to advocate that the City prioritize tree canopy
19 and environmental justice areas in neighborhoods that
20 don't have tree canopy coverage.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And isn't it
22 fair to say that the tree canopy for New York City, a
23 substantial part of that also is within NYCHA, the
24 trees and tree canopy of NYCHA?

1
2 ALIA SOOMRO: Definitely, and part of it
3 is preserving and, you know, maintaining that.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you.
5 Just close by saying that as we're hearing today the
6 importance of our green spaces, the importance of the
7 funding for our parks and our tree canopy, the
8 importance of NYCHA and our housing and how it's
9 connected to our parks, if this Administration,
10 besides words, cares about these issues, cares about
11 our greenspaces, cares about NYCHA, and states its
12 goal to fund Parks at one percent or more, then it's
13 time that we see that money backing up those words.
14 So thank you all so much for your work.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all so
16 much. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to begin
18 our next virtual panel: Jen Gaboury, Nancy Cardwell
19 [sp?], Benjamin Watson, and Kayla Valez [sp?].

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Then our-- we'll be
22 followed by our next in-person panel: Christopher
23 Hanway [sp?], Jamell Anderson, Brianna Paden-
24 Williams, Linda Hoffman, Eileen Maher, Lauren
25 Schuster, Lisa Dagley [sp?], Na'ilah Amaru, and Anna

1
2 Kril. Begin with Jen Gaboury. The next in-person
3 panel will be Christopher Hanway [sp?], Jamell
4 Henderson, Brianna Paden=Williams, Linda Hoffman,
5 Eileen Maher, Lauren Schuster, Lisa Daglion [sp?],
6 Na'ilah Amaru, and Anna Kril. Remote panel can begin
7 with Jen Gaboury.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: time starts now.

9 JEN GABOURY: Hello there. Good
10 afternoon Chair Brannan BNT [sic] members, and
11 Council Members. Thank you so much for your
12 endurance today. Really appreciate you being here
13 listening. My name's Jen Gaboury. I teach courses
14 in gender and politics at Hunter College where I also
15 serve as the PSC CUNY Chapter Chair here. We've
16 heard today across the session about the need to
17 resist the PEG cuts, and James Davis talked about the
18 \$60 million dollars in cuts that CUNY might receive,
19 but of course it's not enough just to think about the
20 restoration of those cuts. We really need money
21 beyond that, and are encouraging you to stand strong
22 and push against austerity budgeting as we've heard
23 across the day. What-- it's not just going to be
24 enough for us to resist those cuts. We have existing
25 vacancies and what we know is that we can hire

1 workers at CUNY right now. The vacancies we need are
2 things like financial aid advisors, lab techs, set of
3 STEM courses, writing center staff, support for
4 English language learners, admin workers to keep
5 their programming going, including people in DC37. I
6 have a DC37 worker about eight feet away from me
7 right now, and there are positions that are not
8 filled, and I'm really concerned about the positions
9 that are not filled right now and what it would mean
10 for us to sustain more cuts. One of the really sad
11 things about what happens at college is people come
12 into college and then leave college without a degree,
13 and it's a real tragedy of institution that is
14 preventable on our end. And it is in fact the cost
15 of austerity. There is nothing intuitive about
16 enrolling in a course of study or sorting through
17 financial aid work. People need advising to do that.
18 And so we are here to encourage you to invest in
19 advising, going beyond the things that you were going
20 to do, you know, going beyond resisting PEGS. We
21 encourage you to invest in advisors to help us. We
22 know that when you invest--

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
25 expired.

1
2 JEN GABOURY: Thank you so much. Thank
3 you so much.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is
5 Nancy Cardwell [sp?].

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nancy Cardwell? Next
8 we go to Benjamin Watson.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Benjamin Watson?
11 Next we go to Keila Velez.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 KEILA OTTERO: Good afternoon Chair and
14 Council team. My name is Keila Ottero. I am going to
15 speak on behalf of all CUNY students, but especially
16 CUNY veterans and military members as a Peer Mentor
17 under the COVA program, which is the Central Office
18 of Veteran Affairs. I want to go back to a lot of
19 the discussion that was mentioned this morning about
20 homelessness and food deficiency and shelter and
21 protection about their mental and emotional health.
22 As a peer mentor, that is our job and that I why we
23 are here asking for assistance. You will see more
24 in-depth on the testimony that I sent via mail, but
25 we want to serve our students as diligently as we

1
2 can, and in New York City and worldwide, we always
3 say we defend our veterans, we protect our veterans,
4 we want to serve our veterans, but yet there's not
5 much we're doing for our veterans, especially those
6 that are coming back into civilianhood [sic]. So, we
7 do ask for assistance for transportation, for
8 housing, for again health services, financial
9 literacy to help them, because New York City is a
10 high-price city and many of our veterans need the
11 help not just financially, but mentally, emotionally,
12 and with the community. So again, to wrap it up
13 quickly for the next speakers. Please help CUNY.
14 Please help COVA continue to grow, because we're not
15 doing it for us, we're doing it for the next
16 generations, and I'm speaking as a Chapter 35
17 recipient and daughter of a Germany-served veteran
18 and a Korean War Vet granddaughter. So thank you for
19 your time, and again, more in-depth information.
20 Help us help CUNY. You want to say that you're
21 military friendly, help us be military friendly and
22 supportive. Thank you for your time.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Last call for Nancy
24 Cardwell or Benjamin Watson?

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Ossé?

3 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Yeah, just to
4 comment about veterans, and I see a couple of
5 veterans that are here today. You know, your Chair
6 did not have a Preliminary Budget hearing which was
7 completely disrespectful to veterans of this city.
8 You know, I have Black Veterans for social Justice
9 with my district, and I just want to make sure that
10 you all know that, you know, your chair of your
11 committee should be fighting for you to have both
12 Preliminary Budget hearings and Executive Budget
13 hearings. So, glad to see you all here today. You
14 know, we will definitely advocate for all of you. I
15 will continue advocating for, you know, my black
16 veterans within my district, but just to let that
17 stay on the record.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, I will now call
19 up the next in-person panel: Christopher Hanway
20 [sp?], Jamell Henderson, Brianna Paden-Williams,
21 Linda Hoffman, Eileen Maher, Lauren Schuster, Lisa
22 Daglion [sp?], Na'ilah Amaru, Anna Kril. As a
23 reminder to all people testifying, we are accepting
24 written testimony in full. If your remarks are going
25 over two minutes, it can be submitted up to 72 hours

1
2 after the hearing is concluded at
3 testimony@council.nyc.gov. You can begin when you're
4 ready.

5 ANNA KRIL: Good afternoon. My name is
6 Anna Kril. I am a two-time breast cancer survivor as
7 the Founder and President of Astoria Queens SHAREing
8 and CAREing. Thank you Chair Brannan, Health Chair
9 Schulman, my Council Member Cabán, and all the
10 members. I am here today to ask that you support our
11 request of \$250,000 under the Cancer Services
12 Initiative, an increase of approximately \$100,000
13 over our FY23 allocation. This would be our first
14 increase since the creation of the initiative.
15 SHAREing and CAREing was founded 29 years ago to
16 address the needs of Queens's women living with
17 breast and ovarian cancer. It was our position then
18 and remains so today that Queens cancer residents
19 should not have to leave the borough for quality
20 cancer treatment care and support. Through the years
21 our reach has expanded and now we serve women and men
22 with all types of cancers. We are a one-stop,
23 grassroots, community-based organization which
24 provides free bilingual supportive services to
25 Queens's cancer survivors, their families,

1
2 caregivers, and community members. We strive to
3 reduce fear and eliminate cultural barriers in order
4 to promote early detection and treatment as well as
5 to improve access to life-saving services. With
6 council funding we assist approximately 4,000
7 individuals a year. Over the course of the past two
8 years we have provided programming in 11 of the 14
9 Queens Council Districts. While the majority of
10 those we serve reside in Queens, we have also
11 assisted cancer survivors from all other boroughs.
12 No one is ever turned away. Please help us to
13 continue to assist cancer survivors, their families
14 and to try very hard to detect cancer at its most
15 earliest stages so people can survive and live.
16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 JAMELL HENDERSON: Good afternoon Chair
19 Brannan and members of the New York City Council. It
20 is an absolute honor and privilege to be here before
21 in true service, as I serve as the New York City
22 Council Regional Board Chair for Citizen Action of
23 New York. I am here to stand and on behalf the
24 members to really call out and encourage you as
25 members of this council and this committee to stand

1 with the people in supporting, investing and
2 increased investments in the everyday city agencies
3 that help the everyday New Yorkers move forward. We
4 have a mayor right now whose narrative is to force
5 our born-and-bred New Yorkers who are literally
6 trying to navigate our city's changing environment.
7 We have a narrative that while he is of CUNY, he is
8 cutting CUNY. We have a narrative that while he says
9 he stands for hunger and mental health and
10 homelessness and other things that are affecting the
11 daily lives of New Yorkers, he is telling us and
12 letting you all know that the city agency that needs
13 to be 100 percent immune from all of these things is
14 the NYPD. And we want to-- we were here to encourage
15 you all to let you know that the funding that is
16 needed for people like myself who live in NYCHA, a
17 proud resident of Kingsborough Houses in Brooklyn,
18 those who are in foster care, those who are looking
19 to seek an opportunity to excel in public education,
20 those who are looking for an opportunity to have true
21 affordable housing instead of mis-interpreting that
22 word where there's construction being built all
23 around and it's not for the everyday born and bred
24 New Yorkers. The New York Times issued an article
25

1
2 saying that 200,000 black New Yorkers left, not
3 because they wanted to, but because they could not
4 afford the cost of living here, and yet, we are still
5 being faced back here with these same situations
6 where \$11 billion dollar budget for the NYPD is being
7 pushed and promoted where the common funding that is
8 needed for the everyday people are being silenced.
9 So I'm here on behalf of the members of Citizen
10 Action of New York, the people of NYCHA, and the
11 everyday hard-working unionized, organized, educated,
12 and galvanized people of the City of New York. We
13 are encouraging you all to stand with the people as
14 we continue to fight and push for our city. Thank
15 you.

16 EILEEN MAHER: Good afternoon. My name
17 is Eileen Maher. I'm a Civil Rights Union Leader
18 from Vocal New York, a social worker, and a survivor
19 of domestic violence for which I was criminalized and
20 incarcerated for rather than helped. I am here to
21 urge you to rather than over-fund the NYPD including
22 the absurd SRG unit which are nothing more than a
23 glorified overpaid group of racist thugs. Rather, use
24 that money to fund education, domestic violence
25 services, mental health, health, library,

1
2 alternatives to incarceration, reentry and violence
3 interrupter programs. These programs have been
4 scientifically proven to improve lives, communities,
5 families, and decarcery [sic]. The continued
6 investment in the SRG as well as other absurd NYPD
7 programs is nothing but a money pit. They stand
8 around, playing on their phones, then when an
9 opportunity arises for them to kidnap a person of
10 color, a mentally-ill person or someone of a lower
11 income bracket and use abusive and racist and
12 inciting remarks to try and create a false violent
13 situation, and when that doesn't work they resort to
14 physical violence, especially the so-called or unused
15 kettling. It is beyond deplorable. I've been
16 kettled by the NYPD SRG in four situations. So I
17 call bull that they-- when they say they don't use
18 it. When I was experiencing domestic violence that
19 led to my incarceration I pleaded with the NYPD and
20 was laughed at. One officer said that's what you get
21 for being in an inter-racial relationship, only he
22 used a different word. That officer is a lieutenant
23 with the SRG now. And toy dogs-- I'm an animal
24 trainer. I know the importance of real canine in many
25 first response field, including police work and

1
2 fireman, but seriously, if they want a toy dog,
3 Fisher Price has a few in their selection. And
4 finally, just stop it with Rikers. It's-- just--
5 that's another money pit. Just put the money back
6 into de-carcerating [sic]. And finally, it was
7 really difficult to get in here today. They said
8 that there were no spaces, but when I came in there
9 were like 40 open chairs. So I'm just curious why
10 that happened. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 NA'ILAH AMARU: Good afternoon
13 Chairperson Brannan and members of the New York City
14 Council Finance Committee. I am Na'ilah Amaru
15 Director of Policy and Campaigns at the Human
16 Services Council, a membership organization
17 representing over 170 human services providers across
18 the City. Agency takes on this work so our members
19 can focus on running their organizations and
20 providing direct support to New Yorkers. We thank
21 the City Council for the \$60 million workforce
22 investment in the previous budget. However, the
23 workforce investment is not a true COLA. We ask that
24 you pay us what we are worth. Provide a 6.5 percent
25 COLA, estimated at \$200 million for all contracted

1 human services workers in the FY24 budget and
2 announce a multi-year agreement that matches that of
3 DC37 that just achieved a five-year deal. I must
4 also emphasize that a COLA included in the budget
5 needs to be a percentage, because only a pot of
6 funding means providers cannot rely on what
7 percentage they will actually get for their workers.
8 We need a full 6.5 percent COLA included in the final
9 budget. The human services sector is a critical
10 workforce essential to the social and economic fabric
11 of the City. Yet, the City continues to disappoint by
12 voicing that it is committed to equity while paying
13 poverty-level wages for human services workers who
14 are 70 percent women and 75 percent people of color
15 with roughly two-thirds of full-time workers earning
16 below the 2019 near-poverty threshold. While the
17 sector has grown, funding has not. Government calls
18 on nonprofits to be like businesses and partners in
19 helping to solve our most pressing social issues, all
20 while not treating nonprofits like a business or
21 partner. When Silicon Valley Bank failed, the
22 government response was immediate, as it closing put
23 millions of taxpayer dollars at risk. However, in
24 response to the closure of human services nonprofit
25

1
2 Sheltering Arms, the Administration stated that they
3 are working hard to clear the backlog. Then the City
4 announced substantial investments in the NYPD
5 Officers with nothing for human services workers in
6 the Preliminary Budget. This lack of action and
7 divestment is dangerous, and the sector cannot
8 continue to participate in an unjust system. The
9 city must act now to show its commitment and receive
10 the just pay that they deserve, and so we ask that
11 you pay us what we are worth. Provide a 6.5 percent
12 cost of living adjustment. This sector is at a
13 breaking point. Without government investment
14 providers will have to make a difficult decision
15 about how and if they will be able to work with
16 government to serve their communities, because this
17 system is flawed to continue. Thank you for the
18 opportunity to testify, and I look forward to
19 continuing our work with the City Council to support
20 the Just Pay Campaign.

21 LINDA HOFFMAN: Good afternoon. I'm
22 Linda Hoffman, President of New York Foundation for
23 Senior Citizens, and I want to thank you, Mr. Chair
24 and members of the Finance Committee, for the support
25 that you have provided for New York Foundation for

1
2 Senior Citizens Citywide Home-sharing and Respite
3 Care Program. On behalf of our Board of Directors,
4 we would deeply appreciate you ensuring a
5 continuation of our program by supporting the
6 provision of \$200,000 from the Speaker's Citywide
7 Budget, an allocation from your individual and
8 borough delegations discretionary budgets within the
9 next city budget. Our Respite Care Services provide
10 affordable short-term in-home care at the low cost of
11 \$17 an hour paid directly to the homecare workers by
12 frail elderly who are above the Medicaid level and
13 are attempting to manage at home with the help of
14 others, caregivers, and thereby prevent their need
15 for nursing home care. Although the cost of private
16 agency homecare is \$30 an hour, our Respite Care
17 services provide the lowest cost and highest quality
18 homecare at \$17 per hour and free of charge in
19 emergency situations. During the past 42 years we
20 have provided over 12,000 older adults citywide and
21 many more thousands of their caregivers with respite
22 care services plus jobs for hundreds of certified
23 home health aides. Our free home-sharing services
24 match adult hosts with extra space in their
25 apartments or houses to share with responsible,

1 compatible adult guests in need of affordable
2 housing. One of the match mates must be over the age
3 of 60. During the past 42 years, we have
4 successfully matched over 2,500 persons in 1,250
5 shared living arrangements. I am meeting with the
6 Commissioner of Aging, Lorraine Cortez Vasquez this
7 Tuesday for guidance on how we might obtain
8 additional program funding, plus extend our home-
9 sharing services to asylum-seekers through HRA. This
10 program is a win/win. It prevents
11 institutionalization and thereby saves the City
12 significant Medicaid dollars, and I really hope and
13 pray that it will be possible for you to assist us
14 ensuring that we can continue this program citywide
15 hopefully by having Speaker's funding at \$200,000
16 which was \$150 last year, because we really need this
17 funding this year, especially this year, and
18 allocations from your individual and borough
19 delegations within the City's next budget. We thank
20 you in advance for hopefully providing these
21 desperately needed funds.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

24 BRIANNA PADEN-WILLIAMS: Hello. I'm
25 Briana Paden-Williams. I'm the Communications and

1
2 Policy Associate at LiveOn New York. Thank you for
3 the opportunity to testify today. LiveOn New York's
4 members include more than 110 community-based
5 organizations that provide core services which allow
6 all New Yorkers to thrive in our community as we age.
7 When I last testified on this budget we were ringing
8 the bell on a divestment from older adult's services
9 throughout the services with inflation costs
10 crippling organizations and a growing wait list for
11 homecare and case management. Now, the crisis is
12 only worsened with additional cuts to key services
13 including the Home Delivered Meals Program and older
14 adult centers with the proposed \$12 million cut from
15 the Mayor. Yet, we know the aging population in our
16 city is growing and the need for services will
17 continue to rise. And so this budget must be a
18 turning point in our city's ageist tendencies to cut
19 aging services and instead, we need to actively
20 invest in creating a better place to age for all of
21 us. And therefore, LiveOn New York recommends the
22 following investments, many of which were championed
23 in the city's Preliminary Budget response, and we
24 join HSC and other organizations today calling on the
25 City to just pay all human service workers a livable

1 and equitable wage. Poverty-level government
2 contracts have left human service workers severely
3 underpaid for years, and so we call on the City to
4 establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5 percent COLA for
5 all human services contracts. We also encourage the
6 City to invest an additional 29.4 million to address
7 the unmet needs for older adults through the DFTA
8 services, and this includes investments in technology
9 as well as investments in the case management and
10 homecare waitlist, as well as additional investments
11 in technology and communications and marketing. We
12 also encourage the City to allocate funding to
13 develop a thousand units of affordable senior housing
14 per year, as well as increase the reimbursement rates
15 for the SARA [sic] Program. And lastly, we encourage
16 the City to invest an additional \$2.6 million for the
17 Support our Seniors Discretionary Initiative, as well
18 as continue to fully fund all discretionary
19 initiatives as well. And so to truly make New York a
20 better place to age where we can all thrive in
21 [inaudible] we must build a true, caring economy that
22 supports all New Yorkers as we age, regardless of our
23 background. More information can be found in my
24

1
2 written testimony, but thank you for the opportunity
3 to testify today.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And on Zoom, Lauren
5 Schuster.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 LAUREN SCHUSTER: Good afternoon and
8 thank you Finance Chair Brannan and members of the
9 Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify
10 today. My name is Lauren Schuster. I'm the Vice
11 President of Government Affairs at Urban Resource
12 Institute. URI is the largest provider of domestic
13 violence shelter services in the country. We provide
14 shelter to more than 2,200 domestic violence
15 survivors and families experiencing homelessness each
16 night. As the City feels the strain of the growing
17 homelessness crisis, so to do our staff who are being
18 asked to do more with much less. In addition to the
19 fact that the budget does not include a 6.5 percent
20 COLA for human services workers, it also passes down
21 a 2.5 percent cut to providers disguised as an
22 efficiency measure. This cut if implemented would
23 result in fewer staff supporting our clients as they
24 recover from trauma, rebuild their lives, and secure
25 permanent housing. The burden on our staff has the

1 potential to lead to significant service disruptions
2 to our clients. The vast majority of our workforce
3 are women and people of color, many of whom work two
4 and three jobs to support their families and rely on
5 at least one form of public assistance to make ends
6 meet. They deserve just pay, a 6.5 percent COLA
7 without cuts to our sector. We are grateful to the
8 Council for including \$3 million dollars in the
9 budget for micro-grans for survivors of gender-based
10 violence, and we urge the Administration to include
11 \$6 million dollars in the final budget to fully fund
12 the program. Finally, we know that domestic violence
13 continues to be one of the leading causes of
14 homelessness in New York and across the country. URI
15 works at the intersection of homelessness and DV and
16 we rely on Dove [sic] funding to do so. We
17 appreciate the council's previous support of our
18 economic empowerment program with Dove funding and we
19 hope that the Council will continue to support URI's
20 EEP program along with our pals, APIP [sic], RAP
21 [sic], and legal assistance programs. URI has
22 submitted detailed testimony. We really appreciate
23 the opportunity to testify today, and we look forward
24

1
2 to continuing our work of partners in the City to
3 provide access--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
5 expired.

6 LAUREN SCHUSTER: to safe, stable, and
7 supportive housing to every person who needs it.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Lauren.
10 Thank you all for your testimony. We've also been
11 joined by Council Members Velázquez and Williams.
12 I'll just-- I also want to just correct for the
13 record-- it was mentioned earlier before that we did
14 not have a veterans executive hearing, budget
15 hearing, but we absolutely did. I was here, and I
16 chaired it. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
18 go to the next Zoom panel: Adrienne Alfred [sp?],
19 Salvatore LaPizzo [sp?], Leonard Williams, Brendan
20 Gibbons [sp?], and Tori Lyon [sp?].

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Begin with Adrienne
23 Alfred [sp?]. Okay, moving on next is Salvatore
24 LaPizzo [sp?]

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Moving on, Leonard
3 Williams.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 LEONARD WILLIAMS: Hello, can you hear
6 me?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We can hear you.

9 LEONARD WILLIAMS: Okay, I can't-- okay.
10 I'll start the video. Hi, good afternoon my name is

11 Leonard Williams. I'm currently President of the

12 Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 32. We would

13 like to see Support our Veterans Initiative added to

14 the budget for Fiscal Year 2024 with an increase in

15 funding. This would allow every Council Member to

16 designate funds to veterans' organizations and

17 veteran's services. I know our City Council Members

18 already do and should be able to designate funds to

19 help with veterans services. This goes a long way

20 for people to appreciate the service and sacrifice we

21 veterans deserve before signing a blank check for the

22 freedoms most people take for granted today. Most of

23 us get out of the service and go about their lives

24 being proud of their military service. We don't ask

25 for anything in return. We get a job. We get job

1
2 with benefits, get married, start a family, and
3 believe we can resume a normal life. Soon after, we
4 have the realization that's not happening. We shrug
5 it off and say to ourselves I'm okay, and then years
6 pass and we realize we do-- that we do need mental
7 healthcare. We turn to the VA and usually get denied
8 because time has passed. When I came home from
9 Vietnam I filed for PTSD and was denied. I turned to
10 alcohol for the next 20+ years and I am blessed to
11 have a wife who stood by me and I haven't had a drink
12 since-- or drugs since 1986. I am one of the lucky
13 ones. Many veterans aren't as lucky or as fortunate
14 as me, and they end up homeless and/or incarcerated.
15 Councilman Bob Holden, Chairman of Veterans Services,
16 and councilman from my Vietnam Veterans Chapter in
17 Maspeth, New York knows firsthand and is doing all he
18 can to help us. Veterans deserve this and a lot
19 more. This isn't a hand-out, we earned it. We'd
20 like to see an increase in the budget for veterans
21 services, City Council Members understand and work
22 with us to overcome the obstacles we encounter.
23 Listening and understanding veterans' everyday
24 problems is a huge-- is huge for our mental health.
25 It gives us the feeling of being recognize and

1
2 appreciated that we accomplished something and
3 deserving of a thank you for serving our country.
4 Funds are available already through City Council
5 Members for different services for the seniors with
6 transportation to and from doctor's visits,
7 neighborhood clean-ups, and cultural events,
8 etcetera. Increase funding for veterans' services
9 and Support Our Veterans initiatives through City
10 Council Members is necessary for veterans' mental
11 health. Thank you for the opportunity for allowing
12 me to address my personal experience and the needs
13 for all veterans in New York. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next,
15 Brandon Gibbons [sp?].

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No Brandon Gibbons.
18 Next, Tory Lion [sp?].

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Come back around to
21 Salvatore LaPizzo [sp?].

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, last call for
24 Adrienne Alfred [sp?].

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we're going to
3 move on to the next in-person panel. Call up Shirley
4 Wang [sp?], Elizabeth Porsella [sp?], Anna Lilia
5 Araiza, and Joshua Fann.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Hang on one second.

7 ANNA LILIA ARAIZA: Sure.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So, just to repeat,
9 Shirley Wang [sp?], Elizabeth Porsella [sp?], Anna
10 Lilia Araiza and Joshua Fann [sp?].

11 ANNA LILIA ARAIZA: and Josh-- he's on
12 his way in. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You want to go
14 right to left, left to right, stage left?

15 ANNA LILIA ARAIZA: Thank you for that.
16 Good afternoon, Chair Brannan and Council Members.
17 I'm Ana Lilia Araiza. I'm the Director of Youth
18 Leadership at Community Food Advocates, and first of
19 all, we just want to thank you for your support of
20 school food. We know that this council has been
21 champions of school food for many years, including
22 our fight for universal free school meals in 2017.
23 So thank you so much for that. We're here once again
24 to just continue to encourage the Council to the
25 enhancement of all middle school and high school

1
2 cafeterias. We're very encouraged to see the \$200
3 million mentioned in the priorities of this council,
4 and I'm going to yield the rest of my time to our
5 young people. You'll see my full testimony, but we
6 just want you to hear from our young people as well.
7 Thank you so much.

8 ELIZA PORSELLA: hello, good afternoon.
9 I'm Eliza Porsella [sp?], a current senior at the
10 International Baccalaureate School for Global
11 Education and a member of the Youth Food Advocates
12 since 2020. I'd like to begin by expressing our
13 gratitude for \$50 million dollars of our budget
14 request being included in the Mayor's Executive
15 Budget. It doesn't go unnoticed, and now so many
16 more students will be able to enjoy an enhanced
17 cafeteria environment. However, we aren't done
18 advocating until all students have equal access to
19 those enhancements. I'm here to advocate for an
20 additional \$150 million in funding to be allocated
21 for cafeteria enhancement for all New York City
22 public middle and high schools. School food is
23 imperative to a successful school day for the average
24 student. The New York City Public School System
25 boasts 1.1 million students, the great majority of

1
2 whom rely on school food. Aside from just eating
3 school lunch, cafeterias are also supposed to be a
4 safe and comfortable environment where students can
5 take a break from thinking about classroom
6 assignments. Students deserve an environment where
7 they're able to focus on tasks other than school work
8 and get the nutrients they need to sustain a healthy
9 lifestyle. As someone who often relied on school
10 food when my mother didn't have time or had to go to
11 work, I've always wanted to see improvements that
12 allowed the next generation of students who need
13 school food to be happy and not hungry. We have
14 effectively achieved considerable improvement as
15 result of cafeteria enhancement that does make me
16 feel like future generations will get the nutritious
17 and flavorful food that they need and deserve. The
18 results speak for themselves. At Hillcrest, lunch
19 participation increased by 20 percent after cafeteria
20 enhancement and roughly the same was seen at Far
21 Rockaway High School. At Edward R. Murrow High
22 school, the increase was 30 percent after
23 enhancement. Just recently I was listening to my
24 classmate and friends tell me how jealous she was of
25 her brother's enhanced cafeteria, telling about the

1
2 booth seats and the options that he can eat within
3 his dietary restrictions. All students deserve to
4 feel respected by their cafeterias, and they deserve
5 equal access to those kinds of exciting new
6 initiatives like plentiful options and more dynamic
7 seating arrangements, and through the added funds
8 that's achievable. Thank you for your time.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

10 SHIRLEY WANG: Good afternoon Council
11 Members. My name is Shirley Wang [sp?] and I am a
12 junior at Midwood High School located in District 22.
13 Today we ask you and Speaker Adams to help support us
14 in urging the mayor to fully fund cafeteria
15 enhancements for all middle and high schools.
16 Amongst student's complaints, the school food has an
17 unwelcoming temperature, environment, and needs to be
18 renovated. From a teenager's perspective, I believe
19 most kids my age or younger want appealing food and
20 appealing space, and since school cafeterias in New
21 York City are not modern enough, an enhanced
22 cafeteria serving hot and cold new times that are
23 readily accessible is very necessary. This school
24 year many students indeed got meals from time to
25 time. Cafeteria seats have been filled right as

1 students cramming to get to library for a more
2 aesthetic light. And ongoing survey that me and my
3 Youth Food Advocate partners [inaudible] as the
4 groundwork for enhanced cafeteria. Approximately
5 65.7 percent felt that the rehabbed cafeteria in
6 Midwood contribute to a welcoming environment with
7 zero percent disagreement that it didn't. 85.8
8 percent agreed that the line wait time to get food in
9 a cafeteria is short. As our resource shows that
10 enhanced cafeteria creates a welcoming environment
11 focusing on inclusion. The importance of school food
12 extends to the same students in reducing the hunger
13 from a long day to understanding that a good number
14 of students do not have the financial means to
15 purchase food or bring lunch form home every day.
16 It's extremely critical for students to get
17 nutritious meals that follow the USDA guidelines and
18 to allow them to socialize in a comfortable setting.
19 That is, again, only relevant when the enhanced
20 cafeteria becomes universal for all schools. The \$50
21 million in the Mayor's Executive Budget is a major
22 step for enhanced cafeteria across the City. We can
23 expect at least a 35 percent increase in lunch
24 participation. The changes in enhanced cafeteria
25

1
2 expenses have been apparent since six years ago, and
3 now extending all New York City public schools for
4 design is a choice of equity. We are counting on
5 you, Chair Brannan, Council Members and Speaker
6 Adrienne Adams in your continued support in urging
7 Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks fully fund cafeteria
8 enhancement for all middle and high schools. Thank
9 you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

11 JOSHUA FANN: good afternoon Chair
12 Brannan and City Council Members. My name is Joshua
13 Fann and I am a junior attending Flushing High School
14 in Queens. I am a Youth Food Advocacy member and we
15 hope that you will support us in urging Speakers
16 Adams to fully fund cafeteria enhancements for all
17 middle and high schools. We would like the continued
18 support to increase implementation of enhanced
19 cafeterias through our schools in the city in order
20 to improve the school food system for all students,
21 encourage more students across the City to
22 participate in school lunch, as well as provide
23 healthier and better food options to students. We
24 all know that food insecurity is a common issue
25 within the City and an improved school food system

1
2 will ensure the students who come families have
3 struggled with food insecurity will receive
4 nutritious meals to prevent hunger throughout the
5 school day. I believe that the implementation of
6 enhanced cafeterias will be an essential investment
7 into the future of this city. As every young mind
8 deserve a healthy and nutritious meal to help nourish
9 their developing minds. Adding on three-- three
10 months ago my own school cafeteria finished
11 undergoing the enhanced cafeteria updates, and I have
12 noticed that my school lunch participation is much
13 higher. Students have much more dietary options. I
14 have heard a lot of positive feedback from students
15 across the school about the enhanced cafeteria and
16 students-- at my own school, student council has
17 noticed these positive changes and they have joined
18 in support of our cause to enhance school cafeterias
19 so that every New York City public school receive
20 these much need benefits like our own cafeteria.
21 Because of this, we would like your support to fully
22 fund the renovation of all middle schools and high
23 schools throughout the City and to enhance cafeterias
24 in order to meet the nutritional needs of young and
25 developing minds and to help bridge the wealth gap

1
2 between all children within our city. Thank you so
3 much for your time, and we hope that you will take
4 these words to heart.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll hear from
6 Nefiza Patwary [sp?], Wesley Wu [sp?], Suryani Dewa
7 Ayu, Laye Chan [sp?], and Faith Johnson.

8 FAITH JONES: Good afternoon Chair
9 Brannan and members of the Council. I'm Faith Jones
10 and I'm currently a sophomore at Brooklyn Technical
11 High School and a member of Youth Food Advocates.
12 I'm here today to ask for your support to bring
13 cafeteria enhancements to all NYC middle and high
14 schools. As you may know, currently NYC students
15 face the issue of inaccessibility when it comes to
16 school food. This might be surprising because free
17 lunch has been available to students since 2017.
18 However, outdated cafeterias, insufficient lunch
19 lines, and lack of choice can make school food
20 inaccessible. This is detrimental as school food is
21 important for one's education and wellbeing. Youth
22 Food Advocates have been advocating for this issue
23 since 2020, and we still haven't been able to reach
24 the goal of all middle and high schools to have
25 enhanced cafeterias. In three years, we were able to

1
2 achieve cafeteria enhancements for 92 school and fund
3 100 more schools with the resources. Consequently,
4 leading to an average of a 35 percent increase in
5 participation in school lunch and a three times
6 increase in available fruits and vegetables for
7 136,000 students. However, about 400 more school
8 still need the funding for the renovated cafeterias.
9 This means a majority of the 1.1 million students in
10 the NYC public school system are depleted of a
11 suitable eating environment and critical nutrition.
12 As this is a critical issue in the present time, I
13 urge you to assist in solving the problem now.
14 Additionally, instead of passing the issue off to the
15 next generation, this issue should be solved for the
16 current students in the public school system. Right
17 now, students are struggling to figure out where
18 their next meal will come from or how many hours left
19 in a day before they get to go home to eat.
20 Personally, I want to see the-- I want to still be in
21 high school and be able to experience the fruition of
22 adequate cafeterias in all middle and high schools. I
23 would love to hear the stories of fellow students
24 being impressed and appreciative of the new renovated
25 cafeterias in addition to hearing the improvement of

1
2 the lunch room experience as this is an integral part
3 of the school day. It's imperative that you support
4 us in obtaining the \$200 million dollars in funding
5 for cafeteria enhancements as this is an issue of
6 equity in NYC schools that should be attended to now
7 rather than allowing the opportunity gaps for
8 students to grow. Thank you for your time.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Good afternoon Council
11 Members. My name is [inaudible] and I'm a 10th
12 grader at Brooklyn Technical High School and a member
13 of the ACT Club. I'm here today to support Youth
14 Food advocates and request for \$200 million of
15 dollars in funding to be added to support cafeteria
16 enhancements at all high schools and middle schools
17 in New York City. School lunch is a crucial topic to
18 be discussed as it so essential to the school days of
19 the hundreds of thousands of students in the City.
20 Not only is it fuel to keep them going throughout
21 their day, but lunch times acts as a break for their
22 students, a time that they can look forward to and
23 relax. Despite school lunch being free for all, New
24 York City public school students, there's still
25 inaccessibility regarding the cafeteria. Many

1 schools don't have cafeterias that allow for social
2 atmosphere and many cafeterias don't have multiple
3 meal options for their students. It's critical to
4 address this as school lunches improving will benefit
5 students in many more ways than just having
6 nutritious food. By renovating cafeterias, students
7 will be more excited about their school day, as
8 they'll know that they have a designated time and
9 place to talk to their peers. This time is also
10 necessary to avoid burnout, especially in high school
11 when students have rigorous academic demands.
12 Additionally, including more choices will allow more
13 students to be included and able to eat lunch at
14 school. variety is a very important part of the a
15 healthy diet, so by implementing that at the
16 educational level students not only get more meal
17 options, but also more [inaudible] of healthy eating.
18 I personally have IBD, a chronic digestive disease.
19 This means that my dietary options can be limited,
20 and I frankly don't have the time to pack my own
21 lunch every morning. I'm lucky that my school has
22 multiple meal choices, but not every kid can say
23 that, and that's simply not fair. It's crucial to
24 include these choices in all schools around the City
25

1
2 to make lunch accessible to as many students as
3 possible. Due to these factors, I'm requesting that
4 \$200 million dollars are put into funding the
5 enhancement of cafeterias in schools around the City.
6 It is essential that schools get the support to feed
7 and nourish their student while keeping them healthy
8 both physically and mentally. Thank you for your
9 time.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

11 LEAH: Good afternoon everyone. My name
12 is Leah [sic] and I'm a junior and a member of
13 [inaudible] Club [sic] at Brooklyn Tech. Today I'm
14 here in support of Youth Food Advocates and to speak
15 on behalf of all our students and children from
16 middle school to high school in regard to improving
17 our school cafeteria in both accessibility and
18 presentation. Although some schools have been
19 redesigned to fit modern standards, there's still
20 tons of more schools that need this funding. I live
21 in Queens and I practically grew up in an elementary
22 school there. Comparing the cafeteria in that school
23 and my current school, I would much rather eat in a
24 cafeteria that looks like Tech [sic]. Presentation is
25 important, especially for young children. The more

1
2 appealing a cafeteria seems to you, the more they
3 want to spend their time there. This would further
4 stimulate the desire to dine and socialize with other
5 people during your lunch time. Furthermore, with
6 more variety of food being served, the consumption of
7 meals within schools would increase. If these two
8 points are implemented in more schools, not only
9 would engagement increase between students in
10 cafeterias, but children's academic aspect would also
11 be boosted. As an important part of our city, this
12 council can help change this. More varied and
13 appealing cafeteria food leads to more children's
14 consumption. More children eating would meant that
15 overall academic grades go up and that there's a
16 direct correlation. Better academic grades lead to a
17 much further advancement in our education system and
18 the development on my future generation. With your
19 support, we can ensure these conditions improve for
20 all our cafeterias. With funding being prioritized
21 and revamping of schools, we could ensure equity
22 across all NYC schools so that this benefits all
23 students, allowing them to receive the essential
24 nutrients that they need in order to be able to
25 succeed in school. Thank you for your time.

1
2 WESLEY WU: Good afternoon Council
3 Members. My name is Wesley Wu and I'm a currently a
4 sophomore who's a member of the ACT Club at Brooklyn
5 Technical High School. I'm here today to support
6 Youth Food Advocates and share with you why I know it
7 is urgent to provide cafeteria enhancements for all
8 NYC middle schools and high schools. In middle
9 school, I had a standard cafeteria. My friends and I
10 had to wait 20 minutes in a long line of students to
11 get lunch. When we finally did get food, the long
12 lines made it so unappetizing that we threw it in the
13 trash right away and spent the rest of the day as
14 mindless zombies. The cafeteria was crowded which
15 meant we had to eat next to the bathroom or go hungry
16 because every other place in the school was also
17 crowded with people not wanting to stay in the
18 cafeteria. If we were lucky enough to get a seat in
19 the cafeteria, it would be next to other students and
20 it would create an incredibly awkward environment
21 that made it impossible to have a conversation. My
22 experience in high school has been a better
23 experience. I no longer have to wait for lunch in
24 long lines, and while the food still isn't perfect,
25 it's not as un-appetizing as it was in middle school,

1
2 and despite the high population of Brooklyn Tech, I
3 can find a place in the cafeteria to talk with my
4 friends without an awkward atmosphere. I no longer
5 have to go to the bathroom to each lunch. Compared
6 to middle school, I find myself wanting to eat lunch
7 in the cafeteria more often and feel more excited for
8 lunch. However, students continue to face many
9 similar experiences like those at my middle school.
10 When students see long lines they are discouraged
11 from getting lunch. Without a healthy cafeteria
12 environment, students aren't able to socialize as
13 well and have to spend their lunch at unsuitable
14 places like the bathroom. Without appetizing and
15 nutritious food, students don't get the energy they
16 need to learn efficiently. It is essential for
17 students to have good lunch experiences in order to
18 do well at school and all these factors prevent them
19 being so. Thank you for prioritizing the \$200
20 million dollars toward cafeteria enhancements in your
21 budget repose. I was glad to hear from Youth Food
22 Advocates that there is currently \$50 million dollars
23 in the budget, and I hope you continue to support the
24 full funding because I know from my own experience it

1
2 will greatly improve students' lives. Thank you for
3 your time.

4 SURYANI DEWA AYU: Good afternoon Chair
5 and members of the Committee. My name is Suryani
6 Dewa Ayu, and I'm an Urban Planner, designer and
7 researcher and my work focuses on the link between
8 public space, public health, and transformative
9 justice. Thank you for this opportunity to testify
10 alongside the brilliant community food advocates,
11 Youth Food Advocates Lunch for Learning Coalition--
12 they're amazing-- in support of enhanced student-
13 centered cafeterias in all New York City middle and
14 high schools. To date, NYC DOE has redesigned 92
15 cafeterias, serving over 136,000 students in middle
16 and high school, approximately 100 more cafeterias
17 are in the works because of these phenomenal folks.
18 This is critical work, and it has just begun. So
19 far, only one-third of cafeterias serving middle and
20 high schools are completed or funded. Now is the
21 pivotal time for NYC to commit \$200 million in
22 capital funds to reach every high school student and
23 middle school student in the City. Cafeterias can and
24 should be community spaces. Redesigning all middle
25 and high school cafeterias in NYC public schools will

1
2 have a major impact on the health and wellbeing of
3 people across the City. In fact, it already has
4 begun. High school students with redesigned
5 cafeterias experienced a 35 percent increase in lunch
6 participation with four to five times more fruits and
7 vegetables served each day while reducing food waste.
8 If all high schools receive the enhancement, L for L
9 [sic] projects that 30,000 more high school students
10 would participate daily. Cafeteria redesign supports
11 social/emotional health and counteracts stigmas by
12 creating student-centered public space. The seating
13 area is student-centered with more welcoming
14 comfortable social seating such as booths and high-
15 tops. The redesign moves away from intuitional long
16 tables and benches. Students feel good and there are
17 clear visual signals that the food is changing for
18 the better, how our middle and high school cafeterias
19 in NYC public schools shared spaces where our young
20 people come together, break bread, nourish in
21 community, how their designed is fundamentally a
22 health and education equity issue. Let's keep the
23 momentum going. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all.
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Last members of this
3 panel, Ashley Yang, Simiran Bagum [sp?], Armine Kahn
4 [sp?], Yoo Sin Liu [sp?], Anthony Wang, and Yasmine
5 Bonilla. You may begin when you're ready, whichever
6 order you like.

7 YASMINE BONILLA: Good afternoon Chair
8 Brannan and Council Members, and thank you for
9 allowing me the opportunity to speak with you all.
10 My name is Yasmine Bonilla and I'm a senior at
11 Francis Lewis High School, the largest public school
12 in District 26. I believe one of the most prominent
13 issues with school food is outdated cafeterias which
14 contribute to the stigma surrounding school food.
15 For many middle and high school students, the image
16 of a school cafeteria extends little beyond a large
17 room with rows of long rectangular tables and long
18 lines. But as our learning tools in classrooms
19 become updated over time, why should our cafeterias
20 remain stuck in the past. At the start of the school
21 year at Francis Lewis High school an enhanced serving
22 line was installed. As the year draws to a close,
23 there's some things that I've learned about enhanced
24 cafeterias that I would like to share. The new
25 serving lines feature modernized displays that mimic

1 a deli-style experience. This makes the food seem
2 more visually appealing and makes the cafeteria
3 environment a more welcoming and inviting one. By
4 displaying food in a manner that students are
5 familiar with and love, the cafeteria feels less
6 institutional and more attractive. You don't feel
7 like you're going to the school cafeteria to eat
8 school food. You simply feel like you're getting to
9 eat food. Enhanced cafeterias improve school food
10 experience by prioritizing student choice, fast
11 service, and socialization among students which will
12 help significantly in removing that stigma that we
13 students often associate with school food. In fact,
14 at my school the updates have resulted in about a 33
15 percent increase in daily school lunch participation.
16 The student's council at my school has even signed
17 the YFA sign-on letter to show their support for the
18 enhancements cafeterias. Us Youth Food Advocates at
19 YFA are grateful for the \$50 million dollars of our
20 budget request being included in the Mayor's
21 Executive Budget, and we hope that the rest of the
22 \$200 million dollars can be included so that all New
23 York City middle and high school students can enjoy
24 the benefits of a modernized cafeteria. As a senior
25

1
2 I will be leaving the New York City public school
3 system in the next few weeks, and as I cross that
4 stage in my graduation cap and gown, I would love to
5 see that the entirety of the next generation of
6 middle and high school students enjoy an equitable,
7 welcoming cafeteria environment that truly embodies a
8 student-centered space. After all, success starts
9 with our school community and the spaces they create
10 for their students to thrive. Thank you for your
11 time.

12 RAMEEN KHAN: Good afternoon Chair
13 Brannan and Council Members, thank you for allowing
14 us to speak in front of you today. My name is Rameen
15 Khan and I currently am a sophomore in the Brooklyn
16 Latin School. I live in District 28 and have been in
17 public school in my entire life. Today I come here
18 to speak to you about supporting enhanced cafeterias
19 in public school, and I have spoken to my student
20 council leadership who also support the initiative.
21 So while you only may see me sitting here before, I
22 come with the support of my whole student body of 823
23 students. School is supposed to be a place where
24 students feel affirmed and valued academically and
25 socially, and school food accessibility is also a

1
2 factor. We are thankful for this council's support
3 and that the Mayor's Executive Budget also included
4 \$50 million dollars as a major commitment. However,
5 I urge the City Council, the Speaker, and the
6 Chancellor and the Mayor to allocate full funding for
7 improved cafeterias in all middle and high schools.
8 At my school, Brooklyn Latin, the recently upgrade to
9 the cafeteria has resulted in faster lunch lines and
10 a more positive lunchtime atmosphere. With reduced
11 wait times, I've observed more students getting lunch
12 and other food options. Investing in better school
13 food now will lead to a better experience for all
14 students in the future. Accessing school food is
15 difficult for many students due to the limited
16 options and scheduling issues. At Brooklyn Latin,
17 since the enhanced cafeteria update, there have been
18 more students coming in and out of the cafeteria to
19 get lunch. I remember walking into the cafeteria
20 when it reopened for the first time and my friends
21 were so shocked with the changes. All around me I
22 could hear students exclaiming about how different
23 and new the cafeteria felt to them. And when I asked
24 them if they would start eating more in the
25 cafeteria, they were all up to the idea. As of three

1
2 months after the update there has been a 20 percent
3 increase in the participation from my school and the
4 cafeteria has been seeing a consistent increase in
5 students taking and eating lunch. The atmosphere has
6 become more enjoyable and positive and it makes the
7 students feel like they're having a place to relax
8 and belonging. I'm asking you to continue support--
9 supporting the funding for all middle and high
10 school's cafeterias to receive enhanced cafeteria
11 model updates with the entire amount of \$200 million
12 dollars. With your support for these changes,
13 students like me could feel affirmed and valued and
14 know that we are the focus of why we are all here
15 today. We need your support to bring big change.
16 Thank you.

17 YOO SIN LIU: Good afternoon Chair
18 Brannan and Council Members. My name is Yoo Sin Liu
19 [sp?]. I live in Queens and attend the East West
20 School of International Studies. I am a junior, and I
21 appreciate you listening to all of us students today
22 and appreciate your support. First, we appreciate
23 the \$200 million dollars that were requested was
24 included in Council priorities. Hereby, on behalf of
25 our Youth Food Advocate members and leaders, I extend

1
2 our utmost gratitude to you and Council Members. We
3 do acknowledge that the Mayor has included \$50
4 million in the Executive Budget, and in this regard I
5 would like to express our gratitude again. I would
6 like to bring up the positive effects of the
7 investments on school cafeteria. We have relevant
8 data from three different high schools, Hillcrest
9 High School, Far Rockaway Campus, and Edward R.
10 Murrow High School. These data were from 2017 until
11 this school year. These datas [sic] were recorded at
12 the same time every year. We do observe that there
13 is a clear gradual increase in participation
14 percentage in school lunches. This shows that the
15 fund in school campaign finance is definitely worth
16 the money being financed. Because we do see that
17 people do appreciate the enhanced cafeteria even five
18 years after the original enhancements. Regarding the
19 data and achievements, I want to underscore the
20 importance and value of fund in school cafeteria.
21 This is definitely worth all of us to make this
22 increase in cafeteria participation increase in every
23 high school. We hope you and Speaker Adams continue
24 to push the full \$200 million to include all high
25 schools and middle schools to receive a better school

1
2 lunch experience and its increase participation and
3 decrease of student hunger. Thank you for your time.

4 ANTHONY WANG: Good afternoon Chair

5 Brannan and the members of the Committee. My name is
6 Anthony and I'm currently a sophomore at Hunter
7 Science in the MLK campus, and I live in District
8 One. With around 20 percent of my community in
9 poverty, I understand the importance of school food
10 for students in these households. While it is not a
11 secret that school food has not been the best
12 regarded food, it is what the students need. In a
13 study conducted by Feeding America in 2021, nearly
14 1.5 million New Yorkers now experience food
15 insecurity, including one in four children. This is
16 not to mention the pandemic's effects on parents' and
17 guardians' live savings and jobs. Hunger is an urgent
18 issue that-- in our city that our schools can help
19 address, but the lack of variety, presentation of
20 food, or simply the taste of school food turn many
21 students away from the system. The result is that
22 our kids go hungry and perform worse at school. As a
23 Youth Food Advocate, I had the opportunity to present
24 to other students about the solution and the impacts
25 of enhanced cafeterias. Presenting the hunger issue

1
2 and the issue with the current cafeteria system to
3 Teens for Food Justice has led to a wide arrange of
4 reactions. Many were shocked at the 35 percent
5 increase in lunch participation while others were in
6 awe of the restaurant-like cafeterias that given
7 school cafeterias new life. Enhanced cafeterias not
8 only improve the visual appeal to students, they also
9 have the merit of making the lines shorter. In my
10 campus, we have a small school of only 300 students.
11 Some days the lunch line can be as long as 35 to 40
12 minutes, making time for students to eat around five
13 to 10 minutes. I want to request more funding to
14 renovate all cafeterias and place further emphasis on
15 the students' experience in the cafeteria. I am
16 grateful for the initiative led by the \$50 million
17 dollars already dedicated to this cause. Thank you
18 for your time.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We have questions
20 from Council Member Brewer followed by Nurse.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
22 much. So my question-- I know MLK campus very well
23 so I know that you hopefully will get your cafeteria
24 renovated fairly soon if my calls get-- are
25 successful. And you obviously have the hydroponics

1
2 which is wonderful. But generally, I want to know
3 from others, what it is. There's obviously the
4 construction, that's one aspect, and did the food
5 improve dramatically? Is it a combo that makes it so
6 successful? That's my question. Because-- and also,
7 if your school was one that people went out for
8 lunch, which is a lot of the schools, does it help
9 bring people in to lunch so that they stay in the
10 school? Those are my questions.

