

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

JOINTLY WITH

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY

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September 24, 2024
Start: 1:07 p.m.
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HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - COMMITTEE ROOM, 16TH FLOOR

B E F O R E: Althea V. Stevens, Chairperson of
the Committee on Children and Youth

Farrah N. Louis, Chairperson of
the Committee on Women and Gender
Equity

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND
YOUTH:

Rita C. Joseph
Linda Lee
Julie Menin
Chi A. Ossé
Nantasha M. Williams

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER
EQUITY:

Tiffany Cabán
Kevin C. Riley
Inna Vernikov

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
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A P P E A R A N C E S

Jess Dannhauser, Commissioner of the
Administration for Children's Services

Elvita Dominique, Executive Director of the
Office of Equity Strategies at Administration for
Children Services

Steven Gordon, Director of LGBTQAI+ Equity
Strategies within the Administration for Children
Services Office of Equity Strategies

Dr. Amy Wilkerson, Assistant Commissioner for
Runaway and Homeless Youth at New York City
Department of Youth and Community Development

Ronald Porcelli, Director of the New York City
Unity Project at the Mayor's Office of Equity and
Racial Justice

Erin Beth Harrist, Director of the Legal Aid
Society's LGBTQ+ Unit, and the Juvenile Rights
Practice

Nadia Swanson, Director of Advocacy and Technical
Assistance at the Ali Forney Center

Galloway, Advocacy Manager at the Ali Forney
Center

Luna Floyd, Legal Fellow at Lambda Legal Defense
and Education Fund

Pedro Gonzalez

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Tabitha Commonis

Elizabeth Saracco, Integrated Treatment Model
Director at the Children's Village and the Co-
Chair for the agency's LGBTQ+ Staff Affinity
Group

1
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone
3 check for the Committee on Women and Gender, located
4 on the 16th floor, recorded on 09/24/24, recorded by
5 James Marino.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, and
7 welcome to the New York City Council hearing of the
8 Committees on Children and Youth jointly with Women
9 and Gender Equity.

10 At this time, can everybody please
11 silence your cell phones.

12 If you wish to testify, please go up to
13 the Sergeant-at-Arms desk to fill out a testimony
14 slip.

15 At this time and going forward, no one is
16 to approach the dais. I repeat, no one is to approach
17 the dais.

18 Thank you for your cooperation.

19 Chair, we are ready to begin.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Good afternoon,
21 and welcome to today's hearing on addressing needs of
22 LGBTQ youth in the City Child Welfare System. I am
23 Althea Stevens, Chair of Children and Youth Services.
24 I am joined by my Colleague, Council Member Farrah
25 Louis, Chair of Women and Gender Equity.

1
2 Today we will discuss how ACS, DYCD, and
3 the Unity Project can collaborate to ensure that
4 LGBTQ+ youth in the foster care system are supported
5 with safe, affirming homes.

6 We will also be hearing four bills
7 related to increasing transparency, reporting, and
8 accountability in the foster care practices. Intro.
9 008, sponsored by Deputy Speaker Ayala, and today is
10 her birthday. This bill will require ACS to report
11 the main allegations that lead cases into
12 investigation for children, abuse, or neglect. Intro.
13 056, sponsored by Council Member Ossé. This bill will
14 mandate ACS to survey foster youth on their LGBTQ+
15 and racial identity and report annually on such
16 responses. Intro. 0081, sponsored by Member Riley.
17 This bill will require the ACS to conduct quarterly
18 audits of foster care placement notification. Council
19 Member Hudson is introducing a bill. This bill will
20 expand the foster care youth experience survey to
21 include questions about the treatment of LGBTQ+ youth
22 regarding their gender expressions, gender identity,
23 sex characteristics, and sexual orientation.

24 LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately
25 represented in the foster care system and often

1 because of family rejection and social prejudices.
2
3 Tragically, instead of finding refuge, many face
4 further discrimination and isolation within the
5 foster care. Those who feel unsafe frequently end up
6 in the homeless and youth shelter system, an already
7 overburdened safety net. This underscores the urgent
8 need for affirming placement with long-term support
9 systems that help those youth thrive as they
10 transition into adulthood. ACS has developed policies
11 to protect affirming LGBTQ youth, including a
12 commitment for staff to model appropriate affirming
13 behavior at all times. However, despite those
14 commitments, serious claims of abuse such as staff
15 refusing to choose to use the names of and having
16 transphobic comments continue to surface. These
17 incidents make it clear that having policies on paper
18 aren't enough. A focus of today's hearing is
19 understanding how ACS is enforcing the accountability
20 mechanisms and functions or not functioning. It is
21 not enough to issue guidelines. We need robust
22 systems that ensure compliance, swiftly addressing
23 violations, and implementing corrected action.
24 (cough) I'm sorry. I'm just a little under weather,
25 guys. In response to those issues, the Ali Forney

Center has announced a promising new agreement with ACS to prevent abuse and create safety, more affirming home environment for LGBTQ youth and foster youth. We are looking forward to hearing more about this agreement and how it will be implemented and enforced.

To achieve meaningful changes, we must ensure that ACS and DYCD staff, foster parents, and service providers receive comprehensive ongoing trainings on the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. This training should be beyond the basics, fostering a deep, unwavering commitment to treatment of those young people with the respect and dignity and cultural competencies they deserve. By creating affirming homes, enforcing policies, ensuring accountability, and supporting LGBTQ youth as they transition out of care, we can build a child welfare system that truly protects and uplifts all young people regardless of their identities. Thank you.

I'd like to thank my Committee Staff, Christina, Elizabeth, and the entire A team, because we are the Sweet 16, for the hard work in preparing for this hearing.

Now I'd like to turn it over to my Co-Chair, Council Member Louis, for her opening statements.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you, Chair Stevens, and good afternoon, everyone.

I'm Council Member Farrah Louis, Chair on the Committee of Women and Gender Equity. I'd like to begin by thanking my Colleague, Chair Althea Stevens of the Committee on Children and Youth, for holding this important hearing. I would also like to welcome everyone who is joining us here this afternoon. We appreciate your time and participation.

Under the best of circumstances, foster care poses many challenges for the children and youth who are participants within the system. We know that children in foster care enter the system with unique histories, including those of trauma and, in some cases, abuse. Add to that an overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ youth who are often thought of as the others. Within a system of others, if you will, we have a group of youngsters who are in need of care, understanding, compassion, education, and, when necessary, behavioral health supports. In 2021, the ACS LGBTQAI+ Action Plan reported that LGBTQAI youth

1 were overrepresented in foster care, representing
2 over one-third of the foster care population, and
3 were more often youth of color. LGBTQAI+ youth
4 reported having experienced little to no control over
5 their lives in foster care and reported having heard
6 staff refer to them as being hard to place. These
7 youth reported feelings as they had very little
8 support and were found to suffer from higher rates of
9 depression and reported experiencing fewer feelings
10 of optimism when compared to non-LGBTQIA youth in the
11 foster care system. At this hearing, the Committees
12 look forward to hearing from the Administration about
13 the current policies and practices in place to
14 address reported incidents of safety and
15 discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ youth in the foster
16 care system, particularly the plans contained within
17 the agreement between ACS and the Ali Forney Center.
18 The Committees are also interested in hearing from
19 the Administration and members of the public and
20 other interested stakeholders, including those who
21 have lived experiences, who have taken the time to
22 come here today to join us, and we thank you again.
23
24
25

1
2 I would also like to thank my own Staff,
3 as well as those of the joining Committee who worked
4 so hard to prepare this hearing.

5 Finally, I'd like to thank Women and
6 Gender Equity Committee Staff, Legislative Council
7 Sahar Moazami; Senior Legislative Policy Analyst
8 Cristy Dwyer; Veda Yagnik, the Finance Analyst; and
9 Rose Martinez, Assistant Deputy Director of Data
10 Operations Unit.

11 I will now pass it back to Chair Stevens.
12 Thank you.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: [GAVEL] I forgot
14 to gavel in. It's been a morning, guys. Bear with me.

15 I would like to recognize my colleagues
16 who have joined us, Council Member Riley, Council
17 Member Lee, Council Member Joseph, and Council Member
18 Ossé.

19 I would like to turn it over to Council
20 Member Riley to say remarks about his bill.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair
22 Stevens, and thank you, Chair Louis, for holding this
23 much important hearing today. Good afternoon to
24 everyone in here with us today.

1
2 The Administration for Children's
3 Services and Foster Care System play a critical role
4 in safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable children
5 who, due to various circumstances, cannot remain in
6 their biological homes. The efficiency of this system
7 is often hindered by a lack of comprehensive data
8 collection and transparency. By gathering and
9 analyzing foster care placement data, we can better
10 understand the experiences of children in care to
11 identify patterns, enhance child welfare, enable
12 data-driven decisions, and ultimately improve
13 outcomes. Comprehensive data on foster care placement
14 notices will improve the systematic tracking of
15 child's progress, needs, and outcomes so we can
16 create the stability that every child needs to
17 thrive. With detailed records, social workers and
18 policymakers can identify patterns such as the
19 effectiveness of specific interventions or the
20 prevalence of key issues like mental health concerns.
21 This information can guide targeted support systems
22 services, ultimately leading to better health,
23 educational, and social outcomes for our city's
24 children in care. Increasing transparency in the
25 foster care placement process can help foster

1
2 families to feel more informed and involved, reducing
3 the likelihood of placement disruptions and
4 increasing stability that is crucial for a child's
5 development. Transparency in placement will not only
6 help to protect vulnerable children, but also foster
7 trust within the community among stakeholders. Making
8 strides for accountability in foster care placement
9 is essential for fostering trust among stakeholders,
10 including children, biological families, foster
11 parents, and the wider community. Furthermore, this
12 bill will hold agencies responsible to meet
13 deadlines, ensuring that they adhere to best
14 practices and prioritize the well-being of the
15 children they serve. Steps taken to enhance oversight
16 work towards a more effective and compassionate
17 foster care system. Increasing foster care data
18 collection and ensuring transparent and accountable
19 placement is not just a bureaucratic necessity, but a
20 moral imperative. Increasing data collection will
21 also benefit biological families striving to
22 reconnect with their children. By maintaining
23 comprehensive records, the system can provide
24 biological parents with clear insights into where
25 their child was placed in foster care and the

1
2 timeline for reconnecting with their children.
3 Detailed data on foster care placement can reveal
4 gaps in the system in such areas with high foster
5 care demands, but insufficient foster homes. The
6 well-being of the vulnerable children depends on our
7 commitment to embracing data-driven decisions and
8 transparent practices so it is imperative that we
9 take legislative action to support them. I urge you
10 to support this important legislation and help pave
11 the way for building a foster care system that is not
12 only more efficient, but also more equitable and
13 compassionate. Thank you, Chairs, for allowing me to
14 give my remarks today.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you,
16 Council Member Riley.

17 I would like to acknowledge Council
18 Member Cabán, who is online, Council Member Williams,
19 and Council Member Vernikov.

20 I would like to hand it over to Council
21 Member Ossé to say remarks for his bill.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair
23 Stevens and Chair Lous and, Chair Stevens, I hope you
24 feel better. I know going through a Committee hearing
25 while feeling under the weather isn't the most fun.

1
2 I just wanted to share a couple remarks
3 in regards to my bill, which is being heard today,
4 Introduction 56. As many people may know in this
5 room, it has long been known that LGBTQ youth are
6 more likely to end up in our foster care system where
7 their needs are often not met. This is a compounding
8 trauma, many times following years of abuse and
9 neglect in and outside of the home. Government has a
10 responsibility to care for these young people. We
11 have a responsibility to be able to provide the best
12 possible care as well, to adequately equip ourselves
13 with the resources to tackle a problem. We need to
14 understand its scope. Intro. 56 will provide much
15 needed transparency on LGBTQ youth entering and
16 moving through the system. I encourage many of my
17 colleagues who may not be on the bill to please sign
18 on, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge
19 all of the advocates and non-profit organizations who
20 have been pushing for legislation like this one,
21 hearings like this one, and have really been sounding
22 the alarm on this issue. Without you, we would not be
23 making the progress that we are making today, and we
24 would not be achieving some of the goals that we have
25 set out to achieve in the future. Thank you.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: At this time,
3 I'll turn it over to Committee Counsel to administer
4 the oath.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Hi, good
6 afternoon. Please raise your right hand.

7 Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole
8 truth, and nothing but the truth before this
9 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
10 questions?

11 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOMINIQUE: Yes.

13 DIRECTOR GORDON: Yes.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you.
15 You may begin when ready.

16 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Good afternoon.
17 I'm Jess Dannhauser, the Commissioner of the
18 Administration for Children's Services. Thank you,
19 Chair Stevens, allow me to add my hope for you
20 feeling better soon, Chair Louis, and Members of the
21 Children and Youth Committee and the Women and Gender
22 Equity Committee for holding today's hearing on this
23 very important issue of addressing the needs of
24 LGBTQ+ youth in the City's child welfare system. I'm
25 pleased to be joined today by Elvita Dominique, who

1
2 is the Executive Director of the ACS Office of Equity
3 Strategies, Steven Gordon, the Director of LGBTQAI+
4 Equity Strategies within the ACS Office of Equity
5 Strategies, along with our colleagues from DYCD and
6 the Unity Project in the Mayor's Office.

7 It is of utmost importance to ACS that
8 all youth and families who come into contact with ACS
9 are treated in an affirming manner. We have taken
10 important steps to continuously strengthen our
11 efforts to do this, and I look forward to sharing
12 this important work with you today.

13 ACS is committed to providing high-
14 quality services and improving outcomes for LGBTQAI+
15 youth in foster care. ACS has a dedicated LGBTQAI+
16 Equity Strategies Director, who I introduced earlier.
17 Steven is responsible for policy, best practices, and
18 guidance for serving LGBTQAI+ children, youth, and
19 families engaged with ACS across our entire sector.
20 The LGBTQAI+ Equity Strategies team focuses on
21 ensuring all ACS and provider agency staff treat all
22 youth and families equitably and with empathy,
23 regardless of sexual orientation or gender
24 expression. In 2012, ACS was one of the first, if not
25 the first, child welfare agency in the country to

1
2 develop and implement a policy specifically aimed at
3 promoting safe and respectful environments for
4 LGBTQAI+ youth and their families. In 2013, ACS
5 released a Best Practice Guidance for Serving
6 Transgender and Nonconforming Children and Youth,
7 which was updated in 2017. The policy and guidance
8 laid out ACS' commitment to providing all youth and
9 families served by ACS and our provider agencies with
10 a safe, healthy, inclusive, affirming, and
11 discrimination-free environment. Our policy requires
12 LGBTQAI+ youth have access to gender-appropriate
13 bedrooms, bathrooms, grooming, and hygiene products.
14 Additionally, contracted foster care providers must
15 recruit and support foster homes that are LGBTQAI+-
16 affirming. Youth are also entitled to healthcare,
17 including hormone replacement therapy and gender-
18 affirming surgeries, which ACS will pay for if
19 Medicaid will not. ACS also provides staff and
20 contracted provider staff with LGBTQAI+-specific
21 trainings. With the policy as a foundation, ACS and
22 our providers have spent the past decade-plus
23 strengthening our practice, enhancing training
24 opportunities, and providing technical assistance to
25 our staff and provider agencies. All ACS and ACS

1 provider agency direct service staff, direct service
2 staff supervisors, and foster parents are required to
3 participate in the ACS LGBTQAI+ training upon
4 orientation and every two years thereafter. ACS
5 remains committed to creating and nurturing a safe
6 and affirming environment where all young people can
7 thrive, no matter their sexual orientation or gender
8 identity and expression.
9

10 ACS also contracts with 14 residential
11 foster care programs that all provide affirming
12 placements for LGBTQAI+ youth, including five group
13 homes operated by SCO, which are specifically
14 dedicated to LGBTQAI+ youth. All youth in foster care
15 have access to individual counseling, educational
16 support, health and wellness services, and a Fair
17 Futures coach while they're in care and after.

18 In 2021, after an initial survey and
19 focus groups found that more than one out of three
20 youth in foster care ages 13 to 20 identifies as
21 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or
22 questioning, agender, or asexual or intersex, which
23 is disproportionate to the general population, ACS
24 released an action plan to strengthen our work,
25 specifically as it relates to youth in foster care.

1 The action plan included a dedicated LGBTQAI+
2 committee as part of the larger ACS Youth Leadership
3 Council, working with foster care providers on foster
4 parent recruitment strategies and training, updating
5 the 2012 policy, strengthening training for staff,
6 adding SOGI questions to the annual survey of youth
7 in foster care, and strengthening the services and
8 supports for LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care. ACS has
9 made a great deal of progress since the release of
10 the action plan.
11

12 In addition to the creation of the YLC
13 committee, we've created new trainings for staff,
14 both a foundational training and the refresher
15 training, and for foster parents as well. We've
16 continued to fund the LGBTQ Center and the Ackerman
17 Institute, who train clinicians to support ACS-
18 involved families, organized and facilitated LGBTQAI+
19 events for ACS staff and provider agency staff, and
20 the LGBTQAI+ unit of the Office of Equity Strategies
21 has provided ongoing technical assistance across the
22 agency and our provider community. We also added SOGI
23 questions to our annual youth experience survey, and
24 in the most recent survey, 2024, 35 percent of the
25 youth surveyed did not identify as heterosexual.

1
2 We are also in the process of updating
3 our policy, which when completed will be more user-
4 friendly and incorporate a stronger emphasis on the
5 needs of trans and gender non-binary, non-conforming
6 youth in the policy itself. We have sought external
7 stakeholder and youth comments on the policy
8 throughout the drafting process and look forward to
9 releasing the policy for more formal comment in the
10 coming year.

11 Finally, the Office of Equity Strategies
12 team remains an ongoing resource of support, both
13 within ACS and to our stakeholders. In any instance
14 where there is a concern about the treatment of a
15 young person or family, it should be immediately
16 brought to their attention so that it can be
17 appropriately addressed. ACS continues to have
18 LGBTQAI+ point people, identified champions at our
19 foster care provider agencies. These point people are
20 empowered and trained to report any complaints or
21 concerns. If there is an incident, providers share a
22 summary, case information, and the staff involved so
23 that ACS can speak with all parties and
24 collaboratively develop a plan to respond. This past
25 summer, our colleagues at the Ali Forney Center

1
2 approached ACS with their experience, which brought
3 to bear that there are additional efforts that ACS
4 needed to make both internally and with our providers
5 and throughout the child welfare continuum. We are
6 grateful to the Ali Forney Center for the ongoing
7 collaboration and our shared commitment to work
8 together to strengthen our practice.

9 Since coming together this summer, ACS
10 has taken additional steps to address the concerns
11 raised. This includes the ACS Division of Child
12 Protection has identified LGBTQAI+ champions and
13 point people from across our borough offices and our
14 emergency services office. The Office of Equity
15 Strategies will be regularly meeting with the point
16 people to provide information on best engagement
17 practices and promote ACS's existing mandatory
18 LGBTQAI+ policy and youth engagement trainings. The
19 Office of Equity Strategies is attending DCP zone
20 debriefing meetings to provide information and
21 presentations on best practices of engagement with
22 LGBTQAI+ youth. The ACS Division of Child Protection
23 is creating a strategy for centralizing complaints
24 from RHY providers and flagging those complaints so
25 they are reported directly to ACS senior leadership,

1 up to and including myself. The Office of Equity
2 Strategies has reached out to the State to flag the
3 issue of SCR workers deadnaming and misgendering
4 youth. The Office of Equity Strategies is currently
5 working with the ACS Division of Prevention Services
6 to discuss how to enhance services for LGBTQAI+ youth
7 and their families. Finally, ACS is also taking steps
8 to strengthen our partnership and relationship with
9 DYCD's RHY providers so that we can collaborate on
10 serving needs of any young person we are partnering
11 to serve.
12

13 ACS appreciates the City Council's
14 ongoing interest in our work, and we look forward to
15 discussing the three bills from today's hearing in
16 more detail. Intro. 56-2024 will require ACS to
17 conduct an annual survey of youth in foster care
18 regarding their LGBTQ status and racial identities
19 and their foster care placements. ACS appreciates the
20 Council's interest in this type of information
21 regarding the youth in foster care and look forward
22 to discussing ways to enhance the current annual
23 survey of foster youth required pursuant to Local Law
24 146 of 2016, which is published annually as the Youth
25 Experience Survey.

1
2 Intro. 8-2024 will require ACS to report
3 on allegation types in child protection reports. This
4 bill would include allegation types that are not
5 specifically included in State law and would not be
6 able to be reported in the manner detailed in the
7 State statute and State database ACS is required to
8 use. Specifically, the State allegation is
9 drug/alcohol misuse and the proposed legislation
10 would require reporting marijuana-related allegations
11 separately, which is not feasible. Notably, the use
12 of marijuana is not an actual allegation of abuse or
13 maltreatment. For any substance misuse, legal or
14 illegal substance, it is the impact of the misuse on
15 the ability to care for the child that could create
16 maltreatment. ACS looks forward to further
17 discussions of this bill with the Council.

18 Intro. 81-2024 would require ACS to
19 conduct quarterly audits of foster care placement
20 change notifications. Informing Council when children
21 have placement changes is critically important. ACS
22 looks forward to discussing with the City Council
23 ways to enhance our practice to ensure Council is
24 aware of placement changes.

1
2 It is of utmost importance that all youth
3 and families we serve are treated and cared for in an
4 affirming manner. We are committed to ongoing
5 training and technical assistance for our staff,
6 provider staff, and foster parents as well as
7 services and supports for youth and families so that
8 we can make sure that this is the manner in which all
9 youth who come into contact with us are treated. We
10 look forward to the ongoing partnership with the Ali
11 Forney Center so that we can benefit their expertise
12 in this area, and we look forward to this
13 conversation today. Thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, and
15 thank you for your testimony.

16 I'm going to jump right into it, and I'll
17 just start with last year as the Chair of Children
18 and Youth and having ACS added, it was my first year
19 to host Shadow Day here at Chambers. It was amazing.
20 We had a lot of really amazing young people, but one
21 of the things that was most alarming to me was one of
22 the young people, she came in with a list of
23 legislation. Yeah, she had a list of legislation and
24 was very adamant about her treatment in foster care,
25 and a lot of the treatment was because she identified

1
2 as LGBTQ, and so that sparked my interest in the
3 sense of, like, well, what is really happening in
4 these homes. I know we have a lot of questions around
5 some of the policies for staff, but I was more
6 curious about the side of how are we recruiting for
7 these families and what does this look like, so my
8 first round of questions is going to kind of focus
9 more on that because, like I said, it was just kind
10 of alarming with some of the things that she
11 experienced and feeling like there was nowhere for
12 her to turn and get support. There was a whole other
13 host of other things that they talked about that
14 we'll be having another hearing on, but I just want
15 to say I wanted to just uplift her because the
16 courage for her to come in and not only have
17 legislation, but also was able to kind of talk very
18 freely about that experience and, as always, Ali
19 Forney, who I love and partner in this work that I've
20 been doing since I started, their report also
21 highlighted a lot of this stuff as well so thank you,
22 Ali Forney, for putting together your report as well.
23 But my first question is, at what stage of the foster
24 care intake process is a young person asked to

1
2 identify as LGBTQ+, and does the young person have an
3 input on their foster care placement?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: First of all,
5 thank you, and thank you for uplifting that young
6 person. We, too, are meeting with young people,
7 hearing from them, understanding their experience,
8 and trying to make it as affirming as possible in all
9 of their experiences and their full life.