11 RAMEEN KHAN: In terms of the
12 construction time, for my school at Brooklyn Latin,
13 we have a shared building, but the-- but they did the
14 renovations over the weekend, so none of the students
15 had to sit out for lunch. So it was all done in the
16 span of three days, and it was all completely
17 refurbished by the time we came back to school by the
18 end of that-- by the beginning of that week.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Was the food
20 better as a result, or was it just a construction
21 improvement?

22 RAMEEN KHAN: I would say they're giving--
23 - they're giving the same items, but there's a
24 variety of the items being offered, because there's
25 more vegan and vegetarian options, and the packaging

1
2 for the food seems more appealing, so I see more
3 students grabbing it to eat at lunch.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Anybody else?

5 YASMINE BONILLA: I'd say that the
6 presentation of the food is what changes dramatically
7 and that's what students like to see. It kind of
8 reminds them, as I said, of like a deli. So it's
9 more engaging. It's more fun to get lunch. It's not
10 as institutional as those long lines with the lunch
11 ladies serving your food. It's more like-- it gives
12 you more self-autonomy I would say.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
15 Nurse?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I didn't have a
17 question. I just wanted to thank you all for coming
18 down and all the students who took time to write
19 testimony and wait all day. This is how it works.
20 Takes a really long time to get down here and just
21 thank you for being advocates, and I hope that you
22 continue to raise your voice past high school. It's
23 always really-- it's always a very different tone
24 when we have young people come and just, you know,
25 going through these hearings all the time. When you

1
2 do come it really makes a difference and we remember
3 it. So thank you for being here.

4 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all so
6 much. It's a great program. Thank you. Okay, so I
7 just have to say for the record, we cannot take any
8 new registrants for testimony today. We still
9 several hundred waiting to speak who signed up during
10 the advance period, 24 hours ago. So, the cut-off
11 was 4:00. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to the
13 next remote panel: Marg Curran, followed by William
14 Quinones, Chan Henry, Leslie Segars [sp?], Lorenzo
15 Brooks, Nicole McVinua, Teal Inzunza, and Natalie
16 Interiano. Begin with Marg Curran.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 MARG CURRAN: Hello everyone. My name is
19 Marg Curran and I'm a Case Manager at CUCS which is a
20 nonprofit providing homeless outreach services to
21 single adults in Harlem and Upper Manhattan as well
22 as housing and supportive services to homeless and
23 formerly homeless New Yorkers. I'm also a proud
24 member of District Council 37 and organized a union
25 at CUCS with my coworkers. We are currently

1 negotiating our first union contract with CUCS
2 management. Thank you Chair Brannan, Speaker Adams,
3 Deputy Speaker Ayala, the members of the Council for
4 allowing me to testify today. I'm here to urge the
5 Council and Administration to not approve the
6 proposed 2.5 percent provider flexible funding cut to
7 DHS and HRA contracted programs, and instead include
8 a COLA of 6.5 percent for homeless services staff in
9 the City's Fiscal Year 24 budget. I have been working
10 at CUCS street outreach since 2018. As a case
11 manager I engage with people sleeping outside to
12 build a trusting relationship with them so that we
13 can work together to end their homelessness. I have
14 firsthand experience about the importance of our
15 clients having a long-term relationship with the same
16 worker. I have moved some of the most entrenched
17 members of the homeless community into housing
18 because I consistently showed up for them. Far too
19 often, co-workers who are passionate about the job
20 leave outreach because we're not paid enough. Low
21 wages have led to high turnover at CUCS which
22 ultimately hurts our clients and prolongs their
23 homelessness. Now is not the time to reduce homeless
24 services. I urge the Council to not adopt the
25

1
2 provider flexible funding PEG which will harm
3 services for our clients, and instead include a 6.5
4 percent COLA for homeless service workers. I believe
5 in the work that I do at CUCS street outreach and I
6 proud to serve the street homeless community. CUCS
7 workers--

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
9 expired.

10 MARG CURRAN: need a 6.5 percent COLA to
11 make sure that we can continue to help our fellow New
12 Yorkers in need. Thank you for the opportunity to
13 testify today.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Now hear
15 from William Quinones.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 WILLIAM QUINONES: good afternoon. Can
18 everyone hear me?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we hear you.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes.

21 WILLIAM QUINONES: Yes, good afternoon
22 all present. Thank you, Council, for this
23 opportunity to speak on behalf of the COLA and the
24 increase necessary to serve the people of New York
25 City. My name is William Quinones and I'm a human

1
2 service worker here in New York City presently work
3 at CASES which is Center for Alternative Sentencing
4 and Employment Services. We provide an array of
5 services, and you guys are all welcome to visit the
6 site and see the tremendous work that we've done in
7 the community and continue to do in the communities
8 of people and the lives of people. As a human
9 service worker, I along with my colleagues provide
10 essential services in our community. And here's a
11 brief description of my daily duties, although we
12 offer a wide array of services. This is just some--
13 a part of some of the things I'm doing presently as I
14 speak. I am actually outreaching a few homeless
15 individuals to provide them and connect with service
16 that are essential for their health and wellness and
17 other things that they need because they are
18 connected to families in our community that are
19 thriving. So, we offer housing referrals. We offer
20 psychiatric and hospitalization for individuals. We
21 offer employment services as well as education and
22 multiple other resources. Even though human service
23 providers help connect New Yorkers with life-saving
24 resources, employees at human services agencies
25 receive low wages that barely cover the cost of

1
2 living like New York City. Our work is necessary to
3 New York City's economy and safety. We deserve to be
4 paid fairly under the city contracts for our labor.
5 My nonprofit like so many is funded by the City
6 contracts, and these contracts set the salary for
7 myself and my colleagues. A 6.5 percent COLA would
8 raise the salaries of city contracted human service
9 workers who align with inflation and allows to better
10 service ourselves as well as New Yorkers in our
11 districts and communities. Because of the lack of a
12 COLA, human service workers generally make about
13 \$20,000 a year less than--

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
15 expired.

16 WILLIAM QUINONES: public service
17 workers. So again, folks, please support government
18 contract human service workers by ensuring that the
19 [inaudible] service COLA is included in our upcoming
20 budget at an estimated cost of \$200 million. Thank
21 you so much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
23 hear form Chan Henry.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.
25

1
2 CHAN HENRY: Hello, good afternoon Chair
3 Brannan and members of the Committee. My name is
4 Chan Henry and I have worked in the human service
5 sector for the past five years. I currently work as a
6 Housing Specialist at Urban Pathways, a nonprofit
7 homeless service and supportive housing provider. As
8 a Housing Specialist, I work in the Drop-in Center, a
9 critical service contracted by DHS that accepts walk-
10 in clients experiencing street homelessness. I work
11 on the front lines of moving people from the street
12 into permanent housing. I love my job and I know
13 that the work that I do makes a difference, and I am
14 fortunate to see that difference every day in my
15 clients. To see people grow and obtain the life that
16 they want is rewarding to witness and it drives me to
17 keep doing this work. I recently began pursuing my
18 MSW at Hunter College so I can continue growing my
19 skills to further my-- to further help my clients and
20 I care about this work deeply. However, the human
21 service sector is in crisis. The rates of our wages
22 set in government contracts is insufficient and they
23 have not matched the rising cost of living. The
24 result is that staff cannot afford to work in the
25 programs that serve New Yorkers in need. We're facing

1
2 a high turnover in vacancy rate which affects the
3 services we can provide our clients. The impact is
4 burnout among the staff that do stay who take on
5 extra work. The pandemic made the challenges our
6 clients already face more difficult to address,
7 adding to the burden on workers to ensure our clients
8 obtain stable housing and other essential services.
9 Yet, I do not make enough to sustain myself. As the
10 main funder of services and thereby the main driver
11 of human service wages, we need the government to do
12 more. My organization cannot fund raise itself to
13 fair wages. We also cannot afford to make cuts on
14 our contracts. A 2.5 percent cut to contract staff
15 lines is an unrealistic ask for an already
16 overburdened workforce.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 CHAN HENRY: Thank you for the
19 opportunity to testify today and for your continued
20 support of the human service sector.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll next
22 hear form Leslie Segars.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 LESLIE SEGARS: Good day Chair Brannan and
25 members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Segars,

1
2 and I am a Director of Social Service at Urban
3 Pathway, a nonprofit homeless services supportive
4 housing provider. I've been working in the human
5 service sector for over 20 years. I've been a client
6 care worker, a case manager, a supervisor. I am now
7 the Director of Social Services at Safe Haven.
8 Before I worked at the human service sector, I worked
9 at a nursing home for seven years. I have always been
10 called to helping field. I do this work because it's
11 meaningful to see lives we can change. My goal is to
12 help people break cycles of poverty and struggle. I
13 firmly believe that just because one right now is
14 someone that's hopeless, doesn't mean they have to
15 stay in a hopelessness state. I am committed to
16 continuing to build my skills so I can help people
17 turn their lives around and leave this state of
18 hopelessness. I completed a Master's Degree in
19 Social Work in 2020. It was shortly after that I'd
20 begin current position at Urban Pathways. But human
21 service workers across the sector including myself
22 and my colleagues are not sufficiently valued for the
23 work we do every day. We are facing a high vacancy
24 rate, frequent turnover of staff, and real challenge
25 with staff trying to survive off our wages. I am

1
2 currently facing the issue myself as I work to keep
3 up with the rising cost of living while paying back
4 school loans that I took out so I could be effective
5 in the work I do. City contracts set the salaries
6 for myself and my colleagues, and we need the City to
7 step up and provide human service workers with the
8 6.5 percent COLA to match inflation and allow us to
9 support ourselves as we support New York. While we
10 are in desperate need for a COLA to hire staff and
11 the PEG to DSS is being passed down to the provider.
12 This will require the DS [sic] funded--

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] time
14 expired.

15 LESLIE SEGARS: programs like the Safe
16 Haven I work in to cut 2.5 from my budget by
17 eliminating vacant positions entirely. We do not
18 have staff vacancies because positions are not
19 needed, we have them because contracts do not pay
20 enough. Elimination of this position will
21 permanently increase the workloads of already
22 overburdened staff. I'm a dedicated hard-worker and
23 I am too poor to be rich and too rich to be poor, and
24 I implore this committee to include \$200 million for
25 a 6.5 COLA in this final year 2024 budget as we step

1
2 forward to help the human services. I thank you for
3 your time and I thank you for having me.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
5 hear from Lorenzo Brooks.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 LORENZO BROOKS: Good morning Chairman
8 Brannan and members of the Committee. My name is
9 Lorenzo Brooks as I work as a case manager at Urban
10 Pathways. I work at DHS-funded Safe Haven program
11 which serves as a first step for men who are
12 experiencing [inaudible] street homelessness to come
13 inside. Many of our clients are living with a mental
14 illness or substance abuse disorder, and many have
15 experienced trauma. I am proud to work with people on
16 their first steps towards housing. I have worked in
17 the human services sector for over six years.
18 Essential human service workers like me earn one of
19 the lowest wages in New York's economy due to the
20 chronic underfunding from New York City government
21 contracts. As a predominant funder of human services
22 contracts, government is the main driver of our
23 wages. Mayor Adams has highlighted Safe Havens as an
24 effective model for addressing street homelessness
25 and I can't agree more, but without funding for our

1
2 workforce, these programs cannot be effectively
3 staffed. The high turnover rate is the primary
4 complaint of our clients who are negatively impacted
5 when they build a relationship with a staff member
6 only to see them leave. This past fall every case
7 manager at my site besides myself left for different
8 jobs with better pay. I was the only case manager
9 there for several months. My caseload increased
10 multi-fold, impacting the quality of services we can
11 provide and the ability of our clients to take
12 critical steps. Despite the challenges I am
13 passionate about this work. With a full-time job I
14 recently completed my Master's Degree in Social Work
15 so that I can work more effectively with my client.
16 While I furthered my education, I am concerned that
17 field will not be able to sustain without a wage
18 increase as I accumulated over \$50,000 in student
19 loan debt. City contracts salaries for myself and my
20 colleagues, and we need the City to step up and
21 provide human service workers with the 6.5 percent
22 COLA to match inflation and allow us to support
23 ourselves as we support New Yorkers in need. While
24 we are in desperate need of a COLA to hire staff, the
25 PEG to DSS is being passed down to providers. This

1
2 will require DHS-funded programs like the Safe Haven
3 I work at to cut 2.5 percent from my own budget by
4 eliminating vacant positions entirely. Eliminating
5 positions would permanently increase the workload for
6 already overburdened staff as myself. This is not my
7 first time testifying on this topic before the
8 Council. I continue to do so because with all due
9 respect, it does not seem that the Council is hearing
10 the message. I implore the committee to include \$200
11 million dollars for a 6.5 percent COLA in the final
12 Fiscal Year 2024 budget as a step toward human
13 service workers like me being justly paid for our
14 work.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 LORENZO BROOKS: And I also would like to
17 add that I am one of those who came through the
18 Fortune society, and I became an asset to the
19 community instead of a liability. Please, fund
20 programs that allow places like the Fortune Society
21 to operate and produce productive persons inside of
22 our society. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
24 hear from Nicole McVinua.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1
2 NICOLE MCVINUA: Good afternoon. My name
3 is Nicole McVinua, and I am the Director of Policy at
4 Urban Pathways, a nonprofit homeless services and
5 supportive housing provider serving single adults
6 through a full continuum of services. We hold city
7 contracts with DHS, DOHMH, and HRA. Thank you for
8 the opportunity to testify today about the need for
9 increased wages for the human services workforce and
10 the dangerous proposed cuts to DHS and HRA-contracted
11 programs. The human services sector is at risk of no
12 longer being able to provide the essential services
13 that city government and New Yorkers rely on due to
14 under-investment and staffing shortages. Our
15 contracts pay poverty-level wages to our workforce,
16 composed primarily of people of color and women. At
17 our organization we have a 28 percent staff vacancy
18 rate, high rates of staff turnover creating huge
19 administrative costs, over-burdened staff facing
20 burnout, some of who you are hearing from today,
21 staff relying on SNAP and working multiple jobs to
22 make ends meet, and we have staff facing homelessness
23 and residing in shelters themselves. This is simply
24 unacceptable. The lack of a cost of living
25 adjustment for human services workers in the Mayor's

1
2 Executive Budget means this budget does not fully
3 represent a commitment to essential services and
4 working New Yorkers. While the sector struggles
5 there is a proposed cut to funding to DHS and HRA
6 contracted programs by 2.5 percent through provider
7 flexible funding. We cannot absorb this cut. DSS
8 recommends eliminating vacant positions, but
9 positions are not vacant because they are not needed,
10 but because our contracts do not pay enough to be
11 competitive. Those who will suffer most are the New
12 Yorkers who rely on our services. We implore you to
13 fund a full 6.5 percent COLA on human services
14 contracts at an estimated \$200 million dollars to
15 support our essential workforce and urge the Council
16 not to adopt--

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
18 expired.

19 NICOLE MCVINUA: the 2.5 percent provider
20 flexible funding PEG to DHS and HRA contracts. Thank
21 you for the opportunity to testify.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
23 hear from Teal Inzunza.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.
25

1
2 TEAL INZUNZA: Good afternoon. My name
3 is Teal Inzunza. I'm the Program Director of the
4 Economic Empowerment Program at the Urban Resource
5 Institute. URI is the largest provider of shelter
6 services in our nation, and for almost 40 years we
7 have been committed to helping those most-impacted by
8 domestic violence and homelessness. As an economic
9 justice advocate who's been advocating for economic
10 equity for survivors of domestic violence in the City
11 for over a decade, living wages are not only crucial
12 for survivors, but also essential for human services
13 workers. The wages of human services workers are and
14 have been woefully and embarrassingly inadequate.
15 Proposed budget cuts only worsen this problem leaving
16 us with the burden of supplying higher level of
17 services while struggling to make ends meet.
18 According to MIT's Living Wage Calculator, the living
19 wage for one person with one child in New York City
20 is \$93,426. Our human services salaries are
21 significantly lower than that. We call on you and
22 this committee to prioritize our human services
23 workers and invest in critical social service
24 agencies who support the most vulnerable members of
25 our city. We must ensure fair compensation for human

1
2 services workers by including a 6.5 percent COLA in
3 the upcoming budget. The lack of a COLA in the
4 Mayor's Executive Budget means that this budget does
5 not fully represent a commitment to essential
6 services and working New Yorkers. Human services
7 workers worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and
8 put their lives on the line to continue to provide
9 critical services for our communities and to keep
10 them safe and functioning, and in return, this City
11 gives them poverty wages that do not account for
12 inflation. As a result, many of our human service
13 workers need the same programs they provide including
14 SNAP and housing shelters. New York City would not
15 be the same--

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
17 expired.

18 TEAL INZUNZA: without human services
19 workers. Please support a 6.5 percent cost of living
20 adjustment with an estimated \$200 million dollar
21 increase in the final budget. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll
23 next hear from Nathalie Interiano.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nathalie Interiano?

1
2 NATHALIE INTERIANO: Hello. Thank you so
3 much. Okay, perfect. My name is Nathalie Interiano
4 and I'm the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Care
5 for the Homeless, an organization that provides
6 medical and behavioral health services exclusively to
7 people experiencing homelessness in New York City.
8 We operate 26 federally-qualified community health
9 centers in all five boroughs. We also operate three
10 transitional housing residences, one shelter located
11 in the Bronx, one in Midtown Manhattan, the Safe
12 Haven in the Bronx with a few programs in the
13 pipeline. Thank you to the Chair and the committee
14 for allowing us the opportunity to testify today. I'm
15 here today to urge the Council and Administration to
16 reject the proposed 2.5 percent cut to DHS and HRA
17 contracted programs, and instead include the COLA of
18 6.5 percent for homeless service staff in the City's
19 FY24 budget. At a time when homelessness is rising,
20 we must invest in the services needed to provide
21 integral support to those most in need. We need to
22 ensure that the infrastructure tasked with the
23 response is strong and able to provide not only basic
24 services but also specializes supportive services to
25 help stabilize folks. The reality for Care for the

1
2 Homeless the currently proposed cut will likely
3 affect are case management and social services
4 because the operational staff are necessary to keep
5 our doors open. It is difficult to overstate the
6 importance of our case management staff who play an
7 important role in providing direct services to
8 support our residents and accessing important
9 resources to achieve stability of permanent housing
10 which is the ultimate goal. In our programs, we have
11 encountered difficulty hiring housing specialists and
12 with the proposed cuts, that could be the positions
13 that are eliminated. Without housing specialists or
14 direct service staff, we relegate our residents to
15 languish in shelter for much longer than necessary.
16 we must treat budgets as blueprints for the future,
17 and instead of embracing short-sided approaches, we
18 need to think of how to grow the capacity of homeless
19 service organizations to achieve what they have been
20 tasked to do which is to provide a transitional
21 stable place to reside and help guide our consumers
22 through the myriad of supportive services with the
23 goal of permanent stable housing. At the same time,
24 there's a great need to bolster the workforce who
25 provide these important services. Our resources are

1 stretched thin with high vacancies and turnover which
2 further complicates the work of our remaining staff.
3 Cuts to the budget means higher caseloads which
4 pushes the capacity of our staff and leads to burnout
5 which is a significant issue in our sector.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 NATHALIE INTERIANO: So, essentially,
8 what we're asking for is now is not the time to
9 reduce homelessness in eviction prevention services
10 when our city needs it the most. So we urge the City
11 Council to not only adopt-- to not adopt the PEG, but
12 also to include a 6.5 percent COLA for homeless
13 services staff. Thank you so much for the
14 opportunity to testify.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
16 call up the next in-person panel from University
17 Student Senate, Aaron Gramma [sp?], Boris Onyekaba,
18 Enrique Oripeza [sp?], Jonathan Hanon, Joseph
19 Hernandez [sp?], Zair Ali [sp?], and Miguel Arias
20 [sp?]. Thank you. You may begin when you're ready.

21 SALIMATOU DOUMBOUYA: good afternoon
22 everyone. My name is Salimatou Doumbouya and I am a
23 student at the New York City College of Technology. I
24 am also the Chairperson of the CUNY University
25

1
2 Student Senate where I represent all the-- about
3 260,000 students, and I am the CUNY Student Trustee.
4 Have you ever heard about the City University of New
5 York? It's a place where the City University-- it's
6 a place we find the backbone of New York City. It is
7 a structure that was created to create and maintain a
8 better New York City, to train people who were not
9 expected to succeed due to housing problems,
10 financial issues, food insecurity and others. CUNY
11 is where you go when you want to prove them wrong,
12 because CUNY helps you jump economic and social
13 ladder. This is what I would like to respond to
14 anyone who asks me about CUNY: CUNY operates on
15 their shared governance which is simply explained as
16 the combination of voices from students, faculty, and
17 administration to participate in any decision that
18 would affect the university. That's the choice from
19 CUNY, but that's also a statement of the City's
20 willingness to understand the value that we all bring
21 as a collective to the table. Shared governance has
22 allowed us the students to have a very clear idea and
23 understanding of the mechanism of our university and
24 all the factors that affect how it runs.
25 Furthermore, we have very obviously the understanding

1
2 of what we need. My peers and myself value this
3 engine and work very hard to make sure it functions
4 because we understand that it was built for us to
5 grow and to give back to this wonderful city. I am
6 telling you all of this to let you know that students
7 know what they're talking about. Students have a
8 voice and every time we speak, we speak with power
9 and with conviction rooted in the knowledge of what
10 CUNY is and what New York City is about. Budget cuts
11 to CUNY may seem to some of you like a necessary
12 wrong, but today we are here to tell you that it's an
13 unnecessary burden which will not only harm the
14 university, but harm the whole city of New York.
15 Investing in CUNY's infrastructures for food
16 security, student housing, and ensure that students
17 see no tuition increases for in-state students and
18 out-of-state students is what we are here for. That
19 will be a promise that CUNY shouldn't only survive,
20 but also live. It is a promise to New York City and
21 every single person who choose to live here that
22 things will be okay. You will hear from my peers
23 from different campuses who will tell you
24 specifically how underestimating the impacts of PEGs
25 on CUNY would affect their student experience.

1
2 JONATHAN HANON: My name is Jonathan
3 Hanon and I'm a PHD student at the CUNY graduate
4 Center and an Adjunct Lecturer at John Jay, as well
5 as Co-Chair for Business of the CUNY Graduate
6 Center's Doctoral and Graduate Students Council and a
7 Representative with the University Student Senate. I
8 testified back in November 2021 at the hearing
9 regarding adjunct wages at CUNY in the context of the
10 new deal for CUNY and the establishing of new full-
11 time lecturer line positions. In the year and a half
12 since then it appears that not much has changed in
13 terms of adjunct precarity. We're still employed on
14 a semester to semester basis and we have no
15 protection of our next semester's appointment. Our
16 graduate student workers are paid less than the
17 prevailing wage in New York City and are barely paid
18 enough to live, let alone to thrive. \$27,000 a year
19 is not enough, and it appears that the Governor
20 doesn't want to assist us in the slightest. To
21 compare, New York University graduate student
22 stipends are between \$38,000 and \$46,000 per year.
23 With the cost of food and rent exponentially
24 increasing and the MTA once again proposing fare
25 hikes, our already low stipends are proportionately

1
2 worth less every year. Meanwhile our college
3 presidents and chancellery receive salaries of
4 upwards of \$400,000 per year, and our Chancellor
5 makes almost \$800,000 per year, almost twice the
6 salary of the President of the United States. And
7 yet, whenever high-ranking positions at CUNY are
8 opened, it is typically not our own students who are
9 hired. Full-time positions, whether they be lecturer
10 lines or executive positions are open, but more often
11 than not these are given to outside hires. CUNY
12 prefers to take candidates from what they deem more
13 elite institutions and leaving alumni, students, and
14 adjuncts behind. As I said last time I testified, we
15 need to support our own. We need to ensure that our
16 community is taken care of rather than given our
17 resources to people who do not know what CUNY stands
18 for. We call upon you, our elected officials, to
19 hold CUNY accountable for these egregious hiring
20 practices and have them put their money where their
21 mouth is. In conclusion, CUNY needs to benefit its
22 own community. We discussed this problem year after
23 year, and yet CUNY never does anything about it. We
24 need jobs brought back to our own community. We need
25 job security for our graduate students. We need

1
2 opportunities available for our students who are
3 currently pursuing degrees, and we need CUNY to do
4 better.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Hang on a sec. Can
6 we get quiet in here, please?

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Riffraff.

9 BORIS ONYEKABA: Should I go? Okay. Good
10 afternoon Council Chairperson Justin L. Brannan,
11 Council Members that are here still right now, Gale
12 Brewer, Nurse, and Crystal Hudson as well as Nantasha
13 Williams. My name is Boris Onyekaba. I am a current
14 student of Medgar Evers College, the Vice President
15 at Medgar's Student Government, as well as the United
16 Student Senate Vice Chair for Evening and Part-time
17 Students. Right now, currently, New York City is the
18 most expensive place in the world to live in. I have
19 often been rebuffed that CUNY is a communitive [sic]
20 school, sullyng [sic] the use of CUNY housing
21 options, despite knowing that our target audience
22 since the end of the pandemic have been returning
23 students, I myself being one of them. These evening
24 and part-time students who have already faced or
25 current face strained lives set around family and

1
2 work amongst plenty of other circumstances have also
3 chosen to pursue and finish their degrees.

4 Currently, our student body range from 16 years old
5 up to 70 years old, one of whom is graduating this
6 spring at Medgar Evers College. How do we expect

7 these students to make a choice between school and
8 keeping a roof over their heads, especially when

9 there's sustainable housing opportunities to keep

10 NYC's future workforce here. I believe one of the

11 ways to target such profound issues is to look at it

12 from a long-term development plan in which CUNY can

13 replicate some of the current CUNY housing plans

14 located in already-existing locations around New York

15 City and working to get more centralized location in

16 Brooklyn. Currently, the Transition Academy the

17 Department established at Medgar Evers College worked

18 to support students experiencing homelessness, issues

19 of housing, food insecurity; however, housing

20 opportunities are limited and often go to emergencies

21 first. Which brings me to the idea of replicating

22 the Roth IRA five year rule among programs such as

23 Housing Connect to keep students in the City after

24 they graduate, and for those who do not know about

25 that Roth IRA five rule, it says you cannot withdraw

1 earnings tax-free until it's been at least five years
2 since your first contributions of our Roth IRA
3 account. These rule applies for people from 59.5
4 years old to 105. While the Housing Connect is a
5 public website that allows users to enter a lottery
6 system that often takes several years between a
7 person can receive a pick towards a rented apartment
8 that gives five percent preference to NYC employees.
9 To combine these ideas it would be possible for CUNY
10 to receive housing funds garnered to current students
11 and future workforce of NYC to live nearby without
12 living away from the City. these could come in
13 housing vouchers in which CUNY colleges can utilize
14 by using similar time limits that Roth IRAs state to
15 allow students to pay for subsidized rent prices
16 until they graduate from college, and providing
17 applications for students who aren't in an emergency
18 for housing until after they graduate as well and
19 reaching out to Housing Connect and several apartment
20 complexes that could give a percentage preference to
21 current and recently-graduated students. The
22 objective is to give CUNY a practical goal that at
23 least appeals to place like Brooklyn housing market
24 which currently does not have a location for CUNY
25

1 students that could offer incentive towards public
2 and private housing, and backing from Council Members
3 whom constituents in various areas would be
4 interested in this plan. Offering--

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Just
6 going to ask you to wrap it up.

7 BORIS ONYEKABA: Yes. Offering
8 applications-- basically, this means-- this is by no
9 means a perfect solution to an ongoing crisis. I only
10 wish to continue a process that can yield sustainable
11 results to current and future generations of the
12 great New York City. And I would also like to add
13 that many of our representatives have been here for
14 pretty much the entire day, and I've also heard from
15 them that this has been an ongoing when they're the
16 last to speak, even if they registered early. I'm
17 not entirely sure why that is, but students coming
18 back-- we're sacrificing our whole day to come here,
19 and it does not look good if I go back to my students
20 due to the same thing.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

22 MIGUEL ARIAS: That's on? Hey,
23 everybody. My name is Miguel Arias from the City
24 College of New York. I'm doing political science and
25

1 legal studies over there. I'm a Latino student. Let
2 me say that one more time. I am a Latino student in
3 CUNY, in the City College, pursuing a degree. Most
4 of my family told me I shouldn't do it. Most of my
5 family I won't do it, I won't make it, not because
6 they don't believe that I will not make it, because--
7 but because the system doesn't believe that people
8 like-- that are like me and people who come from my
9 backgrounds can make a difference in this system.
10 Let me give you an example of that. When I came to
11 City College I did so with a few of my peers. Two of
12 them are my super best friends. These two did not
13 knew each other, but they knew me, but somehow they
14 wanted to pursue a career in the same area, so
15 computer science and computer engineering. I was
16 left perplexed when both of them told me they had
17 decided to drop college. Drop college? What? Since
18 they told me this, I went through all the stages of
19 grief. I was angry that they both dropped. I was
20 depressed so much that I didn't want to ask them why
21 they dropped. When I accepted the reality of things,
22 I asked them, and they both described that the lack
23 of funding and care for students in CUNY was the real
24 criminal that stole their dreams of having an
25

1
2 education. They-- this criminal of higher education
3 hides behind the lack of academic advisors that our
4 students get, which in my camp [sic] translates to
5 having four to six advisors for 4,000 students in the
6 social science department, four to six advisors for
7 4,000 students. How is that even fair? This
8 criminal hides in higher education behind food
9 insecurity, which in my campus translates to students
10 doing the personal fundraising to fill our pantries.
11 This criminal of higher education hides behind
12 overpriced book that all the students need to buy
13 regardless if they are the 14 or the 27th edition of
14 the same book. This criminal attack those that have
15 no privilege. I was a little bit privileged. You
16 know why? Because I come from a low-income family,
17 and in City College we have a department called the
18 Seek [sic] Department which is similar to other
19 programs like ASAP are ACE [sic] which offers
20 personal academic advisors help to pay for books,
21 tutoring network, professional preparation for the
22 students, and even jobs at the same departments by
23 the students and for the students. It is programs
24 like this Seek [sic], ASAP, ACE [sic] that we need to
25 continue funding and increase funding for. They help

1 students like me to continue and they prevent
2 students like my friends from dropping, because my
3 friends did not want to drop college because they
4 just wanted to, no. They dropped college because the
5 system forced them to. They didn't have the same
6 sources as I did. Now, when you get out of this room
7 and you see your fellow Council Members, let them
8 know what happened to my friends. Let them know the
9 benefit that I have to speak with you today. Let
10 them know. Thank you.

12 JA'QUAN BROWN: Can you hear me? Good
13 afternoon City Council. My name Ja'Quan Brown. I
14 currently attend the University of City College of
15 New York. I am a newly-elected Senator of the
16 Undergraduate Student Government. A issue I want to
17 address at City College is that the Science and Math
18 Department issues student faces are always addressed
19 and actions are made to these fix these issues very
20 often. Although this is a great benefit for the Math
21 and Science students, I question what about the
22 students who love printing, painting, sculpting,
23 photography, drawing? What about the students who
24 want to be studio engineers, studio assistants,
25 musicians, CEOs? Do the music and art issues in

1
2 these two departments not matter? It's unfair for
3 the students who seek career in art or music because
4 the current issues happening in the music and art
5 departments are going unsolved, simply because no
6 actions are being taken, and Administration continues
7 to ignore these issues. Administration wants all
8 students to be well-rounded, but how can that be
9 accomplished if art and music students are
10 struggling, stressed out about failing, and confused
11 about the course material because of the lack of
12 support from professors. Science and math aren't the
13 only departments taught at City College. Art and
14 music are departments as well and deserves more
15 attention. Our musicians and artistic individuals
16 shouldn't have to deal with explaining issues
17 occurring in their department, but these issues are
18 ignored. These issues deserve to be solved. Our
19 music and art students shouldn't dislike taking music
20 and art courses that would improve their current
21 skills to transform them into even better creative
22 individuals, they should be enjoying their education
23 experience, not dislike it. During my freshman year
24 as a music major I've dealt with these tremendous
25 issues in music courses, and I voice my frustrations

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2 to the Chairman, but there are no actions being
3 taken. Other music majors voice complaints as well
4 as I did. They tell me about it, but nothing was
5 ever done to solve their issues. I student I mentor
6 has reported to the Art Department he was mistreated
7 by his art professor due to the face the professor
8 was unhelpful, wouldn't give him full credit for the
9 assignment and sent him to places to take photos that
10 require consent. Ultimately, the student I mentor
11 finished the course by failure as well as the music
12 major since they dropped their music courses and
13 changed their music majors. To me, that's
14 infuriating and that's frustrating, because it's
15 unfair that at our university there's so many courses
16 for math, science, English, and there's tutoring for
17 these majors in departments, but no-- nothing for art
18 and music. We deserve tutoring services provided for
19 me, other majors and other students that are taking
20 these courses. Let's all together, City Council,
21 provide for our music and art majors. Let's plant
22 the seed so they can prosper and blossom like flowers
23 and be able to finish their semester successfully
24 without being stressed out and want to flip over a
25 desk or knock a teacher out. Let's take action.

1
2 Let's make it better for them in their journey and
3 let's make change.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We have
5 questions from Council Member Joseph.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Good afternoon,
7 couple of question. It's clear that the proposed
8 cuts to CUNY in simpler terms as a student, how would
9 this impact you on campus throughout your educational
10 journey?

11 BORIS ONYEKABA: So, the cuts are going
12 to affect my entire way of looking at the New York
13 City structure, because I'm not the only one that
14 will suffer from this. There are CUNY people in
15 every part of New York City. I know people and I'm
16 sure y'all do and have known people as well that do
17 this. we had earlier panels come in saying even the
18 nurses are feeling the drawbacks, because they're
19 getting the trained individuals that are coming
20 through the CUNY system and have no resources because
21 they don't have classes or any other things like
22 that. Personally, I see the turnover rates, and
23 they're not only happening in government official
24 offices. They're happening in student government
25 offices as well. People are just doing so much and

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2 just don't have the time to do everything, and this
3 will continue to be the case, and I'm not sure how
4 far down it goes in terms of students below us in
5 middle school and high school.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Will you also see
7 overcrowding in the classes as well?

8 BORIS ONYEKABA: Yes. Earlier there
9 were, I believe, in the pandemic time because it was
10 such a, you know, unprecedented thing, there was one
11 to, I believe, 40 is one my professors mentioned.
12 Now, it's a little bit down to like one to 125, but
13 even then students are just not even singing up to
14 still be in it. They do not see the worth anymore.
15 They do not see the point. And the more people you
16 lose in education is bad for the entire state, the
17 City, everyone, because no one wants to learn
18 anything if it's not worth it.

19 MIGUEL ARIAS: In the area of cuts, let me
20 give you an example. City College and every other
21 CUNY colleges we have the tech fee which I believe is
22 also going to get a cut from the Federal Government,
23 and most of the time the tech fee money, although
24 most of the students pay for it, it-- there's always
25 some left over for initiatives that the students

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2 themselves can propose for new technology advancement
3 in their campuses. For example, in my campus, for
4 the tech fee money we can use it for stuff such as
5 getting computers that the students can loan. If
6 they don't have a device or in that area. That year
7 we saw a tremendous cut, and we will have less money
8 for initiatives, meaning that students will have less
9 impact on how the resources are distributed to them.
10 So having this cut at the end of the day, like I
11 said, take away from the students who want to learn.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Can
13 you speak to some of the great programs at CUNY that
14 you know are-- the students can participate, and the
15 programs you think that should be expanded more for
16 students?

17 MIGUEL ARIAS: Sorry, like I was talking
18 in my early introduction, Seek, I think is very
19 important. My friends, they didn't have Seek, but
20 when I was in the pandemic, I was also in the same
21 predicament as them. I was about to drop. Why?
22 Because of the condition of being online, not having
23 someone to be on my shoulder, but then in my program
24 which is the Seek Department, I had my personal
25 advisor and I scheduled a one to one meeting with

1 her, and I told her hey, look, this is what I am. I
2 don't feel like I gonna go far, and then she said,
3 no, no, and then she advised me how to follow up,
4 even though I might be doing bad in classes. She
5 told me, it's okay, continue. Let's reinforce this
6 and this and that. And we work together on these
7 areas, and I think not having a program like Seek
8 that has advisors, that have tutors, that have help
9 for books it will inevitably leave us to this
10 thinking that they have no help when they go to
11 college. They have no support when they go to
12 college, but we found this program. We found Seek.
13 We got-- found ASAP. We found ACE. We at the end of
14 the day are making an impact in the students
15 themselves. These resources go to the student
16 themselves. Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you.
19 Earlier you talked about mental health. As a student
20 who attend CUNY what-- are student ratios-- can you
21 share some information about the mental health
22 support you're provided on campus and what's the
23 student ratio?

24 SALIMATOU DOUMBOUYA: I can say that the
25 ratio is really low for mental student counselor to

1 student. I can talk about my personal experience. I-
2 - before I started pursuing my architecture degree at
3 City Tech I was a student at the Borough of Manhattan
4 Community College where I did a lot of
5 extracurricular activities including mentoring. So
6 every semester I had a court [sic] of about four to
7 six students who were under my responsibility, and I
8 can tell you that that was even before the pandemic.
9 The ratios were terrible. These students came from
10 all over the world. A lot of them also came from New
11 York City and they needed help. They needed someone
12 to talk to, and it was almost impossible to find
13 someone who had the cultural competency to assist
14 them, and just someone who is just available because
15 making an appointment was impossible. Today, I go to
16 City Tech and we have our role in USS, and there is a
17 countless number of students that we lost because of
18 mental health issues, students who want to be
19 civically engaged, students who want to serve others,
20 but there's no way they can serve others when there's
21 no one to serve them, and that's where mental health
22 comes in. The support is really low. I know CUNY is
23 trying hard, but there's still a lot of work to do to
24 remedy that, because it's hard for people to find the
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2 resources. There are, yes, an online platform, phone
3 number. Sometimes you call the phone numbers and no
4 one picks up. That's the thing, a lot of these
5 things are not active, and sometimes we're told it's
6 about staffing. How do we remedy all of that? We
7 believe it's by getting more funding for all of these
8 resources, so that we can more people and our
9 students can be assisted when they need help.

10 JONATHAN HANON: At my college, the
11 graduate center, before the pandemic there were a lot
12 of students who were looking for mental health
13 counseling. I myself was one of them. So when I
14 went to the Counseling Center and I asked them if
15 they had any resources available or if they had any
16 counselors available, all they told me was, "We can
17 give you a list of providers who accept your
18 insurance. Go find a therapist outside because we
19 don't have staffing for that right now." So, even
20 before--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing] How
22 long was the wait? How long is the wait when you do
23 find someone? How long did you have to wait?

24 JONATHAN HANON: Inside and out, also
25 with--

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Inside, they
3 didn't provide me any option to find someone. All
4 they told me was go find a therapist, and when
5 looking outside it was the limit due to the student
6 health insurance having a limited number of providers
7 that we can work with, and the wait for that was
8 somewhere around three months.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Wow. We hear
10 you. Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
12 Williams?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Hello. I just
14 had a quick question about being an adjunct. I know
15 some of the things as a CUNY student myself, I know
16 some of the graduate students talk a lot about not
17 being able to live in New York City and go to school,
18 and I know there isn't a lot of support for PHD
19 students. So if can you talk through how the budget
20 cuts might impact PHD students, graduate students,
21 and a lot of the issues with being adjunct?

22 JONATHAN HANON: So, right now with all
23 the budget cuts, because of all of the reduction in
24 courses due to the lack of enrollment in addition to
25 the fact that our budget is being cut, and so a lot

1
2 of the fulltime faculty needs still be assigned their
3 coursework. There's simply not enough adjunct
4 position across the university to go around for our
5 graduate students, and the reduction and funding
6 across Departments means that there are less
7 fellowships to go to our graduate students overall,
8 which means a lot of our graduate students are going
9 unfunded and it makes it very difficult for us to
10 continue pursuing a degree, because if we can't get
11 our funding we can't get a tuition waiver, we can't
12 get health insurance which means a lot of graduate
13 students are going on leave and trying to find jobs
14 outside of the university, because otherwise we just
15 can't continue in the university without the proper
16 support.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Do you happen
18 to know-- it's okay if you don't. Do you happen to
19 know like how-- what is the word? How long it's
20 taking PHD students to finish because they're leaving
21 to find work, not able to complete their degrees?

22 JONATHAN HANON: I don't know a single
23 student that's finished within five years. All I
24 know is most students take seven, eight, nine years
25 because CUNY just doesn't have the proper funding,

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2 and so we all have to overwork, because most
3 universities the adjuncts don't-- the graduate
4 students don't even need to adjunct to teach and so
5 they can focus on their studies because that's what
6 their fellowships are for. but here at CUNY our
7 primary fellowships are already for teaching, fi
8 that, and if we can't get fellowships through that,
9 then we don't have funding to primarily be graduate
10 students, and so we have to focus on other channels
11 in order to be able to afford to go to graduate
12 school. I myself needed to find a lecturer position
13 in order to be able to teach five classes a semester
14 in order that I could receive any funding whatsoever,
15 because the only option was either teach fulltime or
16 don't get any funding. So the options were slim and
17 for two years I was unable to focus on my graduate
18 studies because I was teaching fulltime.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you for
20 your testimony. Yeah, I'm now five years in, so
21 agree.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
23 Hudson?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Hi there. First
25 of all, thank you all for coming out and testifying

1
2 with us or before us. I was just curious to know,
3 because I know at Medgar Evers specifically the
4 Champs [sic] program is on the chopping block, are
5 there specific cuts at each of your schools? Or I
6 should say are there cuts at your specific
7 institutions that you're aware of that aren't
8 necessarily like the broader CUNY cuts?

9 BORIS ONYEKABA: So, the cuts affect
10 certain schools a little differently. For Medgar
11 Evers, because it's a senior college, it has-- it's
12 supposed to have a little bit more resources, but
13 because it has, I guess, has a consistent lower
14 enrollment year by year, these cuts make it a lot
15 harder because they do not have the staffing already.
16 So, for example, the-- I'll call it the procurement
17 office in our college I believe has only two people
18 working for the entire college, and if you had a
19 comparison of two percent in a school with 4,000
20 students and two percent at a 10,000 student school,
21 it's going to be very, very drastic, and that's what
22 happens in Medgar Evers. So, if you don't get your
23 things in two months in advance, you know, you're not
24 just-- you're not going to get any of that until
25 after your term is done. And for a student clubs,

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2 events like that-- we put in a order for shirts,
3 sweaters, all that type of stuff to give away to
4 students, and that was at the end of last semester in
5 the fall, we just got it at the end of this spring
6 semester. So, yeah.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

8 SALIMATOU DOUMBOUYA: Overall, I can say
9 that for most schools the biggest hurdle is felt
10 inside of the classroom, because a lot students
11 sometimes when class is during the summer, there's
12 not enough faculty to make that happen. A lot of
13 classes are being cut because we are getting rid of a
14 lot of our faculty members, and we are opting, I
15 think, for the-- just for the most affordable option,
16 which is not necessarily the option that gives
17 students more quality. So today's students are
18 wondering is it worth it to have an education at CUNY
19 with everything that we're seeing. The second thing
20 is going to be the food part. Today a lot of
21 campuses still do not have a cafeteria. They have to
22 get outside of campus to get some basic food. A lot
23 of campus only have a vending machine available for
24 them to have food where they can have a snack or a
25 soda or some apple juice and whatever to have food.

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2 Not talking even about the night class students,
3 because I am a night class student, and we have to go
4 to class during Ramadan. I used to go downstairs,
5 and student broke their fast with chips and soda,
6 knowing that during Ramadan students fast for like
7 5:00 a.m. or 4:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., but that's just
8 for a month. Counting all the other CUNY students go
9 through that on a lot of campuses. So the food
10 problem is a big one. The quality of our education
11 is really being attacked, and we believe at USS that
12 even if we go to CUNY, the City University of New
13 York, we still deserve the best education and that
14 comes with valuing our faculty and make sur ewe get
15 the best people and we keep them motivated to do
16 their work, because right now it seems like a lot of
17 them are doing it for the goodness of their heart,
18 but a good education does not come from the goodness
19 of their heart. The City has to invest in that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you for
21 bringing that up. We spoke earlier about food
22 insecurity and the increased levels specifically
23 among the student population at CUNY institutions.
24 So I just want to reiterate for the record how
25 important it is to ensure that CUNY has all the

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2 funding it needs to provide these support systems
3 including food. So thank you. Did you want to add
4 something?

5 JOHNATHAN HANON: I wanted to follow up
6 on food services, that at the CUNY Grad Center right
7 now, we don't have food services, and there's
8 supposed to be a proposal for food services going
9 over the summer, but that keeps getting delayed over
10 and over again. That-- we were supposed to have a
11 meeting earlier this week, but that got cancelled,
12 and so it's looking like weren't going to have the
13 food services set up for the fall semester in time
14 for anything to move forward, even though that was
15 the plan. So we might go another semester without
16 food services.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

18 MIGUEL ARIAS: Real quick, I just have a
19 crazy idea. You know, when I was hearing the high
20 school students also giving a speech about food in
21 the cafeterias, it remind me, isn't it interesting
22 the message that were sending to the students that,
23 you know, in high school you will get food for free.,
24 yeah, the free-free. Yes, you can get it, but once
25 you graduate no, no, no. Good luck with getting

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2 food. Good luck finding something to eat whenever
3 you go to campus. As long as you have something in
4 your pocket to buy something you should be good to
5 go. But how come we-- we get them from our high
6 schools and then we bring them to college, and then
7 we don't support [inaudible] having food security.
8 In my-- when I was introducing my speech I mentioned
9 one of the students in your campus. You know what
10 she did? She did fundraising. She did fundraising.
11 She got about \$3,000 and we were able to fill out
12 pantries a bit more, you know, but we don't have the
13 staff now to get it open all the time. Now, think
14 about it. It's crazy no? We tell-- yes. Don't go
15 to high school. We don't need to take care of your
16 food needs anymore. Last time I checked, to survive,
17 I need food. Isn't that the case? Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Well, thank you all
20 very much. Thank you for your testimony.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we'll now call
22 up the next remote panel: Aliyah Malik, Nadia
23 Narcisse, Sabrina Bennett, Angela Simms, and Edwina
24 Archer. Beginning with Alia Malik.

25

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2 ALIYAH MALIK: [inaudible] Chair Brannan.
3 My name is Aliyah Malik and I'm a Youth Food
4 Advocate. I attend Queens Preparatory Academy, and I
5 am in 11th grade. I also live in District 29. My
6 school is one of the four schools that [inaudible]
7 campus. There are about 1,650 students in the
8 building. The average lunch participation in
9 February of this school year is 20 percent. One of
10 the reasons why the average lunch participation is
11 [inaudible] because of the cafeteria [inaudible].
12 Every day [inaudible] opportunity to get breakfast
13 and lunch at school, but not a lot of people
14 [inaudible] because of different reasons. For me,
15 the environment doesn't look or feel welcoming even
16 when I take breakfast or lunch. I always [inaudible]
17 classroom to eat. Most times I leave without
18 breakfast because I want to get to school early.
19 Sometimes I just [inaudible] before leaving home.
20 Eating breakfast or lunch in my school cafeteria
21 doesn't appeal to me for many reasons. At school
22 they don't have the options I want. During lunch
23 there are always long lines in the cafeteria because
24 they aren't grab-and-go, and most times they only
25 have one server which makes the line go slower, and

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2 not a lot of people have the patience to wait in the
3 line. Most times I go hungry since I only have on
4 period left before I go home. We all know you want
5 the best for us and you want school to feel like
6 home, but in order to feel like home, we need to make
7 the space where we eat look welcoming [inaudible]
8 want to have breakfast and lunch. We would like for
9 you to support all of our New York City middle and
10 high school by making it possible for us to enhance
11 our cafeterias, because it would be unfair for some
12 cafeterias in our middle and high school [inaudible].
13 By doing this there would be more participation in
14 school food as a whole throughout the City. Thank
15 you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
17 hear from Nadia Narcisse.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

19 NADIA NARCISSE: Good afternoon. My name
20 is Nadia Narcisse. I attend Tottenville High School
21 and I'm a senior. We are very thankful and excited
22 for the \$50 million currently included the Mayor's
23 Executive Budget for schools across New York City.
24 This amount of money will cover some schools, but we
25 need \$200 million to see equitable updates and

1 [inaudible] for all schools. I learned that
2 enhancing the cafeteria mimics the style of buffet
3 where students can pick out which foods they do want
4 and lessens the amount of food waste that goes on
5 when students are just handed a meal. Enhancing
6 cafeterias will promote food that isn't just food,
7 but food that is enjoyable, food that is filling.
8 This funding is necessary to help students thrive in
9 the classroom, in sports, and on tests. With this
10 enhancement, students will feel more motivated to go
11 to school and learn. As a freshman, if I saw this
12 implementation I would have loved school lunch even
13 more and been more excited for it. It would be
14 something I would have looked forward to in a new
15 school. As a senior, I hope to leave knowing that
16 generations of incoming freshman and students who
17 will come back in September will have something to
18 look forward to and be happy while eating in the
19 lunch room. As Youth Food Advocates, we are here
20 again with new and old members to promote [sic] an
21 issue we're all so equally passionate about. We ask
22 you to continue supporting this initiative and
23 continue to push for the \$200 million dollars for
24 enhancement of the cafeterias. Thank you.
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
3 hear from Sabrina Bennett.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time will begin.

5 SABRINA BENNETT: Good day to the members
6 of the City Council. My name is Sabrina Bennett.
7 Today I'm representing PMA which stands for Pray
8 March Act. PMA is an organization mobilizing for
9 justice in our beloved New York City. We focus on
10 the criminal legal system, housing, and education.
11 My focus will be on education, specifically special
12 education. I have been an active parent leader in my
13 [inaudible] for over 12 year, and I have witnessed
14 special education issues [inaudible] within their
15 very school. I currently have an eighth grader in
16 special education and I see her frustration and her
17 peer's frustration. Each year we lose more and more
18 teachers, specifically Special Ed teaches, and we are
19 left with general education teachers stepping in to
20 fill those voids. The students' academic and
21 emotional needs are not being met [inaudible]. It's
22 not fair to the teaches, and most importantly, it's
23 not fair to those students who deserve qualified
24 teachers that are trained and specialize in the field
25 of Special Education. Some students are led to

1 believe that they are incapable of learning, that
2 something is wrong with them, or that they don't
3 belong with other students. It may feel [inaudible]
4 if a child can't learn the way we speak, maybe we
5 should teach the way they learn. Although this is
6 true for all students, it is even more true for our
7 special education students. They're needing to be
8 clear information and support for families and
9 students concerning individual educational plans, IEP
10 and Special Education assessments. I tell my
11 daughter every day that she is one of a kind, that
12 she is more than [inaudible] and-- I apologize. She
13 is more than capable of learning. She just learns at
14 a different pace and ways than some of her peers.
15 Most importantly, I tell her that her teachers are
16 special teachers. They know that the job is long
17 hours, less pay, and lots of headaches, yet they
18 choose to do it every day. I implore the City Council
19 to ensure robust funding for the Department of
20 Education to meet the needs of our Special Education
21 population. Invest in recruiting, training, and
22 maintaining qualified Special Education teachers.
23 Invest in all students--

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] time is
3 expired.