10 We do not ask for that information upon
11 entry into placement. We have determined that the
12 better way to approach understanding the needs of
13 young people is for our staff to get to know them
14 well, obviously the case planners at provider
15 agencies, coaches now, who I think are an even safer
16 place for young people to have conversations because
17 they're not responsible for things like court and
18 other parts of the foster care system. We also
19 provide them Know Your Rights pamphlets, which
20 include contact information for equity strategies and
21 for Steven and his office to make sure that young
22 people know there is a place to turn. You need
23 redundancies when you're working with young people. I
24 know I'm talking to someone who works with young
25 people a lot, right, and so we are constantly trying

1
2 to reinforce the message that they're available, that
3 we are available, that we are listening so we have
4 activities to bring young people together. Young
5 people are our best recruiters of other young people
6 to get them to the table to understand that there are
7 supports here. We start in the placement process, of
8 course, by first by looking for family, and so about
9 half of young people who come into our care are going
10 directly to a family member. That doesn't mean that
11 that is necessarily a family member who's fully
12 trained. Those family members do get trained before
13 they become fully certified foster parents.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And just really
15 quickly, even to think about that, and I know you
16 guys have made a huge effort to place young people in
17 family care, and that has been really important, but
18 let's say that is the case. Does a young person,
19 would they be able to say, that's not a good person?

20 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Absolutely.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

22 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Absolutely.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What does that
24 look like?

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So our child
3 protective specialists are having that conversation
4 with them if they're coming into care as a teenager
5 so it's a...

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So only if you're
7 a teenager.

8 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: With all young
9 people, so it depends on sort of the young person's
10 developmental stage. We usually engage parents. We
11 engage the young person. We'll engage siblings to
12 really understand who in their life do they trust so
13 that's the first question if we're moving towards
14 placement. There are child safety conferences where
15 this is discussed. Sometimes families will, someone
16 will step forward right away, sometimes it'll happen
17 weeks later, but we absolutely make sure young
18 people, if they don't feel safe going to a family
19 member, we're not going to send them there.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. What's the
21 cultural competency training do foster care parents
22 receive to ensure that they're providing any
23 affirming homes for LGBTQ youth? Is their training
24 part of a broader (INAUDIBLE) of foster care
25 parenting or is there a standalone course focused on

1 best practices for caring for LGBT youth foster care?

2 Also, please be specific whether the training is
3 delivered online, in person, and is it repeated
4 annually?
5

6 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So every foster
7 parent is trained in our foundational training, and
8 it's repeated twice a year. The foster care agencies
9 are typically delivering that training. We work with
10 Planned Parenthood to update that training and help
11 us to create the best possible contemporary training
12 for this. I'm going to ask Steven to talk a little
13 bit about what we do with Planned Parenthood, but
14 every single foster parent has to agree that they're
15 affirming. It doesn't mean that that is something we
16 just assume. We ongoingly assess that and go through
17 the training, and then they do it every two years,
18 all staff as well.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. I would
20 like to acknowledge Council Member Menin who's also
21 joined us.

22 DIRECTOR GORDON: Thank you, Commissioner.
23 Also, I want to point out that so upon...

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You can pull your
25 chair up. You don't have to scootch over. It's okay.

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DIRECTOR GORDON: Thank you.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We're real tight today, so we're family.

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DIRECTOR GORDON: I appreciate that. Thank you. So, upon orientation, every single foster parent has to take this LGBTQAI+ foster parent training. The staff that provide this training, when they're certified to do that, they're also trained to look for red flags for foster parents that might be unaffirming, or they may be seeing trends of homophobia, transphobia, so that they can then alert the foster care agency's leadership to say maybe this foster parent isn't right, maybe this foster parent should not be certified. In that training, the foster parents learn how to talk to their foster children, no matter what the age, about their sexual orientation and gender identity. They learn to talk about body parts, to talk about gender pronouns, to engage young people about their interests in a gender-neutral way. After that initial training is done, every foster parent also signs what we call an Affirming Home Pledge, which just states that I will accept my LGBTQAI+ foster child for who they are. Children in our foster homes are made aware that if

1
2 there are issues, they can seek out their case
3 planner, and they can also seek out the Office of
4 Equity Strategies as a mechanism of support.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What's the
6 expectation around them reaching out? What does that
7 look like? Because what if they're in a home where
8 the foster parent doesn't allow them to reach out?
9 What does that look like? Could you just be a little
10 bit more specific about how would they reach out?

11 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I'll just start
12 with every child in foster care is visited in their
13 home once a month. The majority of them are receiving
14 therapy and other medical services. The youth have a
15 coach. This outreach to central office is sort of a
16 redundancy, an additional backup plan. They are first
17 reaching out. They also have an attorney that is
18 assigned to every young person in foster care. There
19 are a lot of folks who are checking in with young
20 people to see how they're feeling about their current
21 placement, how they're feeling about their schooling,
22 how they're feeling about the services that are
23 provided to them. This piece of it that we put in
24 place is just to make sure that if all those fail,
25 there's another backup plan.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Are you
3 done with the whole thing with the training because I
4 know you were talking?

5 DIRECTOR GORDON: Yeah.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Is it done
7 online or in person?

8 DIRECTOR GORDON: Our foster care agencies
9 are trained to provide the training via either Zoom
10 or in person. That's at the agency's discretion, how
11 they want to provide the training, and really they're
12 going to assess what's best for the foster parents in
13 regards to scheduling, etc.

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Every foster
15 home goes through a home study, however, that is in
16 person, that is fully, there's reference checks,
17 there's checks around income security and a full,
18 which we can talk further about, for every young
19 person in care. That is expedited for family members,
20 for kin, but then it happens over the course of the
21 first 90 days while the child's in placement.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And so is this
23 training, this is annually they have to take this
24 training or?

25 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Every two years.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Every two years.

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COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes.

4

CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And so if they do
have a young person who's in their home who do
identify as LGBTQs, they still only have to take it
every two years?

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8

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes.

9

CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Has ACS
faced challenges identifying foster care homes that
affirm LGBT youth identities?

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COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Not
specifically, but we have tried to create a full
continuum, right, so we also have some small
residential programs that SEO runs, about five of
them that are specifically dedicated for young people
who identify as LGBTQIA+. We are always looking for,
we struggle with foster homes, of course, for
teenagers. We have not heard a specific concern about
young people who identify as LGBTQIA+, but we are
always looking for..

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CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Wait, say that
again, I'm sorry. You don't struggle with (INAUDIBLE)

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COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We generally
struggle to identify..

25

CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In general.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: For foster homes for teenagers. We have been very successful on a few fronts. One is we've been able to reduce the number of children in residential care, not only the number, but the percentage. Even as the entire census in foster care has precipitously dropped, we've also dropped the percentage of young people in residential care so we're overcoming some of these challenges. We've reduced the number of young people who are AWOC, or sort of away from their placement, by about half over the last four years so we're trying to surround the placement. The best way to do it is to take an experienced foster parent and surround them with lots of supports and services so we're not always looking for, sometimes someone will be a foster parent for a two-year-old as their first time in foster care, and then they really get the hang of it and feel like I can handle a teenager, I understand the system, so we are always focused on making sure we have homes for youth, homes for large sibling groups. Those are some of the places, homes for young people who are medically challenged. Specifically, around youth who identify as LGBTQ, we

1
2 have not seen a specific need that we haven't been
3 able to meet.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I would beg to
5 differ because when you go to the homeless runaway
6 youth facilities, a lot of them are there, and a lot
7 of them come from the system, and I think it also
8 stresses me out when we say things like we've reduced
9 the numbers because that means we still have young
10 people so, yes, that's good, hooray for doing our
11 jobs, but we also can't forget that there's still
12 young people there so, yes, we should be reducing the
13 numbers, right, and so I just always get really,
14 really like, yes, we're doing our job, great, but we
15 still got to make sure that we're supporting these
16 young people, because we know it's hard, especially
17 for teenagers but, again, which is why DYCD is here,
18 right, and made sure they were here because a lot of
19 those young people end up in their drop-in centers
20 and in their shelters because they're leaving these
21 homes because they're not getting the care and
22 affirmations that they need, and so, I mean, I guess
23 you said you don't, but you guys have never thought
24 about doing specific recruitment for LGBTQ youth
25 foster parents, especially if we know this is a

1
2 population who needs additional affirmations and
3 affirms sometimes?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Absolutely, we
5 have.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And what does
7 that look like?

8 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Well, first,
9 let's just be clear. Just because you're LGBTQ
10 doesn't mean that you're appropriate to be a foster
11 parent.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, don't get me
13 started. That's not what I'm saying.

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: But also, we
15 recognize that we want to diversify our foster parent
16 pool. In 2021, the Office of Equity Strategies worked
17 with our Permanency Division. We took a group of
18 foster care agencies, made a workgroup to plan how
19 they could better recruit from the LGBTQAI+
20 community. From that workgroup, we were able to
21 provide those agencies with best practice for
22 recruitment, taking outside-the-box outreach, equity
23 checklists to ensure that their promotion is gender-
24 neutral and inclusive, and we also were able to
25 support them in hosting a couple of recruitment fairs

1
2 via Zoom during peak pandemic times, and it's to our
3 knowledge that they're still practicing what we
4 learned during that workgroup.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, because I
6 also want to make sure that we're being inclusive
7 when we're recruiting because people also want to
8 feel like they're part of things, and so we should
9 make special efforts to make sure that we're
10 recruiting in all communities because we just want
11 good people.

12 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I want to
14 make sure that we're also recruiting in that
15 community as well because they make great parents as
16 well.

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Absolutely.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Are foster
19 parents or families informed of a foster youth if
20 they identify as LGBTQ youth, and do your current
21 policy allow for them to decline a placement?

22 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So, if the young
23 person has shared that with the case planner or the
24 child protection specialist, it absolutely would be
25 shared with the foster parent. So, there are many

1
2 times when they have not, that that's not something
3 that they feel comfortable disclosing yet or having
4 the conversation about. We will certainly, if someone
5 declines a placement, we will allow them to decline
6 that placement because we don't want to put a child
7 into a place that they're not going to be affirmed,
8 but you cannot be a foster parent in New York City
9 unless you're affirming, and so we move to assess
10 that home and often to close that home if that ends
11 up being the case.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, if you
13 decline a young person because of whatever, you're
14 like, okay, so you're done?

15 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Specifically
16 related to that status, if they are declining it, we
17 ask the agencies to do an assessment because our
18 expectation, they've pledged that they are going to
19 be an affirming home. This is something that
20 Commissioner Carrion put into place in 2015, I
21 believe, that all foster parents were expected to be
22 affirming, and so, we follow that policy.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Hmm.

24 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It's often not
25 entirely clear if they decline a placement, right? It

1
2 could be they are concerned about a particular
3 behavior so I'm not saying that, you know, they will
4 say I'm declining it because of a young person's
5 gender expression, but we want to be very careful.
6 Agencies are responsible for ongoing assessments of
7 all of their foster homes.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, absolutely. I
9 think that that's what's the most important.

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: All right. I have
12 a couple more questions, and I'll pass it over to
13 you, Farrah, because I'm fading.

14 What specific intervention strategies or
15 discipline measures are in place to address
16 inappropriate behavior by foster parents and how to,
17 how they are, this damn thing, and how those
18 procedures monitor to ensure accountability and the
19 safety of foster children?

20 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thank you. This
21 is where the LGBTQAI+ point people and champions in
22 each of the provider agencies play a really, really
23 important role, and let's have Steven to talk about
24 that.

1
2 DIRECTOR GORDON: So, in regards to foster
3 parents, if it has been made aware that the foster
4 parent is being inappropriate with the young person
5 around their SOGI, a young person has every right to
6 ask for another placement. We try to empower the
7 young people to alert the caseworker or the attorney
8 that they've been assigned with the hopes that they
9 will alert our leadership in our permanency division
10 and my office. At that point, we would step in to
11 provide counsel to the foster care agency to figure
12 out whether or not the young person should be placed
13 elsewhere and, if the young person is facing
14 homophobia and transphobia, then they absolutely need
15 to be placed elsewhere and, if it's evident that the
16 foster parent is homophobic or transphobic or just
17 discriminatory, then we alert the foster care agency
18 that they need to essentially fire the foster parent.

19 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: If it raises to
20 a level where the child's being neglected and having
21 mental impairment as the sort of State standard or
22 emotional impairment, our Office of Special
23 Investigations would get involved as well and do an
24 investigation of the foster home.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. According
3 to ACS 2021 LGBTQ Action Plan, the agency's plan to
4 increase its therapeutic services to foster care
5 parents/kinship caregivers by expanding access to
6 family therapy through the Eichmann's Institute. Was
7 this program ever implemented?

8 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It was. Both
9 Ackerman and the LGBT Center were funded by us to
10 train clinicians to specifically work with this
11 population.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. And how's
13 that partnership going?

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It's been going
15 well. I think it's roughly about eight years old. We
16 support both Ackerman and the Center in recruiting
17 the clinicians for the program. The clinicians have
18 to work within the ACS continuum of families. We're
19 finding that workers are, clinicians specifically,
20 are gaining knowledge and engagement of families,
21 supporting families through the affirmation process,
22 and really looking at how language can support young
23 people when engaging with families who might be
24 homophobic or transphobic or really struggling to get
25 to a place of affirmation for their child.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In response to
3 monitoring complaints over the treatment for LGBTQ+
4 in foster care system, the Ali Forney Center and ACS
5 announced a new agreement to prevent abuse and
6 implement new policies aimed at providing safe and
7 affirming home environment for LGBTQ+ young people.
8 Can you share some of the top line points of this
9 agreement?

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Sure, and we're
11 really grateful to Ali Forney, as I mentioned in my
12 testimony, for bringing this to us and for partnering
13 with us to continue to improve our practice.

14 One of the main areas of focus for Ali
15 Forney and what they were seeing in the RHY providers
16 was the work of our child protective teams and making
17 sure that they were being as affirming as we are
18 expecting everyone in our system to be, and so we
19 have taken some of the successes from other parts of
20 our system and begun to implement them in child
21 protection. All child protective staff already have
22 been provided the foundational training and do the
23 training every two years but, specifically, we're
24 adding champions and point people in each of our
25 borough offices. We are going to convene them much

1
2 like we do with the foster care agencies and promote
3 best practices through that. Both many advocates and
4 we're going to engage Ali Forney and the RHY
5 providers in making sure our updated policies are
6 sufficiently strong. We're working on trainings
7 together. We're also convening with all of the RHY
8 providers in October to have a robust conversation
9 between our child protective teams and all the RHY
10 providers. We've also...

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And when is that?
12 You said in June?

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: October.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: October? This
15 October?

16 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, maybe I'll
18 come. Tell me more.

19 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Fantastic.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: October 16th. I'm
21 writing it down.

22 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Good. I think
23 it's in the morning.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: 10 a.m.?

25 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: 10 a.m.

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2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Y'all know I love
3 to pop out.

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We'll have
5 virtual options for you, in-person options, however
6 you want to do it.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, a virtual
8 option? Great.

9 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I do also want
10 to mention that one of the key things that was
11 pointed out there was that young people were being
12 deadnamed, intentionally or unintentionally, I think
13 mostly unintentionally, when a call happens, let's
14 say an RHY provider calls the SCR and says a young
15 person just showed up, their parents are transphobic,
16 and the child's being neglected. When the SCR records
17 their name, they often use their legal name, and so
18 then our staff would go out using that legal name,
19 which creates a lot of trauma for a young person, and
20 so we are reworking that whole system, working with
21 OCFS to see if they can make sure they're asking the
22 questions of the RHY provider around what is the
23 preferred name that the young person has, what are
24 their preferred pronouns. We're also retraining our
25 staff, even if that is not there, when you're doing

1
2 this, we need to be going out and asking that
3 question before we call that child by any name other
4 than what they want to be called.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. I think
6 that's all the questions I have for right now. I'm
7 going to pass it over to Council Member Louis, and I
8 have some questions for DYCD, but I'll do that after
9 she.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you, Chair
11 Stevens. Good afternoon again.

12 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Good afternoon,
13 Chair.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Some quick
15 questions for ACS.

16 Foster care and juvenile justice
17 placement provider agencies are required to designate
18 an LGBTQ+ point person. This role is responsible for
19 maintaining records of all LGBTQ+ related issues that
20 arise within their agencies, including reports of
21 harassment, bias, and any unmet needs for affirming
22 foster home or juvenile justice placement. Can you
23 confirm that there are LGBTQ+ point persons appointed
24 to fill this role, and if so, how many?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes. We have 26 foster care agencies, and I believe we have 37 point people because some agencies, 34, some agencies are spread out geographically by different programs, and so they have more than one.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Can you name those agencies?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I can name a lot of them. They're all the foster care agencies.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: The top three?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I don't want to say who's the top three. Children's Aid, SCO, Graham Windham, New York Family.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: SCO (INAUDIBLE) right?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Good. Are foster youth informed that LGBTQ+ point persons exist? I think you highlighted that in previous questions that the Chair Stevens stated.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: And how are they able to report issues of harassment and bias to these point persons?

1
2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So any way they
3 want to report it through their case planner, through
4 their coach, if they have a therapist, through their
5 attorney, and we are educating all of those parties
6 to reach out to us as well, both to the point person
7 and the point people can reach out to Steven and his
8 team.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: In 2023, how many
10 claims of bias and discrimination related to foster
11 youth placement were recorded by the LGBT point
12 person at ACF?

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: For our central
14 office, it was five. I'll let Steven talk a little
15 bit about that. We know there's other issues that
16 have been resolved at a lower level and did not need
17 to come there so I don't want to inaccurately say
18 that we think that's the full universe, but five
19 where we got deeply involved.

20 DIRECTOR GORDON: Thanks, Commissioner.
21 Yeah, the five that were reported, we worked with the
22 foster care agency and the young person to resolve
23 the issue. We interviewed the young person to ensure
24 that they still felt safe in their placement and with
25

1
2 the agency, and we made essentially a corrective
3 action plan with the agency.

4 We are seeing more and more of
5 professionals in foster care agencies be proactive to
6 reach out to us. If they're struggling with a case
7 plan, trying to figure out a young person's housing
8 plan or a young person's mental health medical plan,
9 that our office also provides technical assistance
10 around.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: And would you say
12 that's the same amount that was stated, was it the
13 same amount that requested to be removed from
14 placement due to those claims?

15 DIRECTOR GORDON: We had no young people
16 in 2023 that asked to be removed from their placement
17 because of bias or discrimination based on their
18 SOGI.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thanks.

20 DIRECTOR GORDON: Sure.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Can the agency
22 please detail what is included in the mandatory
23 LGBTQ+ cultural competency training ACS staff are
24 required to complete before hire? If you could please
25

1
2 specify whether the training is online, in person,
3 and is this training taken annually?

4 DIRECTOR GORDON: Sure. Thank you for that
5 question. Training is really critically important to
6 the agency, our large workforce. Our training is
7 required to be taken every two years by direct
8 service staff, their supervisors, our provider agency
9 direct service staff, and their supervisors as well.
10 The foundational training that you referenced, Chair,
11 really references or outlines our LGBTQ youth-in-care
12 policy that talks about engagement, pronouns, chosen
13 names, how to safety plan, best practices for
14 creating affirming and safe environments. We have a
15 refresher training that's taken two years after the
16 initial training that really builds upon that
17 knowledge of how do you build an appropriate case
18 plan, how do you engage a young person around
19 transitioning, and how do you help young people find
20 outside supports and communities.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Okay. Is ACS
22 considering providing additional guidance for staff
23 on how to identify homophobia, transphobia, and
24 foster homes? What methods of intervention are being
25

1 explored to ensure that these inappropriate behaviors
2 are being addressed and corrected?
3

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: For us, and as
5 Chair Stevens opened with, it's really about
6 implementation. We are revising our policy, but it's
7 around having these redundant systems that continue
8 to communicate out to young people that they can
9 share with us, share with someone that they trust.
10 The addition of coaches for young people and them all
11 being trained in this as well so what we really think
12 is sort of the foundational basis of this is that the
13 young person has somebody that they trust and that
14 they can have these conversations with so we are
15 constantly working to build that and bring more
16 resources to bear to young people, and so we expect
17 that our agencies, they really understand young
18 people. There are times when young people are first
19 coming into foster care or have had an experience in
20 foster care where that trust wanes, and it's our job
21 to make sure that they have any avenue that they want
22 to take to connect with us and to get the support
23 that they need.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Okay. This is a
25 quick question on the Unity Project. The Unity

1
2 Project is tasked with working across agencies to
3 address issues facing the LGBTQ community in New York
4 City. One of its three core focus areas includes
5 addressing acceptance and anti-discrimination. Can
6 you share with us what the Unity Project has been
7 doing in terms of supporting LGBTQ foster youth?

8 DIRECTOR PORCELLI: Thank you and thank
9 you for that question. So, this is a very important
10 issue here in New York City, across the nation, and
11 it's one that I often think about whether personally,
12 professionally, is how to encourage this sort of
13 acceptance, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth, and so
14 starting out in the beginning of the Administration,
15 the Mayor hosted a number of different roundtables,
16 and coming from those roundtables was a focus on
17 LGBTQ+ youth and encouraging this sort of acceptance,
18 and so we were happy to begin developing with the
19 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Unity
20 Project Family Acceptance Program. This program runs
21 through CAMBA and it focuses on a multi-pronged
22 approach to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth are able to find
23 and live with affirming caregivers, and so that
24 multi-pronged approach includes various multimedia
25 that really encourages and allows people to see how

1
2 being an affirming family makes an incredible
3 difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth and how
4 different people go through different phases of
5 acceptance and what that means for their youth. The
6 program, in addition to this multimedia component, in
7 addition to the social media, includes education, and
8 so that is education on sexual orientation, gender
9 identity, gender expression, and gender, and then it
10 also includes a number of different resources. There
11 is a wonderful reading list that is included as part
12 of it, and other materials on basic vocabulary that
13 really get families and caregivers up to speed and
14 understand basic LGBTQ+ cultural competency, and the
15 overall importance of creating this sort of affirming
16 environment, not just up until 18, but how that has
17 lifelong impacts for LGBTQ+ people.

18 And then the last point that I will
19 finish off on regarding the program is that there is
20 a component of therapy, whether that is group and
21 peer therapy or one-on-one counseling for families.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Chair Stevens has a
23 quick question based off your response.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because the Unity
25 Project, honestly, I did not learn about what you

1
2 guys did until we were preparing for this hearing so
3 I just have a little bit of questions around clarity,
4 and so are you working with providers? Are you more
5 of a go-between between ACS and DYCD? I'm just trying
6 to get a better understanding of what this is.

7 DIRECTOR PORCELLI: Yeah, that is a great
8 question, and I often get that question. So, Unity
9 Project is the LGBTQ+ programs division at the
10 Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice. The way
11 that it works is developing and funding various
12 innovative programs and initiatives across City
13 agencies so I mentioned DOHMH. We have also worked
14 with ACS on various programs. That is one part of the
15 work. There is obviously a significant amount of
16 community engagement.

17 So, to your second point, yes, there
18 definitely is significant go-between between the
19 community and the different levers of government to
20 make sure that services are being rendered and that
21 they're culturally competent services.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Just piggybacking
24 off of that question. Has the Unity Project worked
25

1 with ACS and DYCD when it comes to their respective
2 policies regarding LGBTQ youths?
3

4 DIRECTOR PORCELLI: Yes. So, being a
5 programs division, I'll touch upon ACS first. ACS
6 mentioned some of the programs that we have worked on
7 them with, but that includes the training of the
8 licensed social workers, clinicians, through Ackerman
9 and the Center. That was originally funded in
10 partnership with the Unity Project and then,
11 fortunately, baselined through ACS, and that's really
12 an effort to create this sort of ecosystem across the
13 mental health and social services sector to support
14 LGBTQ+ youth and to further that sort of education
15 and creating that sort of affirming environment so
16 that's one particular way that we collaborate. I
17 frequently check in with Steven, and Steven was
18 actually the first person that I met in City
19 government in this role, and so we have been
20 continuous thought partners throughout this entire
21 process. We also partner on public engagement, and
22 then Steven is well aware of the Family Acceptance
23 Program and has the information on that to share
24 within his respective network. CAMBA has also reached
25 out to Steven at ACS, and so it's important that we

1
2 have that sort of integration with this program, and
3 that program in particular is well-placed to serve a
4 lot of the needs related to ACS.