4 SABRINA BENNETT: [inaudible] the most
5 vulnerable learners. Thank you for listening to me
6 talk about something near and dear to me. Have a
7 blessed day.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
9 hear from Angela Simms.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has begun.

11 ANGELA SIMMS: Warmest greetings, City
12 Council Members. My name is Doctor Angela Sims. I'm
13 a Sociology and Urban Studies Professor at Barnard
14 College Columbia University. My research focuses on
15 racial inequities between metropolitan area
16 jurisdictions. I live in Harlem and am a member of
17 Pray March Act, a coalition of Christian churches and
18 individuals doing justice to bring shalom in New York
19 City. I come before you to advocate for more social
20 services spending in New York City public schools.
21 According to page 14 of the proposed budget, the
22 social services allocation for Fiscal Year 2024 is a
23 mere \$3.7 million out of a school budget of over \$3
24 billion dollars. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but
25 if I'm not, this \$3.7 million proposed allotment

1 holds cost of the allocation from last year and the
2 Fiscal Year 2022 budget was a decrease in spending
3 from year 2021. This number is frighteningly low
4 given how much-- given how not only inflation but
5 also the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted students and
6 their families. How will students receive adequate
7 social and emotional resources from their schools if
8 there is not significant investment? According to
9 Harvard University Center on the Developing Child,
10 there are three principles that improve outcomes for
11 children and families. One, reduce sources of
12 stress. Two, supportive and responsive
13 relationships, and three, strengthening core--
14 strengthening core skills. Each of these principles
15 require significant investment in social services. I
16 request that the allotment for social services be
17 robustly increased, at least tripled, that more money
18 be apportioned for therapists-- and that more money
19 be apportioned for therapists, social workers,
20 guidance counselors, and librarians. If the Council
21 devotes sufficient resources to social services and
22 schools, this money will enable students to learn and
23 retain more scholastic material, matriculate from New
24 York City public schools at higher rates, and
25

1
2 ultimately will increase the likelihood that children
3 in New York City public schools would turn into
4 healthy adults equipped to thrive and contribute to
5 their families, workplace, and neighborhoods. And
6 these resources are particularly important for black
7 and Latinx students because their parents or other
8 caregivers are more likely than their white
9 counterparts to face [inaudible]--

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
11 has expired.

12 ANGELA SIMMS: of racial discrimination
13 which causes black homes to-- black and Latinx homes
14 to have less adequate material and social resources,
15 excuse me. So I very much encourage you to increase
16 the public schools social services budget. Thank
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I just want to give
19 a shout out to MS297 and PS3 from Council Member
20 Bottcher's District. Thanks for joining us today.
21 Thank you so much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
23 hear from Edwina Archer [sp?].

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.
25

1
2 EDWINA ARCHER: Hi good afternoon. My
3 name is Edwina Archer. I am a born and raised
4 resident in Crown Heights Brooklyn and a member of
5 Pray March Act, an organization led by both the
6 humane and religious duties addressing inequalities
7 in New York City. Today I'm here to speak on the
8 improvements necessary to honor the quality of those
9 who live in the NYCHA public housing. In 2019, it is
10 known that NYCHA set a legal action concerning its
11 inability to provide decent safe and sanitary
12 housing. There are six key areas that need to be
13 addressed in a five-year plan which are lead-based
14 paint, mold, pests and waste management, elevators,
15 heat, and inspections. These areas are all problems
16 structurally in public housing that greatly affect
17 the health and circumstances of the population that
18 lives there. A personal story that sticks with me is
19 my sister's. She works as a DOE Speech Therapist for
20 elementary students which sometimes requires visiting
21 children that are in need of therapy. One of her
22 cases lives on the 14th floor of the NYCHA building
23 where the elevator has not been functioning, and it
24 is not recommended that my sister take the stairs
25 since it is usually unsanitary, and there are

1
2 loiterers and homeless persons there. This
3 structural deficiency of a broken elevator neglected
4 that child's learning and could be risking his and
5 other people's lives if there were ever an urgent
6 emergency. NYCHA needs about \$47 billion dollars to
7 bring all housing units up to a good state of repair
8 over the next five years. The Five-Year Capital
9 Program totals about \$8 billion dollars, a fraction
10 of what's needed. According to the report on the
11 Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Plan, the state would need to
12 provide about \$600 million dollars more annually. We
13 must work with local, state, and federal governments
14 to ensure NYCHA is fully funded in order to honor the
15 dignity of public housing residents and create homes
16 and communities where hundreds of thousands of New
17 Yorkers can thrive. Thank you for listening. Thank
18 you for your time.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will
20 now call up our next in-person panel: Alex Parks,
21 Alexis Brode, Larry Wood, Ruben Argueta, Lisa Lester
22 [sp?], Robin De La Cruz [sp?], Kimberly Blair, Jonee
23 Billy, and Scott Daly. Thank you. You may begin,
24 sir.

25

1
2 LARRY WOOD: Test. I say just. You say
3 pay. Just-- sorry, feeling a little punchy. It's
4 been a long time since my oatmeal this morning. I
5 want to thank Council Member Chair Brannan, Council
6 Members here today for this opportunity. My name is
7 Larry Wood. I work as Director of Advocacy at
8 Goddard Riverside, a Settlement House in Upper
9 Manhattan. Goddard and our sister organization, the
10 Stanley Isaac Center, employ over 700 human service
11 staff who work to feed homebound seniors, create
12 pathways for youth, engage chronically street
13 homeless individuals for aid, and much more. As an
14 agency we strongly urge the Council to include a 6.5
15 percent COLA for all human service staff. Further,
16 we are particularly concerned that the Mayor's
17 proposed Executive Budget would make cuts to these
18 essential services. Specifically, the Executive
19 Budget proposed PEGs to DFTA and DYCD and cuts to DHS
20 contracts described as provider flexible funding. As
21 you heard from other providers, it's really flexible
22 cuts. The PEG for DFTA and DYCD is justified by a
23 purported decreased enrollment in services. This
24 reason is outdated. There is no logic in determining
25 future funding for programs based on enrollment

1 numbers from the pandemic era. Goddard and Isaac
2 operates programming in these areas including for
3 older adult centers. At the Stanley Isaac Center in
4 the Upper Eastside, we serve 6,084 older adults,
5 nearly four times as many as the same period in
6 Fiscal Year 22. Our center on the Upper Westside
7 sees over 125 people a day for lunch, and our Lincoln
8 Square Center attendance has increased 14 percent
9 since 2022. The numbers indicate a return to pre-
10 pandemic levels in senior centers, and they do not
11 justify cuts. For homeless services which I'm
12 particularly upset about, the Administration claims
13 that they are not instating PEGs for DHS, but worse
14 they're actually passing the cut onto the nonprofits
15 that provide the services. To meet the target PEG,
16 programs serving the homeless would have to cut 2.5
17 percent in exchange for salary flexibility, but our
18 homeless service program operates on such a thin
19 margin, there is no excess funding to move around
20 these contracts. The Administration has suggest we
21 cut open staff lines to raise the pay for the
22 remaining staff. Our outreach workers, who you're
23 going to hear from in a minute, are looking at
24 dangerously high caseloads of 39 clients per worker
25

1
2 compared to the best practices caseload of at-most 20
3 to 25 clients. They're already stretched very thin,
4 and it makes it very hard to build a relationship and
5 trust with the chronically unhoused New Yorkers we're
6 trying to engage. There is no way to consolidate
7 funding without adding to really high caseloads.
8 Tomorrow scores of nonprofits are organizing a Day
9 without Human Services. We're closing programs down.
10 We're not going to be putting our clients at risk,
11 but tomorrow outside on Broadway and Mary Street,
12 thousands of human service workers will be down here
13 demanding just pay, and we hope you can give us that
14 6.5 percent COLA you desperately need and oppose the
15 cuts that the Mayor is proposing in those flexible
16 cuts that are just not going to work. Thank you for
17 this opportunity.

18 ALEXANDER PARKS: Good afternoon. Thank
19 you, Chair. My name is Alexander Parks and I'm a
20 Housing Outreach Specialist for Goddard Riverside's
21 Homeless Outreach Program which provides housing
22 outreach services for those experiencing homelessness
23 in Manhattan, New York City. Thank you for letting
24 me testify today. I'm here today to urge the Council
25 and Administration to not approve the proposed 2.5

1
2 percent provider flexible funding cut to DHS and HRA
3 contracted programs, and instead include a COLA of
4 6.5 percent increase for homeless services staff in
5 the City's FY24 budget. The provider flexible
6 funding plan is anything but-- it is a cut in the
7 budget for the vital human services that is already
8 strained to a great extent. Our current budget can
9 just barely meet the needs of the most vulnerable and
10 housing insecure New Yorkers, and a further cut to
11 our budget would undoubtedly leave more of the same
12 New Yorkers without the care and housing that they
13 need. While DSS recommends eliminating vacant
14 positions as a way to meet this cut, it would result
15 in unsustainably high caseloads for remaining program
16 staff, which would negatively impact our clients.
17 Building trust with clients takes time and skill due
18 to their past experiences with trauma, and with the
19 high vacancies and turnover, it becomes impossible to
20 make this connect with the client. Higher caseloads
21 per worker translates to less time to build a
22 relationship with the client, potential lapses in the
23 client's treatment plan of care, and overall
24 prolonging the amount of time to successfully house
25 our houseless population. It also leads to higher

1
2 worker burnout which can create a revolving door of
3 staff and in turn lead to distress in our services
4 amongst the population that we serve. I have not
5 come across one person who has disagreed about the
6 importance of homeless outreach services, yet, here I
7 am advocating for the COLA due to my concerns with
8 the rising cost of living in the City. I am currently
9 working a second job, and was previously working a
10 third job to help make my financial ends meet. This
11 was proven to be unsustainable as I literally worked
12 myself into sickness doing this. My wage is a
13 government-mandated poverty wage, and the City needs
14 to value my work. We urge the Council to reject the
15 provider flexible funding PEG which will harm
16 services for our clients and instead include a 6.5
17 percent COLA for homeless services staff. I do this
18 work because it is the first time in my occupational
19 life that I felt fulfilled with what I do. I put in
20 my utmost effort because it is my passion to see
21 people's lives change for the better and assist in
22 that process. Approving a COLA instead of the cuts
23 will attract more like-minded and compassionate
24 workers which in-turn will ensure the efficiency our

1
2 programs that serve New Yorkers who are the most in
3 need. Thank you for letting me testify today.

4 ALEXIS BRODE: Hi. My name is Alexis
5 Brode and I'm the Medical Liaison for the nonprofit
6 Goddard Riverside Homeless Outreach Program which
7 provides housing outreach services for unhoused New
8 Yorkers. Thank you members of the Council for
9 allowing me to testify today. I'm here to urge the
10 Council and Administration to not approve the
11 proposed 2.5 percent provider flexible funding cut to
12 DHS and HRA programs and include a COLA of 6.5
13 percent for the homelessness services staff in the
14 City's budget. the Mayor's proposed provider
15 flexible funding is and should be called a cut to
16 crucial human services that unhoused New Yorkers rely
17 on to survive in the streets. We already know that
18 there's an extremely high need for our services
19 within this community, and unfortunately, even our
20 current budgets don't meet those demands. Cutting
21 our budget even further will leave more people
22 without the treatment and the housing they need and
23 that's more New Yorkers sleeping on the street
24 unsheltered. If anything, we need more financial
25 support from our elected officials which is why we're

1
2 also here to advocate for the COLA for homeless
3 services staff. My coworkers are among the most
4 empathetic and hardworking individuals I know, but
5 many of them like my colleague need second jobs to
6 make ends meet, and end up burning out and searching
7 for other jobs that don't force them to live paycheck
8 to paycheck. Having inconsistent staff creates a
9 massive gap in services because it hinders rapport
10 building with clients, generates more distrust in
11 services and ultimately creates barriers for people
12 seeking housing. Staff vacancies also cause higher
13 caseloads for providers like myself, meaning less
14 time to spend with each of my clients, less time to
15 work on housing goals and treatment, less time to
16 engage new individuals that would benefit from our
17 services, and again, more New Yorkers on the street.
18 Our caseloads often exceed 40 clients per one case
19 manager due to staff shortages, because as we'll
20 never ever turn anyone away that needs our help.
21 This is still an outlandish amount of individuals for
22 just one case manager to be responsible for. Between
23 getting all my clients to the HRA office to get food
24 stamps, to their housing interviews for apartments,
25 to the plethora of other services they urgently need,

1 we really don't have time to convince people for this
2 COLA. I care deeply about the wellbeing of my
3 clients and supporting this population is one of the
4 most impactful and rewarding experiences, but it's
5 not sustainable for anyone living on city contracted
6 wages that barely cover the cost of living. I urge
7 the Council to prioritize homeless services by
8 rejecting the provider flexible funding and approving
9 the COLA to make sure that our programs can continue
10 to keep experienced and compassionate staff to help
11 our fellow New Yorkers. Thank you for letting me
12 testify today.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

15 RUBEN ARGUETA: Justice in the human
16 service field. My name is Ruben Argueta. I am a
17 proud DACA recipient and a social worker for Goddard
18 Riverside, a nonprofit settlement house that provides
19 a wide array of human services. I am here alongside
20 my colleagues and members of the community to protest
21 the proposed budget cuts to human services,
22 especially those to DFTA, the Department for the
23 Aging. We ask instead to include a COLA increase of
24 6.5 percent for all human service staff in the City's
25 Fiscal Year 24 budget. As a social worker I help

1
2 older adults address their needs by providing them
3 support to accomplish their goals. It is an
4 intricate work that requires knowledge of systems
5 governing the lives of the underprivileged.
6 Goddard's intervention provides more than a
7 transaction. It builds a rapport with members of the
8 center and creates a place they can call their own.
9 Goddard cultivates knowledge and promotes
10 inclusivity, an organization as alive as the willful
11 spirit of the individuals who we humbly champion. We
12 provide essential services that during the COVID-19
13 pandemic kept the city together despite the flaws we
14 discover in the safety net of benefits. We are the
15 link that connects constituents to the greater
16 community. Goddard and other nonprofits alike
17 partner in providing comprehensive mental health and
18 social services. The proposed budgets will hinder our
19 ability to help those in need. The underfunding of
20 social services deters quality talent from our ranks.
21 Those already employed suffer from burnout due to the
22 demanding nature of the job and the low salary that
23 doesn't justify such a commitment or take into
24 account the delicate nature of our work. Employees
25 don't have a choice but to abandon their posts,

1
2 upheave their lives and move somewhere where they
3 feel value and respected somewhere that pays a living
4 wage. We can do better together for the people who
5 need our help, for our fellow employees who are
6 confronting justice on a day to day basis. We
7 deserve to do better for ourselves so that with our
8 hands we engineer and model society for the world to
9 admire. It is within our power to help those around
10 us. It is within our power with the help of those
11 around us to make a difference today as we consider
12 these critical issues impacting the lives of New
13 Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

14 KIMBERLY BLAIR: Thank you Chair Brannan
15 and Committee Members. My name is Kimberly Blair and
16 I'm testifying on behalf of the National Alliance on
17 Mental Illness of New York City, or NAMI NYC, which
18 is the only nonprofit providing direct and extensive
19 support services to family members caring for New
20 Yorkers living with serious mental illness or SMI.
21 Our org is grateful to see landmark commitments made
22 in the Council's recent mental health roadmap
23 including the need to invest in support services for
24 families impacted by mental illness. We are here
25 today, though, to ensure that this upcoming budget

1 supports and reinforces many of those commitments set
2 forth by the City Council. Families are the thread
3 across a fractured system, and the first line of care
4 for loved ones living with SMI, such as Major
5 Depressive Disorder, Bi-Polar Disorder, and
6 Schizophrenia. So when given the proper tools and
7 adequate support, families can intervene and improve
8 mental health outcomes for peers. Academic research
9 of family interventions broadly, and specifically our
10 evidence-based programs support these claims, and all
11 point to the same results. When a family member is
12 involved, emergency room visits and psychiatric
13 hospitalizations decrease, and there is engagement
14 and community-- there's engagement with community-
15 based mental healthcare services. To reiterate, NAMI
16 NYC is the only nonprofit offering these family
17 support services in New York City. For this reason,
18 our organization is asking the City to make a 250,000
19 investment in our one-of-a-kind family support
20 program all available free of charge to anyone who
21 needs them, including myself who I am a peer. In
22 addition to this, our written testimony delves into
23 the need for better preventive services, community-
24 based care, and crisis services. There we also
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1
2 explain the urgency that our city make no further
3 investments towards the premature expansion of the B-
4 HEARD program unless the model is revised to meet the
5 requirements outlined by our mental health community
6 and its CCIC proposal. Thank you for your
7 consideration, and we will submit the rest as
8 written.

9 JONEÉ BILLY: Good evening. Hi, my name
10 Joneé Billy and I am here in dual hats, actually
11 supporting PowerPlay NYC and the Sports Training and
12 Role-models of Success Citywide Girls Initiative, aka
13 STARS CGI. PowerPlay's mission is to advance the
14 lives of girls through sports, helping them grow
15 physically, emotionally, and academically stronger.
16 We create a continuum of opportunities for girls ages
17 eight through 18 and utilized structured sports
18 activities to foster critical social/emotional
19 learning skills girls need to succeed in school and
20 life. We build their confidence and resilience as
21 well as create safe spaces where they can learn from
22 each other and from strong female role models. This
23 has been crucial in helping our girls thrive as they
24 recover from the pandemic. PowerPlay partners with
25 schools and community-based organizations to conduct

1 sports-based afterschool and summer programming
2 emphasizing social/emotional skills, health and
3 wellness, leadership, and college and career
4 readiness. We also serve young people in all five
5 boroughs. PowerPlay also serves a lead agency for
6 STARS CGI, a collaboration of 10 leading nonprofits
7 across all five boroughs and in all 51 City Council
8 Districts that serve under multiple pillars. We are
9 based in the sports, the arts, leadership, literacy,
10 and the advocacy space. Our organizations, we come
11 together and we advocate for over 500,000 girls and
12 gender-expansive youth from systemically underserved
13 communities supporting their growth emotionally,
14 academically, and physically. Here's STARS CGI by
15 the numbers. We are 10 partner organizations. We
16 will be celebrating our 10-year anniversary next year
17 led by 10 strong, fierce women leaders who over the
18 course of our coalition we have raised \$12 million
19 dollars, and like I said, we have served over 500,000
20 girls and gender-expansive youth. We respectfully
21 seek the support of the Council for the restoration
22 of the \$1.5 million dollars funded in FY24 of which
23 PowerPlay receives \$550,000. I will submit my
24
25

1 written testimony that will further delve into it.

2 Thank you so much for your time.

3
4 SCOTT DALY: Thank you Chair Brannan and
5 members of the Council for allowing New York Junior
6 Tennis and Learning, legally incorporated at NYJTL,
7 to testify today. For over 50 years, NYJTL with the
8 Council as partner have been driving force in New
9 York City for the youth to play tennis in communities
10 reaching over 85,000 children annually. Last year,
11 we were in all five boroughs throughout the City.

12 Currently, we are funded under the Council's Physical
13 Education Fitness Initiative. NYJTL provides, as I
14 said, tennis. We also have educational programs and
15 do character development for all the youth throughout
16 the City of New York. Our programs, because of the
17 Council, are free citywide to anybody who wants them.

18 We are extremely grateful to the Council for its
19 support throughout the years for both our mission and
20 our programming. This year we are seeking \$1 million
21 dollars in citywide funding, an increase of \$200,000
22 allocated. It would be our first increase in over 15
23 years. During the 15-- these past 15 years-- 15
24 years ago, minimum wage was \$7.25. Costs have
25 doubled. Costs have tripled. One dollar today buys

1
2 73 cents of what it did back then. Given the years
3 of rising costs as well as the impact of inflation
4 and a pandemic on the economy it's been coming
5 increasing challenging for us to continue providing
6 our programming. It is our belief that talent is
7 universal, but opportunity is not. That is why the
8 funding is so vital to what we do. The overwhelming
9 majority of our young people served by our free
10 tenants throughout the City are black, Latino and
11 Asian. Please, in our written testimony which I've
12 submitted, you have a pie chart which will break it
13 down. It'll show you the even breakdown of how it
14 goes. One last comment I'd like to make that during
15 the pandemic we came out, we served the youth of the
16 City. We came out with programming during the summer
17 of 2020. That year we brought the kids out for the
18 physical education. We now need the help of the City
19 Council and continued funding in Fiscal Year of 2024.
20 The budget is crucial to our vision. With your
21 support we can continue to change the lives of
22 thousands of kids throughout the City. Thank you all
23 for your time and your patience.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
25 much. Thank you.

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UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Just pay.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now call the next remote panel. Kevin Jones, Tanya Douglas, Sarah Jackson [sp?], Andrew Diskin, Shaun Debra Corika [sp?], Lisa Jones, and Pete Graves. We'll begin with Kevin Jones.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

KEVIN JONES: Good afternoon Chair Brannan and members of the City Council Committee on Finance. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Kevin Jones and I'm the Associate State Director for Advocacy at AARP New York which represents 750,000 members across the five boroughs. The City is not prioritizing the basic needs of older adults, and New York that's-- which is New York's fastest growing demographic. New York City's 65 and over population skyrocketed by 36 percent over the past decades, and 18 percent of older adults are living in poverty. In spite of this, the Mayor's proposing drastic cuts to New York City aging and critical aging services. New York City aging receives less than one percent of the City budget, and the Mayor's proposal would cut that even further.

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2 There are a lot of competing demands for city
3 funding, but the budget should never be balanced on
4 the backs of our older adult population. We must
5 provide equitable funding to meet the demand for
6 essential aging services. First and foremost, the
7 City must provide funding to combat hunger and food
8 insecurity. The Mayor's proposing more than \$12
9 million in cuts to home-delivered meals and older
10 adult care center meal programs at a time when older
11 adults face increased food prices and considerable
12 cuts to SNAP, all while one in ten New Yorkers are
13 experiencing food insecurity. The City must increase
14 food program funding for community-based older adult
15 centers and home-delivered meals to ensure that our
16 older adults are not going hungry. Next, we must
17 increase investment in community-based care and in
18 nonprofits that provide these essential services.
19 City must fund New York City aging's homecare program
20 and restore funding to clear the case management and
21 homecare wait list. And of course, we won't meet the
22 demands with existing nonprofit worker shortages.
23 It's not unusual for organizations to have 20 percent
24 or even 50 percent staffing shortages in programs.
25 That's why we're calling on the City to provide human

1
2 service workers with a 6.5 percent cost of living
3 adjustment increase. Older New Yorkers built this
4 city and made it great, and without real investment,
5 we'll leave our older adults behind. The 1.8 million
6 older adults living in New York City deserve better.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We'll
9 now hear from Tanya Douglas.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 TANYA DOUGLAS: Good afternoon. This is
12 Tanya Douglas, and I am the Director of the Veterans
13 Justice Project at the Manhattan Program of Legal
14 Services. Legal Services NYC, as many people know,
15 is the largest provider of free civil legal services.
16 Our Veterans Justice Project has been around for
17 almost a decade, and what we do is provide holistic
18 services to veterans, nearly 100,000 people a year,
19 and we help them in a variety of civil matters such
20 as housing to maintain stability, helping with income
21 maintenance whether it's getting VA benefits, Social
22 Security benefits, and a variety of other family and
23 [inaudible] matters. We appreciate this invitation
24 to testify about the need for increased veteran
25 funding. The COVID pandemic has impacted the

1
2 veteran's community in ways that are unspeakable.
3 Many veterans are part of a self-sufficiency
4 community, and they're not used to asking for help.
5 Our Veterans Justice Project at Legal Services allows
6 low-income veterans to get culturally competent
7 services. So people who are aware of what it means
8 to work with veterans and their families so that they
9 can get critical services and maintain their home.
10 Last-- with funding from the City Council we were
11 able to help several hundred veterans, and I must
12 say, the couple hundred veterans that we helped are
13 much more than just the 200 veterans or so, because
14 each veteran has a family. So we maintain their
15 housing, maintain their income, and help them with a
16 variety of other matters. So we are asking that this
17 funding be maintained, if not increased. Our
18 veterans have sacrificed for us in ways that are
19 untold and often don't ask for anything. So what
20 we're able to provide is one-stop shopping where they
21 can contact us for any variety of civil legal
22 matters, and we work with veterans who--

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
24 has expired.

1
2 TANYA DOUGLAS: [inaudible] whether its
3 gender or race. Thank you very much for this
4 opportunity.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
6 hear from Sarah Jackson [sp?].

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has begun.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sarah Jackson? Okay,
9 we'll move on to Andrew Diskin.

10 ANDREW DISKIN: Hi, good evening, Chair
11 Brannan and members of the Committee. My name is
12 Andrew Diskin. I am a case worker at Urban Pathways,
13 a New York City-based nonprofit of homeless services
14 and supportive housing provider. I've been working
15 in the human service sector for five years. Though
16 for most of my career I've worked in the business
17 sector in New York City. Truthfully, I've made
18 significantly more money in the business world than I
19 do make now. But in that era of my life I was
20 unfulfilled and misusing substances and alcohol to
21 cope with [inaudible] discontent. My life changed in
22 2012 as I became a sober man. I now have more
23 purpose and more clarity in my life. As a case
24 manager I'm advocating for people who can't always
25 advocate for themselves. Many of my clients struggle

1 with substance abuse disorders just like used to.
2 Now, when I wake up on Saturday mornings I think
3 about the positive impact I have had in someone
4 else's life from the week prior. The problem is that
5 human service workers are not sufficiently valued for
6 the work we do every day. I see how insufficient
7 wages drives turnovers and vacancies in my own
8 program and across the sector. It often takes three
9 to six months or longer to build the therapeutic
10 relationships and trust with a client. So what
11 happens when a client has five or more case managers
12 in one year? It's a huge barrier for success and the
13 client's service suffers. Urban Pathways like so
14 many other nonprofits is funded by city contracts and
15 these contracts set the salary for human service
16 workers. A 6.5 percent COLA would raise the salaries
17 of contracted human service workers to better align
18 with inflation and allow us to support ourselves as
19 we support New Yorkers in your district. I implore
20 the committee to include \$200 million dollars or 6.5
21 percent COLA in the final Fiscal 2024 budget as step
22 towards human service workers like myself being
23 justly paid for our work. Thank you for the
24
25

1
2 opportunity to testify today and your continued
3 support of the human service sector.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
5 hear from Shaun Debra Corika [sp?].

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time will begin.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Shaun, your audio is
8 not coming through. Yeah, you're off mute, but we
9 still can't hear you. I'm sorry. Okay, while we
10 deal with difficulties we'll move on to Lisa Jones.

11 LISA JONES: Good afternoon Chair Brannan
12 and members of the Committee. My name is Lisa Jones
13 and I work as a Case Manager at Urban Pathways, a
14 nonprofit homeless services supportive housing
15 provider. I've been working in human services sector
16 for around seven years. I've worked with new clients
17 and supportive housing for formerly homeless and live
18 with a serious mental illness. I am proud of the
19 work I do to help people make strides in getting
20 their lives back on track. But even before that,
21 I've dedicated much of my time to help [inaudible].
22 For me, social work is a calling. I finished my
23 Bachelor's in Social Work in 2020, and now I would
24 like to pursue a Master's in Social Work to continue
25 elevating my skills in better serving my clients.

1
2 The problem is that human service workers are not
3 sufficiently valued, the work we do every day. Prior
4 to working at Urban Pathways, I was working as a Case
5 Manager and a Direct Specialist Provider in a
6 shelter, but for over a year, even while I was
7 working at a shelter, I could not afford an
8 apartment, and so I was living in a shelter myself.
9 In fact, it was only last month I was able to move
10 into my apartment with the help of CityFEPS vouchers.
11 But while I'm excited that I was able to get my own
12 apartment, I'm worried about keeping my apartment
13 with the increased cost of living. Prices keep rising
14 and wages aren't rising at the same rate. It's
15 ironic every day I work with people who have
16 experienced homelessness and are trying to get back
17 on their feet, but at the same time I have to worry
18 about being knocked off mine. Nonprofits like so
19 many is funded by city contracts, and these contracts
20 set salaries for myself and my colleagues. A 6.5
21 percent COLA would raise the salaries of city-
22 contracted human service workers, could begin to
23 better align with inflation and allow us to better
24 support ourselves as we support New Yorkers in your
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1
2 district. I implore the committee to include \$200
3 million--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
5 is expired.

6 LISA JONES: for a 6.5 million-- 6.5
7 percent COLA in the final Fiscal Year of 2024 budget
8 as a step towards human service workers like me being
9 justly paid for our work. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify today and for your continued
11 support for human service sector.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll try
13 Shaun Debra Corika [sp?] again.

14 DEBRA CORIKA: Okay, can you hear me?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we got you.

16 DEBRA CORIKA: Okay, wonderful. Thank
17 you. Good afternoon Chair Brannan and members of the
18 Committee. My name is Debra Corika and I'm an
19 Administrative Assistant working at Urban Pathways.
20 As a human services worker, I provide essential
21 services by working with clients in supportive
22 housing. Many of those I work with are formerly
23 homeless and/or have serious mental illness. I am
24 proud of the work that I do every day to help people
25 make strides in getting their lives back on track.

1
2 I've been working in the human services sector for
3 several years. The job we do is hard and important.
4 The people we serve often deal with difficulties that
5 we may or may not know which may reflect the
6 behaviors that are challenging to deal with.
7 Regardless, they are all human beings just like you
8 and me, and there is a need to be compassionate and
9 lead with empathy, but this work is not easy. A high
10 turnover rate and a high vacancy rate due to
11 insufficient wages makes this work harder. That has
12 an impact on the equality of the service that we can
13 provide our clients. My nonprofit like so many is
14 funded by city contracts, and those contracts have
15 set the salaries for myself and my colleagues. A 6.5
16 percent COLA would raise the salaries of city-
17 contracted human services workers to better align
18 with inflation and allow us to better support
19 ourselves as we support New Yorkers in our districts.
20 Why does the government undervalue human service
21 workers? While deemed essential during the pandemic,
22 the City continues to leave us behind in a field that
23 is overwhelmingly staffed by women and people of
24 color. We make on an average \$20,000 less than a
25 public sector employee. This exacerbates racial

1
2 inequity and gender pay disparities. I implore the
3 committee to include a 6.5 percent COLA in the final
4 Fiscal Year 2024 budget as a step towards human
5 services workers like me being justly paid for our
6 work. Thank you so much for the opportunity to
7 testify today and for your continued support of the
8 human services sector.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
10 hear from Pete Graves.

11 PETE GRAVES: Hello. Chairman Brannan
12 and Council Members, thank you for the opportunity to
13 testify today. My name is Pete Graves and I'm a
14 human services worker here in New York City working
15 at University Settlement where I'm the Education
16 Supervisor at the Adult Literacy Program. As a human
17 services worker, I , along with my colleagues,
18 provide essential services in our community and
19 support a growing immigrant population as they look
20 to better their own lives and the lives of their
21 families here in New York City. Our adult literacy
22 program helps people find jobs, better their English
23 language skills, connect to services and programs all
24 over the city, and much more. Even though human
25 services providers help connect New Yorkers

1
2 to lifesaving resources, employees at human services
3 agencies receive low wages that barely cover the cost
4 of living. Our work is necessary to New York's
5 economy and safety, and we deserve to be paid fairly
6 under City contracts. A 6.5 percent Cost of Living
7 Adjustment would raise the wages of City-contracted
8 human services workers to better align with inflation
9 and allow us to better support ourselves as we
10 support New Yorkers in your districts. Because of
11 low wages, it is difficult for community-based
12 organizations to attract and retain qualified
13 employees. Many potential employees refuse offers,
14 and people who do accept offers are often forced to
15 look for a new jobs outside of our organization
16 shortly after they start, because they cannot afford
17 to provide for themselves and their families with
18 wages as they stand today. Considering the New York
19 City Rent Guidelines Board has tentatively approved a
20 seven percent rent hike for two-year leases, it's no
21 real surprise that people need to look for work that
22 pays better. Some employees, because they are driven
23 by our mission, will take on second jobs just to try
24 to stay with us, which they should not have to do.
25 But in the end, inevitably, against rising costs and

1
2 rents, many of those employees will seek employment
3 elsewhere out of necessity. Along with those
4 employees goes a wealth of experience and
5 institutional knowledge. It's demoralizing to see
6 good, qualified people leave again and again because
7 they simply cannot afford to stay. It's not good for
8 employees, and it's certainly not good for the
9 communities we serve. A COLA is vital to retaining
10 these employees so that we can serve our communities
11 as best as we possibly can.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

13 PETE GRAVES: Please support government-
14 contracted human services workers by ensuring that
15 human services 6.5 percent COLA is included in the
16 upcoming budget. Thank you so much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
18 bring up the next in-person panel from Chinese-
19 American Planning Council: Farris Albokhiti, Jeff
20 Lau, Mary Cheng, Nicholas Lombardo [sp?], Robert
21 Calabretta [sp?], Kathryn Chambers [sp?], Venita Yung
22 Shwar [sp?], and Walter Logan [sp?].

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Appreciate you guys
24 sticking it out.

25

1
2 MARY CHENG: Thank you. Thank you, Chair
3 Justin Brannan and members of the Committee for the
4 opportunity to testify today. My name is Mary Cheng,
5 CPC's Director of Childhood Development Services. I
6 am a proud result of CPC's service, and I have been
7 working with CPC now for 21 years this year, long
8 time. So I understand firsthand how CPC's SCC [sic]
9 Early Childhood School-age Centers and Promise NYC
10 are critical safety nets for nearly 2,000 children of
11 working class AAPI and immigrant families throughout
12 New York City. Today, I am testifying on just
13 detrimental impact that Mayor Adams' proposed budget
14 cut of one billion to the DOE and \$38 million cut to
15 DYCD would have on our community and our city. CPC's
16 program like many across New York City are contracted
17 providers by the City to support DOE's funding, and
18 we are concerned about any significant cut to the DOE
19 that will land on our doorstep as community
20 providers. There is currently a growing mental
21 health epidemic. According to the Center of Disease
22 and Prevention, CDC, stated that over the last 10
23 years leading up to the pandemic, feelings of
24 persistent sadness and hopelessness as well as
25 suicidal thought sand behaviors increased by about 40

1
2 percent among young people. The COVID-19 pandemic
3 has been detrimental to the children's mental health
4 which affects their academic performance and long-
5 term development. The destruction of any in-person
6 learning and pro-longed isolation have increased the
7 students' stress and anxiety. Fourth graders in
8 CPC's program are asking questions like, "What if it
9 stays like this forever? What if my parents die?
10 What if we don't have any money? Why, why do I need
11 to since nothing will change?" And they break down
12 in tears from sadness and hopelessness, weigh heavily
13 on the minds of the students leaving them unmotivated
14 and unable to focus in the classroom. Additionally,
15 students carry their family's pain and loss while
16 managing their own developmental changes and hormonal
17 difficult changes. How do they manage these complex
18 emotions that they are feeling? What outlets do they
19 have? What programs in the city can support them?
20 We combat this by investing more, not cutting DYCD
21 enrichment programs, Summer Rising, Birth to Five
22 Program, and Promise NYC. These programs are our
23 city's safety net to ensuring we invest in all our
24 children and to support in the healing that our
25 community, for our community's wellbeing. The system

1 that we recently testified in imperfect, and we face
2 administrative and operational issues. These
3 challenges are hard and have led to operational
4 issues that have been-- have system-wide impacts.
5 And in recent months we've been working with the DOE
6 as City partners to move the needle towards
7 repayments and enrollment. A cut this significant of
8 \$1.32 would ultimately cut the work and cause-- gut
9 the work and cause irreparable harm to an already
10 depleted and struggling system. so we are asking for
11 the City to not cut, but restore and invest more not
12 less to fix the system, especially ultimately to
13 support the true heart of the program, our staff, our
14 staff who are contracted to serve the City of New
15 York under the same capacity as DOE, educate them in
16 the same curriculum, credentials, assessments, and
17 requirements, and additionally our staff who must be
18 culturally and linguistically competent to best
19 reflect our community. We are hoping that you will
20 ensure, and we call for the committee to ensure
21 adequate investments towards DYCD, Birth to Five
22 contracts, and Promise NYC for all our children's
23 mental wellbeing and additionally support equitable
24

1
2 investments toward pay parity and the Just Pay
3 Campaign. Thank you for your time.

4 JEFF LAU: Hello everybody. Thank you
5 Chair Brannan and the Committee on Finance for this
6 opportunity to testify. Before I begin I do want to
7 just shout out my colleagues who weren't able to
8 stay. They did have to take care of some
9 programmatic responsibilities. I do want to-- as
10 Chinese-American planning Council, as you know, we
11 are the largest Asian-American social service
12 organization in the country. Last year we served
13 about 280,000 at 35 sites throughout the City. I
14 definitely want to just shout out the programs that
15 we wanted to also lift up today which included
16 funding senior services at \$6.7 million to ensure
17 aging populations can live a dignified life. We-- I
18 would like to shout out our program Project Reach
19 which does great work in ensuring that we take care
20 of our homeless and LGBTQ youth throughout the City.
21 I want to say that we also stand in solidarity with
22 our colleagues who are asking for 6.5 percent
23 increase in COLA for all social services workers,
24 nonprofit workers. Yeah, and I'll begin with my
25 testimony. My name is Jeff Lau. I'm the Program

1
2 Director of the Adult Literacy Program at the
3 Chinese-American Planning Council, and today I'm here
4 to urge the City to keep our programs whole without
5 cuts. Adult literacy programs do provide critically-
6 needed services to immigrants across the City. Our
7 Adult literacy program provides free ESL classes and
8 citizenship test prep classes. We build to
9 strengthen communities and serve as a conduit for
10 learning about other critically-needed services such
11 as childcare, senior care, legal services, insurance,
12 housing, college access, food assistance, workforce
13 programs and more. At a time when immigrant services
14 are needed more than ever, we are faced with extreme
15 cuts by the Executive Budget at a time when
16 vulnerable communities are just rebuilding out of
17 COVID-19, when thousands of asylum-seekers are coming
18 to the City, looking at the City as a sanctuary for a
19 better life, and when our community members are
20 learning to defend against rising hate crimes, we
21 obviously can't afford the cuts that were proposed at
22 the Executive Budget. I'll cut it a little short,
23 sorry. We call on the city to increase the per-
24 student investment from 950 to 2,700 to be consistent
25 with New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy's

1
2 response to the DYCD Literacy Concept Paper. We also
3 call on the City to restore the \$4.4 million City
4 Council discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative, and
5 we also would like the City to continue the pilot
6 initiative with \$5 million dollars under a new title
7 of the Adult Literacy Program Enhancement. CPC was a
8 recipient of the pilot initiative and it has shown
9 great results to show that if you even like partially
10 fully fund an adult literacy program, you can do
11 really great work, and we would like to see that
12 continue. We believe our communities are strongest
13 when all of our voices are heard and represented, and
14 supporting adult literacy classes is critical to
15 continue this effort. Thank you for your time.

16 FARRIS ALBOKHITI: Okay. Thank you Chair
17 Brannan and members of the Committee for the
18 opportunity to testify today. My name is Farris
19 Albokhiti, and I'm here today representing the
20 Chinese-American Planning Council, CPC. Like my
21 colleague Mary, I am also a product of CPC as I began
22 my journey with the company back in my senior of high
23 school. I'm here to testify against the proposed
24 budget cuts that would detrimental effects on the
25 wellbeing and livelihoods of the AAPI community and

1
2 other underserved communities in our City. It is
3 crucial to recognize the importance of maintaining
4 and supporting the programs and services that are
5 lifelines for our communities. I am currently a
6 Family Development Coach at-- working under the
7 Neighborhood Development Area Program funded by DYCD
8 and work closely with high school students on a daily
9 basis. We provide academic, college, career, and
10 life skills workshops that would enrich and empower
11 them for a lifetime. So, I want to tell you about
12 one of my participants who I worked closely with the
13 past year. She saw us tabling in the cafeteria of
14 New Utrecht High School where I'm based at, and she
15 decided to-- after hearing about the program, she
16 decided to give the program a shot. Before she
17 joined the program she didn't believe that she could
18 apply and even get into college. She didn't-- it
19 wasn't an option for her. but after working closely
20 with her by providing her the resources that she
21 needs, assistance with college applications,
22 assistance with filling out her financial aid, and
23 one-on-one counseling, and also from the funding that
24 we have with DYCD for the NDA program we were able to
25 take her to college tours of different SUNY's and

1 CUNY colleges. And I'm happy to say that she has
2 been admitted to go to one of the great schools
3 located in New York City, SUNY FIT, Fashion Institute
4 of Technology, which is-- which was her dream school.
5 It was her top choice. So I'm very happy and proud
6 of that accomplishment like for her. And even after--
7 - she's a senior now. She's going to attend next
8 fall, and she reached out to me and my team thanking
9 us, saying that, "Hey, even after I've graduated and
10 I'm not part of CPC can I come back and speak to the
11 other students and be part of the events? And of
12 course, that-- we welcome her to do that, because
13 what we give into the community comes back around and
14 it paves the way for future participants in our
15 program, right? So what you invest in the community,
16 we'll come back and bless, you know, future
17 participants. Also, the time went up, but I do want
18 to ask-- do my quick asks. For the FY24 budget, I
19 believe the city must reverse a \$38.8 million dollars
20 PEG for DYCD-contracted programming, support a
21 prevailing wage schedule for human services workers
22 that through the passing of Introduction 510
23 [inaudible] include a 6.5 percent COLA for human
24 services workers, and including workers paid through
25

1
2 all DYCD contracted programs, and also just a quick
3 shout out. I didn't speak about COMPASS directly,
4 but COMPASS is also a great school that-- I mean, a
5 great program run by DYCD that we, CPC, worked
6 closely with. We need to increase the cost per
7 participant rate to set a wage floor of \$21 per hour
8 for workers so that providers can offer a more
9 competitive wage to combat recruitment challenges.
10 These are very important-- these asks are very
11 important for us to be able to succeed in our
12 programming and providing to the community. Thank
13 you so much for your time today.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, CPC.
15 Love you guys. Thank you.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: Next we'll hear from New
17 York City Council ALE, Dan Kroop, Matt Malloy, Vinuri
18 Ranaweera. I know I pronounced that incorrectly.
19 Please forgive me. You may begin.

20 DAN KROOP: Thank you. Good evening
21 Chair Brannan, Council Members Nurse, Stevens, Won,
22 Ossé, Hudson, Krishnan. Good evening. Pleasure to be
23 here. My name is Dan Kroop and I'm the President of
24 the Association of Legislative Employees, or ALE,
25 which is the staff union at the New York City

1 Council. ALE is proud to be the largest union of
2 legislative workers in the country. In my day-to-day
3 role a Council Financial Analyst I'm behind the
4 scenes of hearing, not testifying, but today is
5 different. I'm here as the leader of our union which
6 is some 400 New Yorkers strong, and our Bargaining
7 Committee. It's been over one year since ALE first
8 sat down with management to negotiate. We said we
9 wanted to work with the Council to write a fair first
10 contract worthy of the staff who dedicate our
11 livelihoods to public service and our communities.
12 Staff have been deliberate in building our proposals.
13 Our union, formed in 2019 and recognized in 2021
14 democratically decided on every one of them with an
15 extensive survey, outreach process, and membership
16 engagement. Collectively, we called on the Council
17 to lead from the front and become a living wage
18 employer. The City Council is an institution that
19 prides itself on progressive values. What better way
20 to put progressive values into action than by paying
21 your own staff fairly. Currently, it's not uncommon
22 for fulltime staff to earn in the \$30-40,000 range.
23 Forty-five percent of Council Member aides earn under
24 55-- excuse me. Forty-five percent of Council Member
25

1 aides make under \$55,000 which is the median salary.
2 While living wages in New York City vary from \$93,426
3 for a single parent to \$134,000 if you consider what
4 it takes to afford the average New York apartment.
5 Staff decided to aim for \$75,000 as a reasonable wage
6 floor, given that we'd never had one before.
7 However, Council management has responded to our
8 salary proposal with a floor of \$44,000. Such low
9 wages as these, plus long, unpaid overtime hours
10 which Vinuri will talk about more, would continue to
11 drive systemic turnover. In her State of the City
12 Address, the Speaker called for creating living wage
13 jobs through collaboration between the city and the
14 state. We believe the Council can also create decent
15 paying jobs. Like the City's budget, the Council's
16 budget is too a statement of values. In 2022 there
17 were 40 executives of the Council who earn more than
18 you all do as Council Members. Those 40 council
19 staff executives took home a total of \$7.4 million
20 dollars. Based on the union's analysis, our \$75,000
21 wage floor costs less. The Fiscal 2024 council
22 budget totals \$100 million dollars. We can do this.
23 We can become a living wage employer at the City
24 Council. ALE is proud to be joined in this fight by
25

1
2 19 unions and labor coalitions that we announced
3 today have our backs, and we have theirs, and that
4 includes the New York City Central Labor Council
5 which represents over 1.3 million New Yorkers,
6 workers across New York who are standing in
7 solidarity with us and us with them. We believe that
8 respect on the job and a living wage are possible and
9 hope the Council will be a partner towards achieving
10 that vision. Thanks for providing the opportunity to
11 testify, and after you hear from my coworkers, I'd be
12 happy to answer any questions you have. Thank so
13 much for your time.

14 VINURI RANAWEERA: Hi, good evening Chair
15 Brannan and all the Council Members here. My name is
16 Vinuri Ranaweera, and I am the Vice President of ALE
17 the union for New York City Council staffers. I've
18 been a Council Member aide for almost four years now
19 and have worked in two Council Member offices. I'm
20 here to tell you about how ALE is pushing for a union
21 contract that uplifts Council staff. As you know
22 well, Council staffers do invaluable work. We support
23 thousands of constituents, many of whom are in dire
24 situations. We actively engage our communities and
25 address their concerns. We help pass critical

1
2 legislation and allocate our Council Members' budgets
3 to essential services. Unfortunately, council
4 staffers are also some of the lowest paid public
5 sector workers and don't receive overtime like other
6 city workers do. Over 120 Council Member aides are
7 under \$55,000 a year. I was personally paid just
8 \$45,000 for the first two years of my career at the
9 Council. Those are poverty wages and don't allow for
10 the workers who serve our city to be able to live in.
11 Housing, childcare, medical, food, and other costs
12 are skyrocketing and it is impossible to keep up with
13 them with these low salaries. Staffers often need
14 other jobs to supplement their income just to meet
15 their basic needs. This quickly leads to burnout and
16 many are forced to leave, preventing retention of
17 institutional knowledge and leading to extraordinary
18 rates of turnover. This also pushes experienced
19 people out of the Council to comparable jobs at other
20 city agencies in the private sector which offer a
21 competitive, livable salaries. It's no surprise the
22 state comptroller found that the Council at 5.8 times
23 the vacancy rate as the average city agency did
24 between FY 2012 and FY 2020. And in FY 2022 the
25 Council had an almost 14 percent vacancy rate. This

1 is a staffing crisis. With current wages it will be
2 very hard to fill positions in any permanent way,
3 causing a serious strain on Council Members'
4 abilities to serve their districts. According to ALE
5 staff survey, people on average work almost 47 hours
6 per week. That's a third more hours than we're paid
7 for, or 600 additional hours a year. If staffers
8 were compensated for the hours they actually worked,
9 they would be paid over \$70,000 a year on average.
10 People work at the Council because they're passionate
11 about empowering their communities, but that passion
12 can only drive them for so long. They also need a
13 living wage of at least \$75,000 a year. They need
14 overtime compensation similar to what thousands of
15 DC37 workers already receive, and additional pay for
16 providing services in languages other than English.
17 This will allow them to sustainably do the work to
18 keep the City running. The Council sets its own
19 budget and has the money to do this, and as Council
20 Members often say, a budget is a statement of values.
21 The Council unfortunately hasn't shown that their
22 staff's time and work is valued. Overwork without
23 overtime, unlivable salaries, and staggering turnover
24 rates set staffers up for failure, and end in worse
25

1
2 outcomes for constituents. The Council should lead
3 from the front in supporting fair pay and labor
4 rights especially for its own workers. Thank you for
5 the opportunity to testify on these issues.

6 MATTHEW MALLOY: Hello and thank you very
7 much to Chair Brannan and all the Council Members. In
8 particular, Chairman Brannan is my Council Members.
9 Bay Ridge is very proud of you. when I look into the
10 crowd here, I can't help but immediately think of all
11 the staff members who work in your offices, who are
12 so proud to work for you who we work with every day,
13 Chenelle in Krishnan's office, Council Member
14 Krishnan, excuse me, Andrew in Council Member
15 Hudson's office, Tony in Council Member Brannan's
16 office, Arleen [sp?] in Council Member Williams'
17 office, Whitney in Council Member Williams' office,
18 Arleen in Council Member Ossé's, Dom [sic] in Council
19 Member Nurse's, I could go on, but I just-- when I
20 look at you, I can't help but think of them. My
21 name's Matthew Malloy. I'm a Scheduler in Council
22 Member Gennaro's office. I'm also our Union
23 Steward's Representative to the Executive Board. In
24 my capacity I am on the front line of handling
25 grievance issues and workplace issues and a resource

1
2 for stewards who are in offices. Our workers have
3 advocated clearly that we must bring an end to our
4 at-will employment status. What we are seeking is
5 similar to the protections that the Council passed for
6 fast food workers in 2020, and today I'd like to
7 speak briefly about two recent grievances that were
8 reported to the Council. Recently, a new staffer, a
9 gay man, disclosed their sexual orientation. They
10 were immediately warned that they should not let
11 their Council Member find out, as the member does not
12 approve of same sex relationships. A few days later,
13 the council worker was terminated immediately. After
14 being terminated, the worker reported their complaint
15 to EEO, and all of this is on file. It's not an
16 anonymous report. The staffer is named and the
17 Council Member is named. That worker reported-- made
18 that report on April 4th. It is now the middle of
19 May and that matter has not been resolved, and as far
20 as we know, that Council Member has received no
21 formal reprimand. Another staff member was warned in
22 another office that their Council Member did not
23 approve of the union and was discouraged from
24 joining. Eventually they became a union member and
25 their office's shop steward. Shortly after, their

1 day-to-day responsibilities began being delegated
2 elsewhere. They created a complaint. That complaint
3 went to ODC. It was considering retaliation based on
4 their union involvement. This complaint was
5 investigated. ODC found no cause. A few weeks later
6 on May 17th, that union worker was fired. They
7 created the complaint on April 26th. In both of
8 these instances, the stated reason for these firings
9 was, "Your services are no longer needed." We are
10 at-will employees. The Council does not have to
11 provide justification for firing a staff member.
12 We've received numerous reports that are similar.
13 Reports of workers being asked to perform political
14 activity while on the job, being asked to come into
15 the office after testing positive for COVID, being
16 asked to retrieve items from an office that's under
17 an active construction site, being stalked and
18 harassed by constituents, and even having their wages
19 being temporarily cut as a form of discipline. If I
20 wanted to emphasize one thing here today, it is that
21 all too often our workers face retaliation for doing
22 the right thing, the thing we are instructed to do,
23 and reporting the activity, and this is the reason
24 why we are advocating so strongly for our at-will
25

1
2 status as workers to come to an end, and for us to
3 have a clear disciplinary process. And just that
4 overall it is so important that our Council Member do
5 not take a hands-off approach to this negotiation.
6 Oftentimes when we canvased members a few weeks ago,
7 we felt that a lot of folks didn't necessarily know
8 the current status of negotiations. We are happy to
9 talk with folks. We're happy to meet with folks,
10 update you if you're not getting updates, but we need
11 our Council Members to get involved. This
12 negotiation is going to impact you for the rest of
13 your terms here. It's going to impact your staff.
14 And thank you very much for allowing us there. Thank
15 you again to Chair Brannan, and thank you very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We have
17 questions from Council Members Nurse followed by
18 Ossé.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Hey. Well, first
20 of all, thank you all for coming and testifying here.
21 I don't know if it was easy for you, but we
22 appreciate it. So a couple things. I mean, one I'm
23 a little embarrassed that \$44,000 was the offer that
24 came back, and I don't-- I'll probably get in
25 trouble. I don't know if I'll get in trouble, but--

1
2 for saying that, but that's embarrassing. And I
3 think many of us would support that. I think we need
4 help being able to pay you all better. You know, we
5 need the pack-- you know this, we need the package to
6 be bigger so that we can actually pay people to meet
7 the demand of the needs and to keep and retain
8 people. There are a lot of good folks who get better
9 offers, and we can't compete. And in terms of these
10 kinds of retaliations, I mean, maybe you could
11 outline or elaborate a little bit more on what seems
12 to not be moving, and if there's better mechanisms
13 for you all to alert people. I didn't know about
14 this, and maybe I'm just not looking in the right
15 direction. I mean, I know there's certain accounts
16 where thing are shared, but it would be helpful I
17 think if you could elaborate what are some of the
18 bottlenecks and what type of communication that could
19 better alert people to these kinds of issues.

20 DAN KROOP: so, yes, I think I'll start.
21 As far as the grievances and the retaliation,
22 specifically today, you know, we have all sorts of
23 stuff that folks reach out to us about. And
24 sometimes they just want to talk informally. A lot
25 of times, issues we face in the offices, we

1
2 internally organize. We try to solve the situation
3 before going through an official process. The
4 things-- everything I've talked about today has been
5 reported in an official capacity to the Council,
6 because I felt it was important to speak about things
7 that on record so we can reflect what the response
8 was. I also chose to use our most recent examples,
9 the two things that happened in April. What we're
10 talking about here specifically is really the EEO
11 process, and I think, you know, one of the greatest
12 problems we have is that a lot of times we will get
13 on the back end from them this statement that I read
14 here which is that their services were no longer
15 needed, and that is really the only legal obligation
16 the Council currently has. So, in our estimation,
17 while like yes, there may be some things we can do in
18 the short term in terms of comms, right, speaking
19 about this publicly. That's obviously very dependent
20 on the impacted worker who usually would like to work
21 somewhere else at the Council and maybe might be a
22 little bit nervous about, you know, tweeting about
23 this. They've already been very brave. They've gone
24 on the record with their name, naming, you know,
25 their Council Member or their supervisor, whoever it

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2 is, and they've gone on record which is already a
3 very brave step. So I think in our estimation the
4 number one thing we need is in these negotiations we
5 need some help getting over the finish line on
6 council workers not being classified as at-will
7 employees and having a very clear disciplinary
8 process with steps that would really just have parity
9 with DC37, parity with legislation the Council
10 recently passed for fast food workers. It's-- you
11 know, we're not trying to reinvent the wheel. It's
12 something that we can take off the shelf. And as
13 terms of-- if there's an interest from specific
14 Council Members and ad hoc organizing in the meantime
15 when these egregious cases come through, that's
16 certainly something we can talk about. But any sort
17 of public pressure that's always going to start.
18 Just like anything with our union, it's going to
19 start with the impacted member and what they're
20 comfortable with.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, thank you
22 very much. Just let us know what we do to be
23 helpful. There are those of us who do support
24 organized labor everywhere. It should be-- you know,
25 it should be able to exist. So, we don't always try

1
2 to meddle, because we know that it's still emerging,
3 but if there are ways we can help, please let us
4 know.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
6 Ossé?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Yeah, thank you all
8 for testifying this evening, and you know, to
9 everyone that's here for waiting as long as you've
10 waited to speak to us. I'm in support of the union.
11 I love my staff. Every single person that's been
12 with me since day one is still in my office, so I
13 think they love me too. I will say that it's-- I
14 think they do. I think they do. You know, I think
15 it's really important for us as members-- and I know
16 you guys were doing some canvassing last week-- to
17 know some of the things that you were talking about
18 and most specially when it comes to specifics. And I
19 know that anything that's publicized or, you know,
20 put out through comms is definitely going to impact
21 that specific worker, but whoever that Council Member
22 is who's treating their staff like that is a
23 disgusting person, and I think that's important to
24 highlight, you know, not only, you know, for us and
25 for the union, but I don't think someone should be in

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2 government if they're treating people like that in
3 the first place. In addition to that, continue
4 letting us know how we could amplify in certain ways,
5 and I don't know if you can do that through the union
6 steward. So Arleen [sp?] in my office, I mean, if
7 she's-- I don't know, like I'm still kind of confused
8 at like the amount of communication that I can have
9 with her about, you know, union-purpose things. If
10 you let her know and have her be the middle person,
11 and me advocating for something like the things that
12 you were talking about. Please let me know how to
13 proceed on that. I think, you know, a lot of us who
14 are, you know, new in managerial roles don't want to--
15 - who are in support of a union don't want to like
16 overstep in some ways and so something wrong. So,
17 some more guidance maybe through some of those folks
18 within our office who are part of that union would be
19 helpful, at least in my office. I'll speak for
20 myself. Yeah, I'm not a union buster.

21 DAN KROOP: Council Member, would you
22 like me to reply to that?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: I said a lot, I'm
24 sorry.

25

1
2 DAN KROOP: That's fine. Just briefly in
3 response, you know, we appreciate the support and we
4 do have to say that so many Council Members not just
5 this year, but right over the past four years that
6 we've concretely been building ALE as the
7 representative of the majority of the workforce here,
8 we've really appreciated the support of the Council
9 Members and the collaboration that, at times, we've
10 been able to have with the Speaker's Office, but
11 right now we are at a choice point, and I think the
12 numbers really tell the story. For over seven months
13 the Speaker's Office had that demand knowing that we
14 were shooting for \$75,000, and to come back with \$44
15 I think really tells a story about the gap that's
16 still there. And so we are going to be asking for
17 your support to help move that conversation along,
18 and we were, of course, back in 2021 ultimately
19 Council Members voted to give the Speaker the
20 authority to first of all-- at that time Speaker
21 Johnson-- to recognize us which was successfully
22 obviously, that's why we're here as the union, and
23 you know, we really think that the Council Members
24 are integral to this. Because as we know, as you
25 know, this is an institution, and I think that's part

1 of what's so important about this contract, just to
2 add to what Matt was saying. The contract should be
3 strong on both the economics and the non-economics,
4 because we're setting the standard at the City
5 Council which is an institution of government that
6 will be here for a long time ahead, and it's never
7 had a contract before. It's never had a union in-
8 house. So we have over 30 years of overdue
9 maintenance on living standards, and that's why that
10 starting salary, which is just really one part of an
11 overall economic package that includes some parity
12 with DC37's pattern on overtime that includes a
13 multi-lingual bonus for staff who serve constituents
14 in languages other than English. That includes an
15 experience bonus. We want all of these things to be
16 part of the conversation on the table, and so your
17 support making sure that, you know, we're in
18 conversation with you, that you understand what we're
19 looking for. It really will close that gap that
20 Vinuri was talking about in terms of the turnover
21 that hurts this institution. So, let's use this
22 budget as a statement of our values, your values
23 actually, as Council Members. You'll be the ones
24 taking a vote on this budget, none of the staff. You
25

1
2 will. So I think the Fiscal 2024 budget should be
3 the statement of the Council's values towards its
4 staff. So if you think we deserve to live in the
5 communities that we serve, you'll be supporting us,
6 and we'll be there to thank you. So thank so much
7 for your time.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We still
9 have questions from Council Member Stevens followed
10 by Williams.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: hi, good
12 evening. First, I would like to say thank you guys
13 for being here, and obviously for me, the treatment
14 of staff was always really important, especially
15 coming from working in service for 20 years, and I
16 just-- and not being unionized and understanding how
17 that sometimes is challenging. But my question is--
18 and this is a real logistical question just around
19 thinking about-- because I know you guys mentioned
20 like, you know, like DC37 and those things. This job
21 is very different than that, especially like working
22 for a Council Member. If you guys do something, we
23 get blamed for it. Whatever. Like, no one cares
24 about those things. So, what does that look like
25 really in real-time and really getting a clear

1
2 explanation of what it looks like if it's not at-will
3 and there is a discipline process and all those
4 things? I would love to just hear what that looks
5 like on the record around like what that process
6 would look like, because to me that's really
7 important. Because I come from service and I worked
8 there for so long and now I'm here. The conversation
9 is-- it looks different than it did before. So, you
10 know, talk to me a little bit about that.

11 DAN KROOP: I'm happy to start and then
12 pass it over to Matt or Vinuri. I think the question
13 of how do you create a grievance policy that's fair
14 for staff is an important one, and this is an area
15 that I would highlight. We've-- you know, we're
16 working with council management. We've gotten some
17 counters that, you know, we're working with. What's
18 missing though is the piece that I think is I really
19 important is progressive discipline, which means that
20 written in the contract is somewhere where if you're
21 tardy the first time, if you-- if someone finds out
22 that you're-- you know, whatever it might. Let's go
23 with tardy for the first time, that you can't
24 suddenly be jumped to being terminated. In which
25 case the union would only have retroactive or

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2 reactive recourse to go through a process which takes
3 our limited time, our resources, potentially all the
4 way through to arbitration to restore people's jobs.
5 So what we're looking for is to be proactive, which
6 means real rules of the road. And the Council union
7 has always been about creating standards where there
8 are none, and making those standards ones that are
9 really robust and fair. And so, you know, if I had
10 to put-- boil everything down that we're talking
11 about, it's about living wages and fair treatment for
12 Council staff. And Matt maybe-- he's been working a
13 lot on the grievance piece of this as a Chief
14 Steward. I don't know if you want to add any on that?
15 I'm really conscious of the other testifiers, as
16 well.

17 MATTHEW MALLOY: Yeah, I think just what
18 I would add to your question is obviously we're on
19 record in what we've proposed to the Speaker's Office
20 and OLR, and I'm very confident we can get you that
21 entire document shortly. I was trying to scramble to
22 see if I could get it very quickly. But I think it--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]
24 I'm sure you know where to find me.
25

1
2 MATTHEW MALLOY: Yeah, yeah, exactly.
3 But I think as Dan sort of outlined, I think the-- it
4 really is almost essentially a copy and paste of what
5 DC37 has, and that really just entails, you know, a
6 verbal warning, a set amount of time, a written
7 warning, a set amount of time, and you know, it sort
8 of follows a ladder--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing] I
10 just-- I just want to jump in. So is that not
11 happening now because of the-- maybe that's why I'm
12 baffled.

13 MATTHEW MALLOY: Sure. Right? Right?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Because that's
15 kind of the thing I'm trying to like get at. So
16 those things are not happening currently, and folks
17 are just jumping straight to termination in some
18 instances? And I'm asking this, because sincerely I
19 know how my office is run. I don't know how other
20 folks' office is run. This is why I'm asking the
21 questions.

22 MATTHEW MALLOY: And I think that hits on
23 a key theme that we have brought to the bargaining
24 table, that we have heard from our members, is that
25 currently-- and it's a really unique part of our job

1
2 as working for elected officials. We like to, you
3 know, refer to this as it's almost as if we're all on
4 51 separate islands, and there's different rules and
5 there's different expectations, and yes, there are
6 tons of offices who would never just fire someone.
7 They would have some sort of independent process that
8 they've all agreed to and it works. But there's no
9 such requirement. Quite literally, you know, you
10 have to obviously go through the formal process of
11 engaging with HR and there's obviously, you know,
12 some steps in term of the paperwork, but we are at-
13 will employees, and if the Council Member deems that
14 our services are no longer needed, that is just
15 [inaudible] enough, and you know, as I, you know,
16 showed in just two examples-- we have many others.
17 sometimes it's very reasonable to suspect retaliation
18 whether, you know, for union involvement, or on a
19 protected category like sex, sexual orientation, or
20 race, and so that's part of the reason why we're
21 emphasizing this so much today. But yes, there are
22 definitely currently offices where people are
23 abruptly terminated and are just-- the reason is your
24 services are no longer needed.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, thank you
3 guys for showing up here today, and like, leading
4 with courage, especially-- we know, like especially
5 when you're the first ones to do sometimes, it's
6 really hard and it's scary and you guys are leading
7 with courage and leading with knowledge, and so we do
8 appreciate that, and you know, we look forward to
9 continuing to-- like, pushing this forward. As you
10 know, this Council is a council who does believe in
11 unions, and we want to be unsupportive and just
12 trying to get to some of the nitty-gritty, but we'll
13 definitely continue this conversation. So thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, I had
15 similar questions, and also just interested in like
16 the nitty-gritty, like what are you actually asking
17 for. I think I did see some type of one-pager that
18 kind of listed out the different demands that you
19 guys had, and so I don't even want to comment about
20 them, I would just rather see them, because some of
21 the things that I saw and even some of the things
22 that were listed in the testimony I would love to
23 further explore what those look like, because-- and
24 this is coming from a person who prior to this, all
25 I've done is work for elected officials, and so I

1
2 know how firsthand how abusive the environment can be
3 and how fluid it is for people to sort of make their
4 own rules, and not a lot of recourse for individuals
5 who are working for elected officials in a political
6 environment, but taking that into consideration, it
7 still is a political environment. And like,
8 different types of industries that have certain types
9 of norms, I do think unfortunately this environment
10 is abusive to elected officials as well. I'm on the
11 record saying that. And so by extension of us, I'm
12 just interested in how all of that gets taken into
13 consideration given the type of environment. Like,
14 we are-- I feel like we're on-call all the time, and
15 we have to create our own boundaries, and we have to,
16 you know, tell ourselves turn the phone off. But
17 again, that's like a reflection of what we have to be
18 responsive too, and our offices are also responsive
19 to emergencies. A fire could happen. Someone gets
20 shot. I mean, so many different things. So, I was
21 just equally interested in the micro nitty-gritty of
22 like what specifically are you asking for? what
23 makes-- I think I saw something around predictable
24 scheduling, which I think can happen, but needs to
25 happen with levels of flexibility because it's not

1
2 like McDonald's or Macy's where you kind of know
3 it's a set amount of work. You have to be there at a
4 specific time. So I just, again, just really
5 interested in the nitty-gritty and also want to thank
6 you all for coming, and say firsthand I know how
7 abusive the environment can be and why it important
8 to have representation. Thank you.

9 DAN KROOP: Thanks, Council Member
10 Williams. It's very powerful to hear you say, as
11 someone who's worked in politics for many years that
12 is an area that unfortunately has a lot of abuse, and
13 that's part of what we put forward as a union was
14 that we wanted to see not just reactive measures like
15 EEO for a small subset of cases that are about
16 discrimination on a protected category or harassment,
17 but bullying. Bullying is very difficult currently
18 under the existing council policy to substantiate and
19 we put forward proposals many, many months ago to
20 beef up the ability of the Council by establishing an
21 Office of Conflict Resolution which is a similar
22 proposal to what was put forward out of a working
23 group that the union at Columbia and management there
24 devised to put proactive measures in place so that
25 you have for example coaching for managers who are

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2 not particularly a droid [sic] at managing their
3 staff, so that you could have restorative justice
4 for issues that arise in the office, to have some
5 sort of mediation there. Not everything has to be
6 legal matter between this party said this and this
7 party said that, and only one of them can be right.
8 In fact, that's a very old model of thinking. We
9 wouldn't talk to many of the agencies, for example,
10 doing criminal justice work or work with our youth
11 and say those are the only options is that you cast
12 them aside and they're no longer allowed, or they
13 haven't done anything wrong at all. We need
14 proactive ways of getting to grips with the bullying
15 culture in politics, and the council wants-- the
16 Council Union wants to be a part of moving that
17 conversation forward. It will impact our coworkers
18 in Albany or in Washington D.C. who are also very
19 admirably, I must say, organizing new unions. Just
20 in terms of some of-- very quickly. I mean, we'll
21 definitely get you the one-pager about some of our
22 demands, but on the flexibility piece, I think it's
23 really important. what we took from DC37's contract
24 and modeled our own overtime proposal on had options
25 for both involuntary overtime where you raise your

1 hand and say I'd like to take that backpack giveaway
2 this weekend, or involuntary overtime where the
3 member says you have to show up because there was a
4 fire in that building and the woman-- and one of the
5 tenants needs you now. We have provisions that we
6 put forward. Unfortunately, the response that we got
7 was there's no circumstance that the council
8 management thought that we would earn paid overtime.
9 That's just very unusual when you look at other city
10 workers, that there's no circumstance where you're
11 mandated to show up on a weekend and a holiday and
12 you don't get a dime, right? So we're willing to
13 talk about, you know, a range of things. What's the
14 budget? What's affordable? What's parity? We're
15 not asking for the sun, the moon, and the stars.
16 We're asking for what other public servants get so we
17 can tamp down the brain drain that unfortunately has
18 impacted this institution historically for decades,
19 and make this institution all it can be. And really,
20 defend and protect and respect the staff who work
21 here who are unionized workers, just like so many
22 other hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the
23 City and millions throughout the metro area. So
24 we're flexible about some of the means, but some of
25

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2 the principles, I think we're still quite far away
3 right now and our negotiations are, and we'd like to,
4 you know, have your support as we try to get closer.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. You
6 know, you mentioned DC37. I remember speaking to one
7 of the presidents of a Local and he talks about how
8 he goes really hard for his members, but then he also
9 said sometimes his members are in the wrong, and he
10 equally will turn to his members and have those types
11 of conversations. And so, again, I have worked for
12 many offices. I have heard lots of horror stories
13 working in Albany, and so I know again, staff needs
14 protection and should be respected, but how-- how do
15 you also-- how will you address things from sort of a
16 more of a neutral perspective in terms of looking at
17 all sides? Because I've also heard flip side stories
18 of the opposite happening. So, you know, how would
19 you look into those types of matters, and would you
20 look at those fairly?

21 DAN KROOP: Just one comment and then
22 I'll pass it along. Our proposal for the Office of
23 Conflict Resolution would have independent members as
24 well, but it was rebuffed by management. So I think
25 we're very open to the idea of there being multiple

1
2 parities helping us move towards a more holistic,
3 more proactive approach to reducing abuse,
4 harassment, and bullying, but we're not really being
5 met at the table on those asks yet.

6 MATTHEW MALLOY: And yeah, I think what I
7 would also add is a few weeks ago we were able to go
8 to the Central Labor Council Offices and have a shop
9 stewards training, and a section of the training
10 regarded on this exact point. Like, listen, it's not
11 as if, you know, immediately upon someone telling you
12 something it's correct, right? There's always a
13 fact-finding part of that process, and that was
14 something we really, you know, emphasize. I think we
15 really value, you know, evidence, documentation,
16 etcetera. So I think in that end currently even now
17 where we do not have an arbitration process, we do
18 not have a grievance process, because we need a
19 contract in order to enforce those matters. I would
20 say even right now ultimately we do have, you know, a
21 process prior to that, you know, before we maybe, you
22 know, send a complaint to EEO and meet and discuss
23 the matter. I think we always want to make sure that
24 there is some sort of, you know, evidence and
25 something to back up, you know, what the member is

1 talking to us about. So, on that end, I think our
2 stewards do a really, really good job of collecting
3 that information and taking the process very
4 seriously, which obviously just gives the union more
5 credibility. I think that's something the union's
6 very aware of, is that if you're going to make a big
7 accusation, you better have, you know, big evidence
8 to go along with it, and I think that's why today
9 everything I've talked about in terms of our
10 anecdotes I've made sure that they were examples that
11 are, you know, on file with EEO. These aren't, you
12 know, anonymous complaints, anonymous sources. We
13 can, you know, talk with the EEO office. They have
14 the specific member aide, the specific Council
15 Member, and all of that is, you know, on file for the
16 record to reflect.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
19 Krishnan followed by Won.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Well, first I
21 just want to say to you all, too, thank you so much
22 for having the courage to come forward and testify
23 today in this forum, much less at this hour, too, and
24 coming forward with very honest accounts and details
25 of all that's been happening and all of your work,

1 too. So it's not easy to do that, and I do-- I think
2 we all do appreciate you and your testimony today.
3 I'm particularly appalled by some of the things that
4 I've heard today, and particularly the EEO issues and
5 the bullying and the things you mentioned. So I
6 appreciate you all disclosing these, and that they're
7 also documented too and are things that we can look
8 into further as well. And I would ask you all, you
9 know, we all here, as you can probably see by the
10 questions and comments you've mentioned, are very
11 supportive of your organizing efforts. And I know
12 I've seen you all at 250 Broadway the day you were
13 firing and lobbying, too, and I just ask that you
14 please keep up informed with details as you provided
15 today too of how things are going, what's happening,
16 how we can be supportive and assist you all in those
17 efforts. In my opinion, this institution should be a
18 model when it comes to worker practices, worker pay,
19 and the work environment that we create, and I
20 appreciate you all helping us, helping this
21 institution get to this place, too. But thank you.
22 I think all of us here, too, we see the work that
23 you're doing. We see you and value you and recognize
24 all of your labor, your sacrifice and efforts. This
25

1
2 is by no means easy work, and if it's not easy for us
3 as elected officials, it's even more difficult for
4 you all as the staff every day in our offices with
5 the work that comes in, some unexpectedly at times,
6 long days, long hours, but we're very grateful, and
7 I'd ask that you just keep us posted of ways that we
8 can be supportive of making this institution the
9 model that it should be. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member Won.

11 I wish-- we still have like 200 people that--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: [interposing] Thank
13 you. Thank you so much everyone for coming to
14 testify. I just had one question. For the DC37 jobs
15 that you're comparing to, can you help me understand,
16 is that-- are those salary jobs or are they hourly
17 jobs?

18 MATTHEW MALLOY: They're hourly-- they're
19 salary, sorry. Dan, I think you should take--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: [interposing] Okay,
21 yeah, could you help me underst--

22 DAN KROOP: [interposing] Sure, we can--
23 yeah.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: If you could name
25 some of those job roles that you're comparing to, I

1
2 think it's a benchmark that will help dispel some of
3 the misunderstandings where people may think that
4 you're comparing to hourly workers for overtime
5 instead of salaried workers, because I think there's
6 a discrepancy in them both.

7 DAN KROOP: There's hundreds of thousands
8 of city workers who are salaried who earn paid
9 overtime.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Can you name some of
11 them?

12 DAN KROOP: Certainly, both civilian and
13 uniformed roles. So, you know, we were looking at a
14 range of contracts when we were doing our background
15 research. I think the DC37 Master Agreement is one
16 of the sources that we used. I saw there were CWA
17 contracts that we looked at, and these are just off
18 the top of my head. So I'm happy to kind of dig into
19 that. But I think the key piece is we know there are
20 other civilian workers who get paid overtime, and
21 there also are civilian workers who get comp time,
22 but don't see a phase out at certain income levels,
23 which was also what was pushed back at us. So many
24 of our members would just wind up phasing out of even
25 earning compensatory time which I don't think is

1
2 fair. So, I think those are a couple of the pieces
3 to help answer your question, but I'm happy to kind
4 of get back-- I don't have that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: I think all of that
6 information is helpful, like what the other members
7 were saying, communicating all of this out so that
8 we're more educated on everything you're fighting for
9 so that way we can be allies to you. And I do agree
10 that it is a problem that you're on an island,
11 because there's no standardization of how an office
12 should be run and there's no standardization of
13 office policy. It's the-- at the preference of a
14 member and their own personal desires of how they
15 want to run their office, so.

16 DAN KROOP: Absolutely.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you for all
18 that you do.

19 DAN KROOP: Thank you. Thanks for the
20 questions, and you know, we're here to raise the
21 standards of this institution and make it practice
22 what it preaches.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you guys.
24 Thank you.

1
2 DAN KROOP: Thanks so much, Chair
3 Brannan.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

5 MATTHEW MALLOY: Thank you very much
6 Chair Brannan.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So, next we'll hear
8 from our remote panel: Sarah Wilson, Hannah Wade,
9 Matthew Bernardo, Marie Mongeon, and MJ Okma. Is
10 Sarah Wilson there? She can begin. Okay, we'll move
11 on to Hannah Wade.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hannah, are you on--

14 HANNAH WADE: Good evening Chairman
15 Brannan. Hello, can you hear me?

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

17 HANNAH WADE: Okay, great. Good evening
18 Chairman Brannan and member of the New York City
19 Council Committee on Finance. I'm Hannah Wade,
20 Director of City Affairs and Public Policy at NYU
21 Langone Health, and I'm testifying on behalf of the
22 Cohen Military Family Center to encourage the Council
23 to fully fund veteran programs in New York City. The
24 Cohen Military Family Center was established just
25 over 10 years ago with the mission to address the

1
2 mental health challenges of veterans by providing
3 accessible, high-quality, evidence-based treatment to
4 veterans and their family members. The City Council
5 through the Mental Health Services for Veterans
6 Initiative has helped the Center accomplish this
7 mission with funding since FY2016 and we urge the
8 Council and the Mayor to do more for our veterans.
9 Veterans and their family members are seeking mental
10 health services at a higher rate than ever before in
11 the last decade of our operation. This sharp
12 increase has resulted in struggles to meet the demand
13 and ultimately a wait list of services including for
14 our City Council funded Traumatic Brain Injury
15 Program. The funding from the Mental Health Services
16 for Veterans Initiative remains the sole source of
17 funding for our Centers TBI program which provides
18 much-needed evaluation and rehabilitation services
19 for veterans with traumatic brain injury. We urge
20 the Council to further invest in the veterans'
21 population by supplementing the veteran's services
22 budget, continuing support of the Mental Health
23 Services for Veterans Initiative, and by creating a
24 new member-designated initiative to support our
25 veterans in every council district. Thank you again

1
2 for the Council's past funding for the center and the
3 opportunity to testify today.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Marie, you can go
5 ahead. Marie? Can you hear us? You can go ahead.

6 MARIE MONGEON: Thank you. Good evening
7 everyone. My name is Marie Mongeon, and I am the
8 Vice President of Policy with CHCANY, the statewide
9 association representing New York's community health
10 centers. I'm here to testify in strong support of
11 the Council's proposal to \$10 million dollars to New
12 York City care for the inclusion of community health
13 centers in that program. Health centers provide
14 comprehensive primary care and support services to
15 more than 1.2 million New Yorkers at sites all across
16 the City. They are vital access points, in medically
17 underserved communities and work hand in glove with
18 community-based organizations and hospitals to
19 address patient's health and social care needs.
20 Rising costs and inflation coupled with workforce
21 shortages are strangling the health center network
22 where reimbursement rates no longer suffice to meet
23 the rising demand for a wide array of services. Even
24 amidst these pressures, health centers have stepped
25 up to serve the unique needs of their communities.

1
2 Many of them are partnering closely with the city
3 government to provide medical care and supports to
4 asylum-seekers arriving from the Texas/Mexico border.
5 We are providing acute and chronic care management,
6 translation services, behavioral health support,
7 immunizations, and connection to insurance when
8 applicable. However, that work is largely unfunded
9 and additional resources are needed to support health
10 center's efforts to provide care to asylees. In
11 2022, the Council passed legislation to expand the
12 New York City Care Initiative to include community
13 health centers in addition to H+H, recognizing the
14 critical role that health centers play and providing
15 care to uninsured New Yorkers. However, the
16 expansion signed into law by the Council is yet to be
17 implemented by the Executive. This year's Executive
18 Budget proposal included \$100 million dollars for New
19 York City Care, but did not mention the expansion of
20 New York City Care to include health centers, nor did
21 it allocate any funding towards health centers
22 specifically. Again, CHCANY's is supportive of the
23 Council's efforts to include health centers in the
24 New York City Care program and supports the request
25

1
2 for \$10 million dollars dedicated to expansion of New
3 York City--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
5 has expired.

6 MARIE MONGEON: Care at health centers.
7 Thank you so much for your time today, and I refer
8 you to my written [inaudible].

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sarah Wilson, are you
10 on? MJ Okma?

11 SARAH WILSON: Yeah, I am. Thank you so
12 much. Hi everyone. My name is Sarah Wilson. I'm
13 [inaudible] advocate. I apologize for my voice. I
14 work at Safety Net Project in Criminal Justice
15 Center, Vocal New York, and SHOUT. I'm very happy to
16 be able to speak today. There's a few different
17 areas that I want to just make brief comments on, and
18 move along [inaudible] people as possible. In
19 regards to housing, CityFEPs finances are needed for
20 the actual voucher rents as well as the process,
21 brokers, fees, etcetera. The cost for a shelter
22 versus housing costs twice as much to keep a person
23 in shelter than it does to let someone out into their
24 housing. HomeBase staff [sic] is really, really
25 needed for the community at-risk. They could not

1 handle [inaudible] and community outreach is turning
2 into shelter or street homeless. There's also a
3 bunch of nonprofits that are able to process SNAP
4 applications and 22E's [sic]. I would love to see
5 them to be authorized to also do the City's
6 [inaudible]. Also, in regard to housing, the Source
7 of Income Discrimination Unit needs a substantial
8 amount of funding so they can actually hold landlords
9 accountable that are refusing to. As far as
10 affordable housing goes, I myself am formerly
11 homeless, dual-diagnosed disabled, SSD, and I'm told
12 I'm too poor for low income housing, but I'm too
13 wealthy for food stamps and medical. There needs to
14 be more very low income housing being created for
15 people who are disabled, SSI, SSD, as well as public
16 assistance because those are the most at-risk in need
17 and they're ineligible. Just to go along with some
18 of these other things. The medical community should
19 be able to be involved. I know the COVID vans that
20 they were using would be a beautiful thing to be able
21 to be used to triage people. Persons like myself
22 with mental and substance, you shouldn't have to get
23 to the point where they want to harm themselves or
24 someone else before they're able to seek treatment.
25

1
2 So that's something that would be very useful in
3 community, involving in the medical staff.

4 [inaudible] training, retrain--

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
6 is expired.

7 SARAH WILSON: all employees [inaudible]
8 on de-escalation and trauma services. Pay for all
9 staff mental health. Empower persons with lived
10 experience as far as [inaudible]. Let them turn
11 their trials into [inaudible] resources and
12 opportunities for community needs necessary that are
13 also overlooked. Interagency for city and state for
14 things that have a crossroad.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
16 you, Sarah.

17 SARAH WILSON: Empowering--

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
19 you.

20 SARAH WILSON: [inaudible] impact people,
21 and that's it. I'll shut up. God bless.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Matthew are you on?
24 Matthew Bernardo? MJ Okma?

1
2 MJ OKMA: Good evening. My name is MJ
3 Okma with SAGE. SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+ elders
4 and older New Yorkers living with HIV for over four
5 decades, providing comprehensive social services and
6 community building programming, services for
7 homebound elders, mental health support, and writing
8 the state's only program focused on the unique needs
9 of LGBTQ+ older veterans. Because of thin support
10 networks, LGBTQ+ older people and older New Yorkers
11 living with HIV tend to rely more heavily on
12 community service providers for care. Yet, they're
13 often distrustful providers after a long history of
14 compounding discrimination and stigma. For many of
15 these elders in New York SAGE is their lifeline. I
16 want to thank Chair Brannan, Council Member Hudson
17 and members of the Council for championing social
18 services and highlighting the underfunding of the
19 aging sector throughout the budget process. Services
20 for elders are more critical than ever, as the
21 population of New Yorkers age 60 and older is growing
22 five times faster than those under 18, with LGBTQ+
23 elders making up a significant part of this rapidly
24 growing population. Last year, this Council made
25 history with the first ever enhancement to the LGBTQ

1
2 Senior Services in Every Borough Initiative since its
3 creation in Fiscal Year 15. This helped meet the
4 growing demand for these services by supporting the
5 new SAGE Center Brooklyn at Stonewall House and
6 directly funding Griot Circle, New York City's only
7 community-based organization specifically serving
8 LGBTQ+ elders of color. It is vital for this
9 initiative to be restored at the new Fiscal Year 23
10 levels to maintain the important work being done by
11 both organizations. This year, SAGE is seeking a
12 renewal of our funding from last Fiscal Year with no
13 enhancement request. This includes funding for
14 programming at our network of Older Adult Centers,
15 mental health services, and the only veteran services
16 in New York specifically serving LGBTQ+ older
17 veterans through our Save Vets program. More
18 information can be found in my submitted written
19 testimony. Thank you so much for your support.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now we'll hear from
21 Matthew Bernardo.

22 MATTHEW BERNARDO: Thank you. My name's
23 Matthew Bernardo. I am the President of Housing
24 Works and a healing community of people living with
25 and affected by HIV. Housing Works is a founding

1 member of End AIDS New York Community Coalition. I
2 will highlight a few of our critical concerns and
3 solutions identified in more detailed written
4 testimony. They are: increased funding for ETE
5 Initiative from \$9.5 million in 23 to at least \$11
6 million in FY24; sustaining City Council funding of
7 at least \$2.3 million for New York City Council's
8 Viral Hepatitis Initiative; continuing \$1.4 million
9 in funding for four existing harm reduction
10 providers; addressing our tragic epidemic of
11 avoidable overdoses in addition to the two programs
12 currently operating with \$1.5 annually in opioid
13 settlement funding. We call for \$1.5 in additional
14 funding for five additional OPCs to include at least
15 one OPC operating in each New York City borough for a
16 total of \$7.5 million dollars annually to support
17 expansion of this life-saving initiative. Supporting
18 greater wage equity for human services workers, we
19 call for a \$21 an hour wage floor for all New York
20 City-funded human service workers and an automatic
21 annual cost of living adjustment; baselining of a
22 \$3.5 million funding for Check HepC and Check HepB
23 Patient Navigation Programs; providing \$10 million in
24 baseline funding for finally reopening New York
25

1
2 Sexual Health Clinics closed to the-- due to the
3 COVID-19 crisis; supporting a cannabis workforce
4 training by licensed nonprofit dispensaries like
5 Housing Works. We believe in enabling members of the
6 impacted community to be participants in New York
7 State's cannabis market is essential in order to
8 fulfil and realize restorative justice goals.
9 Housing Works seeks an add-- a least \$560,000 per
10 year to--

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
12 is expired.

13 MATTHEW BERNARDO: [inaudible] justice-
14 involved clients per year in retail and general
15 vocational readiness. And then lastly, we are urging
16 the Council to fight the homeless epidemic and
17 increase the pilots of Stabilization Centers across
18 the City. Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll hear from
20 Patricia Glover, Karim Walker, Francis Simms [sp?],
21 Venetta Wells [sp?], Iyeshima Harris, Shaun Kennedy,
22 and Pamela Koch [sp?]. Is there anyone else coming
23 forward? For this particular panel, so I'm going to
24 call the names again. Patricia Glover, Karim Walker,
25

1
2 Francis Simms, Venetta Wells, Iyeshima Harris, Shaun
3 Kennedy, and Pamela Koch [sp?]. You can begin.

4 IYESHIMA HARRIS-OUEDRAOGO: My name is
5 Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo, Policy Manager for Equity
6 Advocates. Thank you to the Council Members for
7 holding today's budget hearing and the opportunity to
8 submit this testimony. Equity Advocates work with
9 New York-based organizations to address the
10 underlying causes of food inequities through policy
11 and system change. We convene the New York City Food
12 Policy Alliance. We advocate for public policies and
13 funding that represents-- that responds to our
14 economic and hunger crisis while addressing the
15 ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food
16 system with a focus on benefitting communities of
17 color and under-resourced communities. Today, I want
18 to highlight several crucial recommendations for
19 advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in
20 New York City. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to
21 have profound economic social and public health
22 impacts on our city. We are still grappling with a
23 high unemployment rate and increased household
24 expenses. In light of these challenges, it is
25 essential that we prioritize funding and support for

1 community gardeners, youth development programs, and
2 food scrap collection initiatives. Therefore, our
3 policy recommendations are as follows. Firstly, we
4 urge the increase for funding for the new Office of
5 Urban Agriculture to ensure appropriate staffing
6 levels and enhanced transparency regarding the
7 offices goals and activities. Specifically, we
8 propose a creation of dedicated position for ongoing
9 community engagement. This will facilitate the
10 development of recommendations by the Urban
11 Agriculture Advisory as mandated by the law-- by the
12 Local Law 123. We emphasize the need to invest in
13 training programs that cultivate the next generations
14 of farmers and strengthen viable urban agriculture
15 career pathways with a particular focus on youth. We
16 propose expanding the Department of Education's
17 Career and Technical Education Programs to enhance
18 its agriculture, food, and natural resources
19 curriculum. Furthermore, we commend the Council and
20 the Mayor for their increased investment in SYEP and
21 the Work Learn Grow Program. However, we urge the
22 Department of Youth and Community Development to
23 reassess current regulations that create barriers for
24 urban agriculture worksites. These re-assessments
25

1 should include increasing baseline funding for
2 employer placement, support community-based
3 organizations, working with DYCD, reallocate program
4 funding to out of school programs, and ensuring youth
5 interns are placed at their selected worksite based
6 on their interests. To support community gardeners
7 and maximize the impact of Green Thumb program, we
8 recommend investing \$4.8 million dollars in Green
9 Thumb. This funding would enable the hiring of
10 additional community engagement coordinators, the
11 creation of permanent full-time youth engagement
12 coordinator positions, and capital funding for
13 repairing or purchasing Green Thumb delivery
14 vehicles. These resources are crucial for providing
15 community gardeners with the necessary tools and
16 resources to thrive. In conclusion, I urge the City
17 to prioritize urban agriculture, youth development
18 programs, and community engagement by supporting
19 these recommendations. By doing so, we can build a
20 more sustainable and equitable food system that
21 benefits all New Yorkers.

22
23 SHAUN KENNEDY: Good afternoon Chair and
24 members of the Committee. Thank you for your
25 continued efforts through this budget cycle and to

1
2 all the community members who have spoken today. I've
3 learned so much from the collective wisdom in the
4 room and appreciate the opportunity to be a part of
5 these conversations. My name is Shaun Kennedy. I'm
6 the Director of Food Programs and Advocacy at the
7 Urban Outreach Center of New York and a member of the
8 New York City Food Policy Alliance, a group of over
9 80 food system organizations citywide, each serving
10 tens of thousands of New Yorkers. Iyeshima mentioned
11 that as well. I will provide written testimony
12 myself after this, but I also handed you written
13 testimony from Jerome Nathaniel who is the Policy
14 Director of City Harvest. He's also a member of our
15 coalition. The Urban Outreach Center is a small
16 nonprofit situated between the Upper Eastside and
17 East Harlem. According to a recent report, close to
18 25 percent of our neighbors-- that's one in four
19 people-- are struggling to feed themselves and their
20 families. We operate a food pantry, soup kitchen,
21 and wrap around services that serve over 750 families
22 every week, most of whom are seniors and working
23 families. That number continues to grow with recent
24 migrants arriving to the City. Echoing voices of
25 others here today, our most vulnerable neighbors have

1 not regained footing after the de-stabilization
2 highlighted by the pandemic. If anything, more and
3 more folks how never thought they would find
4 themselves at pantries are walking through our doors.
5 Our seniors, students, families, and asylum-seekers
6 are struggling to make ends meet. Food is just the
7 tip of the iceberg. New Yorkers are being forced to
8 choose between food, housing, and other needs. The
9 Community Food Connection Program has been
10 particularly helpful to us as a pantry in providing
11 healthy produce, meat and staple pantry items, and
12 SNAP benefits are a huge support to our guests. The
13 New York City food Policy Alliance has a full list of
14 recommendations that will be included in my written
15 testimony, but in the interest of time I'll highlight
16 just a few of them here. I ask that you all consider
17 increasing the funding for the Community Food
18 Connection Program, formerly EFAP, to \$59 million,
19 and increased HRA's budget baseline to ensure it can
20 engage community-based organizations and benefits
21 outreach and applications such a SNAP, and to ensure
22 any cuts in HRA headcount vacancy to not impact
23 benefits enrollment. Thank you very much.

24
25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

1
2 KARIM WALKER: Good evening ladies and
3 gentleman of the Council, thank you for taking the
4 time to hear me out. My name is Karim Walker. I'm
5 an Organizing and Outreach Activist Specialist with
6 the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center,
7 and I want to talk about two things today, dignity
8 and compassion. These are two things that have been
9 sorely lacking in budgets passed and it's clear that
10 it's sorely lacking in this upcoming one, especially
11 in light of what happened with the tragedy of our
12 unhoused brother, Jordan Neely. Neely was on that F
13 Train-- it looks like on an F train on May 1st, 2023
14 stating that he was hungry, he was thirsty, and paid
15 for his-- and paid for those complaints with his
16 life. City Hall's proposal to slash funding to HRA is
17 a terrible move that will just-- that will devastate
18 the most dispossessed [sic] and marginalized of our
19 New York residents, especially given the record
20 delays the unit is already having in terms of
21 processing applications for SNAP and housing
22 benefits. That-- and these are well-documented
23 already and well-- so imagine if you will a low-
24 income parent in East New York or Soundview who's
25 already struggling to put food on the table and now

1
2 must wait an additional three to four months just to
3 get their application processed or approved, or
4 widowed individuals in Red Hook looking to get--
5 trying to wait five or six months to get CityFEPs
6 voucher processed. This is intolerable. This is not
7 how we treat New Yorkers. This is not what we do.
8 Meanwhile, our unhoused neighbors and friends are
9 facing sweeps on an almost weekly basis by the NYPD
10 and Sanitation workers when they could easily be put
11 in any of the vacant apartments that are out there
12 for the city. We're asking that the City expand the
13 vouchers and ensure that there's proper funding and
14 timely renewals for expiring vouchers. That includes
15 maintaining a well-staffed unit of -- to renew
16 vouchers which some 55,000 New Yorkers depend upon,
17 and ensuring that the vouchers go out on time. We
18 also urge the council to vote to eliminate the
19 current 90-day rule and to increase the income limits
20 for potential recipients of vouchers. There'll be
21 more of this in my testimony, but this is what we're
22 trying-- we want the City to focus on as we-- in
23 Fiscal 22-- Fiscal Year 2024. Thank you, and I'll
24 take any questions.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

1
2 FRANCIS SIMMS: good evening everyone.
3 Thank you for having me here. I want to start out by
4 saying that I am a front line worker. I am an
5 essential worker, and I am proud of it. My name is
6 Francis Simms. I'm the current Program Director for
7 the Renaissance Men's' shelter. It is a MICA-
8 shelter, Mentally-Ill Chemically Addicted, that is
9 what that means. It is a shelter that is under
10 services for the underserved, SUS. We are 200 bed
11 men's MICA shelter located in Crown Heights Brooklyn.
12 Budget cuts would be catastrophic for our shelter
13 population. Any cuts would greatly impact the
14 programming and services shelters are able to provide
15 our clients. The population we serve have greater
16 needs and require additional one-on-one assistance
17 and attention in order to encourage them to
18 participate in treatment, obtain permanent housing
19 and offer services needed to integrate them into
20 society. It also affects our ability to officially
21 staff our program. Staffing shortages causes
22 caseloads to increase, and staff are no longer able
23 to provide one-on-one attention to the clients as
24 needed. This will also affect our ability to meet
25 and maintain mental health, substance use, and

1 housing referral numbers required by the Department
2 of Homeless Services which our measure-- which are
3 measured through our Thrive metric and SBS reports.
4 With this being said, it should be noted that
5 adequate clinical staffing is required for our
6 population who benefits from the clinical approach
7 and treatment referrals. Retaining mental health
8 staff increasing the probability of patient's access
9 to treatment on-site, as well as from off-site
10 providers. These are additional ways in which budget
11 cuts can impact our service delivery to our clients.
12 Referring clients in a timely manner to alternate
13 treatment and support services, lack of mental health
14 and substance misuse individuals and group treatment,
15 inability to provide treatment planning and
16 engagement, delay in HRA 2010E [sic] submission for
17 housing, inability to provide on-site medication
18 management or treatment planning for challenging
19 clients, lack of psychotherapeutic group
20 facilitation. It is also important to note that
21 budget cuts drastically affect retention. Our
22 inability to properly pay staff leads to high
23 turnover. It is no secret that social services or
24 homeless services are extremely underpaid. We are
25

1
2 also asked to do more with less. Pay increasing and
3 a returning COLA would be beneficial and boost morale
4 and approve staff performance. We are essential
5 workers. Please hear us.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank
7 you all for your testimony. Thank you. Sorry, wait,
8 Councilwoman--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: [interposing]
10 sorry, I can't-- I don't have a question. Well, one,
11 I just want to thank y'all for your service but I
12 couldn't get let it go, the opportunity to go by
13 without just say-- thank you for everybody, but a
14 special thank you to Iyeshima who I've known for over
15 a decade, since before graduating high school, and I
16 just think that your leadership is such a testament
17 to why we need youth services, to why we need summer
18 youth job opportunities, and it just-- you know,
19 every time I see you in these roles, it just makes my
20 heart sing. I'm proud of you, and I think that
21 everything you are is why we really need this budget
22 to work for young people. So just thank you for
23 being here.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
25 much.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, next we'll hear
3 from Rabba Belcar [sp?], James Kushner [sp?], Adam
4 Jamelo [sp?], Dondi McKellar, and Joe Bello. Peter
5 Kempner, please come up to the dais.

6 JAMES KUSHNER: [inaudible] okay. Okay.
7 My name is James Kushner. I'm a disabled American
8 veteran US Marine Corps. A lot of our guys had to go
9 home because they're older and they were feeling
10 sick. As everybody knows, this is Fleet Week, and
11 I'm-- and if you don't know it, I'm not going to
12 explain it now. Anyway, in 1893, the state
13 legislature enacted General Business Law 35 allowing
14 vets with service-connected disabilities to sell
15 anywhere in New York State without restriction.
16 That's restriction to location. In 1988, Mr. Joseph
17 Cazquan [sp?], an Army Airforce vet shot down in his
18 last mission over Germany, wounded, was taken
19 prisoner of war for nine months. Joe tested this
20 law, and it was upheld in State Supreme Court. He
21 won pro se. The state legislature-- pardon me, I'm
22 partially blind, so I'm having a little problems
23 reading. The state legislature annulled the law
24 within a year. This is after Joe won the case. Joe
25 Beezer, Beezer Pitiger [sp?], and myself wrote a new

1 law, General Business Law 35A. Joe during all this
2 process passed away. When this new law was voted on
3 at 2:00 a.m. in the morning, the roll call was taken,
4 and we had won by seven votes. However, Assemblyman--
5 Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver-- I'm sure you all
6 know who he is-- called a recess and sent Assemblyman
7 Bragman [sp?] and other hatchet men to knock on the
8 hotel doors of the Assemblymen who voted for the vets
9 to come back and change their votes or they would
10 never breathe the air of Albany again, and I have the
11 front page article in the New York Times about that.
12 This was horrendous. This was disgraceful and it was
13 allowed to happen. You talk about people being
14 locked up, he should have been. Well, he eventually
15 was. Not long enough as far as I'm concerned. When
16 they came back, some of these Assemblymen were
17 crying. When Silver was ahead by one vote, he closed
18 the vote. In other words, they came back. Some of
19 them came back crying. It went from six, five, four,
20 three, two, one. When it went one back the other
21 way, he closed the vote and we lost. It took us
22 another three years, but we worked at it. And we had
23 to make a compromise with the Democrats in the
24 Assembly to pass General Business Law 35A which is
25

1 the one that I and Beezer Pitiger wrote. This
2 restored the veterans' rights. An election was held
3 amongst the veterans. I and five others were elected
4 to the Disabled Veteran Vendors Advisory Board, and
5 this election was overseen by the New York State
6 Department of Labor. We worked in conjunction for
7 many years with the Bureau of Consumer Affairs.
8 During the de Blasio Administration, various schemes
9 to take over vending which included food as well, and
10 this was-- one of it was done by City Speaker
11 Viverito and also Councilman Vitoli [sp?], and who
12 tried to privatize this vending. It was political
13 chicanery at its best. Let me say that over the
14 years, the New York City Council, the Mayor's Office
15 of Veterans Affairs, and the current Veterans
16 Advisory Board have never served the needs of the
17 disabled veteran vendors. They work for the City of
18 New York, not for the veterans. They carried out the
19 will of the Mayor. But we beat them anyway because
20 we stuck to it. We won't give up. And that's why
21 we're here today. The City Council has chosen to
22 support and even to finance the Street Vendor
23 Project, giving them an office and money through the
24 Urban Justice League. These people are fakes and
25

1
2 frauds. One of the people on their board who
3 represents they say the veterans is not part of our
4 organization. This was put together by the City
5 Council and where they thought they got the right to
6 do this I'll never know. The one who was a veteran
7 on this street vendor project worked for years as a
8 disabled veteran in Midtown New York with a yellow
9 license. We threw him out at least five or six
10 times, and he's still serving as a representative of
11 disabled veterans, and he does not represent us in
12 any way. This organization does not represent us in
13 any way, and it's a disgrace that you keep on
14 financing and keep promoting these people who
15 testified this morning. I'm almost finished. The
16 legitimate Disabled Veterans Vending Advisory Board
17 denounces the Street Vending Project as illegitimate
18 and calls for the City Council to break all
19 association with it. Furthermore, we will not
20 negotiate with any Director of Vending that-- who is
21 appointed by the City Council. We are autonomous and
22 guided by General Business Law 35A, a state law, and
23 we are relying on protection from the courts of the
24 state and not the city. The city has no jurisdiction
25 over us according to this law. Yet, they go around

1
2 promoting this-- these unauthorized groups. And also
3 under Mayor de Blasio, Operational Order Number Six
4 stopped police from enforcing vendor laws, shifting
5 this duty to the DCWP. Law 1116B should be repealed
6 immediately. We do not recognize its authority. The
7 enforcement of General Business Law 35A as enforced
8 by the NYPD will clear Midtown of illegal vendors and
9 congestion and assure the veterans of their rights.
10 And we will no longer come to the City Council and
11 beg to be heard, send letters or anything else. We
12 will take it to court. We will bring in-- we'll use
13 all the actions in the state court, because this is
14 finished now. We're tired of the political
15 chicanery. That's it.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Is everyone
17 testifying? Okay, go ahead.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

19 JAMES KUSHNER: I'm sorry I was slow, but
20 I [inaudible]

21 RABBA BELCAR: Yeah, my name is Rabba
22 Belcar [sp?]. I'm a street vendor, too. I'm a
23 disabled veteran [inaudible]. Yeah, here because
24 this morning we heard that Street vending Project
25 were here for funding. We just want to let you know

1
2 that this Street Vending Project were asking for fund
3 because they are pretending that they are defending
4 disabled veterans, which is not true. They are-- you
5 know what, they are destroying us by the way.