5 And then with regards to DYCD, there is
6 constant collaboration. There's a number of different
7 programs that I can touch upon. In the past, Unity
8 Project has worked with DYCD to fund the expansion of
9 three youth drop-in centers, the 24/7 service,
10 allowing an expansion to an additional 400 young
11 people, and that's 400 young people and then service
12 across all five boroughs 24 hours a day, and then the
13 other program that I can touch upon is Summer Youth
14 Employment Pride. We finished our second cycle, and
15 that is run with DYCD. We see significant challenges
16 for LGBTQ+ youth, particularly in educational context
17 and then employment, and that I think is compounded
18 given some of the challenges that we see today in
19 youth experiencing and facing homelessness and family
20 rejection and so creating a sort of opportunity for
21 them to lift themselves up, for them to be acclimated
22 to the workplace, for them to be able to have various
23 experiences and learn in that sort of manner, I think
24 has been really important, and we do that not only
25 with our agency partners but also with our community

1
2 partners such as the Ali Forney Center, and they've
3 been absolutely instrumental in that sort of
4 programming and really connecting their youth to that
5 programming and, as I mentioned, really ameliorating
6 any sort of challenges that come up, whether it's
7 challenges with documentation, whether it's
8 challenges with recruiting youth, and so fostering
9 that sort of connection between the agencies and the
10 government and then the non-profit sector.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you for that.
12 I have two more questions, and I'll hand it back to
13 Chair Stevens.

14 When Chair Stephens asked you a question,
15 you had mentioned roundtables. So the Unity Project
16 was created under the former Administration, under de
17 Blasio, now under the Adams' Administration. How many
18 roundtables have you been hosting under this new
19 administration?

20 DIRECTOR PORCELLI: So, during this
21 Administration, there has been three roundtables in
22 total. The first one was the LGBTQ+ roundtable at the
23 start of the Administration, the second was the
24 TGNCMB People of Color roundtable, and then recently
25 there was an LGBTQ+ roundtable. That is one forum for

1
2 this sort of community engagement. This engagement is
3 ongoing. Additionally, there was recently a
4 roundtable in August related to TGNCMB safety matters
5 so that is an opportunity to bring together different
6 CBO partners, but engagement of that sort happens,
7 whether it's in a roundtable or some other format,
8 check in with various community-based organizations,
9 not only at roundtables and not only during Pride,
10 but really year-round. There's oftentimes where I
11 meet with the Ali Forney Center every single week and
12 sometimes more than once a week, and so those are
13 ongoing discussions. Roundtable, I think, is one
14 source where people are able to share that sort of
15 information and have that sort of thought partnership
16 across the Administration, but it's certainly
17 something that is important so that we're not just
18 working in some sort of silo here.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. I have a
20 quick legislative question. The Pre-Considered
21 Introduction on today's calendar would expand the
22 foster youth experience surveys that ACS distributes
23 to include specific questions about the treatment of
24 foster youth related to their gender expression,
25 gender identity, sex characteristics, and sexual

1
2 orientation. If passed, how does ACS plan to use the
3 feedback to drive policy change regarding the LGBT+
4 foster youth placements?

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We're very
6 interested in speaking to the Council further about
7 this, and we have this annual survey. It's a really
8 important source of information for us, both on the
9 representation of LGBTQAI+ young people in our
10 system, their satisfaction with our system. We take
11 all of that survey result and not only produce a
12 report, but we reflect on it. We reflect on it with
13 our providers. We build strategies off of it. Many of
14 the ones that we talked about today came from that.
15 We'll also digest it with our Youth Leadership
16 Committee, including the subcommittee for LGBTQAI+
17 young people, to really help understand with them,
18 sort of understand what are ways we can get better at
19 this area, how can we build on this area of strength
20 so we want to have that conversation with young
21 people to make sure we're getting it right.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: All right. Thank
23 you all. I'll yield back to Chair Stevens.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just have a
3 couple questions for DYCD so I think we need to make
4 a little room.

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Amy's here.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, okay, great.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON:
8 Assistant Commissioner for Runaway and Homeless
9 Youth.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, great. All
11 right. So, given that LGBTQ+ youth aging out of
12 foster care system is disproportionate with their
13 placements often enter the homeless and runaway youth
14 system, how does the DYCD coordinate with the ACS to
15 address the unique needs of those young people and
16 what specific supports are in place to ensure access
17 to essential services?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: If
19 a youth ages out of ACS care and ends up in our
20 system after, I guess, their discharge options failed
21 is what I'm hearing, how do we work with them? We try
22 to connect them back to ACS. ACS has a unit that's
23 specifically designated for older youth that have
24 aged out of the system so, if they're still eligible
25 to come back into the system, our first option is to

1 connect them to that unit to make sure that they
2 could explore all of the options that's available to
3 them through foster care.
4

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Could I add,
6 Chair, that we do not discharge young people to
7 homelessness, and we've been reducing the number of
8 young people aging out of care, and we're focused on
9 them, as you were saying earlier. So, we've been
10 increasing housing options. So, young people who age
11 out of care at 21, most of them actually stay past
12 their 21st birthday, as we're working on housing
13 options, whether that's CityFHEPS or Section 8, some
14 of the emergency housing vouchers or NYCHA or
15 supportive housing. There is a group of young people,
16 less than half of the young people who "age out" who
17 sign themselves out of care at 18, 19, and they might
18 be going to a family that they think is appropriate.
19 If that disrupts and they end up in the RHY system,
20 that is possible. That is where they can come back
21 into foster care and they remain eligible for all of
22 the housing supports. So, if that disrupts before 21,
23 we're trying to reduce young people who leave us at
24 18, 19 to unstable on their own volition, and it's
25 coming down, but that's a population I worry about

1
2 all the time, and so that's why we allow them back
3 into care, but I think that's some of the population
4 that we see at RHY.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, I mean,
6 that's a population I'm always really worried about
7 as well because those are the ones that we kind of
8 see cycling out of the foster care system into the
9 DHS system, and it becomes like a perpetual cycle,
10 and so I know that there are things put in place, but
11 sometimes I don't know if we're catching all the ones
12 that we should be catching.

13 I think some of my Colleagues, oh, I
14 think he left already.

15 What anti-discriminatory policies and
16 training does DYCD have in place to ensure that
17 runaway and homeless youth shelters are inclusive and
18 affirming in LGBT youth? Additionally, how does DYCD
19 monitor and ensure that the shelter providers remain
20 compliant with those policies and agency and
21 guidelines?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: The
23 providers are required to complete training annually.
24 Every person who works for one of the provider
25 organizations is required to complete LGBTQ

1
2 sensitivity training to understand LGBTQ issues so in
3 our audits and our reviews of the programs, we go out
4 and we check to make sure that every staff member has
5 competency in that area.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: How does DYCD
7 gather feedback from LGBT youth that are experienced
8 within their programs if it's funded, and how often
9 is feedback used to drive policy and programmatic
10 change?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: So,
12 if a youth within the DYCD system has a complaint,
13 there's a complaint process that they can follow that
14 would allow them to speak directly.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Can you talk a
16 little bit about what that process looks like?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: It
18 requires them to call 3-1-1, and then through 3-1-1
19 they're connected to our unit, and we would follow up
20 with that youth directly, personally, to hear the
21 story and try to, you know, resolve the issue that
22 they may have had with their provider.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I didn't know
24 that it required them to call 3-1-1. How do you get

1 that information out to the young people to have
2 that?
3

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: In
5 all of the programs, whether it's residential
6 programs or drop-in centers, there are flyers that
7 are required to be posted in conspicuous areas that
8 has the information to how to reach out to us if they
9 have a complaint, and every time one of our program
10 managers make a site visit, they're required to check
11 and make sure that that poster is posted in a
12 conspicuous area. It's part of their evaluation
13 process.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Have you ever
15 thought about having that part of the intake process
16 to give that information out?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON:
18 Actually, we recently, maybe about six months ago,
19 required that that flyer be included in the handbooks
20 that are handed out to youth when they enter into the
21 programs so it's part of the intake packet
22 information that they take away from the intake.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Does DYCD
24 track data relating to a number of homeless and
25 runaway youth that are aging out of foster care and

1
2 transitioning into DYCD? And, if yes, is the
3 information aggregated, how many of those young
4 people identify as LGBTQ youth?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: As
6 Commissioner Dannhauser just said, we do not have
7 youth that discharge from ACS to DYCD.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, it's kind
9 of our question because they don't necessarily
10 discharge, but we know that they sometimes bounce
11 back and forth between the systems, and so do you
12 guys track that information and are you tracking to
13 see like any who might be LGBTQ youth or?

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: So,
15 upon intake, we do have the question of their, child
16 welfare involvement is a required question on all
17 intakes as well as questions about their sexual
18 orientation and gender identity so this is
19 information that we have available to us that we're
20 able to track.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And so if a young
22 person does show up at, let's say, at one of the RHY
23 facilities, and they are saying they come from ACS,
24 they're not being discharged, but they are like

1 running away or whatever, what does that look like?

2 What does that process look like?

3 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON: I

4 think that if they ran away, because it's

5 situational, we would try to connect them back to

6 their foster care agency. The foster care agency

7 still has planning responsibility for them to see if

8 they can get back into a foster care bed if they're

9 runaway and they're still in foster care, but if it's

10 a situation where that person has, let's say, aged

11 out of the foster care system, went into their own

12 apartment, something went wrong with that, then we

13 would reach out to the older age unit to get them

14 reconnected to the foster care resources that are

15 still available to them, if they are still available.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In 2023, how many

17 of the homeless young adults between 21 and 24 served

18 in the DYCD identify as LGBTQ youth? Do you have that

19 information?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DR. WILKERSON:

21 Roughly 35 percent.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: 35 percent? I

23 believe Council Member Williams has questions.

24

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Hello. I'm going
3 to ask questions that Council Member Riley had on his
4 bill. Hello, Commissioner.

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Hey, Council
6 Member.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I think it's
8 this one. The audit would include a review of
9 instances in which a notice was not provided as
10 required, the time elapsed between a change in foster
11 care placement and when the placement notice was
12 provided, when the notice of the change was provided,
13 the attorney for the child, and a summary of the
14 information that was missing from the notice so the
15 question is, is there any compliance concerns about
16 the foster care audit bill?

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Anytime there's
18 a bill around data or auditing, it's a capacity
19 issue, and we have to make sure we have the bandwidth
20 to do it, but Council Member Riley's focus here is
21 really important. We want to, first of all, reduce
22 the number of young people who are experiencing a
23 movement in care, most importantly. That has come
24 down in the latest MMR, and so we're making progress
25 in that regard. It's also really important that their

1 attorney, that anybody in their life, knows that they
2 have moved foster homes, and so the focus here is one
3 that we very much welcome. The mechanism that we use
4 to oversee it and make sure it's happening is one
5 we'd like to be in discussion about.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. How
8 has ACS ensured that caseworkers are sharing
9 information regarding notice of change in foster care
10 placement with the child's attorney? What barriers
11 has ACS been facing that has prevented this
12 information from being shared with attorneys?