6 JAMES KUSHNER: Through the Urban Justice
7 League. They're being financed by the Urban Justice
8 League, and it was the Urban Justice League that--

9 RABBA BELCAR: [interposing] It must be
10 an investigation because like I said, they are
11 pretending they are defending disabled veterans which
12 is not-- and we are here to request a hearing for-- I
13 think we learned that, for disabled veterans street
14 vendors, because we are going through a lot of
15 problems these days in the City. We have a state
16 right, but the City Council--

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing]
18 [gavel] Can we get quiet in the Chamber, please?

19 RABBA BELCAR: But the City Council and
20 City agency doesn't recognize these rights that we
21 earned through the state legislature. I'm going to
22 give you just an example, before I-- I mean, the city
23 took out power from NYPD concerning the street
24 vending. They give it to DCWP. DCWP, they don't
25 have enough inspector. They have only 22. How can

1
2 you take power from 35,000 police officers and you
3 give it-- police officer are there 24 hours, seven
4 days a week. And DCW, five o'clock you have to go
5 home. So we need to have a hearing about this.
6 NYPD should get back the power to be on the street.
7 That's all.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

9 JAMES KUSHNER: We're the only people
10 today that are here not to ask for any money.

11 ABDEL JAMELA: Jimmy, [inaudible]

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah.

13 ABDEL JAMELA: Jimmy, give me my glasses.
14 I want to speak. I need to speak. Hello, sir. My
15 name is Abdel Jamela [sp?], United States Army
16 Retired, an Iraq war veterans with [inaudible] metal
17 [sic] device dealer [sic]. A New York City street
18 vendor and a member of the Disabled Veteran Vendor
19 Advisory Committee. Article 35A, we are recognized by
20 the New York State Department of Labor and the DCWP
21 in New York City. I'm writing to you today with
22 frustration and anger about the way the New York City
23 Council and the New York City mayoral office trying
24 to undermine and discredit and destroy the veteran's
25 community in New York City, particularly disabled

1
2 veteran street vendors. We want to work with in the
3 City with dignity and honor, everywhere and anywhere
4 and with no destruction and then with no
5 discrimination, and then with no restrictions.
6 Because the law 35A is our bill of right, and we
7 don't want crumbs [sic] from anybody. From you guys
8 in the City Hall, you go to show us some more,
9 because you've been showing less. You are-- everybody
10 in the City Council is preferring illegal immigrant
11 now that is vendors to the New York City veterans
12 that served honorably in the United States of
13 American wars, and as a war veteran [inaudible] and
14 I'm injured in war, we will make sure that we are
15 getting our right. The NYPD, the lack of enforcement
16 by the NYPD and the loss of work and wags that we are
17 struggling for. We all have families and kids, and
18 we are trying to feed our families in this city. The
19 Street Vendor Project is taking over us, and they're
20 not representing us at all. The Street Vendor
21 Project is a sham, is a scam, and is not representing
22 me as a disabled veteran. The New York-- New York
23 has to recognize the veteran community and it has to
24 recognize the street vendor licensee by enforcing the
25 street vendor law by the NYPD only. The only-- I

1
2 mean, only the NYPD can do the job. The city looks
3 confused today by switching enforcement from the DCWP
4 to the Sanitation Department. The City Council was
5 very short-sided thinking about the ramification and
6 the damages they have done to the disabled veteran's
7 street vendor licensees and to the business community
8 all over New York City. They created a public safety
9 crisis all over New York. The Street Vendor
10 Modernization Act, Introduction 1116 has to be
11 eliminated and dismantled immediately. It's not
12 favoring any poor New York City vendors, particularly
13 disabled veterans who are working in the streets of
14 New York. We want SVP to stop speaking about veteran
15 street vendor, period. They're not representing us.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

17 ABDEL JAMELA: SVP cannot determine our
18 destiny and the city should stop funding them and
19 giving them money and giving them office.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

21 ABDEL JAMELA: Thank you, sir.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Who
23 wants to go next?

24 PETER KEMPNER: Good evening. My name's
25 Peter Kempner. I'm the Legal Director at Volunteers

1
2 of Legal Service. We're a free nonprofit legal
3 services office that serves low-income New Yorkers to
4 help fill the justice gap. Our veterans initiative
5 focuses on older veterans and helping them plan for
6 the future by drafting and executing life-planning
7 documents for them, which include last wills and
8 testaments, powers of attorney, healthcare proxies,
9 and other advance directives. These documents are
10 extremely important for the veterans of our city
11 because we have an aging veteran population, and
12 these documents ensure that they're able to make
13 their wishes clear, that they're able to pick the
14 people that they love and trust the most to act in
15 their behalves, and it allows them to stay in the
16 community for as long as possible. In addition to my
17 job at Volunteers of Legal Service, I'm also a
18 Professor at New York Law School where I cofounded
19 and teach the Veterans Justice Clinic for the last
20 eight years. For the penultimate class of our
21 semester, I always focus on state and local responses
22 to veterans in need and highlight actually the
23 history of what New York State and New York City has
24 done to help our veteran community. I actually speak
25 about the vending license laws that go back to the

1
2 1890s, but also highlight preferences in Mitchell-
3 Lama Housing, preferences on civil service exams, the
4 Blind Annuity Program, protections against
5 discrimination for uniformed service that's found in
6 the New York City and New York State human rights
7 laws, and the Restoration of Honor Act that helps our
8 LGBT veterans gain back some access to benefits, but
9 we also focus on the services that are provided by
10 the nonprofit sector, funded through the New York
11 City Council. This funding ensures that veterans and
12 their families have access to free legal services,
13 social services, cultural enrichment, mental health
14 services, job placement services, and veteran-focused
15 community development. The through line here is that
16 we don't rely on the federal government alone to
17 provide for our veterans. It's extremely important
18 that we as a local community, as New Yorkers, also
19 provide that support as well. The New York City
20 Department of Veteran Services is already the
21 smallest city agency, and it is imperative that the
22 size and the scope of the services that it provides
23 is at a minimum maintained. The current-- the
24 proposed budget, the proposed Executive Plan seeks to
25 cut the size and the scope of the services provided

1
2 by DVS, and there could be no doubt that if DVS'
3 funding is cut, that an agency that already struggles
4 to reach its target constituency will only harm New
5 York City's veteran community. Thank you for having
6 this hearing. I have more details in my testimony,
7 but we must ensure that New York City is a place
8 where veterans feel welcomed and at a home and have
9 the services that they need. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

11 JOE BELLO: Chairman Brannan, members of
12 the Finance Committee, thank you giving me the
13 opportunity to testify. My name is Joe Bello and I
14 was the former Citywide Veterans Director here at the
15 Council. I'd like to begin by thanking Speaker Adams
16 and everyone who advocated for the Council to hold
17 the May 8th Executive Budget hearing on the
18 Department of Veteran Services. Having attended that
19 hearing in-person, it was disappointing that the
20 Commissioner testified it was an opportunity to look
21 back on previous accomplishments. He had never
22 explained what those accomplishments were. The
23 Commissioner also stated that DVS stands committed to
24 continuing and approving of our successful programs
25 and services while continuing to produce effective

1 and positive outcomes for our city's veterans.
2
3 However, from the hearing it was clear to all who
4 watched that DVS did not produce any context to its
5 programs and services from the numbers it provided.
6 Additionally, since no current Council Member served
7 in the military or has a specialty on veteran issues,
8 they listened to what the agency said with little
9 push-back. For example, the Committee heard a former
10 Council Member who now works for the Department of
11 Veterans Services say they help veteran vendors every
12 day while watching the same veteran vendors sitting
13 right across from him in this very chamber shaking
14 their head no. If we agree that the City's budget is
15 a statement of values, then I would say it's
16 difficult to add that value when you lack
17 communication and transparency. Therefore, based on
18 the May 8th hearing, I would like to make some
19 recommendations for this committee and the BNT
20 members for consideration. Some Council Members have
21 publicly stated that the agency is underfunded, but
22 when told that the City's budget has increased DVS'
23 budget every year from FY17 through FY2022, they are
24 surprised because of the lack of communication, data,
25 or context to numbers from the agency. The

1
2 committee and the BNT members should not take any
3 action on increasing DVS' FY24 budget. Additionally,
4 while I always support increased funding for veteran
5 services, this committee and the BNT members should
6 not fund the little-known initiative that we first
7 heard about at the May 8th hearing which would give
8 each Council Member between \$25-50,000 for veteran
9 issues in their districts. There has been no
10 conversations in the community, no devil in the
11 details from either DVS or the Committee Chair to the
12 committee or even the City's Veterans Advisory Board.
13 And so this initiative seemingly appears to be geared
14 towards funding veteran service organizations. I
15 personally want to thank Council Member Narcisse for
16 asking several pertinent questions on this that the
17 Commissioner nor his assistant really couldn't
18 answer. Finally, regarding the Council's Veterans
19 Initiative, for FY21 as a result of the pandemic, the
20 Council gave all initiatives a funding cut. However,
21 in Fiscal Year 22 the Council increased citywide
22 initiatives from \$331 million to \$426 million. This
23 allowed the council to restore many initiatives to
24 pre-pandemic levels and increase support for key
25 programs, except for the Veterans Initiative. The

1 Council's Veteran Initiative from Fiscal Year 21
2 through 23 has stayed at the same level, \$2.7 million
3 in discretionary expense funding. To be fair and
4 equitable, I am asking this committee and the BNT
5 members to increase that funding to the council's
6 veteran initiative to at least somewhere between \$3-
7 \$3.2 million dollars, if not more. In conclusion, as
8 this committee and the BNT members begin the Fiscal
9 Year 24 budget negotiations with the Mayor. It is my
10 hope that you will act and provide resources towards
11 those nonprofits that are doing the tireless work in
12 the community helping veterans and their families
13 with much-needed legal, housing, education, mental
14 health, and community services. Thank you for your
15 time.
16

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Councilman Brannan
19 and Financial Committee Members, my name is Dondi
20 McKellar. I'm a proud LGBTQIA+ United States Navy
21 service disabled veteran and a home owner from South
22 Bronx. I became a street vendor on the advice of
23 military sexual trauma therapist at the Harlem Vet
24 Center in 2004, continuing their long tradition of
25 street vendors who are military veterans. A class

1
2 New York State has given special rights to since
3 1894. Today, there are as many as 20,000 street
4 vendors in New York City. They are small business
5 people struggling to make ends meet. Many are also
6 immigrants and people of color, BIPOC. They work
7 long hours under harsh conditions asking for nothing
8 more than a chance to sell their goods in safe,
9 public places. I'm also-- I am a medical cannabis
10 patient. I was diagnosed in 2015 with a reoccurring
11 glomus tumor cancer in my lungs. I also suffer from
12 chronic post-traumatic stress syndrome-- chronic
13 post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. I discovered
14 that the healing properties of the cannabis helps me
15 with my medical situation. My anxiety doesn't get
16 the best of me like before. Objects and sounds that
17 used to trigger my PTSD happens less by using medical
18 cannabis. I credit my physicians in medical cannabis
19 for stopping the spread of my cancer cells, rendering
20 them undetectable. This enabled me to live a more
21 productive and serene life. As such, I believe that
22 more veterans would experience similar outcomes. To
23 share more light on the topic, I offer a two minute
24 video link by Doctor Sanjay Gupta. So, unless you
25 have a life or death medical need, how can a veteran

1
2 in NYC navigate and seek a physician's referral
3 letter to become part of the medical cannabis
4 program? Most veterans are on a fixed income and
5 face financial challenges towards the necessary step
6 to get New York State medical cannabis card. At the
7 federal level, cannabis is viewed as a Schedule One
8 controlled substance. Acknowledging this is vital
9 for veterans in this emerging socially equitable
10 industry within New York City. For those veterans
11 seeking cannabis support, we need to ensure that
12 these concerns are discussed and addressed as the
13 rollout commence. Veterans have incredible
14 opportunity to heal themselves and thrive with the
15 cannabis plant. New York State has-- New York State
16 wrote service disabled veterans into the cannabis
17 regulations with no representation. At this moment,
18 we see the absence of veterans' representation being
19 normalized. If this continues, New York State laws
20 would threaten to diminish veterans' needs and
21 concerns because of other groups' interests. This is
22 similar to the current situation of the veteran
23 street vending community is finding itself in today.
24 I'll offer the following four suggestions for your
25 consideration. Number one, establish veterans'

1
2 cannabis representation liaison or administrative
3 board that includes both service disabled and non-
4 service disabled veterans. Include budgetary
5 resources to ensure that veteran's concerns are
6 appropriately raised and addressed by the Cannabis
7 NYC Department of small Business Services, SBS, and
8 other city officials. Number two, establish a
9 practice or policies of provided equal access,
10 opportunities, and budgetary resources for veterans
11 street vendors, especially those who may otherwise be
12 excluded, marginalized, including veterans with
13 physical or mental disabilities, or belonging to
14 other minority groups such as veteran widows,
15 LGBTQI+, etcetera. Number three, establish the
16 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to set aside
17 space and services in the City's commissaries
18 including budgetary resources for the NYC veteran
19 street vendor community. The Department of Health
20 and Mental Hygiene permits 74 commissaries citywide
21 in a city of 8.8 million people. Local Law 18 of 2021
22 has 4,000 new food permits heading to the city
23 streets. Additional commissaries will be needed to
24 perform daily public health requirements of cleaning
25

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2 carts as the food permit will not commence. Number
3 four, establish a public--

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Please
5 conclude your testimony.

6 DONDI MCKELLAR: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you
8 very much. Thank you all very much. Thank you for
9 your service. Thanks for waiting around. Thank you
10 very much. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll have
12 Jackie Duval [sp?], Elizabeth Byrd [sp?], Bruce Rosen
13 [sp?], Helen Kaplow [sp?], Jessie Spellman [sp?],
14 Julie Bowen, and Jay Olker [sp?]. Jackie Duval,
15 Elizabeth Byrd, Bruce Rosen, Helen Kaplow, Jessie
16 Spellman, Julie Bowen, Jay Olker, and Mike Kinhead
17 [sic]. Sure. Elizabeth Byrd, Jackie Duval, Bruce
18 Rosen, Helen Kaplow, Jessie Spellman, Julie Bowen,
19 Jay Olker, and Mik Kinhead [sic]-- Kinhead, thank
20 you. Okay, so we can start and we'll move on to the
21 next panel.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go head, thank you.

23 PAULA SEGAL: Thanks so much. My name is
24 actually Paula Segal. I'm here for my colleague
25 Jackie Del Valle. We both work at TakeRoot Justice,

1 and we are here to thank you for holding this
2 hearing, for making an opportunity for the public to
3 give feedback on the Fiscal 24 Executive Budget.
4 I've learned a lot this afternoon, so-- I think we
5 all have, and thank you. As I think folks on the
6 committee and in the council know, TakeRoot provides
7 legal participatory research and policy support to
8 strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based
9 groups in New York City that themselves dismantle
10 racial, economic, and social oppression. TakeRoot has
11 a 20-year history of partnering with those grassroots
12 and community-based organizations that build
13 leadership and power within our neighborhood's low
14 income communities, particularly communities of
15 color, immigrants, and others typically excluded from
16 policy-making. We're here to think about the budget,
17 so I just want to put on the record that we've been
18 working together with members of this Council, with
19 Council Member Nurse who's patiently been here all
20 day and is in the corner and other members to make
21 sure that our budget isn't balanced on the backs of
22 the most vulnerable homeowners and tenants and that
23 we're not counting on lien sale to a securitized
24 trust for bringing revenue into the City. And on
25

1
2 behalf of TakeRoot which is a founder, coordinator
3 and participant in a number of City Council
4 initiatives, we're actually to thank you for the
5 stable foundation that those initiatives have in this
6 budget. And to point a couple of key enhancements
7 that will make our work much more powerful and we'll
8 make sure that it reaches more neighborhoods.

9 Stabilizing New York City is a coalition of
10 grassroots organizations that combines tenants
11 organizing with legal representation and combats the
12 loss of affordable housing at the hands of predatory
13 equity companies. It defends low income tenants from
14 harassment and eviction. We're looking for across
15 the coalition an enhancement of \$300,000 that will
16 let us protect more homes, build more building
17 improvements, and strengthen community organizing
18 around the City. May I finish?

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes, just conclude.

20 PAULA SEGAL: Thanks so much. The other
21 two initiatives that we're looking for enhancements
22 are the Community Land Trust Initiative which has
23 made huge strides reaching neighborhoods across New
24 York City, and we're actually looking for the
25 initiative to be double since we have kind of made it

1 through our first three years as a pilot project. As
2 a one-point million dollar initiative, we're hoping
3 for \$3 million so it'll let us reach neighborhoods
4 we're not reaching now where groups are standing by
5 to start organizing. And finally, our-- we work as a
6 member of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment
7 Collaborative to provide crucial legal services for
8 immigrant workers through the Low Wage Worker Support
9 Initiative. We make sure that folks don't have their
10 wages stolen, and that's an important initiative, and
11 we're looking for an enhancement of \$827,000 across
12 the initiative that will allow an expansion to
13 communities we're not reaching now. And finally, I
14 just want to echo what I heard lots of our colleagues
15 say earlier today so that the City Council must stand
16 firm on funding cost of living adjustments for all of
17 the agencies that do the work that the City sees as
18 important. Thank you so much.

19
20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

21 JULIE BOWEN: Hello. As a New York City
22 resident I'm here again to urge the City Council to
23 permanently disband the NYPD's strategic Response
24 Group, aka the Goon Squad or Hats and Bats, and
25 remove its funding from the already really over-

1 bloated NYPD annual budget. The only way the SRG is
2 used despite what the mayor Police Commissioner may
3 say is to violate the rights of protestors and other
4 undesirables in those heavy-handed discriminatory and
5 violent manner. Why do we need group that is trained
6 to view ordinary citizens as enemy combatants? Are
7 we living in a war zone? If you happen to be black,
8 brown, poor, homeless, a migrant and asylum-seeker,
9 someone experiencing untreated physical and mental
10 health issues, and God forbid any combination of the
11 above, apparently the answer is an overwhelming yes.
12 This is not acceptable. We do not need a
13 paramilitary force in our city, full stop. What we
14 do need is to have robustly funded social services
15 for people who are living in a constant and stressful
16 state if not having enough access to food, shelter,
17 clothing, education, and most importantly free
18 healthcare for all. Why give 500 or more, no one
19 seems to know because the NYPD and they have
20 demonstrated that they are not receptive to answering
21 questions. SRG offers military training and set them
22 loose to harass, intimidate, beat, kill people at
23 will. We do know that the SRG unit has the highest
24 number of racist complaints and allegations of abuse.
25

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2 Again, this is not acceptable. The lowball figure of
3 the \$133 million dollar budget for the SRG could be
4 used to help people in our communities rather than
5 harm them. We need that money and much, much more
6 taken away from the NYPD budget and used to make
7 people's lives better, not worse. We need fully-
8 funded libraries with afterschool programs for kids,
9 as one young girl gave heartbreaking testimony
10 previously that the libraries are the only place you
11 can go to to avoid bullies. We need public parks and
12 playgrounds that can provide needed activities for
13 kids after school. In my neighborhood, the kids play
14 in the street because there's nowhere else for them
15 to go. But what we really don't need is the NYPD and
16 the SRG working hand in glove that the Christo [sic]
17 fascists from the Catholic Church, effectively giving
18 the anti-abortion clinic invaders and harassers their
19 own private armed security service to escort the
20 people who want to break the law while harassing--
21 and make abortion illegal while harassing and
22 arresting those of us who want to uphold the law in
23 this state, access to all abortion services in
24 healthcare. Do cops not know the law? Sadly, it
25 appears not. And what's worse, there are no

1
2 consequence or repercussions for ignorant cops,
3 particularly in the SRG who violate our rights every
4 day.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Excuse me, hi. Hi,
7 can you-- hello? Can you please state your name for
8 the record?

9 JULIE BOWEN: Julie Bowen.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

11 JULIE BOWEN: Sure.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, so next
13 we'll call--

14 JULIE BOWEN: [interposing] no questions?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No questions. Next,
16 we'll call Clea Hazizi [sp?], Christina Rodriguez-
17 Hart, and we'll call on-- we have two folks on the
18 remote that we'll call as well. So, we'll let the
19 remote folks go first. You can have a seat. Mike,
20 you can go first, and then Jessie, and then we'll
21 take the folks on the panel. He's waiting to be
22 unmuted. Mike? Go ahead, Mike.

23 MIK KINKEAD: Thank you, my name is Mik
24 Kinkead, and I appreciate you all sticking around to
25 hear all of us. So, as I said my name is Mik

1 Kinhead. I'm a transgender man and I'm a volunteer
2 at the New York City jails. I want to speak today on
3 the importance of keeping third-party providers in
4 the New York City jails and not slashing the budget
5 for these vital programs. I go weekly to AMKC and
6 RMSC to provide LGBT-specific programming, and until
7 today I was the only volunteer provider for LGBT-
8 specific programming. I just heard someone else has
9 been approved. Just to emphasize why that's not
10 sufficient is as volunteer programmers, not people
11 who are third-party organizers, it took me two years
12 to get my volunteer pass approved. Even after my
13 volunteer pass was approved, it took four months to
14 make contact with the DOC staff in order to figure
15 out which units I should be going to and how to get
16 to those units when you talk about places like
17 Osborn [sp?], Fortune Society, FEPS, those places
18 have highly competent, well-trained staff and they
19 have the networks and support for those workers so
20 that when they have difficult days in the jails, when
21 they face transphobia, when they face any other kind
22 of aggression or oppression within their work, they
23 have a community of other staff members to turn to
24 and they make sure that they never go into the jails
25

1
2 alone, that there's always someone who can witness
3 some kind of DOC misbehavior. Those of us who are
4 volunteers and are not supported by any particular
5 community organizing go in alone, and there are days
6 when it's just simply unsafe to go in alone. I think
7 there was an amazing visual piece in the New Yorker
8 recently by Riker's librarian. This person
9 illustrated sketches of what it was like for them to
10 be in-- within Rikers providing library services. I
11 also just want to say that it is absolute-- DOC
12 cannot at this point in time for whatever reason that
13 they would like to say, bring people to their medical
14 appointments. We know that from the Avenue [sic]
15 settlement or ongoing--

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
17 has expired.

18 MIK KINKEAD: thank you-- ongoing crisis
19 and they cannot bring people to their video courts.
20 I also work with an attorney, and so my clients are
21 constantly not being brought to their video court
22 production. It's impossible to think that DOC can do
23 an additional thing on top of these two primary
24 functions that they are failing to do. They cannot
25 provide the program services.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank
3 you for your testimony.

4 MIK KINKEAD: Thank you. I'm going to
5 say one more thing which is January 2023 I testified
6 before the City Council on how the-- how DOC has
7 completely stripped the LGBTQIA Initiatives
8 Department from a team of four people to one person.
9 It is still just one person. So there's absolutely
10 no way that DOC can provide these life-altering
11 culturally competent services.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

13 MIK KINKEAD: So you must fund Osborn,
14 Fortune, and the other providers.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll hear from
17 Jessie Spellman and then we'll call more folks up to
18 the dais to try to get you all out of here. Thank
19 you for your patience.

20 JESSIE SPELLMAN: Good evening. Can
21 everyone hear me?

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes, go head.

23 JESSIE SPELLMAN: Thank you. Thank you
24 for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jessie
25 Spellman. I use she/her pronouns and I'm a fourth

1
2 generation New Yorker. I've spent time working in
3 public school and community organizing, but I've
4 spent the majority of my career working in business
5 developing and implementing multi-million dollar
6 budget I have an MBA from the University of
7 Pennsylvania Morton School of Business. I'm here to
8 talk to you about two things. Number one, the
9 current use of funds for the SRG is violent, racist,
10 and harmful to New York and the entire community.
11 Second, there is a transformative way that we can use
12 the funds that are allocated to SRG to instead
13 strengthen our community, and you've heard this
14 already today. We need libraries, teachers, social
15 workers, and parks. The SRG herded my co-worker like
16 cattle during a Queer Liberation and Black Lives
17 Matter March using batons to give him bruises all
18 over his ribs and body and he had to attend meetings
19 with clients with a black eye. The SRG grabbed my
20 other friend by her pony tail, threw her to the
21 ground while she defended New York City women seeking
22 abortion. The SRG twisted my friends arm behind his
23 back so violently that they dislocated this shoulder
24 in Fort Greene Park. Just today, the SRG has
25 illegally arrested people outside of City Hall for no

1
2 reason other than exercising their first amendment
3 rights. It is critical to understand the harm the
4 SRG has caused, the violence they have perpetrated,
5 but I don't want to spend any more time reliving
6 trauma in our community. We must disband and defund
7 the SRG and use these precious resources on our
8 neighbors, on our community. As an experienced
9 business person, creating and managing multimillion
10 dollar budgets across industries, I am shocked and
11 appalled there is no clarity or accountability as to
12 how this \$133.7 million dollars is spent. New
13 Yorkers want affordable housing. We want reduced
14 homelessness, and we want trained mental health first
15 responders. Mayor Adams himself commissioned a
16 survey in June that proved this out. You can read it
17 in [inaudible]. A citizen said here today herself,
18 why is there always money for violence and terror,
19 but not for our community. Miriam Cava [sic] tells
20 us that hope is a discipline. So here's what I hope
21 we can use the \$133.7 million dollars to do instead.
22 I'm not even going to read what I wrote down because
23 you heard it from my neighbors and my community
24 members today. The SRG has demonstrated how it
25 terrorizes, intimidates and harms New Yorkers--

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
3 is expired.

4 JESSIE SPELLMAN: [inaudible] founding in
5 2015. By disbanding and defunding the SRG and
6 reinvesting those funds into New York community
7 services, we can provide thousands of New Yorkers
8 what they need. This is my third time testifying
9 before the City Council about the SRG this year,
10 which is the third time that I've been pushed until
11 after 6:00 p.m. to speak. The SRG illegally arrested
12 protestors during this hearing, and I heard you allow
13 several white men to go over their time. We are
14 counting on you. You are a reflection of our values.
15 We have the chance to make a better community for all
16 of us.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

18 JESSIE SPELLMAN: And the time is now.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank
21 you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, hello.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Please. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, may I please have
25 Clea [sp?] come to the dais, Christina come to the

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2 Dais, Christina Hart. We also have Greg Barnes [sp?]
3 remote, Hannah Carline [sp?], Natasha Surren [sp?],
4 Juan Meims or Meems [sp?], Michelle Keller, Briance
5 Rhianna Soto [sp?], Kendra Humphrey [sp?], Griffin
6 Jones, Naraz Medeliah [sp?]. Please state your name
7 for the record before you begin. You can start.

8 CHRISTINA RODRIGUEZ-HART: Hi, my name is
9 Christina Rodriguez-Hart. I live in Queens and I'm
10 part of the Democratic Socialist of America's Racial
11 Justice Working group. I've been part of many
12 peaceful protests and have experienced the NYPD's
13 brutality, especially that of the Strategic Response
14 Group, the SRG. When thinking back over the SRG's
15 typical behavior, I'm reminded of the first week of
16 June 2020 as one example. The City's curfew was
17 utilized as an excuse to attack protestors. On the
18 night of June 3rd, we marched down Lexington Avenue,
19 and as we neared 50th Street it started to rain. The
20 police closed in from the back of the march. People
21 started panicking and running, and I thought I might
22 be trampled. We raised our hands chanting hands up,
23 don't shoot. The SRG in riot gear formed a line in
24 front of us. I was four rows from the front. We got
25 down on our knees with our hands up and kept

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2 chanting. Then we laid down on the street with our
3 hands behind our backs while it poured rain on us.
4 The police then moved into us with their bodies
5 causing people to scream while they tried to get on
6 their feet in order not to be stepped on. The police
7 started grabbing people and hitting them. I saw one
8 go in front of me be thrown to the ground with a
9 police officer lying on top of her and her glasses
10 smashed. Another young guy was thrown to the ground
11 while on his bike. The following night, the police
12 ascended on a peaceful protest I was at as well.
13 Again, people fell to the ground, batons swung,
14 people went running, and the police ran after them
15 and arrested them for protesting. This was on
16 Central Park West and 109th. I went up to the Square
17 at 110th Street to watch. We then heard a loud noise
18 and SRG officers on motorcycles drove up onto the
19 Square from behind us nearly running us over. I ran
20 to the subway and into my car came several protestors
21 that had just been kettled, some of them bleeding so
22 we offered them first aid. I could go on. By
23 enabling a grotesquely bloated police budget to
24 continuously increase every year by allowing our
25 police to militarize themselves so they can treat New

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2 Yorkers as enemies, the City Council has not done its
3 job. The City Council must put an end to the SRG's
4 abuse by disbanding the unit and re-investing those
5 monies directly into our communities. Thank you.

6 CLEA HAZIZI: Hi, my name is Clea Hazizi
7 [sp?] and I'm from the Bronx. I'm a New Yorker. And
8 I'm going to start this off with-- I was actually
9 just outside at the rally a few minutes ago, and I
10 saw the SRG's brutality firsthand. One of them tried
11 to run me and my friend over with a motorbike
12 outside, and another time when we were marching
13 through the arch over there, there were five year old
14 kids inside and they attempted to kettle us in there,
15 but they stopped. And as we continued every moment,
16 they kept coming, and they-- and actually they tried
17 to run us over twice with their motor cars, and one
18 of them even tried to bring it on the sidewalk. I
19 witnessed when they started entering the crowd they
20 tackled four people. One of them was actually put
21 into the back of an ambulance, and the others were
22 arrested. Right outside City Hall-- I have been
23 waiting here with these others, so the other speaker
24 mentioned that. We've been waiting here all day,
25 like we-- they push us back here on purpose to be the

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2 last people to speak. They did that. I came back
3 from that protest to speak, because I was literally
4 almost murdered by them, and this is not the first
5 time. I have been kettled before. I have had one of
6 my friends who has had 14 of his arrests by the SRG,
7 brutalized. I've seen SRG at other protests slam a
8 man so hard to the ground that they cracked his head
9 open and he was bleeding over the ground, and then
10 they started chasing us and I had to run and call my
11 friend who hadn't come there yet while looking over
12 my shoulder begging him not to come down there. This
13 council needs to listen. I know that most of them
14 have left, and I hope that they listen to these
15 recordings, because while they left people were out
16 there being brutalized. I saw them here. I don't
17 what they're doing, but some of them look like they
18 were not paying attention. They were not giving a
19 damn about what was happening. This City Council
20 needs to start doing that, because they literally
21 keep funding the SRG. They're defunding everything
22 else. Like, I had colleagues here before. I'm a CUNY
23 student. They spoke. They're defunding us. We have
24 ceilings falling on top of us. I had to go because my
25 school has asbestos in there, and I had to go. Ten

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2 years from now I'm going to have cancer. We're all
3 going to have cancer. They're funding the SRG.
4 They're brutalizing communities of color and they
5 stand here. They make us the last. This council
6 needs to listen and they need to listen now. And
7 whoever tried making us last on purpose, fuck you.
8 Fuck you now. And we will now stop. I will keep
9 protest. We will all keep protesting every single
10 goddam time--

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Okay,
12 thank you.

13 CLEA HAZIZI: To freaking Mayor Eric
14 Adams and to everybody, fuck all of them. Fuck them.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you so much.
16 Thank you so much. Who's next?

17 MAURICE MEDINA: Hello? My name is
18 Maurice Medina [sp?], and originally I came out here
19 to talk about the need for affordable housing and
20 housing units for those who are houseless. As we
21 know, the state criminalizes poverty and it
22 criminalizes houselessness, and it criminalizes
23 mental health, but the majority of that comes from
24 the NYPD and the SRG. So we are coming here as a
25 collective to ask that you allocate their funding and

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2 move to towards affordable housing, move it towards
3 libraries, parks, the schools. we ask that you take
4 the NYPD and the SRG out of our communities and out
5 of our streets, and put them-- put the money back
6 into our communities for community gardens, for
7 mental health help and awareness, and stop asking the
8 people to pay to be terrorized, to pay to be publicly
9 shamed and defaced, to be booked and be denied food,
10 water, and personal hygiene items. The conditions
11 that people are put under when they're convicted or
12 they're arrested, or they're booked is our tax
13 dollars, and they can't be fed, they can't be
14 clothed, they can't shower, they can't use the
15 bathroom properly, and we're asking people to
16 continue to pay our tax dollars towards the NYPD and
17 towards the SRG when all they do is terrorize black
18 and brown communities and people with mental health
19 problems and the houseless.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

21 MAURICE MEDINA: I want to take a moment
22 to thank all of those who came out here to speak, all
23 of those who gave their testimony, and all of those
24 who they had us kept-- they had us here waiting all
25 day, so thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

MAURICE MEDINA: And thank you to those who are on the council who have listened.

MICHELLE KELLER: Check. Good evening. My name is Michelle Keller. I'm from the District Council 37. I'm from the Retirees Association. I'm also the President of the New York City's Coalition of Labor Union Women AFLCIO, the only national women's organizations in the union. It's regarding the erosion of the retirees Medicare and senior care service. Thank you Chairman. Thank you City Council Members for all that you do. I am retired, after 43 years of my calling public service. That's been the theme here today. Whether organizing for labor worth [sic] on the shop floor or active as an officer in the union hall, the message has remained the same, always protect the worker. Galatians 6:9 of the Bible says to us not to grow weary of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest if we do not give up. Shame on all those responsible here, whatever their political stature, the Mayor, the union, New York City's Labor Relations, and even you, if you're silent and complacent. Government is responsible to protect all workers, the pioneers, the trail blazers,

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2 the sheroes [sic], the heroes, retirees and their
3 dependents, not a sellout for profit and gain. A
4 budget is a moral document, we've heard that, and we
5 know that there is much to do in this big town, in
6 this city now inclusive of migrant population that
7 will never be fulfilled. Why choose to destabilize,
8 sacrifice, and bear harm on civil service retirees,
9 the very foundation of our city's labor. This for
10 profit over patient mentality is a sure destruction
11 of the doctor to patient relationship, so critical in
12 the healing process. Our patients will become liable
13 for additional fees on account for upfront costs as
14 well as after services on default. There is the
15 concern for diminished or limited types of service
16 that can disrupt or impede the healing process. We
17 are concerned about the lack of empathy and knowledge
18 of those trying to negotiate in our interest who are
19 moving to settle on costs greater than the members,
20 former labor, can even hope to cover in their fixed
21 incomes. Such poor credibility and unreliability of
22 negotiating without the review and research of the
23 actual contract leaves us in peril. Our concerns
24 continue for Aetna. The profits connected to the
25 slave movement. The review status or oversight for

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2 questionable reporting and the use of-- as the
3 federal government funds and the CMR programming. We
4 have a further concern for the absence of any
5 services in some states. This is not traditional
6 Medicare, the healthcare that we all labored to be
7 able to enjoy. Who's listening? Who cares? Is your
8 message not-- why does this message not resonate? Is
9 it all for profit of the Wall Street and the
10 insurance companies? At the end of the day, it's get
11 out, get out from the trap. Waive your rights to
12 maintain your due service, your sanity, and your
13 safety. For who gets screwed? The labor retired,
14 left to search for financial source to fund the very
15 service entitled to us that we were promised, further
16 leaving out the [inaudible] at risk and snatching
17 away our annual deductible. City Council, we have
18 put before you a bill in this matter. It has been
19 forwarded to you back in December of the year. When
20 can we expect you to deliberate and offer us support
21 so that retirees can regain their respect and their
22 dignity? There is nothing new to see here. We will
23 keep fighting. We will vote our interest using all
24 we have. We will stay organized. We will deliberate
25 for justice and the security of our good health.

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2 What's disgusting? Union busting. Thank you so much
3 for allowing me to speak.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

5 UNIDENTIFIED: I want to start this off
6 by saying I was born and raised in Brooklyn. As a
7 member of the community in Sunset Park for the last
8 three years, the NYPD did nothing when there was an
9 active shooter at the platform I take every morning.
10 They were not were there. They were texting
11 upstairs. I can tell you, I saw the footage, and it
12 wasn't the NYPD who caught that shooter, was it? It
13 was a citizen. I'm hearing a lot of talk about pride.
14 I heard that a lot in earlier statements about
15 education and the system in place here in New York
16 City. As someone who wanted to go into early
17 education in the UPK system and couldn't afford to
18 live off the salary offered to me if I chose to do
19 that, I'm not really seeing that pride right now. I
20 think we need to fundamentally rethink funding for
21 education and for salary levels for educators versus
22 the administrators who run these schools. Also, as a
23 student who attended BMCC and was a BMCC Scholar
24 recipient, we need to rethink the support and funding
25 that we give our teens and adults as they make the

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2 difficult transition from high school into college.
3 Many of these students are first generation college
4 graduates just like me, and without the proper
5 funding and resources who do we expect to help these
6 youth make that transition. If CUNY cannot afford
7 counselors and admissions staff, who will help these
8 kids? Who will keep them from becoming overwhelmed
9 and dropping out as we saw people speaking about from
10 CUNY representatives and students earlier? I saw it
11 happen in my siblings when they tried to pursue
12 higher education, but felt so unsupported, so lost,
13 and it was so damn expensive that they had no choice
14 but to drop out. Y'all could prevent that if you
15 choose to vote and budget properly. I also grew up
16 in [inaudible] housing in Brooklyn, New York from
17 2000 to 2020, and on EBT and Medicaid to this day. I
18 was eternally grateful to have a unit that was rent
19 stabilized during some of the most violent
20 gentrification of Brooklyn which started in 2007 in
21 Williamsburg and continues to this day. I have been
22 working since 14 and I still have no savings. Why?
23 My abuela who moved to New York City in '73 and
24 worked in the Domino Sugar factory that is currently
25 being renovated for condos is currently facing

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2 homelessness because her building is partially
3 privatized. Her unit at Bedford Avenue has been \$500
4 since I was born and has been in contention since
5 2009. Her landlord has attempted to make numerous
6 false claims against her, refused to do maintenance
7 on her apartment, let the roof fall down over her
8 head, and he's been brought to court for these
9 matters and been found in grievous error as a
10 landlord. She has been proven innocent in all of
11 this, but to this day, right now, she is facing the
12 threat of homelessness because her landlord wants to
13 add renter's insurance fees on top of her rent
14 stabilized apartment, which is illegal. Do you know
15 why she faced these issues? Because her unit has a
16 direct view of the Williamsburg Bridge. Her landlord
17 could be making six times that, what she's paying
18 right now, if he removed the stabilized protection
19 status on her unit. It keeps a roof over her head at
20 the age of 82, and he is still threatening to evict
21 her. What if this was your mother? What if this was
22 your grandmother facing the threat of homelessness
23 since 2007? How would you feel after being made to
24 wait 10 hours to give testimony about this, about
25 real issues that are affecting people like me who are

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2 born and bred in Brooklyn, and these issues don't
3 stop at housing. We see these worries echoed in
4 single-parent households losing SNAP funds. We see
5 children's quality of education being compromised. We
6 see mental health institutions being defunded. All
7 of these are real fears that New Yorkers like me
8 have. We are coming to you today to implore you to
9 think about the real people who will be impacted by
10 your decisions and you're voting on this budget. I
11 implore you to think of the elderly. Think of the
12 disabled. Think of the mentally-unwell people who
13 are forced into the streets because they cannot
14 afford basic life necessities like food and housing
15 anymore. Do you really want to contribute to New
16 York City's already rising homeless population? Do
17 you want to overburden these courts and hospitals
18 than they already are? Do you want to contribute to
19 the overpopulation in psych wards, drug programs
20 because of corporate greed? This is not the New York
21 I know. This is not the New York I was raised in,
22 and I fear for the day that capital becomes the
23 driving force in our political spheres, and I fear
24 that that's already happening right now.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

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2 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm not going to hold
3 y'all I had like a list of things to say, I'm really
4 just cut to the point, because y'all had us here for
5 like the last 10 hours, right? Y'all hate us.
6 That's just what it is, right? Like, I've been
7 waiting for somebody to say it, and nobody gonna
8 [sic] say it, so I'm going say it, right? Y'all hate
9 us. Y'all hate us. Y'all hate this country. Y'all
10 hate the communities, and the only reason why you
11 guys continue to give the NYPD funding, ridiculous
12 amount of funding-- the fact that they make \$29
13 million dollars a fn [sic] day is ridiculous. And
14 only got-- the only reason why you guys do it is
15 because half of you are fucking crooked yourselves.
16 Oh, excuse my langue, because we can't curse. I
17 wouldn't want the gentleman-- I wouldn't want the
18 gentleman in the back with the glasses to throw me
19 out again like he did last month after you guys left
20 from the panels. You guys subject us to these long
21 meetings. You make us sit here, relive our trauma's
22 right, and you guys-- New York City has a policy that
23 says when you see something, say something. You guys
24 see the same shit that we see, and if you don't see
25 the same thing that we see, then maybe you guys need

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2 to stop taking Ubers, stop taking Lyft and get on
3 regular public transportation, alright? I literally
4 live at one of the worst stations which is East 125th
5 and Lex [sic]. It is deployed with nothing but
6 police, and that is the number one station where
7 there's mental health problems. It's a drug issue.
8 It's homelessness, houselessness [sic], and none of
9 you do anything about it, alright? You've sat here
10 and watched kids literally tell you guys that they
11 need food. You hate us. Nobody's protecting the
12 kids. Nobody's protecting anybody with mental health
13 issues. Nobody's protecting houselessness, those on
14 the verge of being houseless or homeless, nothing.
15 And the only reason also is too because half of you
16 are crooked. Have of you get a pension and you don't
17 deserve to get a pension or a paycheck because you
18 guys don't properly do your jobs to receive the
19 payment that you're getting, and so you have to give
20 the NYPD their funky like \$29 million dollars a day
21 because you know damn well that the minute that you
22 guys decided to defund them, they're going to be
23 petty, because they're petty little piggies, alright,
24 and they're going to out your stuff. They're going
25 to let everybody know who you guys are and what you

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2 guys actually represent that you don't want anybody
3 else to know. So it's one hand that washes another.
4 Because at what point do you want it stop? Like if
5 you want this to be a dictatorship and a communist
6 country, then be honest and say it, but don't subject
7 us to sit here 10 hours a day when we have lives. We
8 don't get to sit on our asses and get a paycheck. We
9 actually have to work to survive, because
10 houselessness and homelessness and mental health
11 issues and hunger is a real thing. Jordan Neely was
12 a black man who was hungry. He lost his life because
13 he was frustrated because he couldn't have food to
14 eat. And what happened? Daniel Neely [sic] not even
15 a person of-- not even a police officer, right?
16 Daniel Penny, whatever his damn name is, right? The
17 murder, right? NYPD let a murderer go. Why do they
18 get a check? At what point do we sit here and say
19 people need to get paid for not doing the job that
20 they're getting paid for? You guys are literally
21 defunding citizens. Our tax dollars go to these
22 people. If you defund us any more, we're all going
23 to be out in the street, and then what's going to
24 happen, you're going to criminalize us even more?
25 You're going to throw us in jail? Is that how you

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2 guys are going to get your money? Because we all
3 know that you guys make your money off of black and
4 brown people when we are involved in the system.
5 That's why you guys criminalize us the most. You
6 guys love to sit here and hear our trauma knowing
7 damn well at the end of the day you guys are going to
8 go back to your cozy little homes and sit here and
9 still give NYPD the funding. I sat here for damn
10 near 10 hours, watched you, right? Young lady, I
11 don't even know your name, but I--

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Okay,
13 thank you.

14 UNIDENTIFIED: No, hold on a second--

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you

16 UNIDENTIFIED: because you let these
17 little--

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] You
19 have--

20 UNIDENTIFIED: You let the old--

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] We
22 still have 50 people that have to testify.

23 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm going to finish. I
24 understand that, right? Well, let me just say this--

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] You
3 don't understand it. You got to conclude.

4 UNIDENTIFIED: No, I do understand. No,
5 let me explain this before I--

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] You
7 have to conclude.

8 UNIDENTIFIED: Let me-- well, let me do
9 you a favor. I'm going to say this. Excuse me a
10 second. I'm going to say this before I excuse
11 myself, because I already know what's happening,
12 because I've been thrown out this meeting once
13 already.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: No one's throwing
15 you out. I'm asking you to conclude.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: No, I'm throwing myself
17 out. Excuse me a second. Don't tell me that I don't
18 understand, because I do understand.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I--

20 UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] I've had my
21 ass-- I've had my black ass beat up and down by SRG
22 on Black Lives Matter Boulevard, okay? The only
23 thing that we sat here and asked for is that you guys
24 don't keep giving the NYPD the millions and billions
25 of dollars that you're giving them. We are asking

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2 you guys to save the fucking kids. We guys are
3 asking you to fix mental health crisis, to actually
4 utilize that money and do something that you need to
5 do. How many more of us need to die before you guys
6 decide that we're not going to give NYPD any more
7 funding? How many kids need to be out here skipping
8 school, right, to tell you that they're hungry and
9 don't have the proper hunger. I watched you on your
10 phone. I watched the young lady here with air pods.
11 I watched you two speaking. I watched the three
12 black brothers. I watched the brothers and sisters
13 in the corner snickling [sic]. I watched this sister
14 tell me, oh God.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: No, don't tell me thank
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Could
19 you give us your name for the record?

20 UNIDENTIFIED: I gave you my name, and if
21 you didn't catch--

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] I
23 didn't hear it.

24 UNIDENTIFIED: Well, then you should have
25 been fucking paying attention.

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COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you so much. Go ahead, sir. Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED: And for the record--

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank you so much. Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED: one last thing, don't tell me thank you and don't patronize me.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you so much.

UNIDENTIFIED: Because you don't fucking care.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank you so much. Go ahead, sir. Okay, good night.

Thank you. Go ahead, sir. Clock is on for you now, go ahead.

GRIFFIN JONES: Sorry, I need a moment just to-- whenever--

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] We still have 50 people that have to testify.

GRIFFIN JONES: I understand. Whenever people in uniform start getting up back and threatening, I have panic attacks now.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: No one's threatening.

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2 GRIFFIN JONES: When they start acting
3 like that, yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: No, they're not.
5 NO one's threatening anyone.

6 [audience yelling]

7 GRIFFIN JONES: When they-- sir, with all
8 due respect--

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Okay,
10 go ahead. Go ahead.

11 GRIFFIN JONES: With all due respect, I
12 am having a panic attack because of that, and you
13 don't get to tell me that I am not.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Take as much time
15 as you need.

16 GRIFFIN JONES: Thank you. My name is
17 Griffin Jones. I'm a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of
18 Columbia and a veteran of the BLM protests of 2020
19 and 21. MLK Day '21 here at City Hall, I saw SRG
20 brutality so horrible I remain traumatized. I saw a
21 child brutally thrown to the ground. I saw a trans
22 woman's wig torn from her scalp, and when she said
23 that as a woman she needed it, she was laughed at.
24 "Dude, no you're not. Come on bro, get up." That's
25 all New York's finest had to say as they dragged her

1 along the road, the asphalt ripping apart her flesh.
2 We were peacefully assembled in a public park on the
3 sidewalk. We violated no laws, but the SRG did not
4 care. To justify their attacks, they pulled us into
5 the street and then charged us with obstructing
6 traffic. They wanted us gone, and so manufactured
7 charges. Two people were hospitalized by the NYPD
8 that night and many more were injured. When I had a
9 taser pulled at me at a protest by a third-party and
10 pressed against my head at a distance that would have
11 killed me had my attacker pulled the trigger, the
12 NYPD stood by and watched. When I was beaten with
13 the handle the NYPD watched. I was seconds from
14 death, and the NYPD stood by and watched. They did
15 not care if I died, because I am a BLM protestor and
16 my assailant was not. The SRG's brutality had stolen
17 so much for me. For months after these incidents I
18 was numb. The SRG stole the last semester of my
19 college life lost to trauma. The SRG stole the joy
20 of my graduation day. They stole my ability to enjoy
21 a summer day because of the PTSD I get seeing any
22 officer of the NYPD, the flashbacks I get to the
23 bodies in the street. The SRG stole however many
24 thousands I will have to pay for therapy to fix what
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1
2 they broke inside of me. When I pass this building I
3 get panic attacks. City Hall which should represent
4 justice and love for my city now only represents
5 horror. Supporters say there is a new SRG. That is
6 impossible. How can that be when the officers that
7 did this are still employed and continue to roam our
8 streets inflicting violence on our communities? How
9 can the joyous faces of the officers as they beat
10 children and unleash transphobic violence be
11 reformed? There is no possibly of reform. A budget
12 is a reflection of a city's values, as you've heard
13 many times today. Does this city value racism and
14 transphobia? If it does, by all means continue with
15 this proposed budget. We can melt down the Statue of
16 Liberty and sell her for parts, but if this is a city
17 of liberty and justice for all, it is beyond time.
18 The SRG must be disbanded. You can refer to my
19 written testimony for more details on what they have
20 done.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thanks.

22 [applause]

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next panel will be Na
24 Lekan Masego, Derrick Ingram, Kimberly Bernard,

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1 Hennessey Garcia, Hannah Tayger or Tayger [sp?],
2 Charlette Lopez, and Wendy Brandes.

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4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, whoever wants
5 to start? Maybe go right to left, whatever you want.
6 Just make sure you say your name just for the record
7 before you begin.

8 KIMBERLY BERNARD: Hello. My name is
9 Kimberly Bernard. I am a co-founder of Black Women's
10 March and I am also a co-founder of May Days. The
11 safest communities in America do not have the most
12 police. The safest communities have the most
13 resources. I'm going to say that again. The safest
14 communities in this country do not have the most
15 police. The safest communities have the most
16 resources. I'm not going to sit here and go through
17 all the different ways that I've seen the NYPD and
18 the SRG brutalize protestors and brutalize regular
19 citizens in the Bronx and in Harlem and in Brooklyn,
20 arrest them for no reason, right? Because that is
21 information that you guys already have. You've all
22 seen it. You've see the viral videos. You've heard
23 testimonies. You know what the NYPD do. You know
24 what the NYPD is about. You know that the SRG is
25 violent. We are tired of coming here and sitting

1 before you and asking you over and over and over
2 again to do something to protect the very people that
3 voted to put you in office. We are not going to sit
4 here and ask you or beg you to do your job. We are
5 demanding that you do what is right. We are in the
6 middle of an emergency. This is an emergency.
7 People are dying. People's lives are in danger. The
8 NYPD is extremely violent, but you already know this.
9 There's no excuse and no reason why you should not
10 act. We have been screaming. We sat out there in
11 City Hall for months in 2020, occupying that area
12 demanding that you defund the NYPD and divest from
13 the NYPD and invest in our communities. You did not
14 do what we asked. And I think that you guys are
15 missing the fact that you work for us. You work for
16 us, and the people are demanding that you do what we
17 ask. We need you to divest from the NYPD, from the
18 SRG and invest in our communities.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

21 DERRICK INGRAM: Hi, my name is Derrick
22 Ingram, Co-founder of Warriors in the Garden and May
23 Days. I'm here to state our demands. Housing for
24 all. We demand safe, sustainable, secure housing for
25 the shelter of all human beings. There should be a

1
2 swift end to all real estate monopolies, predatory
3 housing practices, gentrification and unsustainable
4 rent increases, and until this stolen land is justly
5 returned to natives and indigenous people, we demand
6 an emphasis on localized communitarian housing with
7 shared ownership where living structures and land is
8 made into greenspaces and cooperatives, so our
9 community with additional funding and resources can
10 finalize alternative housing solutions. Number two,
11 free public transit. We demand safe, sustainable,
12 secure public transportation access for all. Public
13 transportation is a civic space, a space of the
14 citizens, and now the NYPD and the SRG has
15 transformed that space into a racialized place of
16 control and violence. We demand new initiatives. We
17 demand more social workers and mental health
18 professionals at public transit stations. We demand
19 free access to public transit, as well as the
20 elimination of armed police on public transit with
21 the addition of social workers, government employees,
22 and other non-governmental organizations committed to
23 community affairs, drug abuse, rehabilitation and de-
24 escalation. We demand the decriminalization of
25 performers and public transit vendors who cannot

1
2 afford permit. We demand the MTA end the carceral
3 [sic] mentalities and the utilization of dystopian
4 technologies on all public transit. We demand the
5 transparency in these technologies. This includes
6 the release of information and technologies used on
7 public transit to surveil the working-class citizens
8 including facial recognition technology, tracking
9 technologies and the personal data being stored with
10 the use of newer technologies like Omni. Reimagining
11 public safety: we keep us safe. The people in this
12 room keep us safe. The SRG does not keep us safe.
13 We demand an immediate end to all police brutality.
14 We demand the dissolution of the SRG. We demand a
15 new radical approach, a reimagining of public safety
16 and a community investment. We are determined to
17 break the shackles of oppression made by the
18 governing bodies and enforced by violent police. We
19 refuse to allow one another of our brothers and
20 sisters become victim of the corrupt militarized
21 police that are everywhere in our communities.
22 Universal basic income: we demand a universal basic
23 income. Now, as the country emerges from the
24 pandemic, the guaranteed income movement sits at a
25 crossroads, and a growing body of research based on

1
2 the experiment show that guaranteed income works,
3 that it pulls people out of poverty, improves health
4 outcomes, and makes it easier for people to find jobs
5 and take care of their children. If empirical
6 evidence ruled the world, guaranteed income would be
7 available to every poor person in America, and many
8 of these people would no longer be poor. We look at
9 past mistakes, and we look at our elders for
10 solutions. As the Black Panthers stated in 1996, we
11 believe that if white capitalists will not give us
12 full employment, then the means-- with the means--
13 then the means of production should be taken from the
14 business man and placed in the community so the
15 people of the community can organize and employ all
16 its people, and give a high standard of living, and
17 we, the May Days, agree.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

19 NA LEKAN MASEGO: My name is Na Lekan
20 Masego. I am Chairperson of For Our Liberation and
21 Co-founder of May Days. I will continue the rest of
22 the demands. Number five, drop charges on all non-
23 violent protestors from 2020 until 2023. We demand
24 freedom. We demand autonomy. Local protestors have
25 the right to demonstrate outside and to express

1
2 themselves and speak as the country's economy
3 crumbles and police surveil and attack our community
4 without any regard for our lives. The charges
5 against all the non-violent protestors from George
6 Floyd's murder until now must be dropped as they were
7 detained solely for participating in non-violent,
8 civil disobedience and exercising their human rights.
9 Excessive use of force, intimidation and unlawful
10 arrests seem to be a pattern in which the authorities
11 respond to dissent and non-violent assembly. These
12 repressive actions clearly do not meet New York's
13 obligations under international human rights law.
14 Our comrades have been harassed, sexually assaulted,
15 and intimidated by the NYPD while receiving trumped
16 up, racially biased charges merely demonstrating,
17 and we refuse to live under such a violent regime led
18 by Eric Adams and enforced with your budget. Number
19 six, reparations: we demand reparations. In 1860,
20 over \$3 billion was the value assigned to the
21 physical bodies of enslaved black Americans to be
22 used as free labor and production. This was more
23 money than was invested in factories and railroads
24 combined. In 1861, the value placed on cotton
25 produced by enslaved black people was \$250 million.

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2 Slavery enriched white slave owners and their
3 descendants and it fueled the country's economy while
4 suppressing wealth-building for the enslaved. The
5 United States has yet to compensate the descendants
6 of enslaved black Americans for their labor. We
7 believe that this racist government has robbed us and
8 continues to rob black communities with racist biased
9 budgets. Now we are demanding the overdue debt of 40
10 acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules.
11 Number seven: free access to greenspaces and
12 locally-grown food. We demand access to all
13 greenspaces. We must democratize our greenspaces.
14 We demand an end to food insecurity. We demand an
15 overhaul and increase in community gardens for
16 nourishment. New York City's black and brown
17 neighborhoods are home to New York's power plants,
18 waste water treatment facilities and major highways.
19 Mott Haven neighborhood, 97 percent Latinx and black
20 residents are collectively exposed to about 60
21 percent more pollution than is caused by their own
22 consumption. Mott Haven is nicknamed Asthma Alley,
23 because it has some of the worst air pollution levels
24 in the United States. They don't care about anything
25 above 96th Street. New York's Green Amendment is not

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2 enough. We are living in redline spaces that have
3 strategically put in place to block our communities
4 from resources. Our communities must be nourished,
5 and we demand it be reflected in the upcoming budget.
6 The governing body of New York is failing the people.
7 We have just laid out tangible solutions to the
8 problems affecting the driving force of New York
9 City. Use these demands as a basis for your work
10 moving forward, and if you do not, then it is safe to
11 say that you are complicit in the oppression of New
12 Yorkers. Thank you.

13 WENDY BRANDES: my name--

14 UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Hello,
15 sorry. Hi, sorry. I just wanted to know if you guys
16 could give the hard copy of the demands that you just
17 gave us. Okay, thank you very much. And thank you
18 for coming.

19 WENDY BRANDES: My name is Wendy Brandes.
20 My late cousin Robert Brandes was an NYPD police
21 officer and then detective from 1970 to 1992. I was
22 in elementary school in the 1970s. I didn't get to
23 see Bobby very often, and when I did I thought he was
24 a little scary because he was a very big guy who
25 often had-- who always had his service weapon on him.

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2 Maybe that's why out of all the interesting cop
3 stories he shared with us, what I remember most is
4 what contrasted with his appearance. It was how
5 proud he was when he de-escalated a situation. If he
6 didn't have to draw his weapon, and for that matter,
7 if no one got arrested and everyone just went home,
8 that was his most successful day. That is not what
9 I have seen from this era's NYPD and especially from
10 the Strategic Response Group who I've personally
11 witnesses escalating multiple situations that could
12 have been handled calmly. The most recent incident I
13 personally saw was on May 8th at the candlelight
14 vigil for Jordan Neely. There were masses of
15 officers near Lafayette and Houston long before the
16 event organizers made their appearance. I couldn't
17 even get them all in one photo when I crossed the
18 street to try to do it. When the vigil began the
19 cops immediately started interfering with the
20 speakers to such an extent that I kept my phone
21 camera on the cops for an Instagram Live, which I
22 never do, because I correctly predicted to my viewers
23 out loud that the police would find an excuse to
24 start violent arrests. I would like the City to
25 audit the cost of this kind of one-day police

1 activity that involves perhaps hundreds of officers.
2 It would explain why as the Comptroller said in March
3 that the police regularly blow through their overtime
4 budget and have done so for this Fiscal Year. It's
5 obscene to me that Mayor Adams is willing to defund
6 already underfunded social and cultural services that
7 make life decent for New Yorkers in order to pour
8 money into the type of policing that I know my late
9 cousin, NYPD Detective Robert Brandes, would be
10 disappointed by. Start by disbanding the SRG and
11 reallocating its budget outside of the NYPD and that
12 is a good first step.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

15 CHARLETTE LOPEZ: Thank you to Chair
16 Brannan and to the esteemed members of the City
17 Council Committee on Finance for the opportunity to
18 submit testimony. My name is Charlette Lopez and I am
19 a Program Director here in New York City working at
20 WIN. WIN is the nation's largest provider of shelter
21 and services to families with children experiencing
22 homelessness. I am here just as one representative
23 of thousands of human services professionals in our
24 city, many who like me are women, many who like me
25 are immigrants, many who like me are people of color,

1
2 and a part of marginalized communities who in every
3 space of our lives endure racism. Gender equality,
4 health inequities, and the weight of the many
5 structurally violent ways that leaders in the
6 government and nonprofit sectors seek to get a
7 maximum effort with compensation and reward that is
8 as minimum as possible. My colleagues and I working
9 at nonprofits across the City often endure the harsh
10 work culture and personal safety risk associated with
11 well-known incidents in our city's transitional
12 housing facilities. So as a start to help us restore
13 and remain motivated to do our vital work in the
14 midst of this psychological and physically weathering
15 effects of carrying out our important duties, I
16 Charlette Lopez am here to support the
17 #JustPayCampaign and advocate for a full 6.5 percent
18 cost of living adjustment, COLA, at an estimated \$200
19 million in the fiscal budget. Additionally, I'm
20 opposed to the Mayor's cuts to the DHS/HRA services
21 and the programs to eliminate the gaps that include a
22 2.5 percent net reduction to shelter provider
23 contract rates. Inflation overall is a known factor
24 and we see it in our daily lives as healthcare,
25 housing, childcare, food, transportation and all

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2 other costs continue to exponentially rise. Frankly,
3 by not giving human service workers this needed COLA,
4 city government is actually simultaneously giving
5 human service workers a crass and disrespectful pay
6 cut. Because of the lack of COLA I have seen a
7 steady rate of attrition of human service workers in
8 the few positions I have held in that time in my
9 career track. I have seen low to mid-level human
10 service professionals resign from their position to
11 stay home and care for their children, because
12 childcare costs more than the salaries they were
13 provided for. Many others at various staff levels
14 leave and pursue work in retail, food and grocery
15 services, because jobs at companies like Trader Joes,
16 Wegman's, as well as delivery-based worker services
17 like Uber and Door Dash can have a higher income for
18 an individual than them providing key services to
19 assist families on their journey to permanent
20 housing. For example, families feel abandoned each
21 time they lose a worker whom they have built a
22 relationship with. This is unacceptable. I have
23 even seen a shelter staff who makes \$17 an hour
24 having to live in our shelter facilities while
25 serving other unhoused families. Poor wages is just

1
2 one aspect of the burnout experience across the board
3 by human service colleagues across the City.

4 Implementing the COLA is a start, but I am hopeful
5 for many others in other initiatives that will
6 increase the value and resources granted to human
7 service workers like myself and those I lead by City
8 and the State government and nonprofit organizations
9 as budgets are created and allocated. Thank you.

10 HENNESSY GARCIA: I'm Hennessy. I'm part
11 of a lot of things, so I won't get into it. I missed
12 my final to be today. I waited 10 hours. I find it
13 so interesting how this committee left, a chunk of it
14 left. If your constituents can stay in this place
15 for 10 hours, so can you. I don't know how people
16 sleep at night knowing you constantly fail the
17 citizens of New York. My friends have already about
18 two sets of arrests that literally happened within
19 proximity of this area. Is this protecting and
20 serving? Again, there were children at the march.
21 How is intimidating protestors exercised-- who are
22 exercising their First Amendment rights okay? SRG
23 keeps mentioning get a permit for protesting. I'm
24 sorry, but the point of protesting is to disrupt and
25 call attention to important issues. We the people do

1
2 not need permission to protest. What we believe in,
3 we don't need permission for. Screw your permits.
4 Screw your respectability [sic] politics. The City
5 Council needs to disband and divest from NYPD's
6 Strategic Response Group. My peers and I have been
7 traumatized and brutalized again and again, and we
8 should not have to keep reliving our trauma to
9 convince you that the SRG has to go. Also, please
10 explain to us why this violent group is being
11 deployed in neighborhoods like the South Bronx. My
12 colleague who was here earlier mentioned Mott Haven.
13 That's in the South Bronx. The South Bronx is
14 already heavily policed and neglected. This is my
15 home and my community. You can't come to the Boogie-
16 down Bronx if you never boogied down with the people
17 of the Bronx. You want to know what the Bronx needs?
18 The Bronx needs resources and funding for said
19 resources. We want better building infrastructure,
20 and we want our Mayor to not blame us when our
21 buildings are on fire because we use a space heater
22 because our heat is not working. We want more
23 greenspace and clean air, especially when four
24 highways, the Sheridan, Bruckner, Cross Bronx, and
25 Major Deegan go through the South Bronx. Along with

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2 having the highest asthma rates in the nation, we
3 also have the highest fine particulate matter across
4 New York City. The south Bronx gets called unsafe,
5 dirty, but guess what, when you address the racial,
6 economic, housing, environmental injustices there
7 will be less crime and it will include the quality of
8 life. We deserve better. We do not want or need
9 more police in our neighborhoods, especially a unit
10 that is notorious for brutalizing protestors and
11 protecting actual white supremacists. Like a younger
12 colleague said, this budget is a budget of morals.
13 Imagine what the \$133 million that go to the SRG
14 could do for the South Bronx. We have been here for
15 hours today and hearing the amount of cuts to so many
16 programs that could have actually benefitted the
17 people of the Bronx is so nauseating. But guess
18 what, you have a solution right here. You can
19 listen to the people and do the right thing.

20 [applause]

21 HANNAH TAYGER: Hi, good evening. Thank
22 you to Chair Brannan and the rest of the members of
23 the Council Finance Committee for this opportunity to
24 testify. My name's Hannah Tayger, and I'm a Policy
25 Analyst at WIN which is the City and the nation's

1 largest provider of shelter to families with
2 children. But before this role, I actually worked
3 for two years as an income building specialist in
4 shelter in the South Bronx where I worked directly
5 with families to connect them to employment
6 opportunities so that they could move out of shelter.
7 Specifically, I promoted the economic advancement of
8 the mothers I worked with, emphasizing abilities to
9 ask for promotions and encouraging them to seek
10 higher salaries whenever possible. However, at the
11 same time in my own role, I was stuck in a job with a
12 stagnant salary and zero opportunity for a pay
13 increase as inflation soared. That's because as many
14 have mentioned, WIN like other organizations, is
15 funded by city contracts that determine these very
16 low salaries often called poverty wages for human
17 services workers. So, I'm here today to support the
18 Just Pay Campaign and demanding that the City provide
19 a 6.5 percent cost of living adjustment, or COLA, at
20 an estimated \$200 million in this year's budget. I'm
21 also here to oppose the Mayor's proposed cuts or PEGs
22 to provider contract rates which are written in as
23 2.5 percent. you know, we come to work-- WIN comes
24 to work every day to end homelessness, and at the
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1
2 same time some of our staff are housing insecure
3 themselves because of our low pay. I'll just speak
4 personally. When I was a direct service worker at
5 shelter, I myself was rent-burdened while living in a
6 very humble apartment with multiple roommates
7 struggling to make ends meet. However, I have had a
8 relatively privileged position compared to many of my
9 colleagues who often have to support families and pay
10 back student loans while living on shelter salaries.
11 Ultimately, I goes without saying that the group that
12 suffers the most from these city contracts' low wages
13 are the families we serve. That's because there's
14 insanely high turnover, understaffing. This is very
15 costly, because it takes longer to link families to
16 permanent housing. Shelter is extremely costly
17 compared to paying for vouchers and it's also
18 dangerous because prolonged stays in shelter as we
19 know result in worse health and mental health
20 outcomes. So please include a 6.5 percent COLA in
21 your budget, and thank you for the opportunity to
22 testify.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
24 much.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll hear from
3 Malo Sansosa [sp?], Caninetto Idera [sp?]- I
4 apologize [inaudible]- Nicky Besuden, Bex Goolsby,
5 Mayla Beach [sp?], Alvin Dan, and Amalie Avita [sp?].
6 Names were Malo Sansosa, Caninetto Idera, Nicky
7 Besuden, Bex Goolsby, Myla Beach, Alvin San or Sal,
8 and Amalia Vito.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Start from the left
10 and just say your name before you begin, please.

11 NICKY BESUDEN: My name is Nicky Besuden.
12 The NYPD Strategic Response Group-- excuse me. The
13 NYPD's Strategic Response Group is a violent gang of
14 thugs specifically tasked with violating the rights,
15 liberties and humanity of protestors in New York
16 City. Since the uprising in 2020 following the
17 murder of George Floyd, I've had dozens and dozens of
18 interactions with the SRG. Not only have I witnessed
19 them abuse their power and position by violating
20 beating and arresting protestors expressing their
21 First Amendment right. I've personally been
22 arrested, assaulted, and kidnapped by the SRG on at
23 least seven occasions, including when they broke my
24 arm in the summer of 2020 with a baton as I was
25 helping someone up off the ground after an NYPD

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2 cruiser nearly ran them over. The SRG notoriously
3 targets my queer and trans siblings for arrest,
4 making a point to taunt, harass, and dehumanize them,
5 hoping to quell and quash the momentum led by black,
6 trans, and queer folks, especially women and femmes.
7 City Council allowing the SRG to continue operating
8 is an investment in violence, white supremacy, and
9 the continued systemic oppression of our black and
10 brown community members. By continuing to allot
11 increased budgets to the NYPD and SRG, City Council
12 is saying we approve of the SRG's unhinged,
13 unchecked, all-encompassing power to abuse New
14 Yorkers and we refuse to protect and ensure the
15 safety and liberty of our citizens. I'm here today to
16 ask that you abolish, not defund, abolish the SRG and
17 reallocate their \$100 million dollar plus budget to
18 addressing the root causes of inequity in our city,
19 housing, food, education, and mental health services,
20 because the safest communities have the most
21 resources, not the most cops. This is just one step
22 City Council can take now on the path to imagining a
23 better New York City, one that doesn't endorse a
24 systemically oppressive force of power-hungry
25 monsters, especially one that is actively at odds

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2 with its citizens. Abolish the SRG. Abolish the
3 NYPD, and fuck Eric Adams.

4 BEX GOOLSBY: I'm not going to thank any
5 of you for the chance to speak today. It's my right
6 to be here today. I was one of the first 15 people
7 in the door this morning. I've been here for-- how
8 long has it been, 10 hours now, and it is ridiculous
9 that you continue to put us at the very end of all of
10 these hearings. So, I'm not thanking you for the
11 opportunity to speak here today. I am here. It is
12 my right to be here, and I'm going to tell you what I
13 think about the fact that you're continuing to
14 prioritize the NYPD over everything else in this
15 city, while we heard children beg for food, beg for
16 food from you today. My name is Bex and I'm a
17 community organizer here in New York City, and I'm
18 here-- I could speak about a multitude of things, but
19 I'm here to talk about the NYPD and about the SRG.
20 The sight of an NYPD officer anywhere in this city
21 does not make me feel safe. It immediately rips me
22 out of the present and sends me back in time. I know
23 that in this feeling I am not alone. When I see an
24 officer, I do not only see one, I see them all. I
25 see the one who threatened to cut my hand off with a

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2 buzz saw. I see the one who fastened zip ties around
3 my wrist so hard I nearly bled. I see the one who
4 turned off his body camera in the middle of the road
5 and leaned in close to me whispering in my ear about
6 how he could do whatever he wanted to me. I see the
7 faces of every officer who has ever enacted violence
8 against me and who I have watched to the same to
9 others. There are millions of New Yorkers who just
10 like me have been brutalized by the NYPD and live in
11 a constant state of remembering. Mayor Adams has
12 claimed that he wants to unite the City, but the City
13 is already united. We are united in the violence we
14 have and continue to experience at the hands of the
15 NYPD. A big amount of the violence perpetrated by
16 the SRG, the violent unit which has threatened and
17 brutalized many of us here, including myself. The
18 SRG does not illustrate the worst of the NYPD, rather
19 it is the Department's shining star. The unit is
20 deployed to epitomize the violence that so many
21 officers wish they could inflict. They volunteer for
22 the SRG. The volunteer to be there and to beat us on
23 the street. It's the unit which violates
24 constitutional rights and which beats New Yorkers
25 within an inch of their life when they try to

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2 exercise such rights. The NYPD and the SRG enact
3 violence against the people of this city each and
4 every day, and you and this budget enable them to do
5 so. It has been said so many times today that what a
6 society spends money on is a reflection of what it
7 prioritizes the most. \$29 million dollars is spent
8 every single day on the police in this city. So what
9 does the City of New York prioritize? What do you,
10 the City Council Members, prioritize. Disbanding the
11 SRG is about much more than getting rid of one police
12 unit. It is about showing New Yorkers what the City
13 government's priority is. Is the City's priority
14 keeping people safe? Is it providing food for our
15 children, or housing and help for our aging family
16 members or for our houseless neighbors? Or is the
17 City's priority and your priority stripping every
18 budget, every single City service down to the bone
19 and directing all to the NYPD and resigning us to a
20 life in a police state of your deliberate design.
21 I'm here today-- tonight, to disband-- to demand that
22 the SRG be disbanded and that the \$133 million
23 dollars it receives be redirected to actual community
24 resources that will enable all New Yorkers to live a
25 life of hope and safety, not one dominated by fear.

1
2 That is not a life that we should have to ask for
3 nicely; it is the life that we deserve.

4 AMALIE AVITA: Amalie Avita, for the
5 record. In 2021 the public high school I attend more
6 than doubled our guidance team and finally hired our
7 first social worker. Some of this money came from
8 \$135 million dollars-- please keep that figure in
9 mind-- in federal funding that was used to hire
10 social workers and nurses. I'm asking this body not
11 to reverse this progress, not in the middle of next
12 year, not in the next Fiscal Year, and not ever.
13 Just Monday Chair Brannan asked the DOE about their
14 plans to save programs that are relying on federal
15 stimulus dollar. The response was that there is no
16 plan. Conveniently, the SRG costs \$133 million
17 dollars annually. Don't approve a budget that does
18 not give more funding to the School Construction
19 Authority for them to increase our capacity in
20 school. And then I along with many of my peers would
21 appreciate if we can then stick to the capacity. My
22 school got a new building last year. It's our first
23 year in our new building that we're already 200
24 students over the capacity, authorized by the School
25 Construction Authority. Our education system is in

1
2 dire need of investment, and meanwhile our system of
3 policing is broken beyond repair. The death of
4 Jordan Neely, the 26 New Yorkers killed by the police
5 since 2007 while in a mental health crisis and the 37
6 people who died at Rikers in the last two years
7 illustrate a city that is utterly failing to protect
8 those most vulnerable and instead focusing on
9 brutalizing those who question these systems. Though
10 the SRG was formed as a counter-terror unit, it has
11 rapidly evolved into an unaccountable violent unit,
12 often violating the First Amendment rights of so many
13 New Yorkers. And to be clear, we want a disbandment.
14 We do not want a rebranding. Increases in funding
15 for police come at the expense of our civil
16 liberties, our communities, and our schools, and so I
17 should spend my time pretending everything is normal
18 or is normal as it can be. It's not normal. We've
19 been here for over 10 hours, and it's disheartening
20 to sit here and feel hopeless and that this body will
21 likely make decisions behind closed doors that make
22 no sense. Why do we even consider cutting CUNY?
23 There's no way I can testify in good faith without
24 addressing the fact that in this room there are just
25 four Council Members left. Folks, there are a

1
2 combined 24 Council Members on the BNT, the Budget
3 Negotiating Team, and on the Finance Committee, and
4 all the Council Members should be here, and let's not
5 vote on another bad budget again, saying that the
6 cuts were a surprise. The cuts are not a surprise
7 this year. and one of the four people left is the
8 Chair and has listened to people talk to empty rooms
9 three times, testifying about their trauma, and yet
10 is not on Council Member Ossé's bill to disband the
11 SRG. Chair Brannan, are you listening? What I don't
12 understand is how you can sit through these hearings
13 time after time and not have it stick [sic]. We've
14 been here for 11 hours. I haven't gone to school. I
15 have a test for a college class tomorrow morning. So
16 that is all for today. Thank you. Or, not thank
17 you.

18 ALVIN DAN: Hello, my name is Alvin Dan
19 and I'm a social work student at Hunter College. I'm
20 here today representing myself as someone who's
21 experienced police brutality the past three years, as
22 well as a member of the Crown Heights Care
23 Collective, a hyperlocal abolitionist collective
24 organizing against police violence and police
25 intervention in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where Saheed

1 Vassel, a black man who was experiencing a mental
2 health crisis was murdered by the NYPD's Strategic
3 Response Group back in 2018 for mistaking the shower
4 pipe he was holding for a firearm. Since then, the
5 SRG has ballooned in size and budget going from \$15
6 million dollars to \$90 million dollars in one year
7 from a 350 police officers unit to a 700 police
8 officers unit. We now know they have \$133 million
9 dollars in their budget. I think we've heard enough
10 facts today for the past 10 hours about how abysmal
11 the NYPD has conducted their department over the past
12 three years, especially this year. They purposely
13 refused to testify the first two meetings, the first
14 two meetings, right? But they came in with shiny
15 shoes to come grovel at the budget meeting back in
16 April where Chief of Police Jeffrey Maddrey was lying
17 to you, and y'all sat there and listened to it. And
18 it's kind of crazy, because like I'm going off-cuff
19 at this point, because like I've said this speech at
20 the past two meetings, you know? But I here I'm
21 going to update with what the SRG has done since
22 then. Two weeks ago the SRG attacked protestors who
23 were-- who couldn't even have the dignity to mourn
24 the murder of a black man who was screaming for food
25

1
2 and water who was murdered by Daniel Penny who was
3 just exonerated. They-- two hours it took for them
4 to process. We were-- we were trying to get people
5 out of jail for 15-- it was like two days straight,
6 15 people. We have leaked audio footage of officers
7 scrambling around, scratching their heads, trying to
8 figure out what to charge all the people they just
9 brutalized and arrested who were just there to mourn
10 the death of a black man who was begging for food and
11 water. It's hard to find trust in a City Council
12 that's getting funding from the same Super PAC,
13 right? The same Super PAC, Common Sense New York,
14 talk about it. Why is Joann Ariola, a Republican
15 Council Member from Queens, sharing the same seat as
16 Kamillah Hanks, a Democrat councilwoman from Staten
17 Island-- one's talking about refunding the police.
18 The other one's talking about disbanding it, but
19 y'all are part of the same team. I've been here for
20 10 hours. I've been brutally arrested by the SRG
21 five times in the span of three months. I got batons
22 to my face. I got batons to my throat. I had my hair
23 ripped out, had my face smashed into the concrete on
24 Black Lives Matter Boulevard. Talk about irony,
25 right? We have a Mayor that runs this city like a

1
2 cop running a police department, and everything else
3 is just fodder. Six million has been cut from
4 libraries, 250 cut from Board of Ed. We got-- all
5 the people who showed up today didn't come saying we
6 need more cops. They said they need more funding.
7 They need a Council that doesn't want to share the
8 same legacy, the same governing body that let the
9 Nazi's run the show. I implore you to look deeper
10 within you as your role as Council Members, and think
11 about the fact that you guys are funding and allowing
12 the same authoritarian body that ran Nazi Germany.
13 Same badges, same uniform, same regalia, same judge,
14 jury, executioner. I think it's apparent where the
15 priorities are for this city. You know. \$133
16 million dollars, y'all cut six million from
17 libraries, bro? You think kids want to watch a cop
18 beat the shit out of a homeless person rather than
19 read a book in the park? Are you out of your minds,
20 dude? You know what I mean? You can't call this
21 city a Sanctuary City, when you deploy the same
22 police officers that beat up abortion rights
23 activists and trans rights activists and migrants.
24 You know what I mean? You can't-- you don't get to
25 call it a Sanctuary City. Calling this city a

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2 Sanctuary City is like saying a pizza is a vegetable
3 because it has tomatoes, bro. It's a joke. This is
4 a joke. Please do not share the same legacy as
5 people who let the Nazi's run their show. This is
6 your one chance. The whole City is watching. Human
7 Rights Watch is watching, literally. You know what I
8 mean? Like, you have-- I don't want to hear in 20
9 years, man, that was a bad idea. We probably should
10 have done something about it. I don't want to hear
11 that in 20 years. You know what I mean? Like, think
12 about it. These are real New Yorkers telling you--
13 telling you that they got beat-- the shit kicked out
14 of them. They were sexually harassed by the same
15 officers that you think is a good idea to deploy to
16 20 of the precincts in the City. It's not-- they're
17 not going to stop at protestors, bro. If y'all take
18 off your suits and wear hoodies, they're going to
19 come for you next, bro. If you stand five inches
20 next to a demonstration, they're going to come for
21 you. Just like it's happened to so many people, so
22 many people. Y'all ain't happen to have any idea how
23 many people you've radicalized in this city. You
24 have no idea. The City is watching. Generations of
25 New Yorkers are watching.

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

ALVIN DAN: We're going to be coming to your addresses soon, not City Hall.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

ALVIN DAN: My name is Alvin Dan.
Disband the SRG.

MAYLA: My name is Mayla. I am a concerned citizen of New York. I have personally seen SRG attack, kettle, and severely hurt people that were peaceful and not resisting. They were exercising their right to protest and their right to freedom of speech. I have seen where a far right fascist physically attacked a black activist, and the SRG violently arrested the peaceful black activist that was getting attacked. I have personally seen Joseph Cuervo [sp?] who worked at the Sixth Precinct push a 14-year-old black boy, boy-- we're not going to call him a man because he's a boy, he's a child-- down on the ground and tell him to stay down n-word. I had that on video. Once Joseph Cuervo saw that I was recording and I screamed at him to let him go, I got body slammed down on the ground and arrested, and they said that I attacked a police officer. While I was at Sixth Precinct, they brought in an activist

1 who went into a seizure. They didn't know how to
2 handle that seizure. They were just going to let him
3 lay there on the ground and seize, until I finally
4 convinced them to let me help him, because I used to
5 be a nurse. But I had to help him while handcuffed
6 to a bench. When I put his head in my lap to stop him
7 from banging his head against the ground, they said I
8 couldn't do that. Instead, they gave me an empty
9 tissue box and said that can be his pillow. By the
10 time I made it to Central Bookings, and I asked them
11 several times for feminine products, and I told them
12 it was in my backpack and they refused to go get
13 them. By the time I went to Central Bookings, I
14 already had blood all the way down my legs. They
15 refused to give me water for almost 48 hours. They
16 refused to let me sleep. Every time I tried to
17 sleep-- because they had me in isolation-- every time
18 I tried to sleep they would come and bang on the cell
19 door telling me to wake up. They refused to give me
20 food. I asked for at least a sandwich. They refused
21 to give me a food. By the time I got out of there, I
22 had dried blood all the way down to my shoes. I had
23 to throw away my leggings, my panties, my shoes
24 because they refused to give me a pad. That's what
25

1
2 NYPD does. And instead of Joseph Cuervo being fired
3 or demoted, he was promoted. Of course, we know
4 that's a common trend, because he was found back
5 several years ago beating a gay man three different
6 times, sent him to the hospital and back for having a
7 sex toy in his pants [sic], and calling him very
8 homophobic names. But they promoted him to a
9 Sergeant. So we already know they're going to
10 promote him. I have personally experienced SRG using
11 intimidation and threats of violence during a sweep
12 of an encampment at Thompson Square Park. Twelve SRG
13 members surrounded four people and yelling at us that
14 we weren't working fast enough. Meanwhile, they were
15 supposed to be looking for the subway mass shooter,
16 who by the way, was found blocks away by a community
17 member, not even the NYPD. This is not the first
18 time nor the last time that they have targeted
19 encampments or an unhoused neighbor. This misuse of
20 NYPD and SRG is still happening today. The SRG is
21 not here to keep us safe. The NYPD is not here to
22 keep us safe. After they have gotten told repeatedly
23 not to kettle protestors by the City, they still
24 continue to not only kettle protestors, but also
25 cause panic and chaos into peaceful protests. The

1
2 only ones that are not peaceful at protests is the
3 NYPD and the SRG. Who pays the NYPD and the SRG more
4 money when they can't even follow the law or their
5 code of conduct themselves? Use the funding to get
6 the people in actual apartments and actually pay for
7 the apartments. Actually pay when they say that
8 they're going to pay the electric bill instead of two
9 months later, because they haven't-- they've given
10 them six months to get a job and they haven't found a
11 job in two months and \$103 electric bill is too much
12 money. So now someone has a \$500 electric bill and
13 already about to be evicted within two months of
14 being in an apartment after being in a domestic
15 violence shelter for over a year. That's what I'm
16 personally going through. But instead of going to
17 HRA today to try to get-- again, get that taken care
18 of, I'm down here for over 10 hours trying to get you
19 guys to listen. We don't need more cops or more SRG
20 or more shelters like Eric Adams says-- lies, and
21 says we need. We don't need abusive shelters that
22 are basically mini jail with a day pass. Let's be
23 real, that's what they are. They're mini jails with
24 a day pass. You get a day to go out and have a
25 little fun, but you got to be back by 10:00 p.m. Our

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2 teachers are unpaid and are supposed to teach our
3 youth. Our nurses are being unpaid, but supposed to
4 save lives. Our unhoused is not given a fair shot
5 due to voucher amounts, food stamps, and cash
6 benefits not being enough, but you're continuing to
7 cut the budget.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Can I ask you to
9 conclude please?

10 MAYLA: Huh?

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'm trying to ask
12 you to conclude your testimony.

13 MAYLA: Okay, I will. We need community
14 resources and truly affordable housing, especially
15 for our black and brown communities, because they're
16 the ones that suffer the most. But instead, you guys
17 keep giving more money to the NYPD to make sure that
18 their lives are comfortable and get new shiny toys to
19 play with and get praised for arrests and beating
20 unhoused neighbors and targeting and abusing black
21 and brown communities, the LGBTQ and anyone else that
22 perceives as a threat to their white supremacy
23 lifestyle. Thank you for putting us last and showing
24 us that at-best the council does not want to see the
25 faces or hear the voices of their people-- of their

1
2 citizens who the SRG traumatize, or at worst, they do
3 not care. We have been sitting here for hours
4 watching Council leave and coming back, but when it's
5 finally our turn, of course they don't come back,
6 except for just a few. Thank you for showing the
7 same respect as everyone else was shown by being on
8 your phone and sleeping and not paying attention to
9 what we have to say. You let your own council sit
10 here and argue with you for over a hour and a half,
11 which they brought up very good points. How are we
12 supposed to have you guys take care of us, when your
13 own employees are talking about how much of a shitty
14 and horrible employers you guys are.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

16 MAYLA: Yeah, fuck you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Go ahead.

18 Just say your name for the record.

19 VALERIA SANSOSA: My name is Valeria
20 [inaudible] Sansosa. I am representing the Uptown
21 Free Store in Harlem. We are a mutual aid network
22 that has been in operation since early 2020 during
23 the pandemic when the City was, as per usual, missing
24 in action. In the past three years within my network
25 we have fed more than a thousand families, elderly,

1 the disabled, those with mentally-ill-- illnesses.
2 We have been able to pay jail support. We have been
3 able to pay immigration fees, and all of this
4 community organizing has come from our community.
5 For the past three years, we have been doing the job
6 of this city within our own community. So I won't
7 repeat what everyone has said here all day today.
8 You know what's happening within our communities.
9 You do not care. But I'm here to let you know, that
10 you're not yanking all of us. It might be only a few
11 of us, but you're not yanking all of us. June 19th
12 of 2023 will be my seventh year of not paying rent,
13 and I won't pay rent again in this city. I do not
14 pay taxes, and I won't pay taxes again in this city.
15 I have housed undocumented people within my dwelling
16 and I will continue to do that. I have housed
17 houseless people within my dwelling, and I will
18 continue to do that. I do not pay for groceries,
19 because as a human I will not pay for groceries,
20 because this city continues to yank from all of us.
21 So I'm here to let you know you're not the only ones
22 getting over. You're not the only ones getting over.
23 And for the record, for our ancestors, and for every
24 woman that fell in the Black Panther Party and for
25

1
2 Malcolm and for Beco [sic], and for Lamoomba [sp?],
3 and for Marielli [sp?], and for all of our resistance
4 fighters within our ancestral strain, you aren't the
5 only ones getting over.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, let's call up
8 Sidar or Sidar Scarlours [sp?], Roque Rodriguez
9 [sp?], Sophia Costanzi [sp?], Walter Masterson,
10 Callan Ditmyer, Christopher Leon Johnson, and
11 Isabelle Leyva.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, you can begin
13 please. State your name before you begin.

14 SIDAR SCARLOURS: My name is Sidar
15 Scarlours [sp?]. I'm a resident of New York City.
16 I'm a student, and I'm here to urge the New York City
17 Council to disband and abolish the NYPD Strategic
18 Response Group in all its forms. I'd like to begin
19 by mentioning something that a bunch of people
20 mentioned before which is that I think most people
21 thanked you before they started this, but you guys
22 are paid to be here. Like, you got paid for this
23 entire 10-hour ordeal. I'd like to thank all of the
24 community who has shown up today to demand what you
25 are hired to do, what you're being paid right now to

1
2 do that you're refusing to do, because Councilman
3 Brannan is on his computer. Turn down your laptop.
4 I'm a student. I know when the professor tells you
5 laptops away, please.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'm trying to tee
7 up the next speakers. Thank you so much.

8 SIDAR SCARLOURS: Okay, okay. People get
9 scared when they hear the phrase abolition, and on
10 some level I get that, but you have heard hours of
11 testimony today asking for funding for social
12 services of all kinds, nurses, care workers,
13 students, teachers, all of the people who have come
14 here can get the funds that they need. So when you
15 get together after this hearing and wonder how on
16 earth will we fund all of these programs, well, why
17 not take that money from the NYPD? That's what we
18 mean when we talk about defunding. I originally
19 wrote this testimony last year. I was planning to
20 talk about my experience with the SRG, being
21 brutalized by them, watching as an SRG officer walked
22 down a line of protestors on the Brooklyn Bridge,
23 pepper spraying each of us with malice, knowing that
24 there was nothing I could do but wait for the burns
25 of that chemical weapon to hit my face, or what it

1
2 feels like to be hit with a bike as it is used as a
3 weapon by SRG officers after they fell off their own
4 bikes and got embarrassed. But I can't, because
5 since last year, the SRG has only continued its
6 practice of brutality and lawlessness, and it is only
7 getting worse. In theory, the SRG exists to prevent
8 and respond to terrorism. However, unless they've
9 been keeping their valiant anti-terrorism work a
10 secret over the past few years, I haven't heard of a
11 single instance of the SRG actually doing the work
12 they purport to exist because of. In fact, the one
13 instance of terrorism that has actually occurred in
14 this city recently, the Brooklyn subway shooting, was
15 not only not stopped by the SRG, but the SRG failed
16 to even attempt to respond to the violence. When the
17 shooter turned himself-- attempted to turn himself
18 into the police, but then was found by community
19 members, where was the SRG? Were they perhaps
20 responding to a different instance of terrorism? No,
21 they were violently clearing a homeless encampment
22 less than five blocks from where the shooter was
23 apprehended. Instead of doing their job, the only
24 reason the unit ostensibly exists, they were wasting
25 thousands of dollars and taxpayer money to arrest

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2 people whose only crime was existing as a person
3 unable to afford housing in this city. Now, the SRG
4 did not kill Jordan Neely, but make no mistake, the
5 SRG and the NYPD as a whole is responsible for Jordan
6 Neely's murder. Two years ago Eric Adams began his
7 crusade against the City's most vulnerable
8 population. Whether it is the sweeps of makeshift
9 shelters, something that has been ruled
10 unconstitutional by the US Court of Appeals, the 9th
11 Circuit, forced hospitalizations of people without
12 clear access to care-based treatment are flooding the
13 subway with thousands more cops to arrest people for
14 everything from panhandling to taking a nap. The
15 NYPD and the SRG are this city's violent arm that is
16 being directed at our city's most vulnerable
17 population. Doesn't it seem odd that there was
18 literally a rally happening today in defense of
19 Daniel Penny where one of your Council Members was
20 speaking? Isn't it odd that this cop is being-- or
21 this murderer is being treated like a cop who killed
22 someone on duty, and the NYPD even knows that?
23 Daniel Penny may not be an SRG officer, but he was
24 doing their job that day. Please listen to the words
25 of hundreds of others who spoke before me today. If

1
2 you need help funding our communities, why not take
3 it from the NYPD? Disband the SRG. Abolish the
4 NYPD, and fuck Eric Adams.

5 WALTER MASTERSON: Hi. I'm here to speak
6 for the NYPD and our plans for the Strategic Response
7 Group.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Please say your
9 name.

10 WALTER MASTERSON: My name's Walter
11 Masterson. I'm here to speak for the NYPD and our
12 plans for the Strategic Response Group. I currently
13 run one of the largest police charities in America.
14 You can learn more about it by googling 40 percent
15 cops. For those of you who don't know, the Strategic
16 Response Group is a unit trained in counter-
17 terrorism. Now, you might ask yourself, what is
18 terrorism? Well, according to our own training
19 manual it's Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street,
20 and anti-Trump protestors. You know, people are
21 constantly asking us why we don't list--

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Are we
23 doing a--

24 WALTER MASTERSON: Neo Nazis, or other--
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Are we
3 doing a bit?

4 WALTER MASTERSON: white supremacists
5 groups in our training manual.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Is this a bit?

7 WALTER MASTERSON: And there's a reason
8 for that.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sounds like a bit.

10 WALTER MASTERSON: I certainly-- I'm not
11 going to sit here and-- I'm going to sit here and
12 disparage the proud boy-- the police by insulting the
13 Proud Boys or the Patriot Front, okay? Now, the SRG
14 has done an amazing job dealing with non-violent
15 protestors, the homeless, and helping force birthers
16 block access to Planned Parenthood. Now, the
17 Strategic Response Group has been such a huge success
18 that we are now planning on deploying them to every
19 police precinct in New York City. Yes, the officers
20 responsible for hundreds of civil suits during
21 peaceful protests are now going to be on patrol
22 everywhere you go. So, Mayor Eric Adams is making
23 huge cuts to every department in New York City,
24 except the NYPD. So thank you everyone else for your
25 sacrifice. Four percent cuts across the board to

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2 each department. NYPD, they're getting raises. So
3 thank you, Mayor Eric Adams. Lastly, I just want to
4 give a shout out to all of the Democrat Council
5 Members that have made this possible, all the
6 Democrat Council Members who marched with Black Lives
7 Matter, who marched for women's reproductive rights,
8 then turned around and supported the SRG being
9 deployed in their district, Gale Brewer, Mercedes
10 Narcisse, Oswald Feliz, Rafael Salamanca, Selvena
11 Brooks-Powers, Diana Ayala, Darlene Mealy, Julie
12 Menin, Justin Brannan-- thank you very much, sir--
13 Kamillah Hanks, Keith Powers, Linda Lee, Marjorie
14 Velázquez, Amanda Farías. Thank you for everyone in
15 the Democratic Party that has helped fund the NYPD
16 and the SRG. We got a little nervous when we saw you
17 marching with Black Lives Matter, but we're glad you
18 pulled through in the end. Alright, thank you.

19 SOPHIA COSTANZI: My name's Sophia
20 Costanzi and I would like to state for the record
21 that we're now down to three Council Members. For
22 the third time in a row, we who support disbanding
23 the SRG have been pushed to the end of the day so
24 that we can testify to an empty room. Tell your
25 fellow Council Members that they should be ashamed of

1
2 themselves. There should be nothing more important
3 to this body than hearing the public. Once again, a
4 budget is a reflection of our values, and we spend
5 most of our money on cops. That means our number one
6 priority is cps, not education, not infrastructure,
7 not libraries, housing, parks, the arts, healthcare,
8 elder care, foster care, any care, and if you're
9 sitting there thinking that police spending is for
10 public safety, here's why you're wrong. Once again,
11 research has shown time and time again that the
12 safest communities are the ones with the best
13 services, not the ones with the most cops. True
14 public safety is access to resources. It's pretty
15 simple. If people have what they need, they won't
16 have to resort to crime. How can we, one of the
17 richest cities in the world, allocate away our own
18 resources? The definition of insanity is doing the
19 same thing and expecting different results. You
20 cannot continue to throw more cops at a problem they
21 cannot solve. It's literally insane. After of
22 deploying thousands of extra cops into the subway,
23 Jordan Neely was murdered by Daniel Penny on the
24 train. Cops did not stop this crime. They actually
25 inspired this crime. We are so desensitized to

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2 police brutality that our so-called good Samaritans
3 are mimicking the same behavior that killed Eric
4 Garner, George Floyd, Elijah McClain [sp?], Manuel
5 Ellis [sp?], Christopher Lowe [sp?], Derrick Scott
6 [sp?], Byron Williams [sp?], John Elliott Neville
7 [sp?], and I could keep saying names. We cannot
8 continue to sponsor the public health crisis that is
9 the NYPD. Jordan Neely was a product of a system so
10 full of cracks he fell through every single one. He
11 was literally begging for help in the moments leading
12 up to this death. If he had gotten it, he would be
13 alive today. Likewise, if Daniel Penny had access to
14 the mental healthcare our veterans so desperately
15 need, Jordan Neely would be alive today. So, first
16 on the chopping block, SRG. You have heard what they
17 do, and you know good and goddamn well that it's all
18 true. With the least transparency and the most civil
19 suits seems like a no-brainer, over \$133 million
20 dollars that could actually help people. Think of
21 the parade of agencies you have seen today and all
22 budget season long and what that money could do for
23 them. Think of the high schoolers who literally in
24 this room just asked you for food sitting here,
25 calmly explaining to you why they need food. Our

1 city is bleeding. This is not robot dog science.