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So our Family
14 Court Legal Services team oversees this process, so
15 agencies will communicate with the FCLS attorney who
16 will share that with the child's attorney who will
17 share it with the parent's attorney. There are, you
18 know, sometimes challenges in communication, but we
19 speak to the providers regularly to make sure that
20 they're communicating with everybody and that they're
21 communicating in ways that are timely. We think by
22 and large we are meeting the mark here because we've
23 got lots of redundancies put in place so each agency
24 is required to put this in the system to make sure
25 that the right foster parent is getting paid, that

1
2 they have QI systems in place, and that they're
3 flagging it immediately to the FCLS attorney. We also
4 have in place conferences that come together when
5 there's a potential for a move. Say a young person
6 suggests that they want to move or a foster parent
7 needs help, with placement preservation conferences,
8 we try to come together and say what services could
9 happen here, is there services we could do together,
10 foster parent and young person or parent, and see if
11 there's a way to preserve that. If it's not able to
12 preserve and the child's moved, now we're doing a
13 more planful move, and we're able to, so the more
14 often we're doing those planning conferences and
15 doing a planful move, the easier it is to make sure
16 we're communicating around it. When it happens on an
17 emergency basis, which is more rare but happens,
18 that's where we sometimes see some breakdowns in
19 communication, but we really want to make sure that
20 their attorneys know and are working hard to do it.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay, and can
22 you just help me understand the, I guess the internal
23 operations of foster care in general? So, I know like
24 a lot of the foster care services happen to be
25 carried out by providers, and so in terms of like

1
2 actual government, ACS workers, what is the feedback
3 loop between ACS and the providers, because the
4 providers are really doing like the day-to-day work,
5 and I'm just trying to understand internally like
6 what is the feedback loop if something does happen on
7 an emergency or an agency needs to take a particular
8 action, I know they're not like calling ACS to say,
9 hey, can I take this action, I think they're probably
10 like taking action, but just wanted to know like the
11 feedback loop back to the agency and the child.

12 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah, and we
13 would love to set up some time with you, Council
14 Member, to talk through that. Deputy Commissioner
15 Mendez and her team have an office that we call
16 Shared Response so it's shared with the agency. Any
17 emergency situation, any major decision that they
18 have to make, that's available to them, and it is
19 well-utilized. We also have circumstantial, so if a
20 child's going to move or there's a decision around
21 adoption or reunification, there are conferences that
22 are convened. Our staff will facilitate most of those
23 conferences. Some of the conferences are facilitated
24 by providers. We also have a robust oversight looking
25 at every agency's data around how often children move

1
2 in their care, how often children are going home
3 safely, how often they're contacting children. We do
4 case record reviews of all agencies, and that gets
5 rounded up into a score for the providers, and we
6 meet in a process that we call continuous quality
7 improvement, where agencies identify their areas of
8 greatest strength and areas of greatest weakness with
9 us, and we develop plans to resolve those so we know
10 every agency, how they're doing on what we call
11 permanency, which is sort of combined, are they
12 getting children to a loving home, hopefully home, or
13 to a kinship provider or adoption in a timely way,
14 and a variety of other areas around safety, how many
15 of their children have left their care, etc., etc.,
16 etc., so we can walk you through all that and how we
17 work with them to try to continuously improve.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, I have
19 lots of questions about that, like I want to
20 understand like cadence, like how often you're having
21 these continuous care conversations. Okay.

22 And then just two more things, somewhat
23 on the hearing topic, but it could be more expansive.
24 Does ACS have credible messengers within ACS because
25 the former foster care young person that Chair

1
2 Stevens mentioned, one of the things she also noted
3 was, like, wanting to be able to support other youths
4 who identify as LGBTQIA, and I just was wondering do
5 you have individuals who have gone through the system
6 that might identify, that can sort of support young
7 people who are currently in the system? And then the
8 last thing she had mentioned that I thought was quite
9 interesting was the clothing budget so, for instance
10 you may present as a woman, but maybe you want to
11 wear men's clothes and your foster parent is telling
12 you, no, you have to go buy dresses, and so she
13 talked about this sort of back and forth issue with
14 clothes and the clothing budget and so just wanted to
15 know what stipulations or support can they have to
16 say, especially if they're older, like I don't want
17 to buy that, can I buy something else, and for them
18 to be able to buy the types of clothes that, or,
19 again, if they present as a male and they want to
20 wear a dress, like how can we ensure that the things
21 that they want to wear, that they're actually allowed
22 to pay for and wear those things through the budget?

23 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thank you. And
24 if this young person is looking for a job, I'd love
25 to meet with them.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I want to hire
3 her, too.

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: This is really,
5 really important to Deputy Commissioner Mendez, that
6 young people get what they want, that they have an
7 individualized experience that's tailored to their
8 needs, what their interests are so not only is there
9 an initial clothing allowance, there's also in the
10 rate sort of ongoing clothing allowance, young people
11 are allowed to purchase what they want to wear.

12 That's also sort of part of many of the trainings
13 that we're doing for foster parents, including the
14 LGBTQAI+ trainings. We also are looking at some of
15 the ways in which young people get stipend, and we
16 have college choice, and we make sure that young
17 people can access that kind of resource.

18 I think as far as credible messengers, we
19 have both formal positions in the providers and at
20 ACS. We have the Youth Leadership Committee, there's
21 the Youth Advisory Board at Fair Futures, but there's
22 a lot of staff at ACS who are credible messengers but
23 aren't in roles that are specifically to that so, if
24 you come to the Children's Center, there's a lot of
25 our staff who have had lived experience, who have

1
2 been in foster care. We obviously also care deeply
3 about lived experience for parents, and so have staff
4 that are in our advocacy office that have experience
5 in that way, and it's deeply, deeply important that
6 they're seen and that young people and families know
7 that they're in our system. Each agency has parent
8 advocates, many of them have youth advocates, and
9 we've really, really been lucky to have a wonderful
10 YLC and the Youth Advisory Board so we're trying to
11 find every way to hear from young people.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you, and
13 I'll follow up about foster care.

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Great. Thank
15 you.

16 I should have said one thing about
17 (INAUDIBLE) Sorry, Chair. There's also a special
18 payment mechanism so, if the clothing allowance, I
19 lost my train of thought there, isn't sufficient, or
20 they've decided, you know, that they're going through
21 a transition, there are special payments that
22 providers can make and charge back to ACS for those.

23 DIRECTOR GORDON: Commissioner, if I will?

24 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah.

25

1
2 DIRECTOR GORDON: Also, I do want to say
3 our Youth Leadership Council is made up of both
4 current foster care youth and former foster care
5 youth, and it really is a mechanism of creating
6 community as well as the chairs of our Youth
7 Leadership Council are three ACS staff who also have
8 lived experience.

9 And in regards to the clothing allowance,
10 if a foster parent is not allowing a young person to
11 wear the clothing that corresponds with their gender,
12 that is an example of a non-affirming parent, and ACS
13 and the foster care agency would then step in and
14 intercede.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.
16 Council Member Joseph.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you for
18 that, and thank you for keeping the practices. My two
19 boys came from foster care, so anyone ever heard of
20 my story? So, my two boys came from foster care, and
21 you know that, and I fight really hard for them.

22 I had a couple of questions around the
23 allowance. Is there ever going to be an increase to
24 that allowance because parents can't really, if you
25

1
2 really think about it, it's not ideal. Is there any
3 way that formula can be raised?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So, yes, it has
5 been raised, and we can get you the exact numbers,
6 because the State raised the rates about two years
7 ago for all foster parents. They did not cover any of
8 the costs of that, just as an asterisk.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Inflation.

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: The City has
11 picked that up and is making sure that foster parents
12 have adequate rates. We are also looking at ways in
13 which we provide stipends to young people. Often,
14 they've been attached to an independent living
15 workshop or something like that.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Or school.

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Or school. We're
18 trying to attach them to things that encourage young
19 people along the way of their success. We're doing 60
20 dollars a day in college choice as one example, and
21 so we're in a planning process right now around what
22 those stipends might look like, but the allowances
23 have been raised, and we can get you those numbers.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That would be
25 great. How is the partnership with New York City

1
2 Public Schools' Foster Care Office with our students
3 now in foster care?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah, we've been
5 really grateful to have that partnership. We just had
6 a meeting looking at graduation rates together,
7 attendance rates together. The MMR is showing
8 increases in attendance rates. We still have a ways
9 to go, especially for teens in foster care, and so
10 that office has been great. As we have talked about
11 and you have advocated so strongly for around
12 transportation and making sure foster parents are
13 reimbursed, we have a new policy in place, much to
14 your advocacy so they've been a really great source
15 of connection and information and, you know, out of
16 900-plus thousand students in the system, less than
17 7,000 are children in foster care so we're also
18 working with them to re-up training for all schools
19 to make sure that they're identifying young people in
20 foster care that are there and that they're getting
21 everything that they're entitled to. And lastly, I
22 will say it's all of the work that we've been doing
23 in New York City Public Schools around accessing help
24 outside of the foster care system for families has

1
2 been something that's been a real boost. The office
3 has really boosted along with Donna and her team.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Because we know
5 when students enter foster care and they enter the
6 New York City Public Schools, it takes about 30 days
7 for them to get to school, and we want to reduce that
8 chronic absenteeism rate as students are entering
9 care. We want to make sure that's also reduced. And
10 the amount of bullying our students, because I
11 visited a school who's transgender students in foster
12 care. How do you work in making sure safety transfers
13 are done appropriately and rapidly?

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So, we have a
15 dedicated education team in our agency that is under
16 our Family Permanency Division, and they get flagged
17 to them. They work with either local school or
18 through the office.

19 On the matter of transportation to
20 school, I also just want to uplift the work of First
21 Deputy Commissioner Saunders and her team at the
22 Children's Center and adding every transportation
23 option you could possibly imagine to make sure every
24 young person is getting up, getting to school,
25 getting to their original school because we know in

1
2 that moment, losing your school in addition to losing
3 the placement in your family can be really traumatic
4 and so school stability is a major focus of ours so,
5 whether they're at the Children's Center, whether
6 they're going to Staten Island or they're going to
7 the Bronx, they are an amazing team who's up very
8 early in the morning making sure young people are
9 getting out the door and we have the right
10 transportation options for them.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And that's very
12 important. How many students LGBTQ+ do we currently
13 have in our foster care system?

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Our estimate is
15 around 35 percent as well, and that comes from our
16 survey, and that's been pretty consistent in our time
17 surveying young people.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, thank you.
19 Thank you, Chair.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I just
21 have a few more questions on some of the legislation
22 we're hearing today.

23 Intro. 8 would amend existing reporting
24 requirements regarding the child welfare system by
25 requiring ACS to additionally report the main

1
2 allegations that led to its receipt of a report of an
3 opening case and investigation of child abuse or
4 neglect. The allegations would specifically include
5 parents' or caretakers' marijuana usage and
6 inadequate food, clothing, and shelter. Is the agency
7 supportive of this bill?

8 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We're supportive
9 of the intent. There's difficulties. The drives what
10 gets tracked as an allegation, and so substance use
11 is not an allegation. It's really around sort of the
12 whether or not any substance is impairing a parent's
13 ability to care safely for the child so marijuana is
14 not an allegation, as an example, and so if someone
15 calls the State's Central Registry and says this
16 parent is using marijuana, they're not going to
17 accept that, and so what we want to do, and we talked
18 to Deputy Speaker and understand sort of the intent,
19 we want to make sure we are not, as a system, that we
20 are consistently looking at whether the substance
21 misuse is affecting parenting and if that is the
22 intent (INAUDIBLE) ways to be able to always have
23 accountability there and make sure we're promoting
24 best practice.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, because that was the next part of the question just around like, especially because marijuana has been legalized, like what have you done to like update your policies? What does that look like? Because I do know like with the Registry, it's a lot different and you actually have to have (INAUDIBLE) so it's a little different, but just like have you updated those policies and what does that look like?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We've trained staff. We also have made sure that we're communicating through Child Stat, through all of our conversations with staff and training that it is about the impact on the child. As you know, we've been reducing the number of instances where we're filing neglect petitions or abuse petitions in family court, and one of the areas that we looked at sort of many years ago is how do we make sure that we're not just using a positive toxicology. A lot of the work has also been with Health and Hospitals. They are putting in place plans of safe care so they're making sure that they're asking for consent from parents to do drug testing at the time of birth and, if a parent is found to be positive tox for a particular

1
2 substance, they too have to ask the question, is this
3 likely to impair the parenting and are they seeing
4 evidence during that time. If it's not, then they put
5 in a plan of safe care. They can connect families to
6 services and they do not call the SCR. We've seen a
7 drop in that, and it's critical that those plans of
8 safe care are strong, and we know Health and
9 Hospitals is working on that.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. Look
11 forward to hearing more about that (INAUDIBLE) Deputy
12 Speaker as well.