2 This is a test of your humanity. Try not to fail.

3 ISABELLE LEYVA: Hi, my name is Isabelle

4 Leyva. I run the NYCLU's Protest Monitoring Program

5 through which we've documented police conduct at

6 protests for three years. Before I start, I just

7 want to talk about why people in this room are so

8 angry right now. And the reason for that is that

9 more than 100 people signed up today, took time off

10 work, to testify about the SRG specifically. In terms

11 of comparison to how many people signed up for other

12 issues, by far more people signed up to talk about

13 SRG than anything else. So the fact that we are--

14 it's almost 10:00 p.m. and we are all now testifying

15 to a room that is empty except for us is incredibly

16 frustrating. That is after an oversight hearing

17 where the NYPD did not show up, and then we testified

18 to an empty room. This is after a budget hearing

19 where we again testified to an empty room because we

20 were again pushed to the end of the day. So the

21 anger that is felt in this room is righteous anger,

22 and I just want to say that. And now I want to talk

23 about the SRG, but I have testified to this council

24 so many times about why this unit has to be

25

1
2 disbanded. I've talked about the facts and the
3 figures, all the reasons why the SRG is a threat to
4 the safety and the First Amendment rights of New
5 Yorkers. So today, I'm just going to talk about some
6 of the things that I have I seen during the more than
7 200 protests that I have documented at since 2020
8 myself with my two eyes. I have seen the SRG use
9 barricades to break limbs. I have seen the SRG kettle
10 protestors and pummel trapped people with batons and
11 fists. I have seen the SRG hold a taser to the head
12 of an unhoused man while clearing Washington Square
13 Park after curfew. I have seen the SRG use bicycles
14 like baseball bats, swinging them at people's heads.
15 I have seen the SRG stand on top of cars and swing
16 their batons at the crowd below. I have seen the SRG
17 pile on top of protestors as they scream I can't
18 breathe. I have seen the SRG pick up a protester by
19 her hair and slam her head-first into the sidewalk. I
20 have seen the SRG stand by as white supremacists
21 attack counter protestors and then escort them to the
22 subway. I have seen the SRG arrest journalists two
23 weeks ago. I have seen the SRG beat photographers
24 with batons. I have seen the SRG pepper spray
25 elected officials. I have seen the SRG rip unhoused

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2 community members from their tents and violently
3 arrest them. I have seen the SRG throw someone so
4 hard into a light pole that it looked like every bone
5 in their face was broken. I have seen countless
6 beatings, dog piles, broken bones, and open wounds.
7 I have seen enough. New Yorkers have seen and lived
8 through enough, and they come here and they re-
9 traumatize themselves again. What we haven't seen is
10 a semblance of accountability. The NYPD continue to
11 show up to their own oversight hearing and continues
12 to refuse to answer any questions about a unit that
13 is currently being deployed to black and brown
14 neighborhoods. But New Yorkers did show up. We keep
15 showing up. We keep sitting here and telling you
16 that the SRG does not keep us safe. Anything less
17 than the full disbandment of this unit is
18 unacceptable. We keep showing up and we are asking
19 that you do the same. Disband the SRG and reinvest
20 its funds into our communities.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm sorry, it's just-- you
22 know, I'm not sorry, but I-- it's why I haven't been
23 coming to these hearings, you know. I have not been
24 coming to these fucking hearings because I can't
25 stand listening to the replay of people who I love

1 and cared about. Because you start talking about it,
2 and I can see it, and I can feel it in my body, and I
3 have the fucking SRG on me, and I couldn't breathe,
4 and I said I couldn't breathe. I was at Floyd [sic]
5 protest. We finished the protest. We come onto the
6 sidewalk. We're on the sidewalk on November 4th,
7 Wednesday, November 4th, 2020 because I know, you
8 know what I mean? And I watched the SRG come onto
9 the sidewalk and punch this woman in her face. She
10 couldn't have been 120 pounds. I was shocked. I just
11 stood shocked, like-- and because I stood shocked and
12 I wasn't moving, then they started to pummel me
13 [inaudible]. I got hit in the back of the head. I
14 got hit in the ribs. They get on top and there's four
15 people on top of me. They're punching me. It's a
16 dogpile. I played football. I know about the
17 dogpile. They get in the dog pile. They hit you in
18 the balls. They hit you in the back. They hit you in
19 the ribs. And y'all know that. So I don't-- I don't
20 even care about your shocked look, oh, wow they hurt
21 you. You know. I know you know. I know you don't
22 care. I know you don't care because of how you vote.
23 I know you don't care because you want the SRG in
24 your district. I know you don't care because you
25

1
2 also marched, Julie Won, with people with Black Lives
3 Matter protestors-- promised to not increase the New
4 York City's budget and then turned around and
5 increased it, so no, I don't fuck with you. You know
6 what I mean? Because you're a liar, and I know you
7 don't care about me, because if you cared about me
8 you would follow through and stop these people who
9 are trying to harm you, brutalize me. So I'm going
10 to read my actual thoughts. I have lost all faith in
11 this institution. I don't know if I ever had it, but
12 I lost it, but I couldn't sleep tonight with a clear
13 conscious without sharing my experiences with the
14 SRG. On September 19th, at a protest against ICE I
15 watched the SRG attack people in bicycles. They took
16 a femme individual who couldn't weigh 100 pounds
17 soaking wet and slammed them off their bike directly
18 on their face. Afterwards we lost-- we got very
19 angry that day. It was at a ICE protest. So we said
20 no, we can't stand that. We marched into the street
21 in Times Square. We sat our asses down and let them
22 arrest 90 people. You could look it up. They
23 arrested 90 people. Did any of those charges stick?
24 No. How much overtime did they charge? You know how
25 long it takes to process 90 people? It took me 15

1
2 hours to get out of there. You know what I mean?
3 They did that. On December 11th, 2020 the SRG
4 marched behind us as we marched in solidarity with
5 folks who are on hunger strike in ICE detention. The
6 SRG formed a line behind us for an hour and then
7 broke that line just long enough to allow Cathleen
8 Casillo [sp?] to drive her car through the crowd
9 injuring nine people include me who broke my fucking
10 leg, and my friends who still have spinal injuries
11 and cognitive issues as a result of this attack. And
12 immediately after this attack, do you know what the
13 SRG did? They arrested protestors. They beat on
14 protestors. They brutalized us in the street after a
15 car ran us over. Do you understand? Do you
16 understand what I'm saying to you? Do you get it?
17 Is it sinking in? Y'all are villains. Not you,
18 Sandy, because actually didn't vote to increase the
19 police budget, but everybody else who voted to
20 increase the police budget after watching everybody
21 here get their mother-fucking ass whooped for a year.
22 Y'all are villains. I am done. I'm so sick of this
23 shit.

24 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready?
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: so your name for
3 the record, please.

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: yeah, my name
5 is Christopher Leon Johnson. On the record, I'm a
6 member of Brooklyn Community Board Eight. I'm a
7 member of the press, and I'm a member of the New York
8 Press Photographer [sic] Association. Now, I had a
9 lot of things I wanted to say about defunding Vocal
10 New York because of the fact that they are real
11 corrupt. They got a lot of these Council Members
12 under their thumb with the threats of a primary and a
13 funding against them, and most like they'll get voted
14 out, and especially in certain more like
15 progressively in districts. And I'm not here to
16 disrespect you, Council Member Sandy Nurse, but you
17 stand next to Douglas Powell, a level three sex
18 offender who's here in December. We were going
19 against Intro 632, and he had the audacity to call
20 out, to disparage Susan Lee who's running for City
21 Council against your comrade in the Progressive
22 Caucus Christopher Marte, and he had the audacity to
23 disparage Ms. Yatin Choo [sp?] who is the leader of
24 the [inaudible] Alliance. And you had the nerve to
25 defend it and try to throw Yatin Choo and Susan to

1
2 the wolves, and you never apologies for that even
3 when it was on video that this guy was disparaging
4 the Asian people. And then you had the nerve to
5 stand next to Douglas Powell just a few weeks ago.
6 Rest in peace to Jordan Neely. And you stood next to
7 the guy and you tried to be real slick, and you only
8 ran that one photo of you just standing, kneeling
9 down, holding flowers etcetera on Twitter. But you
10 went on Instagram and instead-- I don't know who do
11 your editing, but whoever gives you the wrong
12 [inaudible] they should be fired in your office. You
13 had a slick, a little slick shot of Douglas Powell
14 standing next to you acting like it's all good. Now,
15 I know you won't' apologize for that, but you need to
16 apologize because it's disgusting that you stood next
17 to this guy, even this guy being a racist. And I
18 know you hate the New York GOP. I know you hate
19 Republicans. You don't want to stand next to
20 Republicans, but you had a prob-- but you have no
21 issue of standing next to Douglas Powell who's a
22 level three sex offender. Now, what else I need to
23 talk about is like you blocked [inaudible], shout
24 [sic] to--

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Do you
3 have a budget question?

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: [inaudible]
5 budget, yeah, I'm here. I'm calling for the
6 defunding of Vocal New York.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

8 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I'm calling
9 for the bu-- the defunding of Vocal New York, and
10 that's all I'm calling for. And I'm going to tell
11 you this right now. I know that a lot of you guys are
12 running with minimal opposition in 2023, but 2025,
13 because we know Mayor Adams is running for Mayor, and
14 I know you might run for Public Advocate or Mayor
15 yourself, but if you dare fund Vocal New York this
16 time, 2025 you guys will not be voted to the higher
17 office, and all you guys be voted out. And that's
18 what I need to say. Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

20 CALLAN DITMYER: My name's Callan Ditmyer
21 [sp?], and I'm currently-- I don't-- I'm going to be
22 honest, it's been-- it's definitely been hard hearing
23 what everyone's had to say. I mean, personally I
24 can't say I've had any experience being hurt or
25 attacked or anything by the SRG, but I definitely

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2 have seen it. I've seen what's happened to all my
3 allies that are here today, and I wanted to commend
4 all of you, everyone who's spoken today. You're
5 really out here doing the work that's needed, and
6 like-- yeah, I'm the-- lack of words right now. But
7 I just wanted to thank, because you're all really
8 doing the good work that's needed here. And yeah,
9 just like as it's been pointed out multiple times,
10 like people-- as I've been here like basically 12
11 hours. People have pointed out CUNY being defunded.
12 As a current CUNY student myself at Brooklyn College,
13 I know that all these resources that-- instead of
14 going to a unit that's known for brutalizing and
15 attacking people, it could be going-- actually making
16 people lives better. I don't have too much else to
17 say after that, because I'm a little bit tired like
18 most people here are, but that's just one of-- and to
19 close out, I just wanted to say I think what we can
20 do. I do believe-- I know there's been-- there's a
21 lot of tension. I do have the belief that people can
22 change and make themselves better. If we want to
23 say, if we want to-- if everyone here wants to show
24 that that's the case, that we're open to improving
25 making the lives of everyone here better, we can get

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COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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this-- we can disband this group the SRG, and we can use the funds allocated to it to actually making the lives of everyone better. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next panel will be Shanelle Bueno [sp?], Amy Wagner, Aya Aziz, Ciera Ocosior [sp?], Britany Spalding [sp?], and Margo Barrett [sp?].

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You can begin. Just state your name before you begin.

CIERA COSIER: My name is Ciera Cosier [sp?]. I'm here to ask you to disband the SRG, defund the SRG. I'm an artist. I'm a designer. I wrote you a letter on that whatever form that you have to put in. I'm going to use my time instead to just look at you guys. I want you to think. I want you to think about what it feels like to be like these people. I want you to think about what it feels like to go home into your bed and have the experience that they've had. I want you to feel the broken arm, the broken leg, the smashed in ribs, the days off work, the time in the hospital that they had to experience. I didn't experience that but I want you to feel it because you have this ability to change it. You do. You do. You do. The rest of the Council Members who

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2 fucked off, they do. I don't. I'm a little ass
3 artist. I don't have fucking anything right now.
4 But these people, they need your help. So what are
5 we going to do for the next 36 seconds? I'm not
6 giving up my time. You know? It's fucking a shame.
7 We could have beautiful parks. We could have
8 beautiful cities. We could have elevators in the
9 subway. We could have food for our kids, and instead
10 we have these people fucking brutalizing people.
11 Think about it. Feel it in your bones.

12 SHANELLE BUENO: Hi, I'm Shanelle. I'm
13 here to talk about the school budget, because--

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Just
15 put the mic a little bit closer. Thank you.

16 SHANELLE BUENO: I'm Shanelle. I'm here
17 to talk about the school budget and about you guys
18 not cutting more. Because you cutting-- you cutting
19 out the school budget is students missing out on
20 resources. It took-- four months ago, I just got
21 Physics textbooks for my Physics class when we should
22 have gotten them in the beginning of the school year.
23 So my teachers were not working out of the textbook
24 and we missed out on crucial work in physics. Not
25 only that, we don't have books in our libraries. Our

1 library is empty. There's probably 10 or five
2 shelves filled with books. We need more money for
3 teachers, for the schools, because the school system
4 is crumbling. Some schools don't have teachers for
5 English and Math. Some students don't get the
6 subjects that they need to because the schools don't
7 have money. The schools don't have money for
8 pencils, paper, to buy new printer because their
9 printers don't work anymore. They don't have money
10 to buy toilet papers for the bathroom, soap, to buy
11 janitors to repair the bathrooms when they break,
12 because they don't have money. Taking away money
13 affects the school system, and then when you take
14 away money from the school system it affects the
15 whole system, but you already know that.

17 AMY WAGNER: Good evening. My name is
18 Amy Wagner and I am the Director of the Ya-Ya Network
19 youth activists, youth allies. We were intended to
20 be part of a panel of folks coming to you from a
21 group of our collegial police-free schools
22 organizations. I don't know if they're still waiting
23 to be heard or if they've just given up. So I'm
24 going to say my piece at least. Before founding the
25 Ya-Ya Network, I was a clinical social worker for

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2 more than 10 years in what were considered to be last
3 chance transfer schools. we had not metal detectors
4 and only one school safety agent, and despite the
5 fact that many of our students had been pushed out of
6 the previous high schools for fighting, we had no
7 fights, zero. These schools created supportive and
8 safe community by maintaining a high student to adult
9 ratio, including counselors, social workers, paras,
10 and community members. All teachers work with small
11 family groups of students. Students knew that they
12 had adult allies and peer mediators who would help
13 them manage any conflicts before they turn into
14 fights. And students trusted-- students trusted us
15 to support them, and we trusted students to come to
16 us when they needed help. This is what school safety
17 looks like. Students who begin each school day being
18 searched, scanned and wanded [sic] by police do not
19 feel safe. They feel criminalized. After three years
20 of COVID, students have lost traction in their
21 education progress. The rates of depression,
22 anxiety, and suicidal ideation have skyrocketed.
23 Schools are still reeling from last year's draconian
24 cuts. While Chancellor Banks has announced no new
25 cuts for the beginning of this school year, he has

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2 also made no promises that the DOE will not claw back
3 defunding later in the school year. In light of
4 this, you must reject the Mayor's plan to deeply cut
5 the education budget again and to hire 500 new school
6 police. Instead, redirect the \$475 million dollars
7 to hiring restorative justice counselors, social
8 workers, community support staff to provide students
9 with the services they need and the school
10 communities that they deserve.

11 AYA IZIZ: Thank you. My name is Aya.
12 I'm here with-- as an adult ally with the Ya-Ya
13 Network. I just want to reiterate that we have
14 waited six hours. Shanelle, a high school student,
15 has waited six hours on a school night to tell you
16 that she has only just gotten Physics textbooks at
17 her school. It is May. It is almost June. It is
18 almost the end of the school year. We are Ya-Ya
19 Network, an organization with a 25-year history of
20 supporting young people impacting the policies that
21 impact their lives. Ya-Ya's young people were out
22 here being brutalized by the SRG today as we waited
23 hours and hours to give testimony. I am here to
24 implore you to look at the violence the NYPD is
25 enacting on our youth and do something about it

1 because it is your responsibility because that is why
2 we elected you. Our schools need social workers,
3 counsel worker-- counselors, restorative justice
4 coordinators. We need resourced schools and arts
5 programs and academic enrichment programs. We do not
6 need NYPD. I went to an NYC public school without
7 metal detectors where I felt safe, not because the
8 students there were any different from the Black and
9 Latinx students-- student bodies racially profiled
10 and targeted and brutalized by the NYPD. I felt safe
11 because I knew everyone, because my class sizes were
12 small and kept me in relationship with everyone,
13 because I had relationships with my teachers, because
14 I had people to support me if ever I had a problem.
15 When I began teaching in NYC after schools I was
16 shocked by the disparity between the school I
17 attended and the schools I worked in. I met students
18 violated and traumatized by metal detectors. I met a
19 student whose college essay was about how transformed
20 she was by the mentorship of her choir teacher and
21 how heartbroken she was when she lost her choir and
22 her mentor in her junior year when her school's art
23 program was gutted suddenly and her teacher was
24 abruptly fired. New York City has the most
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2 segregated school system in this country, and this
3 council has presided over a systemic racialized
4 inequity that robs our young people of education and
5 takes all that money that could be invested in their
6 development, and instead invests in their
7 brutalization. You have the power to stop this, so
8 do it. Do something. The month I joined Ya-Ya I
9 witnessed youth on a middle school dance team in Bed-
10 Stuy dragged across the ground in handcuffs by the
11 NYPD. Again, they were in middle school, 12, 13, 14
12 years old crying and bloody and brutalized, and I
13 couldn't do anything, because what? There's no
14 reason to do that to young people. As you negotiate
15 this budget, I ask that you do everything in your
16 power to get \$75 million dollars to hire restorative
17 justice coordinators in 500 schools, get another \$75
18 million to hire community members into positions that
19 build safety and support young people to learn and
20 grow. And please, reject the Mayor's plan to recruit
21 560 new school cops. More police will only serve to
22 cause more harm and undermine the restorative
23 practices we know make schools safer and keeps
24 students learning.

1
2 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm going to go before the
3 person next to me, just because they said that they
4 wanted me to. I'm here today to demand City Council
5 fully disband the NYPD Strategic Response Group and
6 reallocate its funds to services that actually serve
7 us instead of brutalizing us. Over the past three
8 years, I've personally seen the SRG beat, shove,
9 drag, pepper spray, tase, and kettle New Yorkers
10 including medics and legal observers. Under Eric
11 Adams' increasingly violent police state, the SRG has
12 participate in the City's cruel encampment sweeps,
13 arrested clinic defenders, and intimidated abortion
14 patients, and threatened to play the L-RAD [sic] a
15 military weapon in front of children at Drag Story
16 Hour. In 2021 I was myself arrested by SRG officers.
17 Four of them slammed me to the ground, and I could
18 have injured my head if I hadn't been carrying a
19 backpack which cushioned my fall. Despite being
20 compliant and yelling that I wasn't resisting, four
21 officers insisted on carrying me by each of my limbs
22 with my legs spread apart in the air. I left the
23 precinct over eight hours later with broken blood
24 vessels and bruising on my arms that lasted for
25 weeks. All my charges were dropped. NYPD leadership

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2 has repeatedly lied under oath in this very room
3 claiming gag order that prevents them from discussing
4 the SRG. However, both the Attorney General and
5 lawyers involved in these suites have confirmed there
6 is no such gag order. The NYPD refuses to respond to
7 questions about the SRG because they know the unit is
8 indefensibly racists, transphobic, queerphobic,
9 biases, brutal, and that its officers get off on each
10 other's sadism. For months now, hundreds of New
11 Yorkers have taken time out of their lives to tell
12 you our firsthand experiences being brutalized,
13 traumatized, and repressed by this specific unit.
14 Continuing to fund the Strategic Response Group would
15 be the antithesis of safety. Council Members, stop
16 funding your own constituents' brutalization. City
17 Council must fully disband the SRG and prevent it
18 from ever being recreated in any form. I want to see
19 it's \$133 million reinvested into our libraries, into
20 our education, and into the many things that many
21 speakers have mentioned before me today over 12
22 hours. These things would actually make our
23 communities happier and safer.

24 BRITTANY SPALDING: Hello. Hello
25 everyone in the room. My name is Britany Spalding

1 [sp?]. Thank you for listening. I'm here to
2 represent the 68,000 little guys of the shelter
3 system. As a kid I wanted to be accepted and you
4 know, all of that good stuff, just being something to
5 someone. My adolescence was spent like orphan Annie
6 and a child [inaudible] mixed in with The Color
7 Purple. Due to my mother's ongoing crack addiction
8 and poor treatment of her mental health, you can only
9 imagine what a child sees and encounters living in
10 over 40 different households by the time I was 17
11 years old. I was a kid who raised by this same
12 system. And the programs and the people-- let me
13 put this down for a second. The programs and the
14 people of the general welfare system helped me, okay?
15 Four years ago I decided to leave from a family
16 abusive situation that had been occurring my whole
17 life, okay. Once I had left, which is what brought
18 me into this situation, my safety has been
19 compromised over and over and I'm not knowing why.
20 This journey started with me looking for my
21 biological father, my paternal family, and for
22 whatever reason my adopted family is not-- they have
23 been trying to do everything. I have moved three
24 different states because I have been afraid because I
25

1 don't know what's going on. My children have been
2 removed from my custody, not by any type of legality
3 that I've done, neglect, or anything like that, but
4 just because my family they have money, they're able
5 to do things back in Kentucky that I'm not-- I came
6 here for help, and unfortunately, I have not been
7 able to get that help. I have not been able to get
8 any assistance with employment and being able to
9 sustain myself so that I can move forward with my
10 life and with my children. Every time I talk to one
11 or complain or make a grievance at the shelter,
12 because I am now homeless-- at the shelter, they say
13 DHS, go to DHS make a complaint. After listening and
14 being here time after time listening to these budget
15 meetings and these different issues that I am
16 hearing, I'm not understanding how they could say
17 that they would like a 2.5 budget cut when there are
18 so many issues that makes me question, and I would
19 think that maybe you all would like to join on the
20 per-- just looking at a different perspective of who
21 needs to be held accountable for what is not being
22 done. I don't know if it's more money or if it's
23 more training. I do agree that the people that are
24 servicing us is case workers. I mean, if they're in
25

1 the same situation as us, how much help can they
2 really offer in a process where they're not even able
3 to process themselves out of. And like I said, once
4 again, it brings us back. Let DHS know. Let DHS
5 know. Well, they're not doing anything and they're
6 proposing budget cuts. How? I just don't
7 understand, so I'm afraid. I'm afraid. I don't know
8 what's going on. I can't even call my children. I
9 have no support. I have two-- unfortunately been--
10 I've witnessed the SRG myself because I was going to
11 different federal buildings asking for help. I have
12 no criminal record. I am not mentally unstable. Do I
13 have a mental sickness right now? Absolutely,
14 because I am poor. I am without my children, and I am
15 trying my best to do everything that I can, and I'm
16 not getting the help, y'all. I'm not-- I'm not
17 getting it. I want to work. I want to live, but I
18 can't. I'm running from my family, and I'm in a
19 system that is not helping. And all they keep saying
20 is go into the same people that now have learned,
21 that are proposing things that it's not even of
22 integrity. It doesn't even make sense. When they
23 know how much help that we need just in the facility
24 that I am in. I can only imagine the other
25

1 facilities. And I won't even speak on what I've
2 heard and all of that. I'm only going to go based on
3 what I've witnessed, and what I have taken [sic] in
4 my own hands and been a reasonable person, okay? And
5 I am not getting the help and I am afraid. So this
6 is my last resort, because I have been here from
7 Texas to-- from Florida, to Kentucky. Okay, so
8 that's all. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'll give you my
11 card and we can set up a meeting and speak and figure
12 out what we can--

13 BRITTANY SPALDING: [interposing] Yes, I
14 emailed you. I wasn't going to tell nobody. But you
15 might have didn't get it, or they might have replied
16 but I-- my email, I wasn't able to get back in it
17 because I don't have a phone.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, before you
19 leave, I'll give you my information.

20 BRITTANY SPALDING: Yes, sir.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Shanelle, can you
22 tell me what school you go to?

23 SHANELLE BUENO: I go to [inaudible].
24 It's right down the block.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'm sorry.

1
2 SHANELLE BUENO: I got to Mecca [sic].
3 It's right down-- it's right down the block.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.
5 Thank you all for your testimony. We're going to
6 call forward Kanene Holder and Braden Holiday [sp?],
7 and then we're going to go to remote testimony, Anooj
8 Bhandari, Laura Wig [sp?], Madeline Borelli [sp?],
9 and Martin Urbach.

10 KANENE AYO HOLDER: Good evening. It is
11 a good evening to be here in the room that says, "A
12 government of the people, by the people, and for the
13 people." Hopefully it is a good evening, because
14 we're here to represent the voices of those that are
15 unheard, the voices of those who are ignored, the
16 voices of those who can't speak, and I'm speaking for
17 them. I'm Kanene Ayo Holder. I'm an award-winning
18 educator and diversity expert here to amplify black
19 issues, black issues, issues, issues, on and on from
20 400 years and on into infinity without intervention
21 and disruption from you all. Can we agree that
22 systemic racism exists? If you agree, excuse me,
23 please say yes. You all can as well. Or you're
24 nodding your heads affirmative, okay. Then that
25 means that we are actually literally funding our

1
2 oppression. I'll say that again. You all agreed
3 that systemic racism exists, and this is a budget,
4 and we're all taxpayers. So we're literally funding
5 our oppression, minute by minute, day by day with
6 every transaction on a micro level like a bag of
7 chips to a macro level like a condo. We're literally
8 funding our own oppression. And I would like my
9 intelligence to be respected, because I'm thinking
10 about this out loud, and all of you all intelligent
11 people whatever that even means, right? So like,
12 literally break that down. We agree to this, yes,
13 yes, yes. And we pay our taxes, yes, yes, yes. So
14 we literally are-- all of us are complicit in a
15 system that is racist and homophobic and everything
16 else, but I'm all of those things, too, but I'm
17 specifically here to talk about black issues. There
18 are 83 different streets in Brooklyn named after
19 slave-holding families. I learned-- I learned that
20 after my second National Endowment for the Humanities
21 Fellowship. Teachers were flying in from all over
22 the country, one of 36 that I was, and I'm from
23 Brooklyn, and I'm holding a bill of sale with the
24 names of Vanderbilt, the Perkins [sic], and the Lots
25 [sp?] family, the New Lots Train Station, by the way,

1
2 the Three Train, last stop. So, again, we are
3 funding our own systemic racist system. We're doing
4 it. We're complicit in it. Now, I'm here to talk
5 about blurgent [sic], black and urgent issues, right?
6 This is taxation without representation, and I would
7 like an audit. What is my money funding? Seems like
8 there's some issues that are urgent and there's news
9 cameras and there's funding, right, that comes real
10 quick, but when it's intersected the urgent issue is
11 intersected with blackness, meaning blurgent, black
12 and urged, there's a lot of excuses. There's a lot
13 of patronizing. There's a lot of well, well, and a
14 lot of crumbs if anything. Again, the crumbs are
15 also what? Our tax dollars, because we're funding
16 our systemic racial oppression, right? So, one, I
17 would like to talk about one issue which is black
18 maternal health. I went on the Department of
19 Health's website in New York City. Black women in
20 this city are nine times as likely to die in
21 childbirth or their children within two years. As I
22 then scrolled through all the different Department of
23 Health statistics, black people over-indexed in
24 everything that is deadly except for, guess, opioid
25 overdose. The whites own that one. What? So again,

1
2 I am black in this country. I am 43 years old,
3 forever 21 if you're wondering, and I would like to
4 have a baby, but again, the statistics would tell me
5 don't do that even though taxes are coming out of my
6 paycheck. So again, I'm trying to understand and
7 justify or at least get an audit, right? You talking
8 about budgets, maybe I need an audit. I want to know
9 how bad my taxes fund in terms of the discrimination
10 and racism, right? Because that's what-- that's
11 what my tax-- that's what all your tax dollars are
12 doing. I want to know how many babies are dying. I
13 want to know how many black women are-- I want to
14 know, because I'm really confused, because I pay. Of
15 the people, for the people, by the-- I pay my taxes.
16 I'm one of these people. I'm going to move on.
17 Housing violations-- HPD, DOB, a joke. I live in a
18 building on 125th Street. 421-A tax abatement-- 18
19 floors. I was in the elevator, it fell several
20 floors. Terrifying. The lights started flickering.
21 I've been calling HPD, DOB for years. Again, I win
22 awards in writing curriculum and programming and
23 curating for children. I do not have the mental,
24 physical capacity to be on the phone all the time
25 with DOB and HPD. That is not the potentiality of

1
2 who I am. That's not why I went to college. That's
3 not why I have multiple degrees. I have a fellowship
4 with Colin Powell Center for Policy Study. The same
5 CUNY kids, I know some of them. I was at CUNY
6 yesterday with the Racial Justice Division of Colin
7 Powell School, because again, it's racial. And
8 that's what I want to do with my time. I don't want
9 to be sitting here-- and again, useless. You get 40
10 days, the landlords do, to repair the elevators.
11 What? There are dozens of people in my building that
12 have been trapped in the elevator. Some of them had
13 to crawl out from under the shafts. Again, that's my
14 tax dollars funding people being trapped, including
15 myself, in that elevator, and HPD and the DOB, you
16 know, playing patsy with the landlords. Now, how
17 does that also impact me as an educator? When
18 children are in rooms and in homes that are, you
19 know, have housing violations, rats, roaches, mold,
20 ceilings falling apart, no hot water, no heat, how do
21 they show in up a classroom? I know, that's why I
22 got awards in it, because I was so keen to their
23 needs and their issues that I was able to intervene,
24 but most teachers don't know how to do that, because
25 they-- it's a lot to juggle, right? So, again, these

1
2 issues aren't segmented. They are holistic. When the
3 DOB and HPD don't do their jobs, you know what goes
4 up? Child abuse and domestic violence, because
5 people are frustrated and they take it out on the
6 people that are most vulnerable in their own
7 household. So all of this matters, and I've seen
8 it. I've seen it as a tenant. I've seen it as a
9 teacher. I've seen it as a transit rider. I see it.
10 So when we look at all these people who are flipping
11 out, whatever that even means-- when we talk about
12 mental health issues, how much of these mental health
13 issues are exacerbated because we pay our taxes and
14 we don't get services in return? I'm really
15 confused. From simple things like potholes to major
16 things like HPD, DOB, can you please hold these
17 landlords accountable? Can you make sure that they
18 provide heat? That building in the Bronx that has 17
19 people die, that wasn't because of some frayed space
20 heater cord, and that became what Eric Adams and
21 everybody else wanted to say, we're going to regulate
22 the space heaters. No, regulate the landlords that
23 are too cheap and want to profit off of not providing
24 heat for people. And then the children when they
25 come in class and they're-- they're walking around--

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2 like, that's what happens. You cannot expect a 12-
3 year-old or a nine-year-old or a five-year-old
4 to be able to process landlords profiting off of not
5 providing heat and water. It doesn't make any sense
6 to me. And we've been-- I've been teaching for 20
7 years. I've been teaching for-- I was a teaching
8 fellow, and I grew up in Brooklyn. I am a public
9 school baby. You all should be damn proud of me. Do
10 you know how many awards I have, from public school--
11 from public school? I figure it out, and I can't
12 guarantee that for tall these other children
13 languishing in these bullshit ass schools right now.
14 I can't guarantee that they're going to get a quality
15 public school education and a stable-- and stable
16 enough home so that they can be able to rise and
17 thrive and get published. My theories are quoted. I
18 have lectured at ivy league-- at Columbia University
19 several times. I can't guarantee that. And I've
20 actually had little 12-year-olds, little 11-year-
21 olds, I've had them do stuff like this. I had them go
22 talk at Columbia about issues, sure did. But again,
23 when we thing about HPD in a silo, and then we think
24 about transit in a silo, no child is thinking to
25 themselves, well, you know, that's just the transit

1 budget. They're not thinking-- oh, that's the
2 housing budget. No, they're a child. And to be
3 honest with you, adults, when we're navigating all of
4 these potholes literal and figurative potholes in our
5 lives, we're not parsing through what part of the
6 budget wasn't addressed. It's all of it. Now, I
7 would like-- add this to the budget, because you
8 have-- you can be adding all kinds of stuff to the
9 budget. If restaurants can get an A, B, C, D rating,
10 why not buildings? For people who are actually
11 blessed to be able to live in a home, because again,
12 other people have already addressed homelessness,
13 people have already addressed police brutality. So I
14 am here to deal with other issues. So, if you all
15 can put A, B, C, D on restaurants-- do you know how
16 many times these schmooze operator realtors, right,
17 wine and dine tenants. Oh, this-- oh, look at the
18 rooftop, oh this. And it happened to me, and now I'm
19 in a building with a landlord that is harassing me.
20 They moved the super next-door to me on the 11th
21 floor. Have you ever heard a super living on the
22 11th floor, sharing a balcony with a Tenant
23 Association President? Y'all are laughing, because
24 it's insane, right? Right? Playing music two
25

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2 o'clock in the morning loud as can be, disrupting my
3 ability to be brilliant, to be of service as an
4 educator. That's what you all allow landlords to do,
5 because I have been filing report after report-- if
6 you pull up my name, Kanene Ayo Holder in 311, you
7 will see it. I have done-- I've talked to Mark
8 Levine. I've talked to so many people, and it's
9 always okay, okay, and nothing's done. So the
10 landlord gets to profit, right, off of not being held
11 accountable. So maybe an A, B, C, D rating to let
12 people know, you know what? Don't put your \$4,000 or
13 \$8,000 security deposit plus the first month's rent
14 and everything else that you need to do into that
15 building. Because that's what these developers are
16 doing. They're build up these-- my building was
17 built in nine months. It's on a-- it's 60 West 125th
18 Street. It is a death trap. It is a-- if you walk
19 there right now, you can smell the gas, because
20 they're trying to slap together some Ponte [sic]
21 Bistro Restaurant. You can smell the gas right in
22 front. I'm telling you. If something happens in
23 that building-- I'm going to say this now-- don't be
24 surprised, because I've been telling DOB and HPD for
25 years. You can smell the gas. So when the explosion

1 happens or someone's trapped in the elevator or
2 whatever else is going on in my janky building that
3 looks luxury with our tax dollars, because it's a
4 421-A abatement, don't say that Kanene Ayo Holder
5 didn't say so here. A government of the people, by
6 the people, for the people. I'm going to put it on
7 record, 60 West 125th Street. And then what they do
8 is they sold the building in a year, and then they
9 change the address so that when you go to court
10 there's no record of what building you're talking
11 about. So again, where is the government in this?
12 They have the address down as 52 to 64, but then our
13 address and our rent receipts say 60 West. So then
14 the lease doesn't match, and so then when you go to
15 court or you go and say anything, they go, oh,
16 there's no building by that name. I've done this.
17 I've done this with DACR [sic]. Again, I should be
18 publishing my theories about education and how to get
19 kids to thrive under ridiculous circumstances because
20 we are literally funding our own systemic racism,
21 right? That's what-- that's what I do best. And
22 instead, I'm spending too much of my time, right,
23 running around, right, with multiple agencies that I
24 fund that don't do anything and allow these landlords
25

1
2 to do what they do. Now, the last point that I will
3 make, and thank you so much, because there are a lot
4 of blurgent issues, right, but I'm being very
5 selective in curating in terms of my issues, okay?
6 So, the last one is can you smell what the rock is
7 cooking? Can you not see that this is going to be
8 worse-- I know I'm funny. This is going to be worse
9 than 1970. We're on the precipice of a wave, a
10 surge, and then another surge, and then another surge
11 of people who have been disenfranchised, who are
12 delusional, who don't trust anything, who have not
13 been educated, who know that HPD is not going to do
14 anything about the building, who know that they're
15 not going to get healthcare, who know that the
16 teachers, you know, are too exhausted, who know that
17 if they go into the shelter they're going to be raped
18 or their stuff is going to be stolen, they know these
19 things. Do you know understand what's about to
20 happen? I wrote about it. I'm published. I call it
21 the trauma-class. There's the upper-class. There's
22 the middle-class, and then there's what I call the
23 trauma-class that trumps race. At least 40 percent
24 of society is in trauma from school shootings to mass
25 shootings to crime in the streets to mental health

1
2 issues and vicarious trauma. That's what everyone is
3 under right now, and so mental health is going to
4 exacerbate and become normalized, because so many
5 more people who could be dealing with things are not
6 going to be able to deal with the tsunami of trauma
7 that is constantly going to be in other people's
8 faces, and then they're going to vicariously also
9 then carry their trauma, and then they're going to be
10 passive-aggressive and all kind of other defense
11 mechanisms. I'm telling you, I published this.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I have to ask
13 you to conclude your testimony.

14 KANENE AYO HOLDER: Trauma-class.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

16 KANENE AYO HOLDER: I love you black.
17 It's Kanene Ayo Holder, 60 West 125th Street. Who
18 here can help me?

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We're going to--
20 I'll give you my card. I'll help.

21 KANENE AYO HOLDER: Thank you. And
22 again, what are we doing to make sure-- oh, last
23 thing. Racial Justice Commission, I interviewed the
24 Executive Director, and no offense to him, but I'm
25 curious as to-- there's a Charter in New York City

1
2 right now-- do you all know this? That there's a
3 Charter in New York City that says-- nodding his head
4 yes. There's a Charter in New York City stating that
5 New York City is going to prevent racial harm in the
6 future and heal the racial harms of the past. Hello?
7 Do y'all know this? It passed. It was on the
8 budget. It was on the-- the budget-- it was on the
9 ballot in November.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

11 KANENE AYO HOLDER: And so I'm just--
12 again, like if this is the first budget with the
13 Racial Justice Commission, how will this budget be
14 impacted from a racial lens, how will that lens
15 actually be real. Last thing, George Floyd's
16 anniversary, 05/25, is tomorrow. So, is New York
17 City performative in painting BLM, you know, yellow
18 on streets, or are we actually going to enact the
19 blurgent, the black and urgent-- the urgency of the
20 millions of people in the streets and around the
21 world that we said that we were going to do. Shout
22 to to Security, because you know, y'all didn't escort
23 me. I love you all black.

24

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We
3 still have about 45 people on Zoom that are
4 testifying.

5 KANENE AYO HOLDER: God bless them.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go ahead, sir.

7 BRAYDEN HOLIDAY: Hi, my name is Brayden
8 Holiday. I'm going to say that the NYPD budget needs
9 to be cut significantly by at least 75 percent and
10 transferred to community resources. NYPD has failed
11 to [inaudible] illegal firearms that will be used in
12 crimes for 30 years despite the increased funding in
13 spite of technology. New York City laid off a lot of
14 city workers in the past before. NYPD is able to lay
15 off officers and meet the new budget requirements.
16 We need real solutions such as real affordable
17 housing, extensive medical and mental health
18 services. We need to fix the root problems in
19 crimes. There are those who say if we have more cops
20 there would be less crimes. There are 200 civilians
21 per officer. This is a numbers game. NYPD cannot be
22 everywhere. The City need to eliminate the attraction
23 of black markets that are selling illegal firearms by
24 [inaudible] so there are less gun crimes. NYPD at
25 the March budget hearing said that everyone has a

1 part in public safety. That's the equivalent to FDNY
2 say everyone has a part in taking out a fire. NYPD
3 admit that they're not responsible for an
4 individual's safety, even though they're supposed to
5 be the sole public safety department of New York City
6 by having military weapons, arresting powers, and
7 qualified immunity. In the case of Lozito versus New
8 York City 2013, two NYPD officers in the front train
9 car [inaudible] refused to bring harm [sic] to Mr.
10 Lozito even though they were more than capable to do
11 so. The court dismissed the lawsuit because NYPD
12 officers are not obligated to protect individuals.
13 Of course, we're told [inaudible] cops in the subway.
14 You about to get stabbed, they're not obligated to
15 protect you. So what's the point of paying them?
16 The case of Warren versus District of Columbia 1981
17 made law enforcement obsolete by saying that police
18 are not obligated to protect individuals from harm or
19 death unless they're under custody. This is 1981.
20 Three women called 9-1-1 for an intruder, and cops
21 respond in five minutes. They were raped for 14
22 hours. The Supreme Court said they're not obligated
23 to protect anyone from harm or death unless they're
24 under custody. The tactic and strategy for the past
25

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2 30 years are a definition of insanity of doing the
3 same thing over and over and expecting different
4 outcomes. Politicians need to stop thinking like
5 politicians and think like business people by
6 eliminating [inaudible] black markets. I just want
7 to say one more thing. People blame bail reform for
8 higher crime. That's not true. Bail reform is like
9 past months before the high crime. Higher crime
10 happened because schools are shut down, parks are
11 shut down, pools have shut down, libraries are shut
12 down, after school programs shut down. Can you
13 imagine, right? We own this money, but you want to
14 move the money out of resources which is even worse
15 than COVID. We have white people getting shot up in
16 white neighborhoods. We're talking about rich
17 neighborhoods. People getting pushed in subway
18 tracks at 14th Street, Canal Street, Chambers Street--
19 - these are like 14th Street everything. Then you
20 talk about some people start shooting people in white
21 neighborhoods. Can you imagine? This is going to
22 worse than the 80's. I want to say for example-- I'm
23 a video game person, right? So, I-- I'm a video game
24 person, right? So basically I've played [inaudible]
25 2077 [sic]. The crime in that game is so bad I know

1
2 that medics, you know, EMTs everything, they carry
3 assault rifles. So, it's like-- I'm not going to say
4 it's going to be as bad, but if you don't fix this
5 right now, like pass this budget-- put the budget all
6 the way down NYPD, boost [sic] everything out, it's
7 going to be a lot worse.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you for your
9 testimony.

10 BRAYDEN HOLIDAY: Thanks.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now going to go to
12 Zoom beginning with Anooj Bhandari.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 ANOOJ BHANDARI: Hi, everybody. My name
15 is Anooj Bhandari. I am giving testimony alongside
16 Teachers Unite and I'm a community organizer and
17 youth organizer with Restorative Justice Initiative.
18 I am advocating for \$75 million dollars towards
19 hiring restorative justice coordinators in schools
20 across New York City, and \$75 million dollars in
21 bringing on support staff that are from the
22 neighborhoods that our young people represent across
23 the City. This is in addition to a hiring freeze and
24 a removal of the School Safety Agent positions that
25 are in the New York City schools. I used to be a

1
2 restorative justice coordinator in New York City
3 schools, and I'm currently a restorative justice
4 organizer working on multiple education justice
5 coalitions. During just the two-year window when I
6 was a restorative justice coordinator in the schools,
7 we were able to lower school suspension rates by over
8 60 percent while also creating leadership
9 opportunities for over 50 young people to be able to
10 take on leadership roles, and this is just within one
11 school that is taking on this work right now. The
12 issue is not that we don't have alternative ways of
13 developing safety. The issue is that the combination
14 of mayoral control and police presence in schools are
15 an equation that leads to quick, escalating, and
16 ineffective reactions to harm rather than supportive
17 and transformative shifts in how we can actually
18 greater understand school support to look and feel
19 like. I've worked across multiple schools in the
20 Department of Education over the years. At this
21 point have consulted with over 18 schools supporting
22 the development of restorative and transformative
23 justice programs and processes, and I can tell you
24 that the greatest factor between whether programs
25 could thrive was if staff and students have felt

1 supported in their community to actually invest
2 energy into building community. This need for
3 support is one that can only come from community, and
4 so we demand that you stop investing in tactics that
5 are harming our young people, harming young people
6 with disabilities, black and brown young people--

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8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
9 expired.

10 ANOOJ BHANDARI: queer young people, and
11 to invest in actual solutions that aren't contingent
12 on preserving a budget for what is already the
13 largest policing budget in the nation. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll
15 next hear from Madeline Borelli.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 MADELINE BORELLI: Hi, good evening. My
18 name is Madeline Borelli. I'm a Special Education
19 teacher, a parent, and a Teachers Unite member. I'm
20 here, still here, on a school night to urge you to
21 reject the school budget cuts, to stop using school
22 funds on policing and instead to move the money
23 towards restorative staffing positions and programs
24 that actually keep our kids safe. As an educator,
25 I've seen firsthand that our kids are traumatized.

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2 They need social and emotional support. Yet, year
3 after year, the City cuts the schools budget and then
4 funnels an egregious amount of that dwindling budget
5 into criminalizing our students through policing and
6 surveillance. I'm tired of being asked to do more
7 with less. I'm tired of my students not having access
8 to programs and supportive staff, and I'm tired of
9 working within a system that pushes children out
10 instead of meeting them with compassion and care. So
11 just this year I had a student of mine stop coming to
12 school because of a lack of access to this care. My
13 student was struggling against suppressive forces of
14 poverty and comes from a family that has been deeply
15 impacted by the violence of the carceral system. And
16 instead of getting the support that she needed when
17 she was in crisis, she was repeatedly suspended until
18 she stopped coming to school altogether. She was
19 pushed out. Now, if my school had been able to
20 provide the student and her family with the mental
21 health support and resources to help navigate
22 conflict and address harm, I truly believe she would
23 still be in my classroom. So I'm here to demand that
24 you reject the Mayor's proposal to cut \$1 billion
25 dollars from our schools, and instead invest in

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2 restorative staffing and programming such as those
3 outlined in the Dignity in Schools Campaign's FY24
4 budget demands. City Council must give schools more
5 resources to support students to learn and thrive.
6 So I'm here to demand that the City also redirect the
7 \$475 million from school policing to opportunities
8 for young people. City Council should be looking to
9 fund solutions that remedy the problem, not allow it
10 to continue to grow, and it's unconscionable that the
11 New York City has an entire police force that--

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
13 expired.

14 MADELINE BORELLI: [inaudible] and
15 targeting students while they're at school, yet I'm
16 out here spending my own money on color pencils and
17 lab supplies. Do not let the Mayor cut our funding
18 and fill our schools with cops. Do the right thing.
19 Budgets are moral documents, and our youth deserve
20 better, and I also stand in solidarity with those and
21 echo the demands asking to dismantle the SRG unit.
22 Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we
24 will hear from James Collins.

25

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time. James
3 Collins, please accept the unmute request.

4 JAMES COLLINS: Okay. We seem to have
5 technical difficulty there. Alright. You hear me
6 now?

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, you may start.

8 JAMES COLLINS: Good. Thank you. My
9 name is James Collins. I'm a 1991 HRA retiree. My
10 point evolve around the statement made by the Common
11 Sense Caucus last December that healthcare savings
12 should not be achieved on the backs of our retirees.
13 Now, in the closing months of the Trump
14 Administration, CMS amended its managed care manual
15 effective January 1, 2021. CMS would no longer
16 require proof that a retiree had voluntarily selected
17 a Medicare Advantage Plan, just that she had received
18 timely notice of her former employer's intent to
19 enroll her. This is the rule that allows the Mayor
20 and the MLC to subvert the will and choice of over
21 150,000 retirees, many of them your constituents.
22 This rule change if implemented as outlined in the
23 March 10th OLR letter will financially coerce many if
24 not most City retirees out of senior care, into an MA
25 plan against their will. This Trump gift to the

1 insurance industry warmly embraced by the Mayor, by
2 the MLC, and apparently by your own Council Speaker
3 threatens current and future New York City retiree's
4 access to their traditional Medicare that they have
5 enjoyed for decades. We won't be silently complicit
6 with this Trumpian [sic] assault on traditional
7 Medicare. Exercise your legislative--

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
9 expired.

10 JAMES COLLINS: [inaudible] Amend Admin
11 Code 12-126 to mandate the availability of a Medicare
12 supplement plan for Medicare eligible retirees. And
13 finally, hold public hearings to address the
14 challenges of providing high-quality healthcare in a
15 financially-responsible manner to meet the health and
16 medical needs of city employees and retirees, and
17 with regard to retirees, how they can have input into
18 decisions affecting their health and wellbeing.
19 Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
21 we'll hear from Martin Urbach.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 MARTIN URBACH: Good evening. Peace,
24 justice, blessings, all the power to all the young
25

1
2 people. My name is Martin Urbach. I testify here
3 today as restorative justice coordinator, youth
4 organizer, music educator, and Dean of Culture at a
5 Title I school in New York City. I'm the founder of
6 the Circle Keepers, youth-led restorative justice
7 youth development cohort, and I am also a proud
8 member of Teachers Unite. I'm here first and
9 foremost as an educator who loves youth and who
10 believes in the power of public education as a place
11 where liberation can happen. I'm here to call on the
12 City Council to designate \$75 million dollars
13 directly to 500 high school to hire school-based
14 restorative justice coordinators just like myself,
15 and an additional \$10 million dollars to fund
16 restorative practices in our public schools. A
17 commitment, economic funding, and support both at the
18 ground level and at policy level will make schools
19 much safer for all of us. We demand access to
20 ongoing restorative justice training for all school
21 staff. Fund restorative justice electives, clubs,
22 and advisories to sustain paid school-based
23 opportunities and work-based learning internships for
24 young people to lead restorative justice practices,
25 right? Every school in the City should have access

1
2 to the kinds of programs I have been able to build in
3 my school. As a restorative justice coordinator over
4 the past six years, I've trained over 50 students in
5 peer mediations and conflict resolution. The
6 students hold over 200 mediations a year, sometimes
7 six or seven in one single day, including one-on-one
8 mediations, roundtable mediations, and in-clan [sic]
9 circles ranging from mundane issues of disagreements
10 over grades or cellphone policies to much more
11 complex issues such as harms of racism, physical
12 confrontations, and even sexual violence. Our circle
13 keepers have trained students as young as sixth
14 grade, doctoral students and educators all over the
15 country, including the recent workshop at South by
16 Southwest EDU in Austin, Texas. Because of the power
17 of youth-led school-based restorative justice, I have
18 firsthand seen a young person transform through--

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
20 expired.

21 MARTIN URBACH: through mediation, from a
22 teenager proudly say they've never and would never
23 apologize to a single person in their life, to a
24 young person who took accountability, looked at their
25 peers in the eyes and truthfully said, "Yo, I didn't

1
2 mean to hit you. I'm sorry. I got so frustrated. I
3 didn't know what to do. You did not deserve being
4 punched. My bad."

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank
6 you for your testimony.

7 MARTIN URBACH: You know what? Props to
8 the young person. They did that, but also--

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
10 you. Thank you for your testimony.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
12 we'll hear from Jeanette Estima.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time. You
14 may begin.

15 JEANETTE ESTIMA: Hello. So, my name is
16 Jeanette Estima and I'm the Director of Policy and
17 Advocacy at Citymeals on Wheels. Thank you for the
18 opportunity to testify. Citymeals was created over
19 40 years ago to fill the gap in the City's home-
20 delivered meals program by providing meals to
21 homebound older adults on weekends, holidays, and
22 during emergencies. I'm here tonight to join the
23 chorus of people demanding care, not cuts. Like many
24 providers, Citymeals has experienced a huge growth in
25 the need for our services over the years which was

1
2 compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, before which we
3 were serving 18,000 older adults, while today we're
4 serving nearly 22,000. We're also experiencing a
5 staggering increase in our costs due to inflation
6 like many other providers. In FY22 our food cost
7 doubled. Sorry, increased about 33 percent and our
8 fuel costs nearly doubled. Maintaining our current
9 level of service under these circumstances is
10 untenable. Therefore, we respectfully request
11 \$800,000 through the Council's Senior Centers
12 Programs and Enhancements Initiative to ensure that
13 our emergency response infrastructure is adequately
14 funded. We also request \$4 million for weekend and
15 holiday meals that are not currently covered by the
16 City's home-delivered meals program. While the
17 entire network of older adult services has been
18 underfunded, the FY24 budget proposes \$12 million
19 dollars in cuts to congregate and home-delivered
20 meals. We maintain that there should be no cuts to
21 essential services, and instead we request a
22 significant investment for inflationary adjustments
23 in these programs, including \$14 million dollars for
24 home-delivered meals and \$46 million for older adult
25 centers. Programs cannot successfully operate

1
2 without staff, but providers have struggled to
3 attract and retain workers due to the low wages set
4 in City contracts which failed to reflect the
5 essential nature of their jobs. Therefore, to shore
6 up the nonprofit providers that implement the City's
7 critical human services programs,--

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
9 expired.

10 JEANETTE ESTIMA: we urge the City to
11 establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5 percent cost of
12 living adjustment for city contracted human services
13 workers. Thank you very much.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
15 we'll hear from Milena Luna followed by Cheryl
16 Warfield.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 MILENA LUNA: Yes, one second. Sorry.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go ahead.

20 MILENA LUNA: Alright, yeah, sorry. Good
21 evening. I'm Milena Luna, Interim Executive Director
22 at Dance NYC, a service organization advancing
23 interest of the dance industry in the metro NYC area.
24 The dance industry contributes \$300 million annually
25 to the City's economic activity and yet, dance is

1 typically the least-funded of the performing arts.
2 Dancers are constantly innovating new models and
3 connecting us to our bodies and humanity as leaders,
4 activists, and healers. As the City opens doors to
5 new New Yorkers, dance workers are best positioned to
6 support their integration through this body-based art
7 forms, building bridges across cultures and creating
8 safe spaces to be affirmed and empowered. Studies
9 have shown the significant social impacts of arts and
10 culture including improved outcomes in mental health,
11 safety, and other dimensions of social wellbeing.
12 The dance workforce is made up of BIPOC workers,
13 immigrants, and undocumented workers, disabled
14 workers, workers who are members of the LGBTQIA+
15 community, parents and caregivers, and
16 immunocompromised, and low-income workers. These
17 workers deserve the right to have fair wages,
18 experiencing safe working conditions, affordable
19 housing, childcare and healthcare, and be able to
20 create engaging cultural experiences that New Yorkers
21 can access. None of this is possible if the City's
22 investment in the arts and culture is inadequate or
23 distributed inequitably and continues to allow the
24 white supremacy ableism, xenophobia, and misogyny to
25

1
2 proliferate. Financial stability is a critical need
3 in order to keep dance and dance education in
4 classrooms, community centers, and on Broadway. I'm
5 here to ask you to invest in arts and culture by
6 baselining \$40 million increase in funding for DCLA
7 to assist in creating more stability for the arts and
8 culture sector, allocating an additional \$10 million
9 to the \$40 million baseline, while also ensuring
10 transparent and equitable distribution by DCLA to
11 prioritize increases for smaller entities. And also,
12 fully funding the council initiatives that serve
13 critical communities including those of many new
14 immigrants. And finally, to create a plan to
15 increase DCLA's funding to 0.5 percent--

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
17 expired.

18 MILENA LUNA: of the City budget. Thank
19 you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
21 we'll hear from Cheryl Warfield followed by Jerina
22 Ribbons [sp?].

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 CHERYL WARFIELD: Good evening. I'm
25 Cheryl Warfield, an opera singer, teaching artist,

1
2 and both a union and independent artist in District
3 Six. I founded and run Advance MORE Opera, a
4 nonprofit showcasing outstanding and diverse talent
5 while providing culturally-responsive outreach and
6 educational programming to youth and seniors in
7 under-invested communities in Manhattan and the
8 Bronx. I speak to you tonight in support of
9 baseline funding for arts and culture to fund
10 discretionary initiatives supporting New York City's
11 cultural institutions, independent artists, and
12 cultural workers, noting culture's baseline budget
13 has not been increased in more than a decade. My
14 small budget BIPOC nonprofit joins fellow arts and
15 culture colleagues in our ask to make history by
16 adding \$40 million to baseline funding for the
17 Department of Cultural Affairs to increase stability
18 in our workforce and in our community program; to
19 invest an additional \$10 million dollars to more
20 equitably and fully fund the City's' cultural
21 ecosystem to be split 50/50 between CIG and CDF
22 grantees. Fully fund all council initiatives which
23 serve youth, seniors, and our crucial work serving
24 communities of color and older and immigrant
25 communities. We thank the Council for your support

1
2 of our industry and ask for you to continue to fight
3 for us as further cuts in negotiations are made.
4 Please stand strong against oppressively imposed
5 austerity measures. Thank you for the opportunity to
6 testify.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next,
9 we'll hear from Jerina Ribbons followed by Francine
10 Garber-Cohen.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jerina Ribbons?
13 Next go to Francine Garber-Cohen followed by Nat
14 Cabrera.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

16 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Hi.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin,
18 Francine.

19 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Hi, I'm Fran
20 Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera Company. I
21 was going to restate the push for the arts funding
22 that Cheryl Warfield just made, but however, I'd like
23 to read a not from a singer, a Salvador-American
24 tenor who sang the leading role just last week in the
25 Student Prince which Regina Opera presented. It

1
2 shows the impact that the arts have on New York City
3 residents. This is a letter that the singer emailed
4 to me: "Dear Fran, thank you so much for the
5 opportunity to perform with Regina Opera. When I
6 first heard about the auditions for the role of the
7 prince and the audition selection of the serenade, I
8 quickly searched YouTube to listen to the song, which
9 it turned out I had heard before on one of Mario
10 Lanz's [sp?] albums. I fell in love with the music
11 again and felt I really needed to sing the role. It
12 fit vocally with the broad range. I felt I truly
13 understood the character, so I was happy when give
14 the role. Everyone was so kind and supportive. That
15 really helped a great deal. I had a wonderful time
16 and I learned much in the process. You have a true
17 sense of family in your company. Thank you for what
18 you do for singers who want a chance to perform their
19 hearts out, as well as for the artistic contribution
20 to the community. Music is healing and helps change
21 hearts for the better. And he hopes to collaborate
22 again in the near future. Hugs, Asweldo [sp?]." The
23 arts are so important to the spirit of New York City
24 as well as the culture, bringing in tourists and I
25 just-- we also would like to thank Chair Brannan--

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
3 expired.

4 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: for support of--
5 continuing support of Regina Opera Company. Thank
6 you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
8 hear from Nat Cabrera followed by Elana Paulino.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 NAT CABRERA: Hi, my name is Nat Cabrera
11 and I'm a dedicated human service worker here in New
12 York City working at the Center for Alternative
13 Sentencing Employment Services, CASES. Each day my
14 colleagues and I tirelessly work to provide vital
15 services to our community, ensuring the safety and
16 wellbeing of our fellow New Yorkers. Human services
17 including myself face difficulty on a daily basis in
18 affording basic living materials as well as suitable
19 housing due to wage disparities. These challenges
20 are compounded by inflation as well as the rise of
21 cost of rent, utility and goods. Many of my
22 colleagues who are full-time struggle every day to
23 make ends meet, and some find it increasingly
24 challenging to support themselves, let alone
25 families. According to the New York City Department

1 of Housing Preservation and Development, the 2022
2 annual median income in the New York City region is
3 near \$21,000 for a three-person family. As
4 documented in the March 2022 report by the Center for
5 New York City Affairs, human service workers make up
6 20 to 35 percent less than similarly educated workers
7 in comparable positions in city governments and
8 elsewhere in private sectors. For an example, basing
9 the comparison on median annual salary, those with
10 Master's Degrees or better in City private sectors
11 have a median salary of \$100,000 or more, and which
12 is significantly higher than the \$60,000 median
13 salary for workers of master's degrees at the
14 education level. Shocking statistics also reveal
15 that roughly two-thirds of full-time human service
16 workers earned below the City's near poverty
17 threshold in 2019, while more than one out of every
18 four court human services workers lived in near
19 poverty conditions. Human service workers keep our
20 communities safe and functioning, and in return the
21 City gives them poverty wages that do not account for
22 inflation. As a result, many human service workers
23 need the same programs they provide, including
24 staffing housing shelters. Our organization
25

1
2 struggles to attract and retain workers and
3 communities suffer when we cannot fully staff
4 programs. New York City would not be the same
5 without--

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
7 expired.

8 NAT CABRERA: Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next we'll hear from
10 Elana Paulino.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 ELANA PAULINO: Good evening City Council
13 members. Can you hear me?

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes, go ahead.

15 ELANA PAULINO: Okay, thank you. Good
16 evening City Council Members. May I suggest these
17 hearings be spread out over two days in the future
18 because of waiting almost 13 hours to provide
19 testimony is ridiculous and traumatizing. Anyway, my
20 name's Elana Paulino. I am a social worker. I
21 represent my colleagues at the Center for Alternative
22 Sentencing and Employment Services, also known as
23 CASES. I specifically work for the Manhattan Pre-
24 Trial Supervised Release Program, a city contracted
25 [inaudible] alternative [inaudible] where I run an

1
2 interdisciplinary team that works to connect pre-
3 trial participants to [inaudible] community supports
4 and services needed to achieve stability [inaudible]
5 their community. My team is intentional, effective,
6 and dedicated to de-carceration, but we are not well.
7 On behalf of my colleagues at CASES, we need your
8 help now, and hope you will approve [inaudible] a 6.5
9 percent cost of living adjustment for all human
10 service workers and creating a comprehensive wage and
11 benefits [inaudible] contracting human service
12 workers to have equitable compensation to civic [sic]
13 workers. Our program addresses the social and
14 emotional needs of our pretrial clients who may be
15 suffering with a severe mental illness, substance
16 addiction, homelessness, physical and sexual abuse
17 while they await sentencing in the community. we are
18 so proud of our [inaudible] by way of jail reform,
19 but [inaudible] and we lack equitable pay from
20 community-based agencies like CASES seems like a set-
21 up and intends to keep mass incarceration a direct
22 descendant of the old Jim Crow laws alive in our
23 city. Please prove me wrong and include a cost of
24 living increase to the budget of this fiscal year and
25 beyond. After the pandemic caused [inaudible]

1 industry to work in the private sector for higher
2 wages leaving programs like ours to work harder than
3 ever, to work harder than ever before to stabilize
4 and support our clients involved in the criminal
5 [sic] legal system. When speaking with my staff
6 about the needing for the aforementioned request,
7 they cited skipping out on lunch some days, having to
8 choose between buying monthly metro card--

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
11 expired.

12 ELANA PAULINO: [inaudible] being behind
13 on rent, spending upwards of 70K [sic] for graduate
14 degrees in an attempt to secure higher pay, only to
15 be left with crippling debt. [inaudible] Please
16 show all our human service workers [inaudible] social
17 and emotional needs [inaudible] on their own. You
18 need us to provide these [inaudible] trauma-informed
19 and culturally-sensitive [inaudible], and we expect
20 the [inaudible]. Thank you for consistently
21 advocating and spearheading initiatives [inaudible]
22 in our communities, with the exception of the NYPD
23 Strategic Response Group. The allocation of funds to
24 this group is completely disgusting. Have a good
25 evening.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We're
3 going to try and go back to Jerina Ribbons.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, try and go next
6 to Toph, T-o-p-h?

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 TOPH: Can you hold off on the starting
9 time because I had no heads up there? Can you hear
10 me?

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We can hear you.

12 TOPH: Okay. Please don't cut me off.
13 I've been waiting for over 12 hours to speak. So it
14 might go 30 seconds over, but I'd really appreciate
15 not being muted as I'm on hour 13 of sitting here.
16 Thank you. From K to 12 children in this city are
17 told to say the Pledge of Allegiance, the last line:
18 with liberty and justice for all. The same bodies
19 that require this are the same bodies that call for
20 the charge to beat nonviolent protestors for trying
21 to get liberty and justice for actually all. It is
22 abhorrently clear that the NYPD SRG believes and
23 enforces liberty and justice for only white,
24 cisgender, heterosexual people. The SRG comes in
25 droves to nonviolent protests, protests attempting to

1
2 protect folks at Planned Parenthood, Drag Story Hour,
3 immigration, and migrant action, LGBTQIA+ action,
4 protests for protecting black and brown lives, and
5 protests about the never-ending police violence
6 towards the black and brown communities, as well as
7 protests for trying to help the unhoused. The SRG
8 empowers and emboldens the fascists who embody hate
9 and violence in this city. over the past 12 and half
10 hours, when I hear the testimony of nurses, Universal
11 Pre-K teachers, 3K teachers, teachers, mental health
12 professionals, people working in senior programs,
13 summer programs, libraries, pools, recreation
14 activities for children, children begging for school
15 lunch, services for seniors, meals on wheels, social
16 work services in schools, disability services,
17 homeless services, veterans services, LGBTQIA+
18 services, shelter for migrants, the unhoused, and how
19 their budgets are being stripped, and the NYPD
20 continues to get more and more money. I am calling
21 for the disbanding of the NYPD SRG who harm black and
22 brown communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, the
23 unhoused, migrants, immigrants, and so many more
24 including the--
25

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
3 expired.

4 TOPH: No, no, no. Including the many
5 people that you've heard from today. Are you still
6 listening?

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes.

8 TOPH: You muted me. Okay, thank you.
9 Just let me finish, please. I've been here 12 and
10 half hours. The SRG solely beats protestors trying
11 to get rights and services for oppressed groups.
12 People are begging for money today for people, and
13 the NYPD has \$11 billion dollar budget. The SRG
14 makes up at least \$133 million dollars of that. That
15 money, that \$133 million dollars could solve almost
16 every group's issues that presented today.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you for your
18 testimony.

19 TOPH: I will also-- wait, wait, wait,
20 wait, 15 more seconds. I will also add that I am a
21 New York City school teacher. I'm a New York City
22 Public School Special Ed teacher, and I'm also a New
23 York City social work-- school social worker. My
24 position as a reading specialists was defunded during
25 COVID. My job as a school social worker will be cut

1
2 at the end of this year because it was created for
3 people with-- the crisis with COVID and the mental
4 health crisis. What will-- and a full caseload.
5 What's going to happen to these kids? You've heard
6 this time and time again. School teachers and school
7 staff and all these other people presenting today
8 don't get overtime, but the NYPD has an unlimited
9 overtime. I am imploring the two City Council staff
10 who are still here to cut the entire SRG budget and
11 allocate the money to all the services that you have
12 desperately heard people speak for today. The whole
13 law and order trope is fear mongering. The
14 communities with the most care, the most love, and
15 the most services and the least NYPD presence are the
16 healthiest communities. Allocate funding to
17 communities and services in need. Harmed people harm
18 people. Hurt people hurt people.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

20 TOPH: [inaudible]

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
22 much.

23 TOPH: Put the money into care, not cops.
24 Thank you.

25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next
3 we'll hear from Claire Tondreau followed by Peter
4 Tarson [sp?].

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 CLAIRE TONDREAU: Good evening to you
7 all. I'm Claire Tondreau. Thanks for waiting and
8 listening to those of us who were put last today.
9 I've lived in New York City for over 40 years, and in
10 all of those years, policing hasn't solved any of our
11 fundamental issues in the city. Since we've been
12 dealing with the Strategic Response Group of the
13 NYPD, things have gotten worse. I'm here to urge you
14 to hold the NYPD Strategic Response Group accountable
15 for abusing New Yorkers by taking their funding away
16 and disbanding the unit. What more do you need to
17 know than you already know? What more do you need
18 hear than you've already heard through the past 12
19 hours and in previous hearings as well? Beyond the
20 brutality, you know the NYPD refuses accountability
21 or even transparency when it comes to the SRG. The
22 City Council shouldn't be in the business of funding
23 a unit that refuses oversight among everything else.
24 I mean, speaking from the point of view of a business
25 owner, it's just really bad budget management. From a

1
2 finance perspective, the SRG is a shameful waste of
3 money. The \$130 million a year could help so many of
4 our city's residents through all the initiative that
5 those of you who remain have listened to for the past
6 12 hours, things we shouldn't have to beg for or wait
7 so long to speak on. So if you're hesitating to take
8 away the SRG's funds and disband the unit, I hope
9 you'll ask yourself when you are alone why. What
10 keeps you from doing what's best for New Yorkers, or
11 your colleagues? Fear of blowback from the NYPD?
12 Fear about your job and losing it? The feeling that
13 nobody you care about will know how you voted? The
14 feeling that the people you care about most will be
15 proud that you support a military group that's waging
16 war with New Yorkers, with citizens like us? I urge
17 you to do the right thing for New Yorkers. Take away
18 the SRG's funding, disband them. And I also urge you
19 to work to convince your colleagues--

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
21 expired.

22 CLAIRE TONDREAU: to hopefully do the
23 same.

24

25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll
3 hear from Peter Tarson followed by Sergio Usirin
4 [sp?].

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 PETER TARSON: Apologies there. Hi. So,
7 I do not have personal trauma around the SRG, but
8 everything that I have heard just-- one cannot remain
9 silent. Is this abjectness, this leaving people to
10 squirm powerless, is this the city that we want? I
11 know all of you are human beings. We may not see eye
12 to eye, but I'm sure that you can understand that
13 even if it's a powerlessness you have never
14 experienced, even if your basic needs are not
15 criminalized, even if when people have made you
16 abject, they have been brutalized, that is not
17 acceptable. We can-- everyone must be able to sleep
18 safely, walk safely, and speak safely. We cannot let
19 this go on, genuinely. Justin Brannan, I saw your
20 immense humanity, your immense compassion for the
21 person here who was unable to feel safe in their
22 housing. I see a human being in you, and I know that
23 you see a human being in all of us. We are all human
24 together. we are all in this city together, and
25 there can be no way for us to construct a budget and

1
2 a society based completely on leaving people to
3 squirm bloody and saying you deserve it. This is not
4 an option. We have to defund the SRG. The SRG is
5 not providing security. It is providing brutality.
6 We have a choice to make that we New Yorkers have had
7 to make for decades now. We-- Americans have had to
8 make for centuries now between a city where our
9 approach to people falling out of the confines of
10 society is more hatred, is preserving our pristine
11 windows at the expense of our hollowed, powerless,
12 and fearful hearts, because in all of us are children
13 when we make others to be crying children. We have
14 to stand together now, because we love each other,
15 because we belong together. Is this the city that
16 you want? I know we all see each other in the
17 street. We all see human beings in the street, and I
18 am deeply aggrieved that any of you have such deep
19 pain that you're able to turn a blind eye to--

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
21 expired.

22 PETER TARSON: everything that you've
23 been forced to turn a blind eye to other's pain. We
24 belong together. You are in power now. Use that
25 power to affirm other's power, and use your love to

1
2 affirm other's love. I have no personal stake in
3 this, but I've been sitting here for 12 hours,
4 because I love you, I love the citizens, and we
5 should all be standing together to pay for essential
6 services, to build up a society where our
7 institutions are based on the embrace of people's
8 highest human truths rather than their inevitable
9 confinement to a punitive powerlessness. Please
10 listen to me. I am not speaking out of hatred. I love
11 you, Brannan. I love you Councilman Brannan.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you for--

13 PETER TARSON: [interposing] I love all
14 of you who have testified.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you for your
16 testimony.

17 PETER TARSON: I'm sorry, I'm not
18 finished. The-- I have not spoken in the concrete as
19 others have. I have not spoken in the financial as
20 others have. I'm just urging you to listen to that,
21 to listen to people, not to listen to lies of hatred
22 that will ultimately turn into hatred toward
23 yourselves. I know, I remember councilperson the
24 other day speaking about a fear of their mother being
25 subject to cybercrime, a form of abject violence that

1
2 is criminalized, but what about the forms of abject
3 violence that are not criminalized? Do you not place
4 your faith in laws and structures that we've
5 established are deeply systemically racist. Place
6 your faith in the hearts of others. Place your faith
7 in your own conscience, and don't let your own power
8 be beholden to self-hatred and the hatred of others.
9 Think in terms of the fiscal solvency of the NYPD.
10 It's--

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
12 you.

13 PETER TARSON: \$133 million budget--

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
15 you for your testimony. Thank you so much.

16 PETER TARSON: [inaudible] desperation of
17 others.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
19 hear from Sergio Usurin [sp?], followed by Alex
20 Baldwin.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 SERGIO USURIN: Can you see me? Can you
23 hear me?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

25

1
2 SERGIO USURIN: Alright. Unbelievable
3 that this hearing isn't split into two days.
4 Unbelievable that police arrested people marching
5 outside of City Hall during this hearing, but let
6 white supremacists from Long Island demonstrate
7 outside of the courthouse while raising money for
8 Daniel Penny. I'm a survivor of the 9/11 attacks. I
9 also got ran off the road by two undercover cowards
10 in the Bronx while I was on my bicycle last July 4th.
11 Did you know that in February, every single FEPS
12 voucher recipient and their landlord got a letter
13 erroneously stating their vouchers would not be
14 renewed for the next year? You know why that was?
15 According to an HRA staffer, they have been so
16 backlogged with processing renewal requests that the
17 automatic rejection letter system got triggered.
18 Some of those people still have not gotten their
19 vouchers renewed and are months behind on rent as a
20 result. Can you imagine how many landlords called
21 their tenants telling them to come up with months'
22 worth of rent or be evicted? Can you imagine how
23 many tenants who don't know their rights might have
24 self-evicted in the past couple of months because of
25 that? We don't have a migrant crisis in the city.

1 We have a housing as a commodity crisis in the city.
2 We don't have a retail theft crisis in the city, we a
3 Police Department looting our tax dollars crisis.
4 Today, the police held-- foundation held a cocktail
5 reception with some real estate landlords and that is
6 directly indicative of the-- that the real estate
7 developers want New York City to be a playground for
8 the rich and the SRG and the NYPD are their private
9 security. The people of this city deserve a refund
10 from the NYPD. Paying for private hotels for the
11 homeless is a step above having them sleep on the
12 street, but the next step is housing vouchers.
13 Housing vouchers, we need to take the increases the
14 NYPD is demanding and put them into housing vouchers
15 for every New Yorker whether they've been here for
16 decades or arrived here from the border yesterday.
17 We need to disband the SRG yesterday. They just
18 arrested a protestor up the street this morning while
19 countering the Daniel Penny fascists. Abolish the
20 SRG. Defund the NYPD. Refund the people.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 SERGIO USURIN: [inaudible] responding to
24 evictions. Deport Vickie Palladino. Cop City will
25 never be built.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now hear from Alex Baldwin followed by Silas David. 1240

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

ALEX BALDWIN: Hello Council Members. My name is Alex Baldwin. I'm a mutual aid organizer and a resident of District 36. I'd like to start by noting that I have been here since 10:00 a.m. and the way the testimony has been organized today has been honestly counterproductive and disrespectful of our time. But I'm here to urge the City Council to disband the NYPD Strategic Response Group. In December 2014, tens of thousands of New Yorkers, myself included, took to the streets for the Millions March to protest the non-indictment of Eric Garner's killer. The Strategic Response Group was announced just one month later. Ever since, they have been a constant and violent presence at racial justice protests, from the largest marches to groups as small as 15 people. As a protestor, the SRG's arrival is synonymous with escalation and violence. They are well-known for unprovoked uses of force and for disrupting non-violent protests with tactics such as kettling and LRAD [sic] deployment. I have personally witnessed SRG officers hit my fellow

1
2 protestors with bikes, push, shove, and trap
3 protestors with bikes and shields, and grab
4 individuals out of a crowd in order to body slam them
5 to the pavement. While a march I was part of in 2019
6 was crossing the crosswalk towards Barclay Center, I
7 was shoved by multiple SRG officers as they suddenly
8 targeted the person next to me for arrest. And this
9 is just what I have seen in person. Legal observers
10 have documented far worse incidents, including some
11 involving pepper spray and baton beatings. Outside
12 of protests the SRG has shown the same tendencies for
13 violence during homeless encampment sweeps and when
14 murdering Saheed Vassal in Crown Heights in 2018.
15 Others testifying today have been much closer to this
16 violence, and in many cases are direct victims of the
17 SRG, and I beg you to hear them. SRG officers are
18 trained to treat racial justice protestors as enemy
19 combatants. In their bike squad manual protest
20 groups are divided into two categories, peaceful and
21 violent. Black Lives Matter movement is listed as an
22 example of a violent group. The SRGs racial bias is
23 further reflected in the stark contrast in--

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
25 expired.

1
2 ALEX BALDWIN: the policing of racial
3 protestors [sic] versus far right and white
4 supremacist groups, and in the racial demographics of
5 SRG misconduct complaints. The financial cost of
6 this militarized suppression of protests is simply
7 obscene especially amidst the widespread budget cuts
8 we have heard about today. The SRG budget has
9 ballooned over times from \$13 million to an estimated
10 \$133 million, and we don't even know that true number
11 because they don't give us any transparency.
12 Taxpayers also end up shouldering settlement costs of
13 the numerous misconduct lawsuits involving SRG
14 officers. This money can be better spent. We know
15 from decades of research that the best way to keep
16 our community safe is to fund them. A robust social
17 safety net, including many of the programs and
18 institutions other speakers have advocated for today
19 is the key to reducing violence and suffering. The
20 city could easily address both interpersonal and
21 institutional violence by disbanding the Strategic
22 Response Group and reallocating its funding to
23 everyday New Yorkers in our communities. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
25 hear from Silas David followed by Olive Harbor [sp?].

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

3 SILAS DAVID: Mr. Chair, Members of the
4 Committee, my name is Silas David and I'm a proud New
5 Yorker. I come before you today to urge the City
6 Council to reallocate funds from the NYPD Strategic
7 Response Group to programs that are better proven to
8 reduce crime, violence, houselessness, and uplift
9 communities. Since 2015, the SRG spending has surged
10 by nearly 1,000 percent from an initial allocation of
11 \$13 million to currently \$133 million according to
12 some estimates. The SRGs also cost New York City
13 taxpayers in the form of extortion [sic] legal
14 settlements as result of abuse and maltreatment of
15 citizens. New Yorkers deserve better. If we're to
16 be serious about empowering and uplifting our
17 communities, especially those that operate at the
18 margins of our society, we must be willing to
19 adequately assess the efficacy of our actions. That
20 said, what is the efficacy of funneling tens of
21 millions of dollars every year into the SRG? Does it
22 make us safer? Is it reducing crime, houselessness,
23 poverty? Programs that target the conditions that
24 enable crime are better positioned to make us safer,
25 not police. Police don't reduce homelessness,

1
2 affordable housing does. Police don't reduce
3 poverty, economic opportunity and social safety net
4 programs do. With this in mind, I implore to
5 consider reallocating SRG funding toward meaningful
6 programs that are proven to make the quality of life
7 better for all New Yorkers. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll
9 now hear from Olive Harbor followed by Ligia Gualpa.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 OLIVE HARBOR: Hi. My name is Olive
12 harbor and I'm here to urge the City Council to
13 disband the Strategic Response Unit of the NYPD and
14 reinvest its \$133 million dollar budget into services
15 that better support our communities such as housing,
16 education, or literally anything else that you've
17 heard from today. I live in Yorkville, one of the
18 neighborhoods that Eric Adams is deploying the SRG to
19 soon, and my heart is literally in pieces hearing the
20 trauma they've inflicted on those who have testified
21 before me today. Internally I'm feeling really numb.
22 And I like them have waited 12 hours to say the
23 following the words to basically a near empty council
24 room. The SRG, as you've heard, is a rogue, violent,
25 and unaccountable unit of the NYPD whose operations

1
2 are not transparent to the public. The SRG was
3 created as a counter-terror unit. Since then it has
4 been unleashed at protests across New York City,
5 escalating them to traumatic levels of violence on
6 our community members, disproportionately people of
7 color and queer people. The unit treats protestors
8 as enemy combatants and doesn't treat all protests
9 equally. It has consistently identified racial
10 justice, Black Lives Matter and pro-abortion
11 protestors as violent while showing protective bias
12 towards far-right protestors. One example is their
13 consistent protection of anti-abortion religious
14 extremist groups, providing them with an escort every
15 month to march to the Planned Parenthood Clinic in
16 SoHo where they are given free reign to harass
17 patients seeking reproductive healthcare. On the
18 other hand, clinic defenders who work to protect
19 patients from accessing the healthcare that they are
20 legally entitled to have been violently traumatized
21 by the SRG, while the far right groups who antagonize
22 clinic defenders and patients receive much different
23 treatment. As someone who can get pregnant, this is
24 mortifying to say the least, and it honestly makes me
25 laugh every time New York positions itself as an

1 anti-- as a abortion safe haven while this is allowed
2 to continue. And it's infuriating to know that a
3 police unit founded as a so-called anti-terror unit
4 sees the people trying to defend my right to abortion
5 care as terrorists, and I urge the City Council to
6 disband this unit and prevent its budget from
7 remaining in the hands of the NYPD before they're
8 allowed to come into my neighborhood and terrorize it
9 as well.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 OLIVE HARBOR: Finally, it's last on me--
13 it's not lost on me that we were left to testify for
14 the very last after most of the Council has left or
15 that the SRG arrested people today who came to
16 testify in-person near this very hearing. That is
17 all.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
19 hear from Ligia Guallpa followed by Athena Bernkof
20 [sp?].

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 LIGIA GUALLPA: Good evening, Chairperson
23 Justin Brannan and everybody who have been here
24 through this extensive evening. And I'm here just
25 like everybody else requesting to fund our

1 communities, in our case fund workers and not NYPD.
2
3 And as everybody has said, New York City is facing a
4 cost of living crisis. In our experience and as part
5 of a worker center that is called Workers Justice
6 Project, we're seeing day by day how essential
7 workers particularly day laborers who are renovating
8 and building-- renovating New York City buildings in
9 their own neighborhood, they can no longer even
10 afford to live in those neighborhoods where they
11 contribute with their labor. Domestic workers who
12 care for New Yorker families are unable to afford to
13 care and provide to their own children, and we're
14 seeing deliveristas [sic] who are delivering New
15 Yorkers food without being able to afford food to
16 feed their own families. Again and again we're
17 seeing how essential workers, low-wage New Yorkers,
18 immigrant New Yorkers are surviving on poverty wages
19 and depending on jobs that are unsafe, dangerous, and
20 more precarious. New York City has a responsibility
21 to invest, protect, and care for essential workers,
22 low-wage New Yorkers, and every New Yorker who runs
23 our city. Day laborers, deliveristas, house
24 cleaners, everybody in our community needs to ensure
25 that has the resources to live with dignity and work

1
2 with dignity in our city. I'm here begging just like
3 everybody else and urging City Council to invest in
4 our communities. Particularly, Workers Justice is
5 requesting \$5.9 million dollars in the Day Laborer
6 Workforce Initiative--

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
8 expired.

9 LIGIA GUALLPA: And we're also asking to
10 make sure that we continue to keep our centers open,
11 especially as we continue to welcome newly-arrived
12 immigrants and continue to contribute the city. And
13 I'm going to end it there. I think everything has
14 been said. We're all begging to make sure that our
15 communities are not defunded and we continue to
16 invest in the health and the safety of our
17 communities. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Athena
19 Bernkof has dropped. We'll now go to LoriKim
20 Alexander.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 LORIKIM ALEXANDER: Hello. My name is
23 LoriKim Alexander. My pronouns are she/her and
24 we/us/our. I live and work here in New York City,
25 and I have been here for 13 hours now. Other folks

1
2 who are saying that y'all are paid to do this, and we
3 are not. It really, really was not a strategic move
4 to have the most traumatized people go last. Folks
5 have been talking about they're retraumatizing
6 themselves, you are retraumatizing people by doing
7 that. You are making the trauma even more
8 compounded. That is ablist. That is unconscionable.
9 Think about that next time. did you not want other
10 people to hear what's going on? I'm here today as a
11 survivor of multiple incidents of police violence.
12 These range from sexual harassment to most recently
13 physical assault by the Strategic Response Group, the
14 SRG. That was two years ago, which has left me with
15 permanent physical damage and limited mobility in my
16 upper body. I need surgery. I was 21 years old when
17 the Disorder Control Unit brutalized me. that's
18 probably before y'all's time, but it was on the night
19 of October 19th in 1998 when the Disorder Control
20 Unit which is the precursor to the SRG, forced scared
21 and unwilling horses to trample my siblings. I
22 narrowly escaped those broken bones because my best
23 friend pulled me up off the ground because we're
24 sitting on the ground peacefully, and I watched bones
25 break, and I can still hear the screams. That was a

1
2 vigil for Matthew Shepherd who was killed. That has
3 stuck with me my whole life. I am 47 years old.
4 That was 25 years ago. A lot of these people who are
5 testifying now,--

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
7 expired.

8 LORIKIM ALEXANDER: they are in their
9 20s. You want them to have this happen to them for
10 20 more years? You have an opportunity now to stop
11 this. You have an opportunity to disband the SRG.
12 It is possible. Are you waiting for someone else to
13 die? Are you waiting for them to come for you?
14 Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
16 hear from Meryl Ranzer followed by David Jenkins.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 MERYL RANZER: Hi. So, my name is Meryl
19 Ranzer. I'm a mutual aid organizer and an adjunct
20 instructor. After waiting over 13 hours to speak,
21 more than half a day, I'm not even here to talk to
22 you. I'm here in solidarity with my comrades because
23 I know they will hear me, but I know that the City
24 Council will not. Why aren't you asking all of us
25 questions now? Like, people who are-- who have been-

1
2 - who have been waiting for all these hours, not one
3 question. You had all of those questions for
4 nonprofits, but not one question for all the people
5 that you put last. Why? It's not a rhetorical
6 question. I really would like you to answer that. A
7 few hours ago, I believe, a young person testified
8 that their school library is empty, but I'm guessing-
9 - and I'm guessing you're all tweeting about it, you
10 know, the book bans in Florida in solidarity with
11 free speech. It's boring. It's fricking boring. Do
12 something. Mayor Adams has ignored the will of most
13 New Yorkers. The Mayor chooses to add to the corrupt
14 and dangerous NYPD's budget instead of using our tax
15 dollars to feed, house, educate, and provide for the
16 basic needs of long-time New Yorkers and our new
17 migrant arrivals. He uses his platform to sew
18 discord amongst the City's [inaudible]. He lays the
19 blame on the shoulders of migrants, people who come
20 to our city to feel safe and provide for themselves
21 and their families. And personally I have witnessed
22 the racist SRG unit of the NYPD escalating situations
23 and being violent on many occasions when marches are
24 led by black community members. My son who was 11 at
25 the time and I were kettled, and they used their

1
2 bikes to shove us when we crossed the street with a
3 group. He was 11. I have video tape of cops forcing
4 a black man with a crutch to walk up a flight of
5 stairs while he was handcuffed. They took his crutch
6 and then cruelly said he didn't need it, and then
7 forced him into an ambulance that he didn't want to
8 go into. The money spent on policing must be
9 redistributed to service for historically
10 marginalized communities that continue to be under--

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
12 expired.

13 MERYL RANZER: [inaudible] funded. No.
14 Mutual aid groups have provided services and
15 thousands of meals on a teeny tiny shoestring budget
16 that includes not one penny from this city. Still,
17 the Mayor demands cuts from the most vulnerable while
18 he is the pocket of real estate developers, one
19 percent buddies, and the NYPD. My greatest fear here
20 is that the City Council will rubberstamp most of the
21 Mayor's budget cuts and approve more funding for the
22 NYPD. Listen to the people. Be brave. Be bold and
23 take a stand. What the hell is stopping you? Why
24 are only a few of you left in the room, and why
25 doesn't the City Council give a shit about their

1
2 constituents? It's infuriating. The only way to
3 keep New Yorkers safe and have their needs met is to
4 cut the NYPD budget to zero. I'm done.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
6 hear from David Jenkins followed by Carol Yu.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 DAVID JENKINS: Hello. My name is David
9 Jenkins. I'm a lifelong New Yorkers, and today, I am
10 again calling on the City Council to disband the
11 NYPD's brutal, unnecessary Strategic Response Group
12 and directly divert its funding to any, any of the
13 public services fellow New Yorkers have called for
14 today. I also need to underscore just how many of us
15 have time and again spoken on this issue. Meanwhile,
16 today I watched the SRG deploy to disrupt a rally and
17 march called specifically to protest the cruel, anti-
18 democratic display of our city budget process as you
19 allow this brutal austerity budget to be forced down
20 our throat. This morning more were arrested
21 demonstrating against the disgusting display by
22 outside agitators from Long Island celebrating a
23 self-deputized racist murderer that the NYPD
24 protected. That is the context for today. Thank you
25 to those who waited all day in the chamber. You're an

1 inspiration. Rest in peace Claron Buffalo [sp?], yet
2 another victim of our carceral capitalist police
3 state. I first testified at a hearing like this over
4 two years ago in the wake of the 2020 protests. I
5 told the story of a domestic violence incident other
6 bystanders and I intervened on and how police mocked
7 the victim in front of her child and offered her no
8 resources. I testified most recently at the
9 oversight hearing for the SRG on March 1st, which of
10 course, NYPD skipped, where I joined a chorus of New
11 Yorkers in detailing the SRG's abuses, redundancy,
12 and the grim reality that this city handles protest
13 and dissent with jackbooted thugs. I chose not to
14 recount specific stories then, but today I'll give
15 you another one for the record, because it captures
16 the spirit and soul and purpose of the SRG. So last
17 July, I-- a week after the Dobbs decision, I attended
18 the [inaudible] defense held by NYC for Abortion
19 Rights. I'd say the SRG was out of control, but the
20 truth is they were just following their standard
21 operating procedures as we've seen from their training
22 manual and countless other protests. I happened to
23 be on the front line when a very large aggressive SRG
24

1
2 officer leaned in and said to the person next to me,
3 and pardon my language, and--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
5 expired.

6 DAVID JENKINS: Thank you very much.
7 This is just a direct quote from an officer
8 supposedly performing his duties. He leaned in and
9 said, "Go for it, motherfucker. Push back, I want
10 you to go for it." What happened next was caught on
11 several cameras, though the comment was lost in the
12 fray. And a moment later that officer reared back
13 and pushed the whole line of us over backward onto
14 the sidewalk, tree beds, and into the street. So
15 look, if the SRG remains in the city budget and you
16 vote for it, you will be personally hastening our
17 country's descent into fascism. History will judge
18 you for this. Lord knows we already have, and we're
19 not going anywhere, and until your [inaudible]
20 finally start killing us for these testimonies,
21 because that's where this shit is going. Remember
22 that when you vote.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'll now hear from
24 Carol Yu followed by Rasheedah Brown-Harris.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

1
2 CAROL YU: Hi, good evening. My name is
3 Carol. I'm a parent of a 3K parent-- 3K student in
4 the city. I'm also a constituent of Julie Won in
5 District 26. Many parents and I have learned
6 recently that the City is overdue in their payments
7 to 3K providers, and that this delay has crippled,
8 even shut down many providers. In a recent testimony
9 from the Daycare Council of New York, they shared
10 that thanks to your help, the City Council's help,
11 the DOE made a public commitment to pay all providers
12 at least 75 percent of their negotiated contract
13 value for the Fiscal Year of 2022. However, this
14 public declaration has not stopped the crisis. In
15 our recent follow-up analysis based on public
16 information from Checkbook NYC, they uncovered that
17 there is a \$95 million dollar gap between what has
18 been actually paid to providers for their 2022
19 contracts and their guaranteed 75 percent minimum
20 contract value that we just mentioned. There's also
21 a \$398 million dollar gap between what's been paid to
22 providers for the Fiscal Year of 2022 and funds
23 budgeted for their contract. Parents like myself are
24 so grateful for the hardworking and really, really
25 wonderful adults that teach and care for our young

1 kids, and providers such as the one in my locality--
2 actually, several of them have had to dip into their
3 private funds to keep the DOE programs afloat and
4 their staff paid, and those providers that didn't
5 have those means have simply been shut down.

6 Although the testimony I just referred to by the
7 Daycare Council was on February 15th, I asked around
8 to my school, to several in our neighborhood, and
9 they confirmed this month that they still haven't
10 received funds that are owed to them for the City for
11 2022. And so as a taxpayer and citizen, I'm taking
12 this hearing as an opportunity to ask that the DOE
13 resolve all those 2022 payments swiftly, and also
14 that for the 2024 budget, I just ask that the budget
15 accounts for contracted--

16
17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
18 expired.

19 CAROL YU: 3K and Pre-K programs in a way
20 that ensures that the DOE pays early childhood
21 providers in a timely manner so that they can care
22 for our children without the added stress of worrying
23 about capital that is owed to them. Thank you so
24 much for the opportunity to testify on this important
25 issue. Good evening.

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COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now hear from Rasheedah Brown-Harris followed by Noeline Maldonado.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

RASHEEDAH BROWN-HARRIS: Okay, can y'all hear me?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we can.

RASHEEDAH BROWN-HARRIS: Thank you. Peace and blessings. My name is Rasheedah Brown-Harris and I'm testifying on behalf of Legal Services NYC, LSNY, LSNY's Citywide Education Unit. LSNY's model of legal representation is a holistic one. When we take a case we look at all the interlocking issues that impacts a student education and we try to address them. We connect clients to other areas of legal-- civil, legal representation as needed, as well as to community-based resources. We also offer wrap-around representation which means that we are engaged on the school-based levels speaking with school staff and administrative, attending IEP meetings, responding to EMS calls, and attending MVR reviews related to disciplinary actions. We also help families search for appropriate schools for their children. LSNY's Citywide Education Advocacy

1 Project is asking for \$500,000 in council funding for
2 Fiscal Year 2024. Our Education Advocacy Project is
3 made up of a small but highly-experienced team of
4 attorneys and advocates. We also provide education
5 and Know Your Rights training to the community. LSNY
6 co-created the Healing Center Schools Working Group,
7 a group of parents, students, educators, advocates,
8 and mental health providers working to bring healing
9 center practices to our schools. The DOE launched
10 the citywide program to create Parent Healing
11 Ambassadors where over 900 Parent Healing Ambassadors
12 registered citywide in all five boroughs. This is
13 the first and only program of its kind in the nation
14 where a school district actually collaborated with
15 parents to bring Healing Center practices in schools.
16 LSNY continues to work with these Parent Healing
17 Ambassadors even though the DOE's program has ended
18 and support is limited. With your support, we will
19 expand and deepen our holistic model of
20 representation and continue our advocacy on behalf of
21 students with disabilities and those who have
22 experienced trauma. We will continue to address the
23 school to prison pipeline, promote social/emotional
24

1
2 and mental health supports in schools, and address
3 bullying, racism--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
5 expired.

6 RASHEEDAH BROWN-HARRIS: biases in our
7 schools-- let me finish real quick. Just half of a
8 minute. We will continue to address racism and
9 biases in our schools, strengthen our community
10 partnerships, and continue the work to develop
11 Healing Center schools. Your support will help us
12 protect our children and help them succeed during
13 these challenging times, and I think-- I just want to
14 say that we all heard tonight, we can all agree that
15 we need to support our children. There's no better
16 place to start than in our schools. Our youth have
17 the right to be safe physically, socially, and
18 emotionally safe, and our schools have the
19 responsibility to provide this. At LSNY Education
20 Advocacy Project is doing the work. Continue to
21 support us, please, and thank you. Peace and
22 blessings.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
24 hear from Noeline Maldonado. Finally, by Sonni Mun.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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2 NOELINE MALDONADO: Good evening Chairman
3 Brannan and whatever Council Members are left. I'm
4 grateful, though I've had to wait, but I am grateful
5 for the space to be heard and considered tonight. My
6 name is Noeline Maldonado, and I'm the Executive
7 Director of the Healing Center, a grassroots
8 nonprofit in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. And thank you
9 Chairman Brannan for your support on the community
10 level as Council Member for Bay Ridge. For the past
11 23 years, the Healing Center has served the
12 communities within the southwest region of Brooklyn
13 in the intervention and prevention of gender-based
14 violence, family violence, and sexual assault. We
15 provide direct services for clients which include
16 resources, safety planning, educational awareness,
17 supportive counseling, food cards, supplements, rent
18 and utilities relief, and support groups for
19 survivors. Last week, the Healing Center advocated
20 for and helped prevent one of our clients and her two
21 special needs children from being displaced and
22 shuffled into the shelter system. So, let's keep in
23 mind that domestic violence is one of the leading
24 causes of homelessness in New York City. This is one
25 of many examples of the impact we're making in the

1
2 community, one person at a time. Youth program is
3 also central to the work of the Healing Center. We
4 run the Daughters of the Lotus Program, a group that
5 empowers teenagers-- teenage girls between the ages
6 of 13 to 18 to educate them regarding healthy versus
7 unhealthy relationships as a deterrent to teen dating
8 violence, which we know is the antecedent to violence
9 in adult relationships. This program is currently
10 funded by the DOVE Initiative, and an increase in
11 funds is needed given the rise of abuse and sexual
12 assault in our communities. Small, tenacious
13 organization like ours is an organization that keeps
14 the pulse on the social justice needs present at the
15 local level. So the Healing Center also hosts the
16 New York City Teen Dating Violence Awareness Walk
17 every April. Teens and adults rally in Brooklyn and
18 march over the Brooklyn Bridge to advocate for
19 awareness around the issues of relationship and
20 violence in adolescence. So, in addition, the
21 Healing Center provides child witness--

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
23 expired.

24 NOELINE MALDONADO: [inaudible] witnesses
25 of domestic violence. As mentioned, we receive

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2 funding from the DOVE initiative, Safe Communities
3 Initiative-- just a couple of seconds-- and DFTA
4 among other discretionary funds, and we're advocating
5 for continued and increased funds. The amount we
6 received has not increased in tandem with the rise in
7 need for services. Lastly, we know that the influx
8 of asylum-seekers will undoubtedly increase the need
9 for services to combat gender-based violence and
10 sexual assault in the changing landscape of our
11 communities. Thank you and good night.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
13 hear from Sonni Mun.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 SONNI MUN: Hi, can you hear me?

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we can.

17 SONNI MUN: Can you hear me? Okay. I
18 just want to start off by saying that I am incredibly
19 angry, so do not even think about cutting me off. I
20 just want to make it very clear to you that the way
21 that these constituents are being treated is
22 shameful. So I have two messages, and then I'm going
23 to continue talking. First, I want the SRG defunded.
24 Second, this is shameful and I want you to tell every
25 single member who couldn't be bothered to stick

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2 around that they should be ashamed of themselves. So
3 let me go back to who I am. My name is Sonni Mun. I
4 am a long-term resident of New York City. I moved
5 here in 1996 to do residency, and I practiced
6 medicine throughout New York City's hospital. I am
7 now a Chief Medical Officer of a small technology
8 company. During the height of the COVID pandemic and
9 during lock-down, when they asked for people to help,
10 I volunteered and I worked my regular job Monday
11 through Friday from home, and I went to the hospital
12 on weekends and volunteered as a physician taking
13 care of people who were dying for no pay. Then when
14 the vaccine was available, I volunteered every
15 weekend. I personally vaccinated about a thousand New
16 Yorkers. I also volunteered and served in the
17 Community Education Council. I volunteer for Moms
18 [inaudible] Action, Gays Against Guns, and Open
19 Hearts, an anti-NIMBI [sic] group so that unhoused
20 people can get housing in all areas where there's
21 resources. I know how these things work, and you
22 guys knew how many people were signed up, and these
23 people are very angry, and you did this on purpose,
24 and you couldn't care less about what anybody's
25 saying, because I know nobody's paying attention, and

1
2 how dare you? How dare you? Let me tell you what
3 happened to me. I am five feet tall, 105 pounds. My
4 first experience with the SRG was last year, or
5 whenever the George Floyd protests. I happened to be
6 standing on the sidewalk with a bunch of other
7 protestors peacefully standing on the sidewalk.
8 Without a warning they-- the police rushed us and
9 they hit me with a baton as I was running away. I
10 had a bruise on my arm. I have videos and I have
11 pictures. I was not-- they didn't even tell us or
12 warn us. I am-- you know, I'm like the average New
13 Yorker. I live three blocks from where you guys are
14 right now. I live in the Financial District. I pay
15 taxes, and yet, the police are supposed to protect
16 and serve us? Beat me for standing on the sidewalk
17 during the protest without a warning. The way that
18 you're going to get more people radicalized and to
19 hate the police is by doing exactly what you're
20 doing, because you've radicalized me. Just within
21 the span of these 12 hours I've become even angrier
22 listening to you. You guys had a high school student
23 begging for books, and I am ashamed to be in the same
24 city with a government that callously lets a high
25 school student beg for physics books, and then pays

1 for a police unit that thinks that we're the enemy.
2 These kids-- most of the kids who were testifying
3 today are younger than me, and a lot of them are
4 students-- they are the heroes. They're actually
5 doing what good citizens are supposed to do. They're
6 actively participating in government and their civic
7 duties. They should be applauded instead of
8 attacked, brutalized, and traumatized and ignored.
9 They're what gives me hope, not you. The last-- and
10 this is my final thing I want to-- again, I was
11 personally attacked by the police for no reason. On
12 May 8th I went to the vigil for Jordan Neely. I was
13 appalled because I have never seen so many police for
14 a relatively small group of people. We were
15 literally lighting candles. At one point when it was
16 getting really, really volatile, I stepped to the
17 side and said to one of the senior policeman that I
18 always see in my neighborhood, because I volunteer
19 for a lot things, and I stepped up to him as an adult
20 to adult, I said, "Listen, you guys are making things
21 worse. You're escalating it. The police are clearly
22 trying to agitate things. Please, I beg you. They
23 just need 20 minutes to just come to terms and have
24 some closure. They just want to finish their vigil.
25

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2 Can you-- it would help everybody if you could tell
3 the other policeman to just stop yelling at them,
4 stop antagonizing everybody." And he barely glanced
5 at me and he said no, and then within 15 minutes of
6 that, the police violently attacked people who were
7 at a peaceful vigil. I brought up the fact that I'm a
8 medical doctor, because I noticed that there was a
9 young black man who was bleeding from his forehead
10 standing by the police van, and he had a huge bruise
11 and he looked a little dazed. I was very concerned
12 that he had a concussion. I started screaming for
13 medical attention, and the crowd also started
14 screaming for medical attention and they ignored us.
15 There was not a single violent person at that
16 protest-- at the vigil. It wasn't even a protest.
17 They caused an injury, and when I said that man needs
18 medical attention, he could have a concussion, they
19 ignored us. I also saw them arresting an older man,
20 a black man, of course it was a black man, who was
21 using cane and they had him on the ground. You guys
22 should be ashamed of yourselves. This isn't about--
23 like, even if it wasn't taking up too much budget,
24 you have people begging for basic necessities and yet
25 you're funding people who are terrorizing your

1
2 community and making you distrust not just the
3 police, but the government. You are doing yourselves
4 a disservice by acting like you don't care. I've done
5 everything possible to help this city because I love
6 New York City. I moved here [inaudible] and I'll
7 never leave, but I-- at the minimum, you should
8 actually care about your constituents. At the
9 minimum you should be ashamed that these thugs are
10 attacking people who are trying to peacefully observe
11 the passing of somebody who had such a difficult
12 life. And I am ashamed that you guys did nothing
13 about this outside agitator coming today to basically
14 say that they support judicial executions. If you
15 really care about law and order, then how could you
16 be okay with that? And also, I'm Asian. Everybody's
17 talking about all the anti-Asian crime, and don't use
18 my Asian-ness [sic] to push more police, because I
19 know that that's not what safety is about. And the
20 word safety has come to mean a lot of different
21 things besides actually safe-- being safe in a
22 community. I want to be safe because we have the
23 resources and we care about each other, not fighting
24 for some scrap of dignity that our government won't
25 give us.

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

SONNI MUN: I'm going to stop here now.

No, do not ever interrupt me again. I'm done now, but I will be back, and I just want you to again let your colleagues know they should be ashamed of themselves, because I am.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

SONNI MUN: No, you're not thankful for me, and I'm not thankful for you. You-- I'm just asking you to do your job.

CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Okay, with that it's a wrap, FY24 Executive Budget hearings are adjourned. Thank you.

[gave]

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COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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 June 29, 2023