13 The next one is, Intro. 56 will require
14 ACS to survey foster youth as their LGBTQ and racial
15 identities and report annually on such responses as
16 they relate to placement of foster youth into
17 permanent homes. Does the agency foresee any
18 complications with collecting this data?

19 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: No, we are
20 currently surveying. We added SOGI questions last
21 year, 2021, and so, you know, the one thing I would
22 say is whenever we're surveying, we want to have some
23 questions that are consistent so we can see progress
24 or lack thereof, but we're open to having dialogue

1 about what questions best answer what the Council is
2 interested in.
3

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: The Pre-
5 Considered Introduction would expand the foster care
6 youth experience survey (INAUDIBLE) that ACS would
7 distribute to include specific questions about the
8 treatment of foster youth related to their gender
9 expression, gender identity, sexual characteristics,
10 and sexual orientation. If passed, how does ACS plan
11 to use this feedback to drive policy changes
12 regarding LGBTQ youth foster youth placements, and
13 how will ACS ensure that foster youth completing the
14 experience survey are comfortable expressing any
15 grievances toward the agency? Are there currently any
16 other options for response to their anonymity and
17 completed without the ACS worker present?

18 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Let me ask
19 Steven to ask about the anonymity question.

20 Every single survey completed as a young
21 person's voice, and we take it very seriously. As I
22 was mentioning earlier, I really want to digest those
23 results with our committee of young people and
24 understand what they see as strategies that would
25 work for them and, each time we finish the survey

1
2 results and analyze them, we put out our plan of
3 action for that, and so we'll continuously update
4 that plan. On the anonymity piece for the survey?

5 DIRECTOR GORDON: The survey, I believe,
6 correct me, it's confidential, not anonymous, so then
7 we can aggregate that data, right? Yes.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. You want to
9 add to that?

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So, we want to
11 be able to follow up with the young person, and so we
12 ask them to include their identity, yeah, yeah, yeah,
13 I'll get there. If there's something that needs
14 immediate follow-up, whether it's some of the issues
15 we were discussing earlier, if there needs to be a
16 placement change or if they feel like they're in
17 danger. They also do have, as we were mentioning
18 earlier, lots of options of places to go, whether
19 it's their attorney, whether it's their coach so
20 we're just trying to increase options and the trust
21 with them.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay. I think
23 that's all I got. Does anyone else have a question?
24 No? Okay. No questions?

1
2 All right, well, thank you guys for being
3 here with me today.

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Feel better.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm trying. I
6 appreciate it. I made it. Thank you, guys. I really
7 appreciate it. All right.

8 A two-minute break.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Can we all have a seat?

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: All right. I now
11 open the hearing for public testimony.

12 I would remind the members of the public
13 that this is a government proceeding and decorum
14 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of
15 the public shall remain silent at all times. Everyone
16 here behaves well.

17 The witness table is reserved for people
18 who are wishing to testify. No video recordings or
19 photography is allowed from the witness table.
20 Further, members of the public may not present audio
21 or video recordings as testimony, but they can submit
22 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-
23 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

24 If you wish to speak today, please fill
25 out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and

1
2 wait to be recognized. When you are recognized, you
3 will have two minutes to speak today on the hearing
4 topic, Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ+ Youth in the
5 City Child Welfare System.

6 If you have written testimony or
7 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
8 the record, please provide a copy of the testimony to
9 the Sergeant-at-Arms.

10 Now, I would like to call to the table,
11 Erin Harrist, Nadia, and G. Galloway. I'm sorry. I
12 don't do this name thing well, and I'm sorry. I'm
13 terrible at it. I have some literacy issues.

14 Whoever would like to speak first.

15 ERIN BETH HARRIST: Hi, good afternoon.
16 Thank you so much to the Committees for holding this
17 hearing today. My name is Erin Beth Harrist. I use
18 she/her/they pronouns, and I'm the Director of the
19 Legal Aid Society's LGBTQ+ unit, and I work with our
20 Juvenile Rights Practice, which represents the
21 majority of kids in foster care in New York City to
22 address systemic issues impacting our LGBTQ+ youth
23 clients.

24 I will say, you know, we appreciate that
25 ACS comes to the table. I appreciate their action

1
2 plan, but we know from day-to-day work that it isn't
3 enough and that there needs to be more done. Just to
4 give a couple of examples, and we've talked about
5 these already today, you know, we know that a lot of
6 our LGBTQ+ youth clients do not feel safe to be
7 themselves in their placements, and sometimes they're
8 overtly discriminated against through misnaming and
9 misgendering, not being able to express their gender
10 the way that is natural to who they are. We've had
11 trans clients housed in facilities that are not
12 consistent with their gender identity, and we've had
13 a lot of issues with access to transition-related
14 care. Just a couple months ago we heard about a young
15 person who was told their transition-related care was
16 considered cosmetic, and therefore that it wasn't
17 something that was going to be provided by the
18 agency, and that's wrong as a matter of policy,
19 that's wrong as a matter of law. We've also had
20 clients where the discrimination is a little less
21 overt, but this involves clinicians who will hear
22 that somebody has, you know, same-sex attraction and
23 consider them to have issues with boundaries with
24 their peers, and they end up in more restrictive
25 housing because of it, right, so we know that the

1
2 clinicians, we also need more accountability and
3 training there as well.

4 And I also want to emphasize, because
5 this is something that comes up quite a bit, has
6 already been referred to a lot during this hearing,
7 LGBTQ youth leave their placements more frequently
8 than other youth. They experience homelessness as a
9 result, and what does it say about the system that
10 they feel safer being homeless or being marginally
11 housed than they do in their placements? Just
12 briefly, you know, we put all our recommendations
13 into our...

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

15 ERIN BETH HARRIST: Into our testimony. I
16 did want to raise the issue of ACS taking dollars in
17 survivor's benefits from ACS youth. This wasn't
18 raised today, but it does impact youth in foster
19 care, and that ACS needs to change this policy
20 immediately.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Don't worry.
22 We'll be discussing it at other hearings. I got it.

23 ERIN BETH HARRIST: That's great. Thank
24 you so much.

1
2 NADIA SWANSON: Hello, everyone. My name
3 is Nadia Swanson. I use they/them pronouns. I'm the
4 Director of Advocacy and Technical Assistance at the
5 Ali Forney Center. Thank you for having this hearing
6 today. Thank you for sticking around, ACS, and a big
7 thank you to Commissioner Dannhauser and Steven
8 Gordon for really coming together and supporting us
9 when we brought these recommendations to you and
10 acting swiftly.

11 My testimony today, I'm going to focus on
12 Intro. 56, but our written will go into more detail
13 on the other areas. One thing is just an amendment.
14 We suggest that the age be lowered from 13 years old
15 to 5, that we start tracking this data and starting
16 to talk to the foster youth about this. The Trevor
17 Project, among many other research findings, shows
18 that youth are self-identifying or coming out at a
19 younger age, even if they don't have the language
20 yet. This is a dynamic process that often begins
21 early in development. The survey was for 13- to 24-
22 year-olds and showed a sample of 24 percent of folks
23 coming out before the age of 13, and when we just
24 looked at 13- and 17-year-olds, it jumped to 35
25 percent. Those folks who came out under 13 also share

1 that 56 percent of them had seriously considered
2 suicide and 22 percent had attempted. The report
3 confirms what we know, that families support greatly
4 diminishes these risks. For trans and gender-
5 expansive minors, we know that developmentally at
6 ages 3 and 4, we begin to understand gender in a
7 societal context, developing over the next two years
8 and becoming rigid at around 5 years old. Studies
9 show that 5 is actually the average age that a young
10 person knows that they have gender variance in some
11 way, with the mean being 7.9. They just might not
12 have the words to say it. I actually previously
13 worked at the Ackerman Institute Gender Family
14 Project that we were talking about today and went
15 through that clinical training. I was in the first
16 class of that. The work that they do at Ackerman
17 starts at 5 years old because of this data. We
18 suggest that this lower, and we can provide different
19 developmental questions and different stages
20 throughout the person's process, the child's process.
21 By identifying early signs, we can prevent further
22 trauma of child hiding their identity out of fear,
23 providing the parents training and therapy..
24

25 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

1
2 NADIA SWANSON: For early childhood, which
3 really benefits the kids from the constrained social
4 construct, and ultimately reducing the need for more
5 placements in the future, if we can get that training
6 in faster. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any
7 questions you have.

8 GALLOWAY: Good afternoon, Chair Stevens,
9 and thank you, Council Member Williams and Louis, for
10 being here today and holding today's hearing. My name
11 is Galloway. I'm the Advocacy Manager at the Ali
12 Forney Center, and I want to echo the things shared
13 today by Nadia and Erin.

14 Today I want to speak to the support of
15 Intro. 2477, particularly regarding the proposed
16 youth experience survey. At the Ali Forney Center, we
17 understand firsthand how crucial it is to understand
18 the LGBTQ+ young people having a voice in the space
19 of their experiences and being able to openly share
20 that. A survey provides an opportunity for them to
21 share their grievances with transparency and
22 accountability. However, the success of a survey
23 hinges on the thoughtful development of that and,
24 when a young person comes to us who has involvement
25 with the foster care system, particularly, they share

1 with us their experiences they've had with ACS
2 workers not being affirming, and we see this far too
3 often when those workers are not affirming their
4 youth's gender and sexual identities. At AFC, we are
5 hearing these stories after an intake of an 18- and
6 19-year-old who has voluntarily left the system due
7 to homophobia and transphobia they've experienced by
8 not feeling heard and not being taken the actions to
9 protect themselves by those workers. What these youth
10 are describing is a form of abuse, and the least we
11 can do is give them multiple ways to speak to their
12 experience. There are numerous considerations when
13 creating a survey on sexual orientation and gender
14 identity. Terminology needs to be carefully chosen to
15 ensure that these participants fully understand it,
16 and we consider the inclusion of multiple options,
17 things like making sure there's an option to write in
18 and that they get to choose how they speak about
19 their identity. These are essential in capturing the
20 diverse ways in which youth experience and speak
21 about their experiences. We also believe that the
22 survey to be successful must be developed by youth
23 themselves and practitioners with experience of
24 running inclusive, accessible surveys. This will
25

1
2 ensure that the survey captures data and also
3 relevant to their experiences.

4 Lastly, I just want to thank ACS for
5 working alongside us in collaboration and sticking
6 around today for today's hearing. Feel better, Chair
7 Stevens, beaming you healing support. Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just have one
9 quick question, because you had mentioned the
10 clinicians and sometimes they're also a part of some
11 of the issues with, like, you know, talking about
12 boundaries with young people. Can you talk a little
13 bit more about that and then also, is there any
14 recommendations around like what are some things you
15 think we can do to put in place to kind of safeguard
16 that as well?

17 ERIN BETH HARRIST: Thank you so much for
18 that question. I think it really comes down to
19 accountability. If you look at the policy, one, it's
20 outdated. Best practices for working with gender-
21 expansive people have changed since 2012, and the
22 policy has taken a very long time to change, but
23 there's also not a lot of accountability provisions
24 for if a clinician is behaving in this way, and I
25 think those need to be added into the next draft of

1
2 the policy, which my eyes on the last draft policy,
3 which was over a year ago, that was not in there so
4 that's something that I would greatly recommend, that
5 that changes.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no, I just
7 think it's important, because sometimes we do miss
8 those pieces that, like, a clinician is part of this
9 process, and they can do some harm if they're not
10 trained properly or if things are not put in place so
11 I would definitely love to talk more about that with
12 you offline.

13 And also, survivor benefits, it is very
14 important. I am on it. We're going to be having, not
15 a whole hearing on it, but on foster care, and we'll
16 be spending a lot of time talking about survivor
17 benefits stuff so I didn't want to throw a curveball
18 at them today since they were so well-behaved. I try
19 to be nice to ACS. I didn't want to throw them a
20 curveball, but thank you.

21 There's no further questions. Thank you.

22 The next panel, we're going to have Pedro
23 Gonzalez and Luna Floyd.

24 You guys can start whenever you have a
25 chance.

1
2 LUNA FLOYD: Good afternoon. My name is
3 Luna Floyd. I'm a Legal Fellow at Lambda Legal
4 Defense and Education Fund, and we would like to show
5 our support for the Council's consideration of
6 Council Member Ossé's bill, number 56, and Council
7 Member Hudson's bill, marked 2477.

8 Council Member Hudson's proposed bill
9 could be improved by adding questions about whether
10 foster parents, caseworkers, or other adults know
11 about a young person's LGBT identity. The option for
12 anonymity allows youth who are not out to ACS or
13 other adults to be more accurately counted. If youth
14 have not disclosed their identity to adults around
15 them, the survey should then ask youth to identify
16 reasons for that decision. Additionally, we want to
17 emphasize that a survey can only be the first part of
18 the work needed to make ACS a safer place for LGBTQ
19 youth. ACS must also finalize and implement a plan to
20 ask youth in care about their gender identity and
21 sexual orientation directly in a respectful and
22 culturally informed way.

23 Finally, we also want to recommend that
24 Council Member Ossé's bill include language requiring
25 ACS to involve youth in the development and analysis

1
2 of these surveys. ACS's Youth Leadership Council must
3 assist in drafting surveys, analyzing results, and
4 developing policy and practice change proposals based
5 on that data collected because youth are experts in
6 their own experiences and must have a say in
7 decisions that affect them. We would also like to
8 recommend that the City Council require ACS to report
9 on its past and current efforts around data
10 collection. We urge the City Council to pass these
11 bills and commit to making sure that this is just the
12 first step to improve experiences and outcomes of
13 LGBTQ youth in care. I thank you for your time and
14 attention.

15 PEDRO GONZALEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon
16 to everyone in this Committee. Ms. Commonis, she will
17 be speaking. We both filled out the paper, but I'm
18 sitting with her just in case. She'd like to share
19 some personal testimony. I know today's focus is on
20 gender and protections for LGBTQIA, but previously
21 we've brought up a concern about reporting and being
22 transparent with respect to ACS data, but I'm going
23 to turn it over so she can share personal experiences
24 quickly.

CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Could you just
state your name for the record again, please?

PEDRO GONZALEZ: Pedro Gonzalez and
Tabitha Commonis.

TABITHA COMMONIS: Good afternoon to the
Councilwomen, Councilmen, and Overseers of the
Committee on Children and Youth for the City Council.
My name is Tabitha Commonis. I am a 36-year-old
mother of four children, and also an American with
mental health and intellectual disabilities and
physical health conditions, such as diabetes type 2,
grand mal seizures, absence seizures, they are also
known as phantom seizures, and a right bundle branch
block, which is a hole in the heart for those that
may not know. I am a mother of four, one stillborn
son and three daughters, one who was adopted. She is
now eight, and two children who are in care, ages
five and four. My five-year-old daughter was born
with intellectual and some disabling physical
disabilities. I've had to endure with ACS for eight
years, even though my oldest is adopted. I still get
lashback because of my prior addiction. I am a
recovering addict as well. The ACS target me with my
mental health and addiction. Of course, addiction is

1
2 not always good in cases like that. I have had
3 disparaging remarks about past substance abuse and
4 having NYPD directed to arrest me during certain
5 removals. I've had homemaking in my home and
6 preventive services since 2021 of October, and they
7 were still removed as well, with all of that in
8 place. I feel like I'm running in circles and I have
9 nowhere else to go. I would like, if at all, somebody
10 to be able to please help us with this, because every
11 time of removal, my daughters are asking if it's
12 their fault, and we cannot discuss the case with them
13 because of the rules of the case. I'm sorry if I
14 rambled. I do get nervous, and thank you for taking
15 your time to hear me.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You did fine.
17 Thank you for being here today.

18 Mr. Pedro, do you have?

19 PEDRO GONZALEZ: Very quickly. I've been
20 around previously on April 25th. I shared briefly my
21 experiences with the case about ACS. One of the
22 things that I wanted to mention very briefly is that
23 oftentimes, when data is being generated by ACS, it's
24 not being transparently presented to this
25 Administration or rather this Body of Council. It's

1
2 very concerning because I've stated previously that,
3 and I'm glad Mr. Dannhauser was able to somewhat go
4 over the figures, but there was an increase this year
5 by 1 percent, especially in low-income communities.
6 Oftentimes, the problems with low-income communities,
7 and especially those who are at risk, that also
8 includes people with military special needs families
9 and LGBTAI members. Housing is the biggest concern.
10 ACS often tells us that it is a hurdle to coordinate
11 efforts with other City agencies. I think that this
12 Body could do with a measure by implementing a
13 liaison that would be assigned by this Committee to
14 oversee those concerns of housing and or other
15 ailments that would disenfranchise families. First
16 and foremost, we all know that working on one income
17 isn't sufficient. Ms. Commonis herself is a recipient
18 of survivor's benefits from her father, who was a
19 World War II veteran, as well as myself, who served
20 in the military. We see the value that ACS has tried
21 to improve the system. We recognize it takes a
22 village to care for the children, but oftentimes not
23 everyone agrees on the best interest of what is
24 important for the children. We feel that parents
25 should also have a proactive role in that, whether it

1
2 be in the question of gender affirmation, whether it
3 be in the question of reunification, what do those
4 processes look like. Parents should be given all the
5 information and tools at their disposal so that they
6 are able to make the best-informed decision for
7 themselves and to support their children. We firmly
8 believe that also this would play a beneficial role
9 for children impacted in the LGBTQAI. As a veteran, I
10 have seen hostile culture towards LGBTAI members, and
11 I feel personally that this Committee could do with
12 addressing these people who are being
13 disenfranchised. I thank this Committee, again, for
14 taking the time to hear what Ms. Commonis and myself
15 had to state and, again, we do appreciate the
16 wonderful work that this Administration and currently
17 this Body of Council is doing. You guys have been
18 proficient with making sure that ACS is being
19 transparent and that they are at their best trying to
20 report everything transparently and proficiently.
21 Thank you and good afternoon again.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want to
23 say thank you to both of you guys for being here
24 today. I really appreciate it. I do remember you from
25 testifying at the last hearing last year, and I know

1 that we took your information, and we still want to
2 be supportive and help as much as we can on anything
3 that you guys need. I know ACS is here. They're also
4 here, and I'm sure you'll be able to speak to them as
5 well, but we want to make sure that we continue to
6 give you the support that you need and point you in
7 the right direction.
8

9 PEDRO GONZALEZ: One more thing I'd like
10 to add. After we spoke to Mr. Dannhauser, we did let
11 him know that I think it's about time that ACS from
12 the top up should be reforming. As a person who's
13 trained in the military, I believe that leadership is
14 vital in holding their personnel accountable.
15 Oftentimes, I don't want to make accusations that the
16 agency may be double-dipping or committing some sort
17 of fraudulent activity with respect to the Department
18 of Social Services and federal funds and state funds
19 that are being administered and utilized. Oftentimes,
20 when the family asks for that support, ACS is
21 oftentimes dissuading the family or ourselves, in
22 this case, when we ask for assistance. It's one
23 hurdle after the other, whether it's for benefits for
24 SNAP through HRA or whether it's through OCFS and the
25 Department of Social Services. There needs to be some

1 sort of easy, streamlined communication between the
2 State and City in order to best implement the
3 assistance needed for families, especially those who
4 live in vulnerable housing that could be considered
5 subpar. Again, thank you, guys.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Listen, I 100
8 percent agree with you. I think that's some of the
9 things that we are always trying to figure out, how
10 to create less bureaucracy and how to make things
11 easier and getting the services to the people who
12 need it most. Unfortunately, the government often is
13 about bureaucracy, but I'm all about figuring it out
14 because I say it all the time, I don't like things
15 that don't make sense and some stuff just don't make
16 sense.

17 PEDRO GONZALEZ: And to be honest with
18 you, I think appointing a liaison to oversee military
19 special needs families and for people who are LGBTQAI
20 would be very beneficial. It should be that this Body
21 appoints somebody that would be experts and not just
22 having childcare professionals, but actually the
23 parents involved in the process as well so that the
24 parents can give their feedback and input based on
25 their personal experiences. Whether we all like it or

1 not, our personal experiences shape our development
2 and who we are and what roads we lead in life, and I
3 want that opportunity to be presented for my children
4 when I fought tooth and nail to get to where I'm at
5 today. Again, thank you guys so much, and we don't
6 want to take up any more of your time but, if you
7 have any questions in the evening, you have our
8 information. You can feel free to reach out to us.

9
10 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. And
11 thank you for your service, and I know even in City
12 Council we did just do an initiative with veteran
13 services coming out of all of our Districts so
14 definitely we'll be in touch so you can have that
15 information as well because we are trying to make
16 sure that we are giving more support to our veterans
17 and people who serve our country so thank you, guys,
18 for being here today.

19 PEDRO GONZALEZ: Thank you, guys, again.

20 TABITHA COMMONIS: Thank you.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We will now
22 transition to the remote testimony.

23 I would like to call Regal Noel.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I would like to
3 call Elizabeth Ward.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

5 ELIZABETH SARACCO: Good afternoon. Thank
6 you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My
7 name is Elizabeth Saracco. I'm the Integrated
8 Treatment Model Director at the Children's Village
9 and the Co-Chair for the agency's LGBTQ+ Staff
10 Affinity Group. The Children's Village serves over
11 20,000 children and families per year in all five
12 boroughs of New York City and beyond through a
13 diverse range of programs. At the Children's Village
14 we strive to create an inclusive and affirming
15 environment for all LGBTQ+ young people and their
16 families.

17 Youth in our foster care and residential
18 programs participate in an active GSA, which provides
19 a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth and
20 allies to learn and grow. The GSA organizes and
21 participates in events with recent highlights,
22 including a Center Lane LGBTQ+ prom, Pride Works
23 Youth Conference, and our campus Pride celebration
24 with weekly workshops, film screenings, and an ice
25 cream social. Our Keith Haring Medical Center was

1 founded with the support of Mr. Haring's family
2 foundation following his many years as a volunteer.
3 Young people receive fully integrated medical and
4 behavioral healthcare, including age-appropriate
5 reproductive health and gender affirming care in
6 collaboration with top specialists in the New York
7 City area. We believe that New York City has some of
8 the most progressive and affirming policies on the
9 inclusion of LGBTQ+ people of any jurisdiction in the
10 United States, requiring affirming foster homes,
11 reporting bias incidences, access to affirming care
12 and services, and the development of programs
13 specifically for LGBTQ+ young people in care. Our
14 challenge and responsibility is to operationalize
15 these policies and commit ourselves to fostering a
16 safe and affirming environment for every young
17 person. We believe completely in this mission, and we
18 also know that we have a long way to go. When a young
19 person has the courage to tell us that they have not
20 been treated in an affirming way, we take this as an
21 opportunity to improve and to validate that youth
22 experience. We appoint people who are visible and
23 available to young people and families in all of our
24 locations.
25

1
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
3 has expired.

4 ELIZABETH SARACCO: Sorry about that.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

6 ELIZABETH SARACCO: Yeah, no, thank you
7 for your time.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: If I
9 inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify
10 virtually, please use the raise hand function in
11 Zoom, and I will call on you in order of your hand
12 raise.

13 No one is there. I see no one else.

14 I would like to note that that witness
15 testimony, which will be reviewed in full by
16 Committee Staff, may be submitted to the record up to
17 72 hours after the close of hearing by emailing it to
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

19 With that, I close this hearing, and this
20 hearing is adjourned. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date October 7, 2024